The Trilemma of Hegemonic Order Competition

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Abstract

Great powers engaged in hegemonic order competition can pursue three desirable objectives: to maximize their influence abroad, to advance an international order that promotes their interests and values, and to avoid war. How do these pursuits interact? I argue these objectives and their associated costs produce a trilemma for decision-makers. The central takeaway is that *only two out of these three objectives can ever be mutually consistent, and order-makers* must *forsake one*. This trilemma emerges from the interplay between two features of hegemonic competition: that competition is zero-sum and that a fundamental tension exists between maximizing influence and advancing an order that promotes one's interests. Three cases illustrate how different order-makers—Britain during the 1895 Venezuela Crisis, Russia regarding Ukraine post-Cold War, and then again after Euromaidan—navigated this important yet thus far unidentified limit on the international ambitions of great powers.

Hegemonic competition | International orders | War | Formal model

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Introduction

The surge of populist tendencies in Western democracies, China's rise, and Russia's war on Ukraine have led scholars and policymakers alike to wonder about the future of the Liberal International Order (LIO):[1] Will the US remain at its helm?[2] Will the interests promoted by the future international order be the same as those promoted currently?[3] Finally, will this transition be peaceful?[4]

These questions reflect three desirable foreign policy objectives order-makers can pursue: maximizing influence, promoting one's own interests, and preserving peace. Yet, while scholars often

[1] Niall Ferguson, Fareed Zakaria, and Rudyard Griffiths. *Is This The End of the Liberal International Order?: The Munk Debates*. Berkeley, CA: House of Anansi Press, 2017; David A. Lake and Peter Gourevitch. "Hundreds of Scholars Have Signed a Statement Defending the International Institutions That Trump Has Attacked". In: *Washington Post* (Aug. 14, 2018). URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/08/14/hundreds-of-scholars-have-signed-a-statement-defending-the-international-institutions-that-trump-has-attacked/; Edward Luce. *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017. 234 pp.

[2] Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu. "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline". In: *International Security* 36.1 (2011), pp. 41–72; Charles L. Glaser. "A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation". In: *International Security* 39.4 (2015), pp. 49–90; Charles L. Glaser and Steve Fetter. "Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and U.S. Nuclear Strategy toward China". In: *International Security* 41.1 (2016), pp. 49–98; Jeffrey T. Checkel. "Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database." In: *Perspectives on Politics* 16.4 (2018), pp. 1225–1226; Michael Mazarr, Timothy Heath, and Astrid Cevallos. *China and the International Order*. RAND Corporation, 2018; Andrea Gilli and Mauro Gilli. "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet: Military-Technological Superiority and the Limits of Imitation, Reverse Engineering, and Cyber Espionage". In: *International Security* 43.3 (2019), pp. 141–189; John J. Mearsheimer. "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order". In: *International Security* 43.4 (2019), pp. 7–50; Xinbo Wu. "The China Challenge: Competitor or Order Transformer?" In: *The Washington Quarterly* 43.3 (2020), pp. 99–114; Michael Beckley. "Conditional Convergence and the Rise of China: A Political Economy Approach to Understanding Global Power Transitions". In: *Journal of Global Security Studies* (2020); Beverley Loke. "The United States, China, and the Politics of Hegemonic Ordering in East Asia". In: *International Studies Review* 23.4 (2021), pp. 1208–29; Jessica Chen Weiss and Jeremy L. Wallace. "Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order". In: *International Organization* 75.2 (2021), pp. 635–664.

[3] Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity"; Bentley B. Allan, Srdjan Vucetic, and Ted Hopf. "The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order: China's Hegemonic Prospects". In: *International Organization* 72.4 (2018), pp. 839–869; Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos, *China and the International Order*; Alastair Iain Johnston. "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations". In: *International Security* 44.2 (2019), pp. 9–60; Inderjeet Parmar. "Transnational Elite Knowledge Networks: Managing American Hegemony in Turbulent Times". In: *Security Studies* 28.3 (2019), pp. 532–564; Michael Mastanduno. "Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending US Hegemony after the Cold War". In: *Security Studies* 28.3 (2019), pp. 479–504; Wu, "The China Challenge"; Chen Weiss and Wallace, "Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order".

[4] Glaser and Fetter, "Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and U.S. Nuclear Strategy toward China"; Caitlin Talmadge. "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States". In: *International Security* 41.4 (2017), pp. 50–92; Arie M Kacowicz and Benjamin Miller. "The Problem of Peaceful Change Revisited: From the End of the Cold War to the Uncertainties of a Post-Liberal Order". In: *International Studies Review* 20.2 (2018), pp. 301–308; David Shambaugh. "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?" In: *International Security* 42.4 (2018), pp. 85–127; Kai Quek and Alastair Iain Johnston. "Can China Back Down? Crisis De-escalation in the Shadow of Popular Opposition". In: *International Security* 42.3 (2018), pp. 7–36; Ketian Zhang. "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea". In: *International Security* 44.1 (2019), pp. 117–159; Evelyn Goh. "Contesting Hegemonic Order: China in East Asia". In: *Security Studies* 28.3 (2019), pp. 614–644; Beckley, "Conditional Convergence and the Rise of China: A Political Economy Approach to Understanding Global Power Transitions".

address these separately, policymakers must contend with them simultaneously. How do these objectives interact with each other?

This article presents a parsimonious model of hegemonic order competition, revealing that states engaged in hegemonic competition face a trilemma. In the model, powerful states decide whether to create an order, select the particular set of interests their order advances, gain influence over states by providing them with benefits, and ensure member-states comply with their order-derived obligations. The goal is to create a baseline that succinctly characterizes the central strategic problems faced by great powers engaged in hegemonic order competition and yields clear implications for the relationship between their quest for influence, the set of interests promoted by orders, and international conflict. *The central takeaway is that, at best, only two out of three of these desirable objectives—influence maximization, promoting interests consistent with one's own, and ensuring peace—can be mutually consistent, and one* must *be forsaken (Figure 1).*

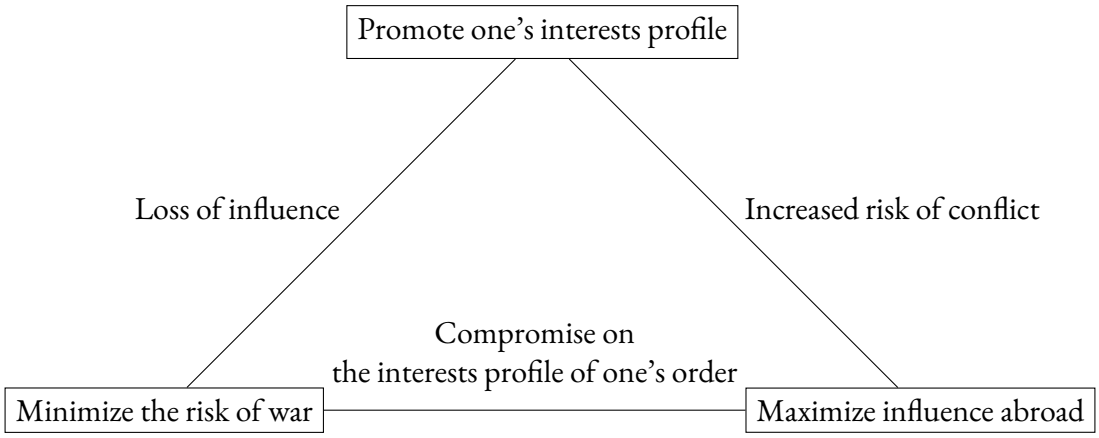

Figure 1: The trilemma of hegemonic order competition. At best, order-makers can achieve only two out of three of these desirable objectives (each represented by a rectangle), and *must* forgo the third.

This trilemma emerges from two features of hegemonic competition. First, the more differences between member-states' interests and those promoted by orders, the more likely members will defect on their order-derived obligations. This forces great powers to choose between promoting their interests or maximizing influence. If they advance an order promoting their interests, members are likely to defect which undermines order-makers net influence gains. Alternatively, they may compromise on the interests profile of their order and promote an order closer to the interests of member-states. This reduces the risk of defection, thus improving influence gains, but it also means the order's interests profile is now different from its creator's. Second, hegemonic competition is zero-sum because

influence, the object of this competition, is rivalrous, excludable, and scarce. Accordingly, any influence gained by a great power must come at the expense of rivals, and any strategy that achieves both influence and interests—such as delegitimizing rivals—devalues the value of peace for competitors, thereby increasing the risk of hegemonic war.

This project contributes to the literature on international orders and war in three ways. First, it identifies a new limitation regarding the foreign policy ambitions of order-makers—the trilemma. This constraint emerges transparently from the model of hegemonic competition introduced here, built from well-established first principles. This is in contrast to standard approaches, which mainly investigate these policy objectives independently.

Second, it provides a framework to assess the risk of localized conflicts arising from hegemonic competition. Standard accounts extensively focus on large systemic wars as a tool for reshaping the international order. Yet, the nuclear age has made this kind of deliberate war unthinkable.[5] However, smaller-scale wars remain a genuine possibility,[6] and these carry the risk of escalation.[7] The model ties the onset of these smaller conflicts to hegemons' broader concerns, including their desire to maximize influence and promote orders that align with their interests and can account for them even in the absence of changing material conditions.

Finally, the model emphasizes the strategic dynamics of *hegemonic* competition. Hegemonic competition differs from other forms of competition (e.g., over territory or resources) in two critical ways. First, the object of competition—influence—requires the consent of states. Second, and relatedly, the substance of order—their norms, rules, and institutions—matters and affects states' willingness to comply with their order-derived obligations. The model introduced here models these dynamics explicitly by making order and their substance endogenous to the competition between multiple great powers. International orders are not preordained but the product of the strategic decision-making process of great powers, who decide whether to establish them and which members to admit. In doing so, it complements the rich literature on direct great power competition[8] by investigating the

[5] Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity", p. 44.

[6] Robert Rauchhaus. "Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach". In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53.2 (2009), pp. 258–277.

[7] Talmadge, "Would China Go Nuclear?"; Riqiang Wu. "Assessing China-U.S. Inadvertent Nuclear Escalation". In: *International Security* 46.3 (2022), pp. 128–162.

[8] e.g., A. F. K. Organski. *World Politics*. Knopf, 1958. 450 pp.; A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler. *The War Ledger*. University of Chicago Press, 1980. 308 pp.; Robert Gilpin. *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981. 272 pp.; Robert O. Keohane. *After Hegemony: Cooperation And Discord In The World*

incentives for conflict that emerge from the production and governance of international orders.

The article proceeds as follows. I discuss the three policy objectives and their associated costs, introduce the argument and formal model, and illustrate the argument with historical cases where order-makers sacrificed one objective to pursue the other two. I conclude by outlining the general implications of the trilemma.

