

**A History of  
Contradictions: US Foreign  
Policy, Liberalism,  
Exceptionalism and the  
State of the World Today**

**Authors:**

Lesley Kelley, Intern, Goeman Bind

Lesley Kelley | Policy Group Intern, Goeman Bind HTO

The author, Lesley Kelley, is currently a candidate for a Masters of Public Policy at Georgia State University, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, where she is focusing on policy evaluation and research. Her areas of interest include youth empowerment, human rights and international development. She is a Policy Intern at Goeman Bind HTO, a Think Tank.

Anyone can quote from this paper but due acknowledgement and reference should be given to Goeman Bin, Think Tank.

This paper is approved by Hemant Batra, Expert Fellow & Leader with Goeman Bind.

## Introduction

American foreign policy is primarily rooted in the concepts of liberalism and exceptionalism. The fundamentals of liberalism are reflected in a political system that embraces legal equality, representation of all citizens, a free market economy and the notion of individual freedom. Another major tenant of American foreign policy is the concept of exceptionalism, or the idea that “Americans constitute an exceptionally good and great people, who represent above all a commitment to personal freedom or liberty; and whose society and state, built on notions of individual freedom, stand as models for export to the rest of the world” (Forsythe, 2002). Beyond its basic premises, liberalism attaches peace to governments who respect the freedom of their citizens as these governments “are more likely to exercise restraint and have peaceful intentions.” In that regard, the combination of liberal values and American exceptionalism places the responsibility on America to promote democracy internationally to ultimately achieve global peace (Singh, 2015). This justification for intervention can be traced to Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mills who claimed that it was the hegemon’s duty to spread democracy and to the oppressed, who included “barbarians”, “the uncivilized” and “culturally inferior” (Singh, 2015). Regardless of whether or not it is America’s “duty” to spread democracy, it can easily be argued that, since liberal democracies do not usually engage in military conflict with one another, widespread democracy can be equated with widespread peace. Thus, “[l]iberalism fits easily with the activist version of American exceptionalism. If America reflects above all the successful and beneficial playing out of the idea of individual freedom, and if this individual freedom is universally valid and not simply a matter of national particularity, then a natural American role is the advancement of human rights in the world” (Forsythe, 2002).

Interests such as national security, public opinion, as well as economic and domestic factors are also influential factors in American foreign policy, often to the detriment of liberal democratic values. Values and interests in foreign policy are not necessarily mutually exclusive, however. “[W]hile the idealistic foreign policies of humanitarianism and multilateralism (‘cooperative internationalism’) are grounded in an Enlightenment morality that values the individual, foreign policies that involve the use of force (‘militant internationalism’) are equally morally motivated, but by values that emphasize the

protection of the community.” In fact, some political scholars have even argued that the spread of democracy is necessary in order to maintain American hegemony (Santos and Teixeira, 2015).

National security can be used to justify almost any military intervention where American ideals are challenged in addition to an actual physical threat. The rhetoric of the Cold War pitted American liberalism against communist oppression, a concept I will explore in the following section of this paper. The polarity of these ideals, combined with the threat of nuclear war made almost any attempt to deter the spread of communism justifiable, even if it meant toppling democratically elected governments – an action clearly at odds with liberal ideology. This is also relevant to the current stance of the US against terrorism in Middle East.

Public opinion also plays an important role in US foreign policy. One of the most compelling examples of this comes in the form of what is referred to as “Vietnam Syndrome”, or a public distaste for international military intervention (resulting from the disastrous failure of the US in the Vietnam War). Recently, this has manifested in American intervention in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, though less associated with American casualties and more with the amount of time and money invested when seemingly little progress has been made. Studies have shown that “[e]ven if strategic interests...are the impelling factors, domestic factors such as election year or worsening domestic economic conditions serve as prohibiting factors for the US intervention” (Aslam, 2009).

From a human rights perspective, liberal values demand that “the primary objective in foreign policy is to do as much good for all individuals as possible, not just to pursue narrow and selfish national interests through exercise particularly of coercive power” (Forsythe, 2002). American support for human rights is born from the culture of exceptionalism. In practice, however, the United States favors some cultures and nations over others, places conditions on humanitarian assistance and has refused to adopt the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Forsythe, 2002). For instance, the United States initially took an isolationist stance in World War I and World War II as a neutral. Neo-isolationism and exceptionalism can be reconciled with the belief that American exceptionalism allows them to lead by example without interference in foreign affairs. In reality, however, the United States does not want to be a part of arrangements it cannot control as it “addresses human rights issues in the Western Hemisphere, but it rejects the regional enforcement of human rights in a way that would impinge on US freedom of choice and claims to superiority” (Forsythe, 2002).

