

THE HOT TAKE

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LOCKDOWNS: NECESSARY FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OR A CURTAILMENT OF LIBERTIES?

HAS THE **U.S.** LOST ITS ROLE AS A PREEMINENT **GLOBAL LEADER**?

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QUESTION ONE:

LOCKDOWNS: NECESSARY

FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OR

A CURTAILMENT OF

LIBERTIES?

COVID19 – HEALTH TEMPERED THROUGH HISTORY

Written by a PhD student at University of Strathclyde

A lockdown represents a response by the government to address the ongoing issue of the transmission of COVID-19 and the repercussions on the security of the nation's people. I would argue that there is no measure that can be made in the best interest of the public safety without curtailing liberties to some extent. We live in a world of compromise. As the government seeks to balance health and economic securities, they are also balancing the freedom of those both vulnerable and less vulnerable to the virus. Anything less than a 'laissez-faire' policy would result in the 'curtailment' of personal freedom. As described in *The Republic*, the government is responsible for managing the course of the "Ship of State," which includes a responsibility to those who do not have the agency or influence to make their own change and manage their own safety.

Intervention by the government is built into the framework of our systems, with the Secretary of Health being responsible for "securing continuous improvement in the quality of services provided to individuals for or in connection with— (a) the prevention, diagnosis or treatment of illness, or (b) the protection or improvement of public health." We are far removed from the institution of political absolutism and we are protected from tyranny, in part, by the structure of our government such that no one person has too much power - no one can claim that they 'are the state.'

COVID19 – HEALTH TEMPERED THROUGH HISTORY

Many have pointed to the outbreak of influenza in the years after WW1 for comparison, we can also draw parallels with the Blitz, the campaign of strategic bombing waged on the British during WW2. During the Blitz, people could have argued that more people had died as a result of the flu or other illnesses confined to the 20th century, but there was not the same resistance to the instruction to enter the underground spaces as we are seeing today. Be it resulting from the palpability of munitions being dropped overhead, there was a level of trust in the government to follow their instruction as one might with their manager or boss - you may not respect them, but it is expected that you respect their position and the authority trusted to them.

Finally, we are entering a new era in which social unrest is fuelled by online commentary. For every government announcement, there is an armada of online voices to dismiss and argue against guidance. Amid the most significant management project since Brexit, it does not help the safety of the public to undermine the organised COVID response, which could set back the country months if not years. Recently, there have been discussions about a responsibility of the social media organisations to curtail the spread of misinformation, which many are pointing to as the suppression of free speech - however, there is potentially something to be explored here in the encouragement of self-harm to oneself and one's community through negligence.

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LOCKDOWN PRIVILEGE

Written by a European politics student

Lockdowns are a necessity - but being able to make this statement is indicative of one's privilege to be able to live comfortably during a lockdown. As much as we love to make fun of COVID deniers, and of the fetishisation of freedom, I tend to believe that these reactions are at its core a form of cognitive dissonance. These people might not afford to believe that COVID is 'real' because making it 'real' would lead to financial insecurity caused by lockdowns and economic uncertainty. The pandemic has been a lonely and traumatic experience, and these feelings have definitely transcended class, but what has not is financial stability.

The question of whether lockdowns are a necessity to public health or a curtailment of liberties takes the form of a red herring. Making the question about 'freedom' becomes a mere distraction. The real question is why is our society incapable to accommodate a couple of months of lockdowns without displacing millions? Our choices are supposedly limited to maintaining public health or risking the lives of people to maintain 'business as usual'. In truth, both of these would be achievable if capitalism was more regulated and governmental support went towards the people who needed it the most. Instead the aid goes to big corporations, with no strings attached.

LOCKDOWN PRIVILEGE

The government must 'actively shape markets'. This could be done through financial assistance with attached conditions - protecting employment and public interest, refusal of aid to companies that do not lower their emissions or hide their profits in tax havens. Due to US stock buy-backs, which used to be illegal until 1982, large companies use their profits to buy-back their stock with resulting profits going to investors and CEOs instead of investment in wages, or research and development. Companies are thus allowed to maintain these unethical practices and despose of workers due to the pandemic but still receiving large sums in government aid.