Hegemonic orders

I define a *hegemonic order* as a *grand bargain* between a powerful state[9] (or a cartel of powerful states) and other states: in exchange for benefits, member-states grant powerful states influence over them.[10] This aligns with the "narrow" tradition,[11] which views international orders as contractual arrangements where rational actors maximize their utility[12] through cost-benefit analysis.[13] Military alliances, economic agreements, and humanitarian regimes may all qualify as hegemonic orders if they share this transactional logic.[14] The same applies to international hierarchies, protectorates, suzerainties, empires, and spheres of influence.[15]

Political Economy. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984. 290 pp.; Glenn H. Snyder. "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics". In: *World Politics* 36.4 (1984), pp. 461–495; Robert Jervis. "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation". In: *World Politics* 38.1 (1985), pp. 58–79; Graham Allison. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* First Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. 384 pp.

[9] For the sake of exposition, I use "powerful state," "great power," "hegemon," and "order-maker" interchangeably.

[10] Unlike Mastanduno, (Michael Mastanduno. "Order and Change in World Politics: The Financial Crisis and the Breakdown of the US–China Grand Bargain". In: *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*. Ed. by G. John Ikenberry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 162–192) I conceptualize hegemonic orders as "grand bargain" rather than as a strategy for hegemonic survival.

[11] e.g., David A. Lake. *Hierarchy in International Relations*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2009. 232 pp.; David C. Kang. *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. Contemporary Asia in the World. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 221 pp.; G. John Ikenberry. *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011. 372 pp.; Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order"; Maël van Beek et al. "Hierarchy and War". In: *American Journal of Political Science* (2024), pp. 1–15.

[12] What constitutes this utility may vary. Here, it suffices to assume it is the result of some unspecified domestic process (e.g., Soyoung Lee. "Domestic Distributional Roots of National Interest". In: *American Political Science Review* 118.4 [2024], pp. 1824–1839).

[13] Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol. "Hierarchies in World Politics". In: *International Organization* 70.3 (2016), pp. 623–654.

[14] Broader conceptualizations of order—as a structural feature of the international system (in comparison to anarchy or disorder) or as predictability—fall beyond this project's scope.

[15] These are frequently the result of negative coercive policies. The consensual nature of hegemonic orders is discussed in the Appendix.

Influence

Powerful states establish hegemonic orders to gain influence over other states. Conceptually, influence can be understood as a metacurrency that can be spent to have another state alter its behavior willingly.[16] Its value depends on the subordinate's strategic and economic value but always increases the superordinate's utility. Historically, influence has been leveraged through tributes (e.g., pre-modern East Asia) or sovereignty concessions (e.g., South Korea hosting US bases and participating in US conflicts).

Influence is rivalrous and excludable—a private good. It is also scarce. While multiple great powers can influence different aspects of a state's policies (e.g., one influencing economic policies, the other security policies), influence is rivalrous because they cannot simultaneously influence the same policy object. For example, with regard to the deployment of the THAAD anti-ballistic missile defense system in South Korea, Seoul could please either Washington or Beijing, but not both. Influence is excludable because states can refuse to grant it, and order-makers can limit competitors' influence. Finally, influence is scarce and only a finite amount of influence exists in the international system. In extreme cases, a powerful state could control every aspect of every state's decision-making process. These characteristics of influence make order competition zero-sum: the more influence an order-maker has, the less its competitor does.

Subordinates grant order-makers influence over their policies in exchange for benefits. Benefits include tangible or intangible goods provided in exchange for influence, such as military security and economic affluence.[17] These can be provided bilaterally (e.g., economic assistance, arms transfers) or multilaterally (e.g., free trade agreements, military alliances). Benefits compensate member states for the disutility of surrendering influence to great powers.[18]

To obtain influence, great powers bear the *cost of production*: the costs of delivering benefits to members. These costs include maintaining credible deterrence (e.g., the US "2-and-½wars" standard), funding international institutions, and the opportunity costs of not investing more resources domes-

[16] Without resorting to brute strength (Thomas C. Schelling. *Arms and Influence*. Yale University Press, 1966).

[17] Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner. "Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment". In: *Review of International Studies* 15.2 (1989), pp. 183–198.

[18] This disutility comes from many sources, a common one being public opinion, as many states contributing to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan experienced (Sarah Kreps. "Elite Consensus as a Determinant of Alliance Cohesion: Why Public Opinion Hardly Matters for NATO-led Operations in Afghanistan". In: *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6.3 [2010], pp. 191–215).

tically. Costs vary with factors like geographical proximity and economies of scale but always increase with the quantity of benefits provided.

Interests

When great powers establish hegemonic orders, they define rules, norms, and institutions that govern member interactions. These prescribe desirable behaviors and advance the specific set of interests—the *interests profile* (IP)—decided by order-makers.[19] For example, the US-led LIO promotes democracy and economic interdependence, while a Soviet-led order might have promoted communism and economic planning. Great powers prefer advancing orders with IPs matching their own, as this allows them to capture the "surplus" of the bargain. In extreme cases, order-makers may bias rules to the point where members become indifferent to staying or leaving.[20]

Significantly, the IP of orders determines another cost hegemons must pay: the *cost of governance*. These are transaction costs that ensure subordinate polities respect the grand bargain ex-post.[21] As with other bargains,[22] states have incentives to renege on their order-derived obligations, and the more differences exist between their interests[23] and the order's IP, the more likely defection is.[24] For example, Western European nations (e.g., Luxembourg, Portugal) are less likely to comply with NATO's spending threshold than Eastern European members (e.g., Estonia, Poland) who fear Russia. Defection can take various forms, such as forceful rejections (e.g., the American Revolutionary War), peaceful departures (e.g., Germany leaving the League of Nations), "footdragging" (e.g., Turkey threatening to veto Sweden and Finland's NATO bids after Russia's invasion of Ukraine), entrapment (e.g., North Korea with the Soviet Union and China during the Korean War), or free-riding. Although

[19] What constitutes desirable behavior may change: e.g., slavery was the cornerstone of some orders but became proscribed in others (J. C. Sharman and Ayşe Zarakol. "Global Slavery in the Making of States and International Orders". In: *American Political Science Review* 118.2 [2024], pp. 802–814).

[20] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 34.

[21] Order-makers can also defect on their obligations. For members, this is equivalent to receiving fewer benefits. If order-makers want to maintain the same influence, they must provide new benefits or pay additional governance costs. Order-makers can exercise self-restraint (Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*) and implement safeguards (David A. Lake. *Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy in Its Century*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999) to avoid these costs.

[22] James D. Fearon. "Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation". In: *International Organization* 52.2 (1998), pp. 269–305.

[23] The origins of states' interests fall beyond the scope of this discussion. It suffices to assume that some exogenous process translates domestic and international conditions into states' interests.

[24] David A. Lake. "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations". In: *International Organization* 50.1 (1996), pp. 1–33.

often deliberate, defection can also be involuntary.[25] Regardless of form and intent, non-compliance reduces the disutility members incur when surrendering influence and this comes at the expense of order-makers.

Order-makers use positive or negative coercion to prevent defection, but these strategies are costly. Historically, orders have employed diverse strategies, from promises of continued trade and financial gains to threats of violence. The Byzantine Empire, for example, combined bribes with military action and religious proselytism.[26]

Governance costs are distinct from legitimacy, which lowers governance costs by making compliance more likely. As Lake[27] notes, "Rather than continuously coercing others into abiding by their will, it is far cheaper and more efficient for dominant states if subordinates comply with rules regarded as rightful and appropriate." Other factors affecting governance costs include local discourses such as nationalism,[28] social ties,[29] economic interdependence,[30] credible commitments not to exploit subordinates,[31] unequal distributions of the benefits of order membership within the state,[32] the transparency of benefit transfers,[33] and technology.[34]

Order-makers can minimize governance costs by restricting membership to states with similar IPs that are thus unlikely to defect. Admission requirements are a concrete manifestation of this dynamic, as seen in the Concert of Europe (monarchies), the Soviet Union (embracing communism), and the European Union (liberal democracies). Such restrictions ensure that orders result in a net utility gain

[25] e.g., Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer. "Cheater's Dilemma: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Path to War". In: *International Security* 45.1 (2020), pp. 51–89.

[26] Adam Watson. *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1992. 337 pp., p.109-111.

[27] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p.9.

[28] Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order"; Tom Long and Carsten-Andreas Schulz. "A Turn Against Empire: Benito Juárez's Liberal Rejoinder to the French Intervention in Mexico". In: *American Political Science Review* (2024), pp. 1–15.

[29] Paul MacDonald. *Networks of Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2014; Michael A. Allen et al. "Outside the Wire: U.S. Military Deployments and Public Opinion in Host States". In: *American Political Science Review* 114.2 (2020), pp. 326–341.

[30] Paul MacDonald. "Is Imperial Rule Obsolete?: Assessing the Barriers to Overseas Adventurism". In: *Security Studies* 18.1 (2009), pp. 79–114.

[31] Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*; Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*.

[32] Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon. ""The Empire Will Compensate You": The Structural Dynamics of the U.S. Overseas Basing Network". In: *Perspectives on Politics* 11.4 (2013), pp. 1034–1050; David A. Lake. "Legitimating Power: The Domestic Politics of U.S. International Hierarchy". In: *International Security* 38.2 (2013), pp. 74–111.

[33] Roseanne W. McManus and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "The Logic of "Offstage" Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations". In: *International Organization* 71.4 (2017), pp. 701–733.

[34] Stephen Van Evera. "Primed for Peace: Europe after the Cold War". In: *International Security* 15.3 (1990), pp. 7–57; MacDonald, "Is Imperial Rule Obsolete?"

for order-makers. Second, order-makers can compromise on the IP of their order, aligning it more closely with member interests, thereby reducing member-states' temptation to defect. The Cold War Western order exemplifies this. Though US-created, this order was not focused on promoting liberal values but on containing and defeating the Soviet Union: the US neither prevented authoritarian regimes—Portugal and Greece—from joining NATO nor did it expel members—Turkey—that became authoritarian after their accession. This is not to say that the US did not have an affinity for democracies; it was merely willing to compromise over ideological interests to compete.[35] Other examples include the Achaemenid Empire, the Ottoman Empire pre-Suleiman, and the pre-modern Chinese-led order.

This approach, however, is costly for the order-maker. Decoupling the order-maker's interests from their order's IP worsens the order-maker's utility by exposing it to domestic critiques (e.g., the US after World War I) and other domestic and international reputational costs (e.g., when the US ignores its allies' human rights violations). Nevertheless, this process can maximize utility if the reduction in governance costs outweigh these losses.

Peace

Order-makers prefer to avoid *hegemonic wars*—the subset of wars[36] fought between great powers over third-party states—whenever possible. This is because, like other wars, hegemonic wars are inefficient,[37] costly,[38] and often domestically unpopular.[39] Just as firms peacefully compete over markets, order-makers can compete over states without violence by varying the nature, quantity, and quality of the benefits they offer to attract members. A striking example is the 2009 bidding war over the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, during which Washington and Moscow provided the Bakiyev government with increasingly larger economic packages to extend or end the lease of the US military installation.[40]

[35] Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order".