Economic interests such as access to oil and international market shares and trade may also determine US intervention abroad. Political scholars have argued that military intervention is used to protect economic interests over strategic interests, noting that the US “frequently intervene in the areas where such [economic] interests are threatened and a conflict situation in the area has always been seen as a threat to those interest” (Aslam, 2009).

Last, political interests such as strategic positions in other countries can prompt military intervention, though liberal ideals suggest that intervention should not be based on “political objectives” (Wu, 2013). America’s ability to gain support from third party nations can determine whether or not military force is used (Blechman and Wittes, 1999).

In the next section, I will trace the history of US military intervention, showing the various influences on foreign policy at play.

## **Historical Context of Foreign Policy and Its Influences**

United States foreign policy has played a major role in American history, beginning with the colonization of the country itself. The inherent imperialistic nature of US foreign policy began with the oppression of native peoples, slavery and expansion westward (Munro, 2014). Out of notions of white supremacy and economic entitlement was born the concept of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism, or the belief that American social and political values were universal and should be propagated worldwide.

In 1823, President Monroe issued what would be known as the “Monroe Doctrine” which declared that nations in Western hemisphere, particularly Latin America, were republics and that any attempts by Europe to colonize these countries would be seen as a threat. Through this declaration, the United States established itself as a “protector” of the freedom of other nations, although this protection came in the form of military force. The difference between American interference and European colonialism was that “American interventionism was seen in a positive light, necessary for the welfare and stability of Latin American countries. In reality, however, the United States was acting imperialistically for economic gains. During the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, “the US built up its Navy and deployed a naval armada around the world, decided to complete the Panama Canal (1902), insisted on an “‘Open Door’ into China to consolidate American economic expansion” (Ouesleti, 2014).

The ideology behind the Monroe Doctrine combined with the Manifest Destiny of westward expansion carried the United States into its first international conflict, the Mexican American War in 1846. “Hence the mixture of idealism and nationalism – tainted with a non-disguised hubris and a sense of mission – that has constantly characterized American imperialist foreign policy” (Oueslati, 2014). The United States continued its paternalistic foreign policy based on beliefs of moral superiority and the obligation to spread democracy with the Philippine American War, lasting from 1899 to 1902 and resulting in American occupation which would span over forty years. During the early 1900’s, Wilson expanded the “paternalistic trend of democracy promotion” through interventions in Latin America, Central Europe, Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia, though European intervention was mostly conducted through international legal framework as opposed to the mostly militaristic intervention in Latin America (Singh, 2015).

America's role in World War I "showed that the nation had become 'indispensable' for the maintenance of the balance of power among European nations and its involvement in World War II, after a brief period of isolationism, confirmed this status" (Ouslati, 2014).

The Cold War brought about a period of ideological warfare, as opposed to military action. The Truman Doctrine framed foreign policy in terms of "two ways of life", one rooted in the liberal democratic ideals of majority rule, representative government and social and political freedoms and the other "based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed by the majority" and control by the government. Despite this seemingly altruistic foreign policy stance, in its fight against Communism, American destroyed democratically elected governments while supporting despots (Ouesleti, 2014). At the end of the Cold War, the United States took its place as a global hegemon. "In general, hegemonic power, structural realism and ideological conflict have guided interpretations of the US interventions in the Cold War era and immediate post-Cold War period" (Aslam, 2009). The loss in Vietnam, however, marked the beginning of noninterventionism driven by public opinion. The unexpected failure and high American casualties made it difficult to convince the American public to use military intervention to shape the global landscape (Blechman and Wittes, 1999). In fact, "...opposition to war as a solution to global differences has become an American public staple. The most concrete expression of the Vietnam Syndrome is resistance to the use of ground troops or any sort of engagement that places United States personnel in harms [sic] way for an extended period of time" (Horowitz, 2003).