The relationship between the private and public sector is deeply flawed, specifically in the US, where we also see some of the biggest numbers of people who deny the pandemic's existence and want economies to reopen. The short sighted mentality of corporations is reflected in the public who have had to bear the biggest burden of the pandemic and who support the system because it's their only means of financial stability. Pharmaceutical companies developed their COVID-19 drug with government aid but are under no obligation to sell the drug at a low price or provide it free. Such practices remain because monopolies are increasingly in charge of the system, through heavy lobbying. This inflicts serious wounds on our democracies. Pandemics will continue to happen and the current system is incapable to think of the long term - fundamentally there is a need to change the way countries think about global health.

LOCKDOWN PRIVILEGE

The truth is that if highly capitalistic economies, like the US, would maintain lockdowns through stimulus packages, high taxes on profits made in the pandemic or any other measure that would allow people to comfortably stay home, it would become apparent that there is an alternative. Perhaps this alternative will move away from unhealthy productivity, from fossil fuels, and from the reign of monopolies and truly represent its citizens.

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LOCKDOWNS: A FAÇADE FOR OPRESSION

Written by an anonymous author

Since January, 150 countries around the world have imposed lockdowns as a means to contain COVID-19. While they have varied in stringency, lockdowns represent a serious restriction of movement and liberties which has far reaching effects on politics, the economy and society as a whole. The debate on lockdowns has mainly been shaped by the experience of western, democratic countries, which has shrouded much of the world's oppressive management of the virus in darkness. Lockdowns and emergency measures are not inherently undemocratic; however, COVID-19 has proven that they often serve as a façade for authoritarian regimes to further oppress its population in the name of public safety. As a second wave of the virus is sweeping through the world, we must recognise the detrimental political effects of lockdowns in countries that already suffer from restricted liberties. By widening our perspective, it becomes clear that lockdowns are not necessary for public safety, rather in many countries they are the very cause of insecurity.

The Freedom House estimates that human and political rights have deteriorated in 80 countries since the virus erupted. This includes deterioration in free media and expression, fair and transparent elections and protection of minority groups.

LOCKDOWNS: A FAÇADE FOR OPRESSION

Nowhere has this been clearer than in Sri Lanka which has used lockdowns and other emergency measures as an excuse to impose a draconian control over its citizens. A country already ravaged by civil war and led by an accused war criminal, Sri Lanka has been in a state of uncertainty and conflict long before the pandemic. However, COVID-19 has led to an exacerbation of authoritarian measures that presents a worrying example for the rest of the world. The virus was met by a military response of drones and other intelligence software tracking those who were infected by the virus. People were forcibly sent to quarantine centres in undisclosed locations. A military curfew was implemented, resulting in over 40 000 arrests of those who allegedly broke it. Elections were postponed, weakening checks on the executive power which left the president ruling without a legislature for five months. Sri Lanka's Muslim population, already a vulnerable group, has been targeted by the government by portraying them as 'superspreaders' and forcing Muslim victims of the virus to be cremated, violating Islamic burial practices. This type of oppression has been replicated in several parts of the world with India who has targeted Muslim minorities in a similar way, Ethiopia who postponed its elections resulting in the prime minister taking control of the country through an internal party process, and Nigeria who has used extensive police violence to enforce its lockdown. Albeit just a few examples, these countries embody a global trend of lockdowns and other emergency measures acting as a façade for authoritarian governments, or governments on the verge of authoritarianism, to further oppress its citizens under the pretence of public safety.

LOCKDOWNS: A FAÇADE FOR OPRESSION

Lockdowns might be justifiable for a short period of time under conditions of complete transparency and accountability; conditions that are impossible in many countries. Acknowledging lockdowns as a valid way, sometimes as the only valid way, to combat the pandemic has created a perfect opportunity for authoritarian regimes to further oppress its citizens. Therefore, it is important that we move beyond the experience of lockdowns from western, democratic countries, recognising that in many parts of the world lockdowns are the very drives of insecurity, oppression and violence.