[36] I use war in the broad sense of a condition of armed conflict between at least two actors, including direct military intervention but potentially also proxy and grey-zone conflicts.

[37] James D. Fearon. "Rationalist Explanations for War". In: *International Organization* 49.3 (1995), pp. 379–414.

[38] Tanisha M. Fazal. "Why States No Longer Declare War". In: *Security Studies* 21.4 (Oct. 1, 2012), pp. 557–593.

[39] John E. Mueller. "Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam". In: *The American Political Science Review* 65.2 (1971), pp. 358–375.

[40] Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Power Contest in Central Asia*. Oxford University Press, 2012. 268 pp.

Peaceful competition, however, is not costless. Competition is inefficient for great powers, and any influence one gains comes at the expense of rivals. Additionally, competition undermines the bargaining leverage of order-makers by allowing member-states to engage in goods substitution.[41] For example, Soviet entry into the foreign aid game during the Cold War forced the US to provide more aid for less influence,[42] while its exit reversed this dynamic.[43]

Empirically, hegemonic orders frequently overlap, with states participating in multiple orders simultaneously.[44] This is most apparent when states join competing institutions.[45] For example, several states traditionally seen as belonging to the US-led order (e.g., New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Canada) joined the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank despite strong US opposition, a development bank widely understood as challenging the US-led World Bank.[46] During the Cold War, many Non-Aligned Movement states participated in both US and Soviet orders, and the 1886 Sino-British Burma Convention made Burma a member of the Chinese and British orders.[47]

These dynamics drive the temptation of war as order-makers may resort to war to mitigate competitive pressures. The relationship between war and order-making is well-established. For Gilpin,[48] large systemic conflicts concentrate material capabilities in the hands of the victor, who is then free to establish a new order; for Ikenberry,[49] "Major or great-power war is a uniquely powerful agent of change in world politics because it tends to destroy and discredit old institutions and force the emergence of a new leading or hegemonic state." In sum, war allows the victor to remove competitors—by

[41] Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon. "Goods Substitution and Counter-Hegemonic Strategies". In: *Undermining American Hegemony: Goods Substitution in World Politics*. Ed. by Alexander Cooley, Daniel H. Nexon, and Morten Skumsrud Andersen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 29–61.

[42] Elizabeth Schmidt. *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*. New Approaches to African History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith. "Competition and Collaboration in Aid-for-Policy Deals". In: *International Studies Quarterly* 60.3 (2016), pp. 413–426.

[43] Thad Dunning. "Conditioning the Effects of Aid: Cold War Politics, Donor Credibility, and Democracy in Africa". In: *International Organization* 58.2 (2004), pp. 409–423; Josef Woldense and Alex Kroeger. "Elite Change without Regime Change: Authoritarian Persistence in Africa and the End of the Cold War". In: *American Political Science Review* 118.1 (2024), pp. 178–194.

[44] c.f. Organski, *World Politics*.

[45] In the Appendix, I discuss arm transfers as another sign of overlapping orders (Kyle Beardsley et al. "Hierarchy and the Provision of Order in International Politics". In: *The Journal of Politics* 82.2 [2020], pp. 731–746).

[46] Julia Bader. "China and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: Undermining Hegemony through Goods Substitution?" In: *Undermining American Hegemony: Goods Substitution in World Politics*. Ed. by Alexander Cooley, Daniel H. Nexon, and Morten Skumsrud Andersen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 88–103.

[47] A.R. MacMahon. "The Anglo-Chinese Convention and the Burmese Frontier". In: *The Asiatic Quarterly Review*. New Series IX.18 (Apr. 1895), pp. 349–362.

[48] Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

[49] G. John Ikenberry. *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. 293 pp., p.254.

increasing their production and governance costs—thereby improving the victor's order-derived utility.

While systemic wars are unthinkable in the nuclear age,[50] smaller conflicts can still challenge extant orders. Directly, these local wars offer the same temptation as large conflicts but on a smaller scale. Germany's 1918 intervention in the Finish War guaranteed Finland's departure from the Soviet sphere of influence and restricted Moscow's ability to influence Finnish politics: the Red leadership and thousands of Reds were in exile, thousands more were sent to camps, and what remained of the labor movement believed it needed to look West for direction.[51] Small conflicts may indirectly impact hegemonic competition if they hinder belligerents' global competitiveness.[52] For example, Russia's involvement in Ukraine undermined its ability to protect allies in Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria. While some have argued war is on the decline, there are few reasons to believe this is the case.[53] Thus, understanding hegemonic competition in a nuclear world requires examining how smaller conflicts emerge from order competition.

The Trilemma

From these policy objectives and associated costs emerges a trilemma.

Consider an international system with a single state capable of establishing a hegemonic order. This state, the "hegemon," seeks to maximize its net influence, promote an order aligned with its interests, and avoid war.

The hegemon offers other states a grand bargain: in exchange for influence over their policies, it grants benefits to those who join its order. While all states desire these benefits, not all are equally valuable members to the hegemon. The greater the distance between a member's interests and the order's, the more likely the member will defect on its obligations. The hegemon can force compliance or tolerate defection, but options cause a net influence loss. To minimize this loss, the hegemon may

[50] Schweller and Pu, "After Unipolarity", p. 44.

[51] Osmo Jussila, Seppo Hentilä, and Jukka Nevakivi. *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State : A Political History of Finland since 1809*. London : Hurst & Company, 1999. 406 pp.

[52] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita. "Pride of Place: The Origins of German Hegemony". In: *World Politics* 43.1 (1990), pp. 28–52.

[53] Tanisha M. Fazal. "The Demise of Peace Treaties in Interstate War". In: *International Organization* 67.4 (2013), pp. 695–724; Bear F. Braumoeller. *Only the Dead: The Persistence of War in the Modern Age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

strategically adjust its order's IP to reduce the risk of defection, but this compromises the alignment of the order with its own interests.

Order-makers face a tension: they can maximize net influence by strategically setting their order's profile *or* promote an order aligned with their own interests, accepting suboptimal influence gains.

The emergence of another state capable of establishing a competing hegemonic order complicates this dynamic. This "rival" shares the hegemon's policy objectives and offers other states a similar grand bargain. This development benefits order-takers but harms order-makers' bottom line. Members gain leverage by pitting the hegemon against its rival, forcing the hegemon to offer more benefits for diminishing influence. As competition intensifies, the hegemon's satisfaction with the status quo diminishes, and its utility worsens.

The temptation for war arises from the desire to reduce this competitive pressure. War is costly but allows the victor to remove their rival from contention. Thus, if the hegemon becomes too dissatisfied with its gains from competition, it may gamble on war to return to uncontested hegemony.

If the hegemon prefers to avoid war, peaceful alternatives can ease competitive pressures. For example, the hegemon could delegitimize the rival or limit its ability to deliver benefits to other states. Tragically, these strategies indirectly increase the risk of war, as the rival may perceive the status quo as less favorable, raising their temptation for war—in addition to any backlash caused by the use of such a strategy.[54]

From these tensions emerges a trilemma: order-makers cannot simultaneously maximize their influence, advance an order aligned with their interests, and ensure peace.

Model

The model proceeds in 3 stages: Great powers first decide whether to wage war against their competitor (Stage 1). Then, they select what IP their order will promote (Stage 2). Finally, they choose how many benefits (i.e., "how much order") to provide other states (Stage 3). Decisions are simultaneous

[54] Jack Snyder. "Backlash against Naming and Shaming: The Politics of Status and Emotion". In: *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22.4 (2020), pp. 644–653; Yehonatan Abramson, Anil Menon, and Abir Gitlin. "Whose Critique Matters? The Effects of Critic Identity and Audience on Public Opinion". In: *American Journal of Political Science* n/a.n/a (2024).

at each stage, and I focus on cases where two powerful states compete. To build intuition, I introduce the model from the ground up, tracing how states' demand for benefits shapes order-makers' incentives.

Let the international system consist of states distributed on the interval of all possible IPs, $X \equiv [0, 1]$. States are described by their position, $x \in X$, on this spectrum.

They benefit from a quantity of order-derived benefits, $q(x)$, and are willing to trade influence, v_x, over their polity to receive them.[55] Common manifestations of $q(x)$ include lowered military expenditures, access to new markets, direct subsidies (e.g., the Marshall and the Molotov plans), and the indirect prosperity these benefits generate.[56] Similarly, v_x can take forms like tributes (e.g., the Chinese Tributary order) or surrendering foreign policy autonomy (e.g., under the Ottoman Empire). Let the demand function of state x be $q(x) = v_x - p(x)$, where $p(x)$ is the price, in influence, of benefits.

This demand generates incentives for states to establish hegemonic orders. Since the model focuses on order-makers, it is convenient to use the inverse demand function: $p(x) = v_x - q(x)$, which represents the profits an order-maker receives for providing one "unit" of benefits to x. Saliently, $q(x)$ represents the total quantity of benefits x receives from all order-makers willing to provide benefits at its position. Formally, if states $i, j, ..., n$ provide benefits to x, then $q(x) = q_i(x)+q_j(x)+...+q_n(x)$.

In practice, few states establish orders because doing so is costly. Great powers set their order's IPs, $\xi \in X$, which may coincide with theirown, $\xi_i = x_i$, or not, $\xi_i \neq x_i$. Let the total costs for one "unit" of benefits be: $C_i \equiv c_i + \kappa|\xi_i - x|$. Production costs, c_i, represent the costs directly associated with providing benefits, like the costs associated with members' defense or financial assistance. Governance costs, κ, capture the transaction costs to ensure x does not renege on the bargain ex-post. Some states are more likely to defect than others, and $|\xi_i - x|$ represents the likelihood of defection. Intuitively, the greater the distance between a state's interests and the interests of the order, the more likely the state is to defect.

The net utility for hegemon i of offering benefits to state x is then equal to the influence gains (quantity $\times$ profits) of providing order to state x minus the expenses (quantity $\times$ costs) incurred to

[55] By assumption, $q(x) \geq 0$ and $v \geq 0$.
[56] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 31.

do so:

$$\pi_i(x) = q_i(x)[v_x - q(x)] - q_i(x)[c_i + \kappa|\xi_i - x|]. \quad (1)$$

In Stage 3, order-makers decide on how much order to provide to each state by maximizing $\pi_i(x)$ with respect to $q_i(x)$. Two dynamics emerge: First, $\pi_i(x)$ decreases with hegemonic competition over x, as i's influence gains decrease in the quantity of benefits provided by rivals: $q_i(x)[v_x - q_i(x) - q_j(x)]$. Second, costs affect hegemonic competition in different ways. Production costs dictate which states are eligible to become hegemons as only states powerful enough to have low production costs, $c_i < v_x$, can establish their own order. If this condition is not met (i.e., $c_i \geq v_x$), the dominant strategy of states is to produce no order at all points, $\forall x \in [0, 1], q_i(x) = 0$. Governance costs determine the size of orders—which states are offered membership and the benefits they receive. Because states close to the IP of their orders are less likely to defect ($|\xi_i - x|$), it is cheaper for order-makers to provide them with benefits. Accordingly, closer states are both more likely to be part of the order and to receive more benefits than distant states. The cost of governance determines how wide a net order-makers can cast. When κ is high, any risk of defection may detract order-makers from offering states membership. This produces narrow orders with few members with similar interests. However, when κ is low, order-makers are less risk-averse because defection is cheap to prevent or harmless to tolerate. This produces wide orders with many members representing diverse IPs.