Additionally, the high amount of civilian casualties and brutal military tactics used in Vietnam forced the American public to question America's role as a defender of human rights and liberal values worldwide (Forsythe, 2002).

The rise of precision technology served as a formidable prescription for "Vietnam Syndrome". With the promise of fewer western and civilian casualties to secure military victory, policymakers were less bound by public opinion and hesitation to intervene in international conflict (Singh, 2015) (Horowitz, 2003). The post-Vietnam war period brought forth competing ideologies regarding the use of military force. On one hand was the Weinberger doctrine, which specified that "force should only be used as a last resort to protect vital American interests and with a commitment to win. Threats of force should not be used as part of diplomacy. They should be used only when diplomacy fails, even then, when the objective is clear and attracts support of the American public and the Congress" (Blechman and Wittes, 1999) (Singh, 2015). On the other hand, was the argument that military force should be used to back diplomacy. Even if public doesn't initially agree, they will eventually if action is in accordance with American morals and values. The (elder) Bush and Clinton administrations subscribed to the latter of these two approaches, using limited force to support diplomacy. This proved a successful tactic in the first Gulf War where the United States used limited military force to defend Kuwait against an Iraqi invasion. The 1993 "Battle of Mogadishu", on the other hand, was an utter failure of limited intervention. Withdrawal from Somalia "reinforced perceptions of America's lack of resolve and further complicates US efforts to achieve its goals through threats of force alone" (Blechman and Wittes, 1999). It is also important to note that,

although they were framed as altruistic and for humanitarian reasons in nature, these interventions were “offensive liberal wars”, aggressive attempts to install American ideals where they did not exist (Singh, 2015).

Moral superiority reinforced by emergence from Cold War reached its height during the presidency of George W. Bush. As historical means of justification for intervention did not apply, the concept of American exceptionalism was revived through neo-conservative discourse wherein the September 11 terrorist attacks were framed as result of American moral superiority. Specifically, the themes of neoconservative discourse include “Presence of imminent danger from illiberal regimes and ideologies; US responsibility to protect its citizens and its way of life; US responsibility towards international security and its allies; and US responsibility towards oppresses and brutalized people struggling to survive under illiberal regimes and ideologies” (Ouesleti, 2014)(Singh, 2015).

Security is the most important theme in the neoconservative discourse of the time as global terrorism is viewed as a threat to nation’s security and liberal ideals. “Expansion of ... US practice of democratization conducted to ensure both its national security and perceived survival in what is a hierarchical and dangerous international system.” (Singh, 2015). Additionally, the events of September 11 breathed new life into neo-conservative ideas regarding military intervention, giving neo-conservative policy makers the legitimacy to quickly advance their agenda of military intervention. In short, realizing their own vulnerability, Americans were supportive of a more aggressive (and ultimately destabilizing) foreign policy strategy in the Middle East.

The invasion of Iraq was framed as an “extension” of the Global War on Terror, though justifications for use of force seemed to change over time to suit political needs. Congress essentially gave George W. Bush the full power to wage war under the pretense that the United States would establish democracy in Middle East. In 2002, three “Guiding Principles” governed foreign policy with regard to the Middle East: “Need for preemptive action; US must be unchallenged superpower; [and] US democratic principles should be celebrated and spread abroad” (Ouesleti, 2014). In Iraq, specifically, the goal was to disarm the government “in pursuit of peace, stability, and security both in the Gulf regions and in the United States” (Wu, 2013). Ironically, while the US was using military intervention to spread democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan, it was supporting dictators and monarchs in neighboring countries (Oueslati, 2014). Some critics of the use of force in Iraq claimed America was (at least partly) protecting their economic interests in oil while others pointed out that the invasion was a result of America’s desire to reconfigure the Middle East to Israel’s advantage. Also, the need for retaliation for the 9/11 Terror Attacks saw a much easier target in Iraq than in Al Qaeda (Hamill, 2003). I would argue that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were presented as “defensive liberal wars”, fought out of the necessity for survival or offensive, to garner public support and avoid restraint in the use of the military (Singh, 2015).