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BORIS JOHNSON - HIGH PRIEST OF SCIENCE

Written by a University of Strathclyde graduate

Throughout the current pandemic, the phrase “following the science” has been used ad-nauseum by politicians and the media. What I would like to address is whether we really are, or is the science being used as a shield by politicians to justify their, more and more apparent, shoddy guesswork and decisions which influence public welfare and freedoms. How would we as the public really know if the government is rationally following the science?

Instead, publicly, we have a kind of media conspiracy of silence. The only opinions allowed are those produced by SAGE, filtered into a message by the civil service, and yes, Boris Johnson. Given the success of the current government at tasks like buying PPE or building track and trace systems, it would be hard to imagine a group of people less qualified to be our epidemiological engineers.

The shutting down of the NHS has led to a rise in deaths from other causes. We can be pretty sure that the fall in cancer diagnoses will bring more early deaths amongst relatively young people soon. The results of the government’s handling of COVID19 have been questionable at the very least. Where then are the questions?

BORIS JOHNSON - HIGH PRIEST OF SCIENCE

The government just refers to SAGE as “the science”, but where is SAGE’s advice that justifies these decisions. We are just told to believe because SAGE are “the scientists”. So why are we all being told what to do by a secret society? Well, the obvious answer is that SAGE is secret because it was expected to advise the government on sensitive issues like cybersecurity or chemical weapons. Seems very reasonable but our current problem is one of public health and restrictions of civil liberties, not geopolitics. Why do the key experts need to remain occluded when their brief is public health?

Probably for no more sinister reason than that the civil service has an instinctive desire to control the message, and because the media, when presented with anything remotely complicated will use a façade of dutifulness to avoid having to deal with anything remotely difficult. Both government and media will claim they are providing a message that the public can understand. In practice they are providing a message the government and media can understand. The media may think this protects the public from confusion and helps compliance, but no good science is done by taking someone’s word for something. If SAGE wants me to accept their opinion, they should be prepared to defend it.

BORIS JOHNSON - HIGH PRIEST OF SCIENCE

So, Boris Johnson enters the temple of SAGE, consults the oracle, and emerges to tell us all what the scientists have decreed. We the assembled are expected to believe without complaint. Everyone claims to have science on their side (a bit like every army used to claim to have god). When in fact, proper scientific processes have been suspended for the time being.

The circumstances of today do not worry me. I do not see a conspiracy of anything other than technical incompetence. What does however concern me is the ease with which science can be used as a justification for quite sweeping executive powers and how supine the media become in response. A media conspiracy of silence on scientific tropes being used to control the population is a worrying failure on behalf of one of the pillars of democracy. The media's duty to report science openly is a debate that must be had. Openness is the key to science. Closing it off and allowing politicians to hide behind it is a threat to civil liberties.

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SCOTTISH LOCKDOWNS: IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH WORSE

Written by a Scottish undergraduate student at the University of the West of Scotland

Covid-19 has had a tremendous impact on Scotland. Not only has it taken thousands of lives, but it has caused a substantial decline in the economy. I have been fortunate enough not to have been personally impacted outside of the restrictions, the restrictions being very divisive amongst the general public. From personal experience some argue that the government should remove the remaining restrictions and leave the public to it and keep each other safe through common sense, whereas others feel that the restrictions should remain in place to further 'flatten the curve' in the rise of Covid cases.

I personally feel that our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has done well in terms of managing the outbreak whilst still compromising to keep the public as happy as possible. She has remained steadfast when deciding how to approach both social and political problems, regarding public pressure. Whatever decision has been made, which has possibly not been what the public wished for, such as the current tier system that she decided was best given the information she had - I personally feel that this is in direct contrast to the way the English lockdowns have been managed. Boris Johnson seems to cave at almost every turn which has resulted in substantial spikes in cases, in particular areas such as Newcastle.