What role does the IP of orders play at this stage? Directly, it influences which states are most likely to be recruited and receive benefits. The cost of governance produces a comparative advantage for order-makers, who can provide benefits to states close to their order's IP relative to more distant competitors. If state x is closer to ξ_i than to ξ_j, then it is cheaper for i than for j to provide x with benefits: $\kappa|\xi_i - x| < \kappa|\xi_j - x|$ and, consequently, $q_i(x) > q_j(x)$. Indirectly, the IP also hinders rival order-makers from competing in its vicinity. This is because the comparative advantage of order-makers near their order's IP manifests as an increase in the quantity of benefits provided to nearby states. This translates into decreased profits for rivals and, thus, reduced order provision. These dynamics make the IP of orders one of the most important determinants of hegemonic competition. Thus far, orders' IPs have been treated as exogenous. Empirically, we know order-makers have great latitude regarding which interests their orders promote.

In Stage 2, IPs are endogenized, and order-makers decide on the specific IP that their order will

promote. This decision is momentous as order-makers are aware of the downstream implications (Stage 3) of their choices: they understand that if they decide to have their order's IP emphasize, say, human rights, they are ensuring Sweden will become an enthusiast participant while de facto excluding North Korea. Yet, by strategically setting the IP of their orders, hegemons can maximize the utility they derive from them. Formally, the utility of providing order at the level of the international system is the aggregate utility of providing order to each state in the system (i.e., at all points $x \in X$), or $\int_{x \in X} \pi_i(x; \xi_i, \xi_j) dx$.

In practice, order-makers frequently advance orders resembling their own IP. Let $\delta|\xi_i - x_i|$ capture the cost of compromise[57]—the penalty order-maker i must pay for promoting an order with IP ξ_i that differs from its own position x_i. I am agnostic regarding the origins of this cost, but it plausibly represents the costs leaders must face for defying their constituency's preferences, those associated with credibly committing to this IP, and the material and reputational costs of compromise. A hegemon can reduce this cost to 0 by setting $\xi_i = x_i$ but this guarantees a loss of order-derived utility (as shown below in Lemma 1).

Thus, in Stage 2, great powers select the IP of their orders by maximizing the following function with respect to ξ_i:

$$\Pi_i^{i,j} = \int_{x \in X} \pi_i(x; \xi_i, \xi_j) dx - \delta|\xi_i - x_i|. \tag{2}$$

That is, the net utility[58] i obtains for providing benefits at each point, $\int_{x \in X} \pi_i(x; \xi_i, \xi_j) dx$, minus the domestic costs of advancing an order that promotes interests different from its own, $\delta|\xi_i - x_i|$.

Many will recognize the distance components, $|\xi_i - x|$ and $|\xi_i - x_i|$, as a staple of spatial models inspired by the works of Hotelling and Downs.[59] A significant departure is worth highlighting. In models à la Hotelling, the issue space is partitioned into connected segments, each exclusively controlled by an actor.[60] Here, a state can "purchase order" from multiple great powers willing to provide

[57] Worth emphasizing, governance and compromise costs describe different dynamics: the former captures the price hegemons must pay to ensure their members respect the bargain ex-post; the latter, the penalty for advancing an order different from their own.

[58] I.e., influence gains minus the costs of order production and maintenance.

[59] Harold Hotelling. "Stability in Competition". In: *The Economic Journal* 39.153 (1929), pp. 41–57; Anthony Downs. "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy". In: *Journal of Political Economy* 65.2 (1957), pp. 135–150.

[60] e.g., Downs, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy"; Randall L. Calvert. "Robustness of the Multidimensional Voting Model: Candidate Motivations, Uncertainty, and Convergence". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 29.1 (1985), pp. 69–95; Alberto Alesina. "Credibility and Policy Convergence in a Two-Party System with Rational Voters". In: *The American Economic Review* 78.4 (1988), pp. 796–805; Gilles Serra. "Polarization of What? A Model of Elections with Endogenous Valence". In: *The Journal of Politics* 72.2 (2010), pp. 426–437.

benefits at its location.[61] Orders may overlap over the entire space or only parts of it. At any point, the quantity of benefits offered decreases in the distance between great powers and that point, with the closest great power supplying the majority of benefits.

Finally, during Stage 1, order-makers decide whether to wage a local war to remove their competitor's influence from the disputed state.This process is modeled as a costly lottery, and great power i launches an attack if:

$$m(i,j)\pi_i^i(x) - w \geq \pi_i^{i,j}(x) \tag{3}$$

where $m(i,j)$ represents the probability i wins the conflict as a function of i and j's military capabilities; π_i^i is the utility i derives from *not* having to compete with j, and w captures the inefficiency of war. $T_i(x) \equiv m(i,j)\pi_i^i(x) - w - \pi_i^{i,j}(x)$ represents i's temptation of war, with war occurring if this value is positive, $T_i(x) > 0$.

Empirically, great powers may bargain to avoid war.[62][63] While important, this process is omitted here, as it would not impact the existence of the trilemma. Intuitively, if hegemons avoid war through negotiations, they sacrifice some influence to preserve peace—thus conforming to the trilemma.

Results

Having described the features of hegemonic competition and introduced a model consistent with them, I formally demonstrate the existence of the trilemma. To do so, I only need to show that order-makers prioritizing influence and peace cannot concurrently advance an order aligned with their IP; those peacefully advancing an order with their interests must sacrifice influence; and those refusing to compromise on influence or interests must accept a heightened risk of conflict.

I proceed in four steps: First, given its rival's profile, I demonstrate that only one IP maximizes

[61] This model builds upon Anderson and Neven (Simon P. Anderson and Damien J. Neven. "Cournot Competition Yields Spatial Agglomeration". In: *International Economic Review* 32.4 [1991], pp. 793–808) and Chamorro Rivas (José María Chamorro Rivas. "Spatial Dispersion in Cournot Competition". In: *Spanish Economic Review* 2.2 [2000], pp. 145–152) and falls under the broad family of Cournot competition models.

[62] e.g., Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Robert Powell. "War as a Commitment Problem". In: *International Organization* 60.1 (2006), pp. 169–203; Nuno P. Monteiro and Alexandre Debs. "An Economic Theory of War". In: *The Journal of Politics* 82.1 (2020), pp. 255–268.

[63] See Acharya and Lee (Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee. "Economic Foundations of the Territorial State System". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 62.4 [2018], pp. 954–966; Avidit Acharya and Alexander Lee. *The Cartel System of States: An Economic Theory of International Politics*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 222 pp.) for similar models where the position (i.e., IP) of states is exogenous but where actors can negotiate—and wage war—over territorial borders.

a great power's influence gains. Thus, promoting any other IP must lead to decreased influence. Second, I show that competitiveness increases rivals' temptation of war. Third, I prove that a great power's temptation of war increases with its inability to compete effectively. Finally, I demonstrate how the trilemma emerges from these findings. As is common in location models, I restrict myself to subgame perfect Nash equilibria and solve the game by backward induction. The proofs for Lemmas 1-3 are omitted for brevity but available in the Appendix.

I begin by demonstrating the central tension between maximizing influence and promoting an order aligned with a great power's IP.

Lemma 1. *Under hegemonic competition, great powers promoting an IP identical to their own suffer a loss of influence compared to those setting their order's profile strategically:* $\forall \xi_i^* \neq x_i, \int_{x \in X} \pi_i(x; \xi_i = x_i, \xi_j^*)dx < \int_{x \in X} \pi_i(x; \xi_i^*, \xi_j^*)dx$.

Lemma 1 obtains because, as long as hegemons are willing to compete,[64] only a single optimal IP maximizes a hegemon's net influence gains, given its rival's profile. Thus, any deviation from this position, including to reduce the penalty $\delta|\xi_i - x_i|$, causes a loss of influence. This lemma holds under the weak assumption the hegemon's IP does not coincide with its order's optimal profile.[65]

Figure 2 displays optimal IPs and quantities of benefits provided as a function of governance costs (κ). The value of theoretical models is, in parts, derived from the insights they generate,[66] and the hegemonic configurations that emerge from the model are discussed in the Appendix.

Two implications of Lemma 1 are worth noting. First, great powers must compromise on their order's IP to maximize influence. Second, this tension is a quandary but not a dilemma, as it is easy to imagine how great powers can improve one without sacrificing the other. For example, a state could wage war over a contested state or undermine rivals' legitimacy (i.e., increase their governance costs).

I now turn to the determinants of war, first on the side of i. As noted previously, when great powers decide on the interests position of their order in Stage 2, they effectively determine where they wish to be most competitive. I now show that this competitive edge—and any other competitive efficiency gain—increases rivals' temptation of war.

[64] Great powers are no longer willing to compete when governance costs are extremely high.

[65] This assumption seems acceptable as the two positions are unlikely ever to coincide.

[66] Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 220 pp., p.100.