Another aspect of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, along with the larger Global War on Terror, is the extension of America’s opposition to Muslim nationalism. This opposition was historically expressed through America’s support for Arab monarchies in Iran and Kuwait as well as the US intervention in Lebanon, Kosovo and Somalia during the

1980's and 1990's. This antithetical stance against Arabs and Muslims may be the perceived conflict between American liberal ideals and Islam, which is often viewed by the US public as antiquated and oppressive. George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" rhetoric certainly reinforced this sense of "otherness" and a clear line between the "good" of American liberal ideas and the "bad" of those who would threaten those ideals. While considering the ideological differences between western culture and Islam, it is only logical to conclude that the decision to intervene militarily is also based on an array of American strategic interests in the Middle East such as America's relationship with Israel and friendly Arab nations.

US interference in Iraq and Afghanistan is a classic example of the juxtaposition between liberal values and American interests. Americans are afraid of colonialism that causes loss of life abroad but also afraid of a "world made chaotic by terror as itself a weapon of mass destruction". To avoid any semblance of imperialism which runs contrary to liberal ideals "...western powers are compelled to fight the cultural battle in smaller terms, as a struggle against terrorism or for democratic rule, however that might be interpreted" (Horowitz, 2003). Additionally, the failure to prioritize the lofty (and often competing) foreign policy goals of the George W. Bush Administration contributed to the ambiguity in military intervention during this administration (MacDonald, 2009). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have proven that spreading liberal values to the "barbarians" of the Middle East is not an achievable goal. What is more realistic is "secularization as a proximate goal, and democratization as some long-range hope" which has proven to be difficult to accept for "a nation that sees its mission as world democratization" (Horowitz, 2003).

## **Current Scenario**

"In a world dominated by the Internet, social networks and alternative sources of information, the traditional ideological tools of US foreign policy, such as civilizational advancement, messianic vision, spread of liberty, democracy and human rights, have become less operational and more problematic for the US at the turn of the twenty-first century" (Ouesleti, 2014). I would argue that the foreign policy of the Obama administration was a reaction to public opinion, mainly fatigue from the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, Obama did not pursue active role in promoting democracy and adopted what has been referred to as a "Leading from Behind" strategy. (Santos and Teixeira, 2015). This strategy is characterized by Obama's retreat from Afghanistan, hesitancy to intervene in Libya and limited military action in Syria. During the Arab Spring, while the Obama administration provided humanitarian aid to countries in turmoil and supported the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi, he refused to actually put troops on the ground or take unilateral action (Santos and Teixeira, 2015).

The Arab Spring presented an unprecedented chance for the spread of democracy in North Africa and the Middle East. While Obama praised the protests, sent aid to the region and eventually backed a UN resolution to establish a no-fly zone, he maintained his hands-off approach, refusing to send American ground troops. In Syria, Obama

challenged Assad's legitimacy and pressured Assad through US sanctions, hoping to eventually force him out of power. These attempts proved to be futile in the face of Russia and China's refusal to support broader UN sanctions – Russia as a close ally of the Assad regime and China as an adherer to non-interference. With ISIS gaining ground in the power vacuums of Iraq and now Syria, and US security under threat, Obama eventually settled on a plan to support the “moderate opposition” with arms and military training. Although there were hopes that the moderate opposition would claim victory and establish democracy in Syria, security concerns remained the focus of this strategy. The move from George W. Bush's Global War on Terror shifted to a narrow focus on the extremist terror threat of ISIS. Security concerns replaced the desire to spread democracy. “Preemption was no longer an element of the national security policy (Santos and Teixeira, 2015).

Although the United States is in decline as global hegemon, it is still the most powerful country in the world. This has prompted Russia and China to often act together in the U.N. to block resolutions that allow the United States to exert control over other nations. Often, Russia and China's cooperation with the US works on a “tit-for-tat” basis, wherein any political assistance given to the US must be rewarded with either a political or economic consolation. In the next section, I will specifically examine the historical and current state of US-Russia and US-China relations and the implications for global security.

## **US Foreign Relations with China**

Historically most American administrations have chosen a route “that counsels cooperation and engagement with China as the best way to integrate China into the prevailing global system as a ‘responsible stakeholder’”. Since the US established relations with China under President Nixon, it has supported the “one China Policy” (despite Taiwan's autonomy), engaged in trade and allowed American investment in China “fueling its economic growth”, allowed Chinese students to attend American universities, “bringing science, technology, and expertise to a nation that desperately needed them. America has supported China's entry into global institution – the World Trade Organization, International Atomic Energy Agency, nonproliferation regimes, the World Health Organization to mention a few. “We have done these things not as a favor to China but because we judged them in our national interest” (Bader, 2016) (Gladky, 2003).