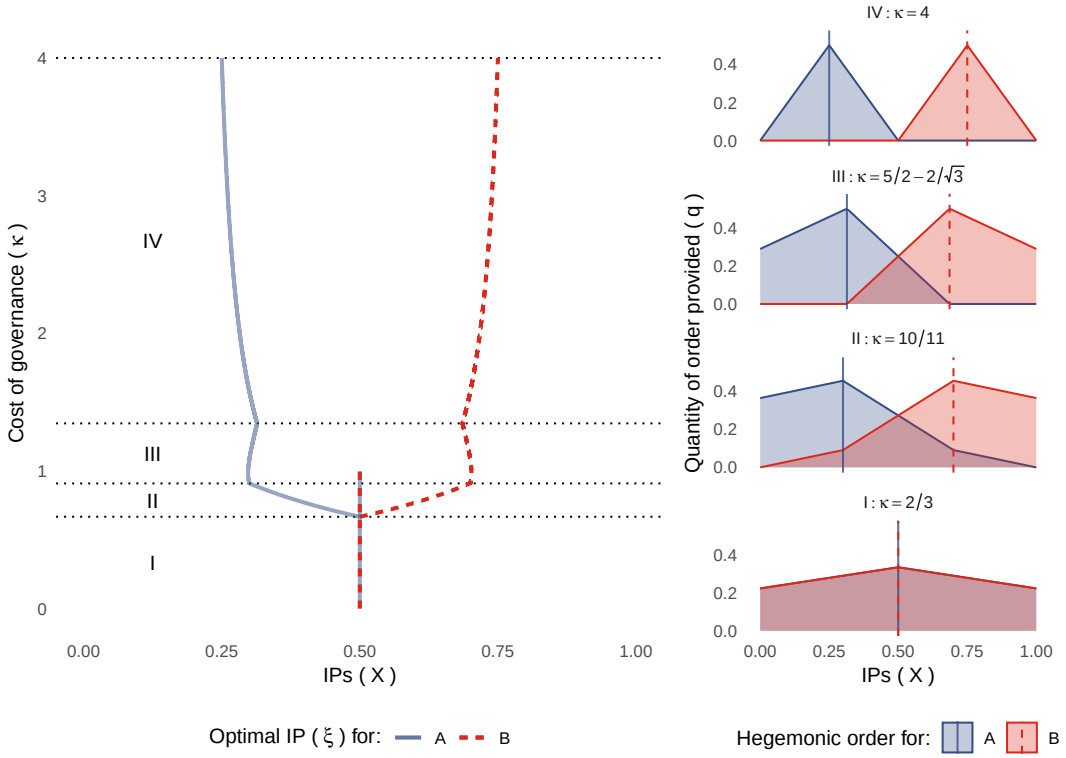

Figure 2: Governance costs, IPs, and quantities (for $v_x - c_{i,j} = 1$ and $\delta = 0$). On the left, optimal IPs given κ; on the right, examples of order provision at 4 different threshold values of κ.

Lemma 2. *Any competitive advantage gained (i.e., any decrease in the production or governance costs) by an order-maker over a contested state increases its rival's temptation of war:* $\forall C_i^\dagger < C_i$ *where* $q_j(x) > 0$, $T_j^\dagger(x) \geq T_j(x)$.

Intuitively, reducing competition costs increases an order-maker's ability to provide benefits, thereby increasing its influence abroad. In turn, this decreases the utility rivals' obtain from peaceful competition and increases their temptation of war.

Importantly, any development that decreases C_i raises rivals' temptation of war, including changes in IP, more effective legitimation strategies, and exogenous shocks that bring member-states' IP closer to the order's. It is worth noting that not all changes in IP increase competitiveness. In such cases, change is also associated with a loss of influence, and Lemma 2 implies that a loss in competitiveness for i reduces rival j's temptation of war.

What about changes that impact j's ability to compete? Policies that hinder rivals' hegemonic ambitions can allow great powers to improve their influence (alter their IP) without compromising their IP (sacrificing more influence). However, these strategies undermine rivals' utility of—and desire to

preserve—peace.

Lemma 3. *Any reduction in an order-maker's ability to compete (i.e., any increase in its production or governance costs) increases its temptation of war:* $\forall C_i^E > C_i$ *where* $q_i(x) > 0, T_i^E(x) \geq T_i(x)$.

The intuition for Lemma 3 is similar to that of Lemma 2: as an order-maker's ability to compete decreases, so does the utility it derives from peaceful competition thereby causing its temptation of war to increase.

Lemmas 2 and 3 produce a dynamic akin to the "risk-reward trade-off" found in the rationalist literature on bargaining and war: that states' desire to maximize peace-time utility may increase the risk of conflict.[67] Here, this trade-off emerges from new considerations: order-makers' desire to ensure members' compliance.

Lemma 1 established the tension between influence and IPs, and Lemmas 2 and 3 show that any changes in competitiveness unfavorable to rivals increase their temptation of war. The trilemma of hegemonic order competition emerges from these findings.

Proposition 1. *Great powers engaged in hegemonic competition face a trilemma. At best, they can only pursue two out of the following three desirable policy outcomes concurrently:*

- *Influence: to maximize the total influence they derive from their order.*
- *Interests: to advance an order aligned with their IP.*
- *Peace: to minimize the risk of war.*

Proof. To demonstrate the existence of this trilemma, I need only show that pursuing any two policy objectives implies forgoing the third. Lemma 1 implies that {*Interests*} is inconsistent with {*Influence, Peace*}. It also implies {*Influence*} must be sacrificed for {*Interests, Peace*}. Finally, {*Influence, Interests*} is inconsistent with {*Peace*}, both directly and indirectly. Directly, a great power may unilaterally forgo {*Peace*} to achieve {*Influence, Interests*}. Indirectly, policies achieving {*Influence, Interests*} increase their rivals' temptation of war (Lemmas 2 and 3). Thus, order-makers face a trilemma: only two out of {*Influence, Interests, Peace*} are achievable concurrently. □

[67] Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem"; Mark Fey and Kristopher W. Ramsay. "Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 55.1 (2011), pp. 149–169.

Illustration

I apply this framework to review three instances where order-makers navigated the trilemma: British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury during the 1895 Venezuelan crisis, Russian President Boris Yeltsin post-Cold War, and his successor, Vladimir Putin, after the Maidan Uprising, both concerning Ukraine.

Like other major international events, these crises were overdetermined, resulting from a conjunction of causes. Here, I argue that the trilemma of order competition offers a comparative perspective, addressing key debates on the causes of peace during the Anglo-American transition and war in Ukraine. These episodes highlight the trilemma's critical dynamics despite temporal and geographical dissimilarities. In each case, order-makers balanced maximizing net influence, advancing their IP, and minimizing war risks but reached different decisions on which objectives to prioritize and which to sacrifice, as summarized in Figure 3.

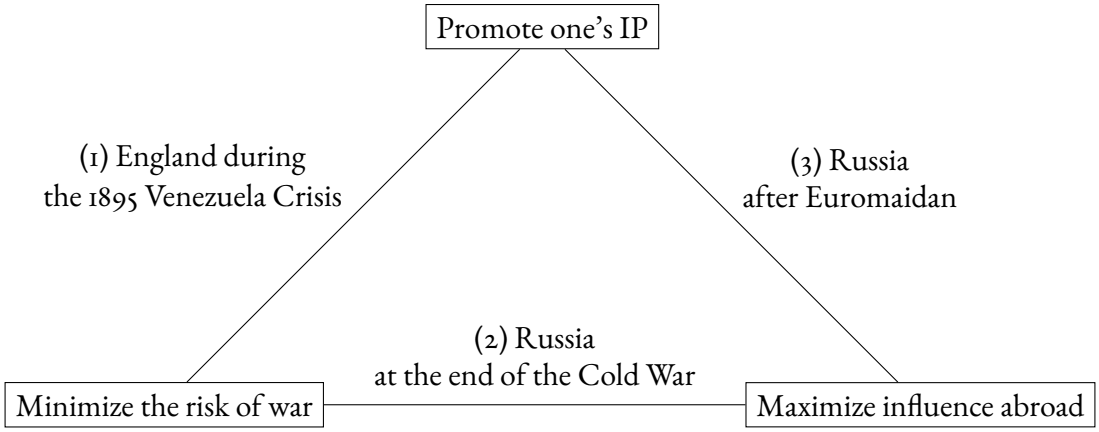

Figure 3: Three illustrations of order-makers navigating the trilemma.

Britain Navigates the Trilemma during the 1895 Venezuela Crisis

The Anglo-American transition is a rare example of peaceful order competition. Some argue war did not materialize because the US accepted the British-led order and "merely passed" Britain.[68] Others emphasize shared values and identities.[69]

I focus on the Venezuela crisis of 1895, a turning point in Anglo-American order relations. In

[68] Organski, *World Politics*, p. 323.

[69] e.g., Yongping Feng. "The Peaceful Transition of Power from the UK to the US". in: *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 1.1 (2006), pp. 83–108; Allison, *Destined for War*; Kori Schake. *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony*. 1st Edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017. 400 pp.

1895, Britain dominated Latin America, and the Monroe doctrine was a "dictum" rather than "an axiom which ought to regulate the conduct of European states".[70] By 1896, the Monroe Doctrine had become just that, and London had accepted that the US—not Britain—held a special position in the region.

Through the lens of the trilemma, the Anglo-American transition was peaceful not because the US accepted the British-led order and avoided threatening British interests. President Grover Cleveland's administration directly challenged Britain, and the threat of war was credible. Instead, exogenous factors heightened Britain's strategic concerns, leading it to concede influence over Latin America to the US.

Context

The Venezuela-British Guiana boundary dispute, ongoing for decades,[71] gained significance when the US intervened in 1895. Why Cleveland became invested in this dispute cannot be fully explored here, but he likely thought championing the Monroe doctrine would boost his domestic popularity, exculpate him from having an "un-American" foreign policy, and allow him to finish his term on a strong note.[72]

When Richard Olney became Secretary of State in June, his task was to draft a dispatch that would, once made public, absolve the administration from its pro-British reputation. In the resulting document, Olney explained the dispute was within the scope of the Monroe doctrine, which required the US to "treat as an injury to itself the forcible assumption by an [sic] European power of political control over an American state."[73] Additionally, the dispute required arbitration, for this was the only way to satisfy the rights of all *three* parties. Cleveland was pleased and later described the dispatch as Olney's "twenty-inch gun."

Beyond the territorial dispute, Olney asserted US supremacy in the Americas. Decades prior,

[70] R. A. Humphreys. "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895". In: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (1967), pp. 131–164, p. 162.

[71] See Grenville and Humphreys. (J. A. S. Grenville. *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*. The University of London, The Athlone Press, 1964; Humphreys, "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895")

[72] Nelson M. Blake. "Background of Cleveland's Venezuelan Policy". In: *The American Historical Review* 47.2 (1942), pp. 259–277; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 164.

[73] "Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard". In: *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, With the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 2, 1895*. Vol. 1. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1896.

then-Foreign Secretary Canning had written, "Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English".[74] Now, Olney proclaimed: "To-day the US is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law".[75]

Olney also challenged the British order by asserting that "any permanent political union between an [sic] European and an American state [was] unnatural and inexpedient".[76] For Britain, this undermined the legitimacy of its order in the Caribbeans and Canada.

Salisbury's response, discussed below, rejected Washington's demands. On December 17, Cleveland shared this response with Congress accompanied by a message considered "among the most crudely assertive ever issued by responsible American statemen".[77] Cleveland reasserted the Monroe Doctrine, emphasized the US' responsibility to settle the dispute via a unilateral commission, and vowed to resist British actions opposing the commission's findings. The President then concluded, "there is no calamity which a great nation can invite which equals that which follows a supine submission to wrong and injustice".[78]

The threat of war was credible. Cleveland was marching "with the martial music which had been stirring American spirits"[79] and all understood the address implied war if Britain pressed on. The British Ambassador reported, "nothing is heard but the voice of the Jingo bellowing out defiance to England".[80] In his correspondence with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Salisbury writes, "A war with America [...] has become something more than a possibility"[81] and, in his response, the Chancellor concurred with this assessment.

[74] E. M. Lloyd. "Canning and Spanish America". In: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (1904), pp. 77–105, p.93.

[75] "Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard".

[76] Ibid.

[77] Blake, "Background of Cleveland's Venezuelan Policy", p. 259.

[78] Grover Cleveland. "Message of the President". In: *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, With the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 2, 1895, Part I - Office of the Historian*. Vol. 1. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1896.

[79] Blake, "Background of Cleveland's Venezuelan Policy", p.275.

[80] Alexander Elmslie Campbell. *Great Britain and the United States, 1895-1903*. London : Longmans, 1960. 234 pp., p.16.

[81] J. A. S. Grenville. "Great Britain and the Isthmian Canal, 1898-1901". In: *The American Historical Review* 61.1 (1955), pp. 48–69, p.41.

Britain Sacrifices its Influence

Salisbury's approach to the trilemma was unambiguous: Britain would neither concede influence nor alter its order's norms and rules—and the Cabinet was initially supportive. "Mr. Olney's principle that 'American questions are for American decision,' even if it receive [sic] any countenance from the language of President Monroe (which it does not), can not be sustained by any reasoning drawn from the law of nations," wrote Salisbury, before rejecting Olney's new American order:[82]

> "The Government of the United States is not entitled to affirm [...] its interests are necessarily concerned in whatever may befall those States simply because they are situated in the Western Hemisphere."

Beyond objecting to US influence over the continent, Salisbury rejected the notion that the union between Britain and its American possessions was unnatural.

Unwilling to surrender influence or alter its order's IP, Salisbury was satisfied engaging in brinkmanship and tolerating an increased risk of conflict. Even the jingo surge that followed Cleveland's message left Salisbury unfazed. The crisis would "fizzle out",[83] and progress could be achieved then. Salisbury consulted the Lord President of the Council, who concurred, and no Cabinet meeting took place over the holiday.[84]

Then why did London accede to Washington's demands? In short, the botched Jameson Raid and the Kruger telegram changed British priorities. On January 3, Kaiser Wilhelm II sent a telegram to the President of the Transvaal Republic, congratulating him on defending his country's independence from the British forces. For many, in the British Cabinet and public alike, the telegram revealed a German hostility thus far unbeknownst to them as it implied the Kaiser could have intervened on behalf of the Transvaal Republic had he been called on to do so. Until then, Britain's traditional antagonist had been France, while Germany—ruled by Queen Victoria's grandson—was seen as friendly. This revelation required a shift in priorities.

The Cabinet reacted swiftly: change was needed on many fronts, including Venezuela. Colonial

[82] "Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote." In: *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, With the Annual Message of the President, Transmitted to Congress December 2, 1895*. Vol. 1. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1896.

[83] Humphreys, "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895", p. 156.

[84] Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 67.

Secretary Joseph Chamberlain promptly urged Salisbury to seek accommodation:[85]

> "I think that what is called an 'Act of Vigour' is required to soothe the wounded vanity of the nation. It does not much matter which of our numerous foes we defy, but we ought to defy someone.
>
> I suggest [...] a serious effort to come to terms with America on the lines of Carl Schwartz's proposal to the Chamber of Commerce. He is very influential and fair-minded. He would make an excellent member of the [Venezuelan] Commission."

The Opposition agreed. On January 9, an Opposition co-leader pressed Chamberlain to accept unrestricted arbitration immediately to avoid war, warning that failure to do so would force him to indict the Cabinet.

When the Cabinet met on January 11, Salisbury faced demands for a volte-face on Venezuela. Despite earlier support for his brinkmanship, the Cabinet now urged capitulation to American demands. After hearing about the Opposition's position, Salisbury warned that "If we were to yield unconditionally to American threats, another Prime Minister would have to be found,"[86] but he stood alone. In Chamberlain's own words, "it was quite clear that the great majority—if not all—the Cabinet would be glad of any honourable settlement".[87] Isolated, Salisbury had no choice but to follow the Cabinet's preferences. "I have great sympathy for Salisbury," writes the next day the Secretary of State for India in a letter to then-First Lord of the Treasury, Arthur Balfour, "as he nurses a policy until the time comes for expression in action and he then finds his cabinet against him and has to retrace his steps".[88]

This meeting reoriented Britain's Latin American policy: peace with the US took precedence, even at the cost of influence. Britain accepted Olney's reading of the Monroe Doctrine and conceded that the US—not Britain—held a special position in Latin America. Over the following months, Salisbury ensured that arbitration favored Britain. The negotiations fall beyond the scope of this project but are a stark reminder that the weak suffer what they must.

[85] quoted in L.J. Garvin. *The Life Of Joseph Chamberlain Vol-III*. London: Macmillan And Co. Ltd, 1934, p.95-6.
[86] Recorded by Chamberlain in his diary (quoted in ibid., p.161).
[87] quoted in ibid., p.161.
[88] quoted in Cedric James Lowe. *Salisbury and the Mediterranean, 1886-1896*. London : Routledge and K. Paul ; Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1965. 146 pp., p. 108.

The Anglo-American transition was peaceful because Britain prioritized peace over influence. While war was not inevitable—historians note "the velvet glove beneath [Cleveland's] gauntlet of mail"[89]—the Cabinet's decision on January 11 to "decline any step that might lead to war"[90] marked a deliberate sacrifice of British influence in Latin America.

Russia Navigates the Trilemma at the End of the Cold War

On the eve of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, then-NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned that Moscow sought to "recreate its spheres of influence".[91] This is emblematic of the conventional wisdom that its order ended with the Cold War, leaving the US to enjoy its "unipolar moment".[92] Through the lens of the trilemma, however, it is evident that although the end of the Cold War had ended the *Soviet* order, it had not reduced Moscow's appetite for a *Russian* order. However, it was initially forced to curtail its ambitions. Kyiv's strong bargaining position and growing US influence in the region hindered Yeltsin's attempt to secure Ukraine's participation in this order. Unable to wage war, Moscow compromised on its order's profile to maintain a semblance of influence over Kyiv.

Context

1991 posed challenges to Russian order aspirations, yet it is evident Moscow never planned to withdraw from Ukraine. Yeltsin met with Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk in December to discuss the future of the Soviet Union, aiming to persuade Ukraine to join the New Union Treaty, a Russian-dominated confederation. Yeltsin had expected that minor adjustments would suffice to persuade Ukraine to sign the Union Treaty, but his bargaining position was much weaker than anticipated. In late November, seven states had been expected to initiate a popular new draft of the Union Treaty. However, Yeltsin objected at the last moment to secure additional Russian powers, and states referred the resulting text to their parliaments. Had the treaty been initialed, Yeltsin could have presented

[89] Humphreys, "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895"; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*.

[90] Salisbury, quoted in Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*, p.68.

[91] Jens Stoltenberg. *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Munich Security Conference Session "Hand in Hand: Transatlantic and European Security"*. NATO. Feb. 19, 2022. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_192204.htm (visited on 02/26/2023).

[92] Charles Krauthammer. "The Unipolar Moment". In: *Foreign Affairs* 70.1 (1990), pp. 23–33. (Visited on 08/31/2019).

Ukraine with an ultimatum: join the union (on Russia's terms) or stay isolated. Instead, Yeltsin's attempt to move the union's IP closer to Russia's position had inadvertently made its existence contingent on Ukraine's approval.

Kravchuk, just elected with a substantial majority (61%), favored Ukrainian independence as he believed he would not be able to govern Ukraine if it belonged to a supernational state controlled by Russia.[93] This was in line with voters who had nearly unanimously voted in favor of independence (92%). This allowed Kravchuk to block any attempt to preserve the Soviet Union with reforms, forcing Yeltsin to seek alternatives.

Russia Compromises on the IP of its Order

For Yeltsin, keeping Ukraine in Russia's order was paramount "no matter what happens".[94] He had warned Gorbachev that if he failed in "drawing Ukraine into the proposed Union [he] would have 'to think about something else"'.[95] This something else became the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an entity explicitly "neither a state, nor a super-state structure".[96] Unable to convince Kravchuk to join the Russian-led New Union Treaty, Yeltsin instead moved the Russian order's profile to whatever common denominator would keep Ukraine associated with Russia—an outcome preferred to a union linking Russia (and Belarus) only to the southern Muslim republics.[97] On paper, the CIS had all the features Russia desired. However, to accommodate Ukraine, none of its requirements was binding.[98]

To retain some influence over Ukraine, Russia had heavily compromised on the IP of its order.[99] However, these concessions were insufficient to prevent Ukrainian defection, and Kravchuk soon rejected the Collective Security Treaty and the IMF's suggestion to establish a single Russian-dominated central bank to manage the ruble.

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[93] Paul J. D'Anieri. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilied Divorce to Uncivil War*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2019, p.35.

[94] quoted in Raymond L. Garthoff. *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1994. 834 pp., p.483.

[95] quoted in Sean Wood and Genine Babakian. "Not Opposed 'In Principle'". In: *Daily Report. Soviet Union* FBIS-SOV-91-238 (Dec. 11, 1991), pp. 12–13, p.12.

[96] Helen Fedor. *Belarus and Moldova : Country Studies*. Washington, D.C, 1995, p.195.

[97] Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*, p.484-5.

[98] D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilied Divorce to Uncivil War*, p.35.

[99] Saliently, war was not a viable option for a variety of reasons, including Russia's recently failed military coup and Ukraine's inheritance of the second-largest army in Europe.

Energy coercion soon became Moscow's tool of choice to ensure Ukrainian compliance with this minimal Russian order. In January 1992, Russia raised fossil fuel prices to world levels as parts of domestic reforms. This contributed to Ukraine's economic collapse and Moscow was quick to exploit Ukraine's weakness.[100] In 1993, Russia linked the provision of subsidized energy to demands regarding the Black Sea Fleet, military bases, and pipeline rights. During a Crimea summit, Russian negotiators threatened to suspend oil and gas deliveries unless Ukraine settled its debt or surrendered warheads and Sevastopol.[101] Kravchuk dared not defy this threat:

> "We had to act on the basis of realism. Suppose we had slammed the door and left. The gas would have been turned off and there would have been nothing left to do [...] The main thing is to maintain energy supplies." [102]

Ukrainians were dismayed. Most parties denounced the deal and accused Kravchuk of betraying Ukraine.[103] Eventually, Kravchuk reversed his stance, and the agreements were never implemented.

The US' entry as an active player in the region forced Moscow to further compromise on its order's IP. In 1991, the US announced it would quickly recognize Ukraine's independence.[104] Leonid Kuchma, elected in 1994 on a pro-Russia platform, quickly realized that Russia would only accept Ukrainian sovereignty as a currency. Initially unwilling to pay this price, he sought rapprochement with the US. Kuchma was willing to denuclearize and seemed pro-reform, two qualities that made him, for Washington, the perfect candidate to rein in Russia's imperial ambitions. During his 1995 Kyiv visit, President Clinton[105] explained: "For America, support for an independent Ukraine secure in its recognized borders [...] is a matter of our national interest as well." In months, Ukraine signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and joined NATO's Partnership for Peace to become the third-largest recipient of US aid.[106]

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[100] Paul J. D'Anieri. *Economic Interdependence in Ukrainian-Russian Relations*. SUNY Series in Global Politics. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. 278 pp., p.78.