There remains, however, ongoing distrust between the two nations, marked by spying, Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, trade wars and recently American withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership as well as disagreements over how to address North Korea's growing nuclear capabilities. Critics of close ties to China argue that the US has “been seduced by the potential of the China market”, thereby ignoring Chinese hostility and acceding leverage, highlighting the debate about what American's approach to China should be (Adams, 2015) (Dumbaugh, 2016). This is not to say that the US should not protect its relationships with long time allies, South Korea and Japan as China may be a military and/or ideological threat to the region. Additionally, Trump's isolationist rhetoric

and self-serving response to the North Korean nuclear threat have left America's Asian allies to question America's dedication to their security (Bader et. al, 2017). The growing sentiment of populism in America has also shifted much of the blame for job loss to Chinese competition and China's human rights record stands in stark contrast to American liberal values. China's a large population, strong and growing economy, and authoritarian government are all traits of a global hegemon, making the United States, role as world leader less certain (Nye, 2016).

While China does pose some regional security risk to the countries of Eastern Asia, it does not pose an immediate global threat and may even be viewed as a stabilizing factor. Additionally, China's aging population, and high levels of corruption, problems with pollution and income inequality suggest that it may not be a serious threat to the current global world order in the near future (Abrams, 2015). In that regard, US-China relations are primarily governed by economic ties. Although the economic relationship between China and the United States is not perfect, it is important for the US and China to continue to view economic progress as a commonality that can be beneficial for both countries and the world as a whole. "[I]n a world filled with chaos, terrorism, nihilism, civil war, and anarchy, Asia is a relative beacon of stability, economic openness, and dynamism" and we must balance our relationship with China accordingly (Dumbough, 2016).

Additionally, the US has an interest in working with China to achieve global security. "Security rivalries lead to security dilemmas and distort destructively the behavior of those trapped in them. If we conspire to make China an enemy, then every problem we deal with, including Iran, North Korea, climate change, and global terrorism, will become orders of magnitude more difficult to manage" (Bader, 2016). It is true that China has been building its role in the Middle East, through energy deals with Iran, eventually becoming a "critical lifeline to the Iranian economy and, thus, the stability of the Iranian regime". It is also believed that China has technology and materials to "rogue regimes", including Iran, allowing them to enhance their nuclear capabilities (Almond, 2016) (Dumbaugh, 2016). Thus, China's participation in the "Permanent 5+1" negotiations to roll back Iran's nuclear weapons program may seem surprising as support for US sanctions would logically damage China's economic relationship with Iran. Without support for the sanctions, the US would have become more likely to take unilateral action which may deprive China of its Middle Eastern Oil Supply and China could end up facing economic isolation from the United States itself (Almond, 2016). Given the fragile nature of global security, it is in the US and China's best interest to maintain their relationship, characterized by "give-and take" cooperation.

With the development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and increasingly heated rhetoric between President Trump and Kim Jong Un, the threat of a nuclear attack on America or its allies in the region cannot be ignored. As North Korea's largest trading partner (and essentially its lifeline), China is the key to containing the North Korean nuclear threat. Along with North Korea's second largest trading partner, Russia, China has played an obstructionist role in the U.N., vetoing many of the proposed economic sanctions on North Korea. President Xi is cautious not to force North Korea to the point of collapse, as that would have a devastating effect on China and lead to instability in the

region. Under increasing pressure from the United States, China continues to try to maintain the status quo. Over the summer, as tensions have flared between the US and North Korea, the US has accused China of “doing nothing” to pressure North Korea to back away from its nuclear program and has warned that it will act unilaterally and potentially with force. The US has accused Chinese companies of not complying with sanctions and, on August 22, 2017, introduced US sanctions on many Chinese companies in question. The point is that the US needs China in its struggle to disarm a nervous and unpredictable North Korea. It would behoove the president to tone down his rhetoric and focus on diplomatic solutions and cooperation with China.

## **US Foreign Relations with Russia**

Unlike China, the US–Russia relationship has historically (and continues to be) based on security more than the economic factors or concerns about global supremacy. Currently, the Russian economy is stunted by low oil and gas prices as well economic sanctions imposed by western powers in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its meddling in the 2016 US presidential election. Additionally, economic ties between Russia and the United States have historically and continue to remain weak (Gladkyy, 2016).