[101] Ibid., p.79.

[102] Quoted in Tkachenko. (Alexander Tkachenko. "Ukraine Leader Rejects Resignation Calls." In: *Reuters News* [Sept. 6, 1993])

[103] Ron Popeski. "Ukraine Leader, under Fire, Defends Fleet Deal." In: *Reuters News* (Sept. 6, 1993).

[104] D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilied Divorce to Uncivil War*, p.33.

[105] William J. Clinton. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton (1995, Book I). 1*. Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 1995, p. 684.

[106] Taras Kuzio. "Neither East Nor West: Ukraine's Security Policy Under Kuchma". In: *Problems of Post-Communism* 52.5 (2005), pp. 59–68, p.65.

Washington's involvement likely contributed to Moscow's decision to accommodate more of Kyiv's demands[107]—to compromise even more on its order's IP. In 1997, Russia formally acknowledged Ukrainian independence when the Black Sea Fleet deal and the Friendship Treaties were signed.[108]

Thus, Russia's order persevered even at the height of the unipolar moment. Unable to attack Ukraine yet unwilling to forsake it, Moscow repeatedly compromised on its order's profile to preserve influence over Kyiv. Over the following decades, Russia leveraged economic and energy coercion to reassert an IP closer to its own, but this peaceful competition over Ukraine would end with Euromaidan.

Russia Navigates the Trilemma after Euromaidan

For over twenty years, Russia had compromised on the IP of its order to ensure Ukraine's membership and ensured Ukrainian compliance via economic (and especially energy) coercion. Yet, in February 2022, it launched a full-scale invasion, devastating Ukraine's economy and infrastructure, causing over a million casualties, and severely damaging Russia-Western relations. What explains this shift?

Since 2022, debates have focused on two broad explanations. The first argues that Russia seeks to "unite Ukrainians and Russians into one Slavic nation",[109] end Ukraine's independence, and weaken the US and its allies.[110] Unchecked, Russian ambitions could threaten America and the world.[111] The second claims that the US and NATO provoked the war by transforming Ukraine into a Western bastion, an existential threat to Russia who had no choice but to launch a preventive war. This view,

[107] D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilied Divorce to Uncivil War*, p.82.

[108] Andrew D. Sorokowski. "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation". In: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 20 (1996), pp. 319–329.

[109] Michael McFaul. *How Trump Can End the War in Ukraine: Convince Kyiv to Trade Land for NATO Membership*. Dec. 12, 2024. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/how-trump-can-end-war-ukraine (visited on 01/06/2025).

[110] Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Michael Kofman. *Putin's Point of No Return: How an Unchecked Russia Will Challenge the West*. 2024. URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/putins-point-no-return (visited on 01/13/2025).

[111] Joseph R. Biden. *2022 State of the Union Address*. The White House. 2022. URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2022/ (visited on 01/06/2025).

supported by some prominent scholars[112] and policymakers, including President Donald Trump[113] and British MP Nigel Farage,[114] was further bolstered by the declaration of Stoltenberg[115] that "[Putin] went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, close to his borders." However, both accounts have limitations: the former struggles to explain the timing of the attack, while the latter overlooks the fact that Ukraine's distant NATO prospects received only lukewarm domestic and European support.

The trilemma suggests another explanation. Russia's mismanagement of hegemonic competition in the early 2010s and Ukraine's post-Maidan pivot toward the West sharply increased governance costs. With the US and its allies disinclined to defend Ukraine directly, Moscow concluded war was the best path forward for the Russian order.

Context

Starting with Kravchuk, Ukraine's foreign policy could be broadly described as "multi-vector," balancing between East and West. In practice, it leaned pro-West when Russia was hostile and pro-Russia when the West was disillusioned with Ukraine's domestic policies. Ukraine's ability to leverage hegemonic competition for greater benefits ended abruptly in 2013 when President Viktor Yanukovych was forced to choose between the (Russian) Eurasian Economic Commission or the EU Association Agreement (AA)—between East and West.

Initially, Moscow competed peacefully. As EU-Ukraine AA negotiations progressed, Russia offered additional concessions to encourage Ukraine to join its Customs Union. By spring, Ukraine signed a Memorandum to become an observer of the Eurasian Economic Commission. For Moscow, this was the first stage of accession to a Russian-led union better aligned with its IP.[116] The memo-

[112] e.g., Jeffrey Sachs. "The US Should Compromise on Nato to Save Ukraine". In: *Financial Times. War in Ukraine* (Feb. 21, 2022). URL: https://www.ft.com/content/b5886606-4d7d-41af-87c1-8d9993722e51 (visited on 01/06/2025); Thomas L. Friedman. "This Is Putin's War. But America and NATO Aren't Innocent Bystanders." In: *The New York Times. Opinion* (Feb. 22, 2022). URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/opinion/putin-ukraine-nato.html (visited on 01/06/2025); John J. Mearsheimer. *Who Caused the Ukraine War?* John's Substack. Aug. 5, 2024. URL: https://mearsheimer.substack.com/p/who-caused-the-ukraine-war (visited on 01/03/2025).

[113] Jason Calacanis, director. *In Conversation with President Trump*. June 20, 2024. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blqIZGXWUpU (visited on 01/06/2025).

[114] Rosa Rahimi. *UK's Nigel Farage Sparks Outrage from Opponents after Saying West 'Provoked' Ukraine War*. CNN. June 22, 2024. URL: https://www.cnn.com/2024/06/22/europe/nigel-farage-ukraine-russia-eu-provoke-intl/index.html (visited on 01/06/2025).

[115] Jens Stoltenberg. *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Joint Committee Meeting at the European Parliament*. NATO. 2023. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_218172.htm (visited on 01/06/2025).

[116] Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton. *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet*

randum was non-binding, but it required Ukraine to refrain from taking any action directed against the Customs Union.[117] Once again, Moscow had compromised on its IP to ensure Ukraine would commit—exclusively—to Russia's order.

Kyiv, however, continued rapprochement with the West. Yanukovych called the European Commission on the day of the memorandum to explain it would not hinder AA progress and, as the Vilnius summit approached, Kyiv and Brussels showed flexibility on selective justice, a long-standing issue. Moscow might have tolerated a slow Ukrainian integration into its order but not one subordinated to another.[118]

With AA ratification—and the prospect of Ukraine leaving Russia's orbit for good—looming, Moscow shifted to a more heavy-handed strategy. In July, the Kremlin launched a trade war, cutting imports of Ukrainian confectionery[119] and agricultural products, and throttling exports to Russia with new customs procedures. The implicit threat was clear: abandon the AA or suffer the consequences. Soon, it became explicit: "[T]o the extent that Ukraine eliminates import tariffs with Europe, we will introduce import tariffs with Ukraine".[120]

At the time, there were fears that Ukraine might default on its debts after years of corruption, lack of economic reforms, and financial mismanagement. By the summer, it was apparent that, regardless of measures taken,[121] the situation was not sustainable. If Yanukovych hoped to be re-elected in 2015, he needed urgent financial support. Salvation, for Yanukovych, would have to come from the EU or Russia.

By then, Brussels had invested significant political capital in the Eastern Partnership. Yanukovych thought it might also compensate Ukraine for the cost of contradicting Russia, but Brussels refused his inflated demands.[122] A complementary source of support was a loan from the IMF, but its conditions were unpopular domestically and risked undermining rent-seeking. Moscow, however, offered unconditional relief and threatened further tariffs if Ukraine signed the AA. "Who will pay for

Eurasia. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016. 212 pp., p.118.

[117] Rilka Dragneva-Lewers and Kataryna Wolczuk. *Ukraine between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge*. Palgrave Pivot. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 148 pp., p.79.

[118] Ibid., p.79.

[119] Petro Poroshenko, the "Chocolate King" and future President, was pro-AA.

[120] quoted in D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilied Divorce to Uncivil War*, p.200.

[121] Anders Aslund. "The Basket Case". In: *Foreign Policy* (Nov. 26, 2013). URL: https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/26/the-basket-case/.

[122] Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk, *Ukraine between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge*, p.85-6.

Ukraine's default, which will become inevitable?" menaced a Russian presidential advisor.[123] The Russian deal also ensured Yanukovych could run for re-election unhindered by unpopular reforms and promised further electoral support.[124] It is transparent why Yanukovych went East: the West proposed to bail out Ukraine whereas Putin offered to save Yanukovych.

This is typical of hegemonic order competition. Order-makers offer benefits (here, financial assistance) for sovereignty concessions. Moscow's offer outmatched the West's, as it had in Armenia weeks earlier. That Yanukovych may have to pay some domestic cost, here in the form of the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv, was not unusual. Protests are a common cost that leaders must pay for their membership, and moving toward the EU was popular among Ukrainians. However, Yanukovych's mishandling of the protests was staggering. As one journalist notes: "Yanukovych was a useless democrat; he was also a useless autocrat. He specialized in crackdowns that were brutal enough to radicalize more Ukrainians into action, but not brutal enough to subdue the revolutionary impulses with fear".[125]

When repression backfired, Moscow faced a reversal of Ukraine's economic integration, the loss of Crimea and Sevastopol,[126] and the rise of anti-Russian sentiments on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti. Far-right activists were a conspicuous minority who displayed portraits and flags of Stepan Bandera on the Maidan. In light of these events, there are good reasons to believe Putin's intervention in Crimea aimed to secure the Black Sea Fleet and that the annexation of the region was his attempt to salvage the situation ex-post.[127] The costs for these actions were either unforeseen or ignored.

Russia Forsakes Peace

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This was a dramatic escalation from the mostly dormant (since 2015) conflict over Donbas. Three developments likely contributed to Russia's decision.

First, post-Euromaidan, Ukraine turned sharply West and appeared determined to leave Rus-

[123] Alex Spillius. *Russia Threatens Ukraine with Bankruptcy over Plans to Sign EU Agreement*. Sept. 22, 2013. URL: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10327027/Russia-threatens-Ukraine-with-bankruptcy-over-plans-to-sign-EU-agreement.html (visited on 03/01/2023).

[124] Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk, *Ukraine between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge*, p.87.

[125] Shaun Walker. *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. 278 pp., p.129.

[126] Yanukovych had negotiated the Sevastopol lease extension.

[127] Daniel Treisman, ed. *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2018. 320 pp., ch.11.

sia's order. Ukrainian ethnonationalism dominated the new administration, and the strongly anti-Russian, far-right Svoboda party controlled a third of the ministers.[128] Russian approval in Ukraine plummeted and, for the first time, more Ukrainians approved of joining NATO than opposed it, as visible in Figures 4 and 5.[129]

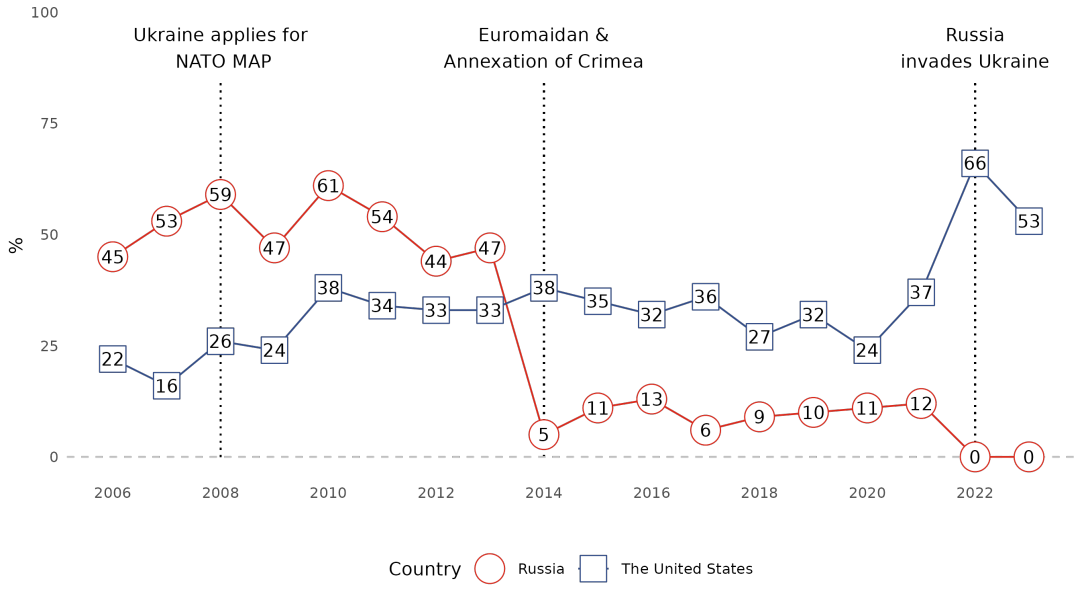

Figure 4: Ukrainian approval of the US/Russian leadership's job performance (2006-2023).

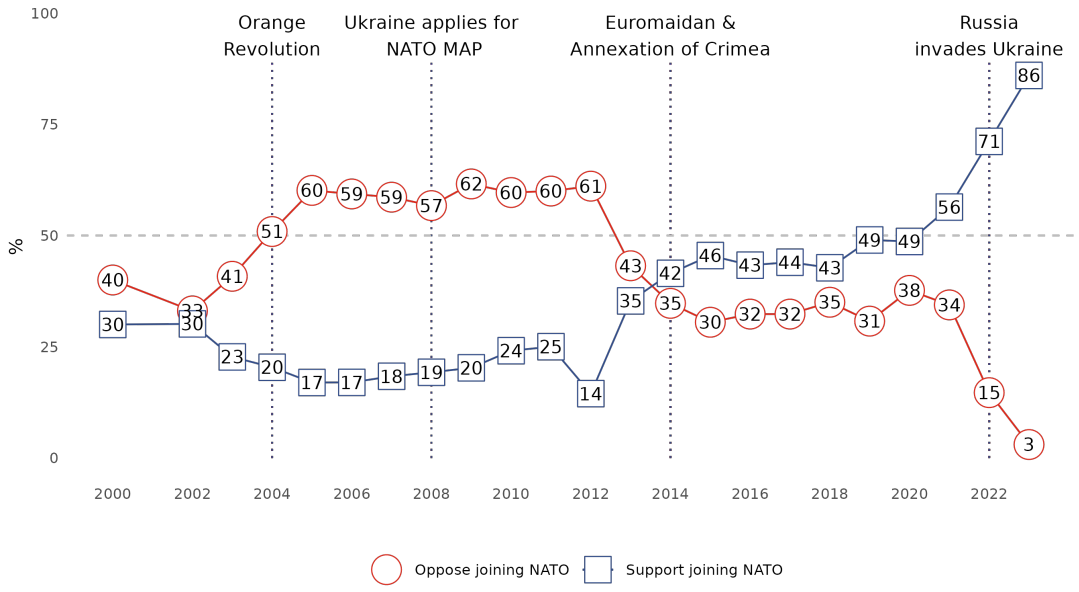

Figure 5: Ukrainian public support for Ukraine accessing NATO (2000-2023).

Additionally, the new regime hindered the Kremlin's influence in Ukraine by banning Russian

[128] Charap and Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p.126-7.
[129] See the Appendix for details.

television stations[130] and social media, promoting Ukrainian, and establishing a Ukrainian Church independent from Russia's.[131]

Second, the West became more willing to insulate Kyiv from Russian coercion. The new government immediately reversed Ukraine's trajectory and signed the AA in June,[132] placing Ukraine firmly inside the Western order and undermining Russia's ability to compete. Economic—especially energy—coercion had been a critical tool for Russia to ensure Ukrainian compliance with its order. Between 2014 and 2018, the US gave Ukraine $1.96 billion to support, among others, anti-corruption efforts and energy diversification. Ukraine was also the largest (non-EU) recipient of EU macro-financial aid, receiving over $700 million annually from the EU and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development each.[133] These changes made governance costs prohibitive for Russia. Worse, this situation risked becoming irreversible as Ukraine prepared its EU application, a highly popular prospect (65%) among Ukrainians.[134]

Third, as Moscow's influence waned, the temptation to rid Ukraine of Western influence—the temptation of war—increased. The prospect of fighting Ukraine alone increased this temptation. "[Article 5 is] a sacred obligation," but "That obligation does not extend to [Ukraine]" stated President Joe Biden before the invasion. Additionally, using force would be contingent on what "the rest of the NATO countries were willing to do as well".[135] As European leaders had long been reluctant to provoke Russia, it was all but certain Ukrainian forces would face Russia alone.

These developments undermined peaceful competition and increased the temptation for war. In his invasion speech, Putin decried a "hostile 'anti-Russia'" near Russia[136]—omitting that his actions

[130] See Peisakhin and Rozenas (Leonid Peisakhin and Arturas Rozenas. "Electoral Effects of Biased Media: Russian Television in Ukraine". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 62.3 [2018], pp. 535–550) on the effect of Russian television before this ban.

[131] Adrian Karatnycky. "Why the West Loves Poroshenko Again". In: *POLITICO* (Mar. 8, 2019). URL: https://www.politico.eu/article/why-the-west-loves-ukraine-petro-poroshenko-again-presidential-election/ (visited on 03/01/2023).

[132] *Ukraine Ratifies EU Trade Pact*. DW. Sept. 16, 2014. URL: https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-ratifies-eu-association-agreement/a-17925681 (visited on 03/01/2023).

[133] Iain King. *Not Contributing Enough? A Summary of European Military and Development Assistance to Ukraine Since 2014*. 2019. URL: https://www.csis.org/analysis/not-contributing-enough-summary-european-military-and-development-assistance-ukraine-2014.

[134] Rating. *Ukraine during the War (March 30-31, 2022)*. 7. Apr. 5, 2022. URL: http://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/sedmoy_obschenacionalnyy_opros_ukraina_v_usloviyah_voyny_30-31_marta_2022.html (visited on 01/06/2025).

[135] Reuters, director. *Biden Says Putting U.S. Troops in Ukraine 'Not on the Table'*. Dec. 8, 2021. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=607ZFFUCGTQ (visited on 12/07/2024).

[136] Vladimir Putin. "Transcript: Vladimir Putin's Televised Address on Ukraine". In: *Bloomberg.com* (Feb. 24, 2022). URL: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-

in 2014 had caused Ukraine to implement policies that made Russia's governance costs prohibitive. Putin could have compromised on the Russian order's IP (like Yeltsin), accepted Ukraine's loss, or waited for a new opportunity as, on the eve of the war, Ukraine remained one of the most corrupt states in Europe with scandals implicating President Zelenskyy.[137] Instead, in February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine to replace its government, choosing the Russian order over peace.

Conclusion

This project introduced a model of how great powers compete over hegemonic orders, identifying the existence of an important limitation of foreign policy. When it comes to hegemonic order competition, great powers cannot have their cake and eat it, too. Only two of the following three desirable objectives are achievable concurrently: maximizing net influence gains, advancing interests aligned with one's preferences, and avoiding hegemonic conflicts. Historical cases illustrate how three order-makers navigated the trilemma: England's 1896 decision to tolerate influence loss for peace with the US, Russia's post-Cold War compromise on its order's profile to retain Ukraine, and its 2022 attack on Ukraine.

More broadly, the trilemma provides a framework for assessing conflict risk in hegemonic competition, shedding light on historical patterns and providing lessons for future scenarios. Applied to the US-Soviet rivalry, it explains the prevalence of local conflicts during the Cold War and why, when it ended, the median rate of the use of force dropped by two-thirds.[138]

Looking ahead, this project suggests that peace between the US and China is possible but requires deliberate efforts. While nuclear deterrence makes systemic war unlikely, local conflicts remain a risk, with Taiwan as a potential flashpoint. Unlike the Venezuelan crisis, where Britain prioritized European affairs, the US views China as a primary foreign policy priority, and Taiwan holds significant strategic and symbolic value for both powers. The legitimacy of the US as a hegemon is tied to its commitment to defending democracy. It is thus implausible that the US would yield to a direct chal-

`putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24` (visited on 02/25/2023).

[137] Olga Rudenko. "The Comedian-Turned-President Is Seriously in Over His Head". In: *The New York Times* (Feb. 21, 2022). URL: `https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/opinion/ukraine-russia-zelensky-putin.html` (visited on 03/01/2023).

[138] Braumoeller, *Only the Dead*, p.207.

lenge. Had London refused to give ground in 1896, Cleveland's administration might have attempted to back down and defuse the situation: Venezuela carried little strategic or symbolic value for Washington, and the US was unprepared to wage war. In contrast, Taiwan is central to Beijing's domestic legitimacy, and China has been developing its regional military capabilities accordingly.

At the same time, the trilemma suggests that peace is not contingent on great powers embracing the same order or sharing values and identities. In practice, a Sino-American conflict would likely undermine both countries' ability to engage in order competition in other regions. A Chinese attack on Taiwan, the most likely spark for such a conflict, would undermine the legitimacy—increase the cost of governance—of China's order among democracies in East Asia and beyond. Similarly, the US may prefer to reach a compromise over Taiwan as a conflict would limit its ability to provide order—increase its costs of production—in other theaters (e.g., in Eastern Europe or the Middle East). As long as these concerns persist, the desire for greater influence may continue to facilitate rather than hinder peace.