Since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has been trying to regain its status as a global hegemon while the United States is concerned with maintaining the global world order. Under Putin, Russia has renewed its interest in gaining control over Eastern European states. These attempts to regain control over the past decade are illustrated by the 2008 war against Georgia and subsequently with Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine. Some argue that the US and Russia are engaged in ideological competition over the former Soviet states, with the US and EU encouraging these states to adopt liberal values, including free market economies. Although the Bush Administration saw intervention in the Russo-Georgian war as the promotion of democracy, lack of support from its European allies and adherence to international law ultimately prevented the US from taking military action. On the other hand, the Obama administration framed Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula as a challenge to international norms, “especially the non-use of force and the principle of territorial integrity” as Putin has clearly shown his refusal to accept Western ideals and the current world order (Boller and Werle, 2016)(Hill, 2016).

Russia’s security threat to the United States is exemplified by its willingness to sacrifice political and economic relationships to procure power in the region. Putin is both charismatic and unpredictable “‘Putinism’ is not especially coherent and is not intended to be. Putin and his political team have retro-fitted a wide range of broadly accepted ‘Russian ideas’ to establish and maintain legitimacy for his presidency”. One of these “Russian ideas” is that the US is to blame for Russia’s problems, domestically and abroad. Russia’s increasing military activity in Europe is an attempt to disrupt NATO and threaten US allies. Russian intervention in Syria is also an attempt by Russia to maintain influence and stability through preserving the current order in the Middle East. Because Russia

does not have the sheer military might that would be necessary to pose a serious threat to NATO or the United States, Putin must back his threats with conventional military force and nuclear weapons and show that he is willing to escalate. It is doubtful, however, that Russia would pursue another Cold War-like scenario. “The goal is to push the United States and Europe away from Russia and out of its neighborhood, not to actually engage in a nuclear exchange (Hill, 2016). Russian meddling in the 2016 US Presidential election has also caused an uproar in public opinion and brought up questions regarding the legitimacy of the president himself. While Trump promoted an enhanced relationship with Russia on the campaign trail, under increasing scrutiny, Trump has supported (though hesitantly) a recent round of Russian sanctions, including the August 2, 2017 “Countering America’s Adversaries Act”.

In Syria, as Bashar Assad’s closest ally, Russia continues to support the regime economically and militarily. This has ultimately led to the failure of Obama’s policy of supporting the “moderate opposition” to bring liberal ideals and democracy to the region. After initial cooperation with Russia to remove Assad’s chemical weapons and coordination of air operations, the US strike against Syria as punishment for alleged use of chemical weapons, severed all ties to an already weak relationship (MacFarquhar, 2017). With regard to terrorism, although the United States and Russia are both fighting ISIS in Syria, they are doing so for two completely different reasons – Russia to secure the Assad regime and the United States for its own security and the security of its allies. With the recent round of sanctions from the US, it is unlikely that Russia will be cooperative in assisting the United States with the North Korean threat either. It is in America’s best interest to contain the Russian security threat through economic sanctions and NATO alliances and find alternative means of dealing with Russia’s abstinence to containing North Korea.

## Epilogue

It is obvious that principals of liberalism and exceptionalism form the basis for American foreign policy. These principals, however, lend themselves to extensive interpretation and can be manipulated by politicians to achieve political and economic goals abroad. By framing international conquest as a “moral duty” and international conflict and terrorism as existential threats, policy makers have been able to justify military intervention under almost any circumstances. The only apparent obstruction to international intervention is public opinion, brought about by previous failures abroad and domestic concerns.

US-China and US-Russia relations illustrate the pursuit of economic and political drivers of US foreign policy. As America’s status as a global hegemon declines, and with increasing Russian and Chinese involvement in the Middle East, the US is no longer able to use unilateral military force to obliterate its enemies, at least not without damaging its relationships abroad. As our economic ties with China become more entwined and as Putin ramps up military interventions in the former Soviet Bloc, American must account for any action abroad which may affect the status quo. Further, as the nuclear threats

from enemy states like Iran and North Korea and international terrorism becomes more prevalent, it is impossible to circumvent either of China and Russia in a lasting solution.