SCOTTISH LOCKDOWNS: IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH WORSE

Back in March, the entire United Kingdom was told that we would be going into a six-week lockdown, the reality was we ended up being in a near six-month lockdown. As a young person living in Glasgow, in the commonly-restricted central belt, it was difficult to have so much freedom of movement restricted. It felt very touch and go, and while there was efficient government guidance on what liberties were allowed, to go back into lockdown in October and now again a 3-week lockdown before Christmas, it has felt very at odds with what was the original government guidance. I believe that had we not ended the first lockdown so early, or been so inconsistent with the restrictions on movement and group gatherings, we wouldn't be where we are right now. That said I'm not an expert, for all we know it may have been a worse outcome.

However, I feel that lockdowns truly were the correct solution to the problem of covid-19; after all, there were very few other options. Lockdown has caused a host of issues for people, not just the ones I have mentioned and yes, we all hate being told what to do and having certain liberties restricted, but would we truly prefer the alternative? It being a monumental number of additional and unnecessary cases or even deaths? No. As of writing this, we are on the cusp of being vaccinated and having lockdowns as just a bad memory. In the end, I think the best course of action was taken to protect the people, despite what liberties were infringed upon.

SCOTTISH LOCKDOWNS: IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH WORSE

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QUESTION TWO:

HAS THE **U.S.** LOST
ITS ROLE AS A PREEMINENT
GLOBAL LEADER?



TRUMP'S ACCELERATION OF AMERICAN DECLINE

Written by a MSc Global Security graduate

As President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office in January, he will be concerned with repairing the extensive damage President Donald Trump has done to America's global standing. In truth, America's place as a global leader had been in a state of decay long before Trump entered the White House, although he can take credit for accelerating the process.

Under Trump, America has seemed ill at ease with itself, unable to keep its own house in order, much less serve as an example and leader in international relations. The US has not taken the lead in tackling the coronavirus, it has instead served as an example of farce and disaster in handling the pandemic, in addition to the bizarre attitude taken by Trump as well as many Americans towards the virus. This was worsened by the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests against the deeply ingrained and systemic racism in the US. At the end of 2020, America's reputation lies in tatters.

Looking further back, Trump has facilitated a definitive step-back for the US in terms of its role as a global leader. By pulling out of the Paris climate agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, the president signalled the end of the US commitment to making the world a safer place and essentially gesturing that America would be going it alone in future.

TRUMP'S ACCELERATION OF AMERICAN DECLINE

This allowed for the likes of Russia and China to become more assertive and further put an end to any notions of American predominance on the global stage. The increasing militaristic dominance of Russia and the economic clout of China has ensured the emergence of a multipolar world, at the cost of US hegemony.

The rot set in before Trump however and the regression of America's position cannot be laid solely at the outgoing president's door. Coming out of the bipolar world of the Cold War in 1991, came a unipolar system with the US as a global hegemon. The disintegration of this state of affairs began soon after with the twenty-first century overseeing the decline of US unipolarity. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent failure to maintain stability in the post-Saddam power vacuum under President G.W. Bush was the first of such examples. In spite of its military strength, it was unable to implement its vision of a democratic domino effect in the Middle East. It also exhibited a lack of authority and assertion in the war in Syria under President Obama, allowing the likes of Russia to play a greater role. Both of these scenarios revealed the limits of American power. Outside of the military sphere, the financial crash in 2008 and America's centrality to this eroded faith in its economic strength and financial institutions whilst feeding the perception of decline and stagnation.

TRUMP'S ACCELERATION OF AMERICAN DECLINE

The twenty-first century oversaw the beginning of American decline which Trump has hastened and there will be no quick reverse. President-elect Joe Biden's electoral victory over Trump was not a landslide, and another demagogue of his ilk, or even Trump himself, could easily find their way into the White House and continue the descent. Whilst Biden presents an opportunity for a return to the status quo, this by no means represents a return to global leadership for the US. It has sunk far too deep for that. The world has seen how America's monopoly on military power and its financial institutions are not infallible and has provided opportunities for its rivals to move in. It has also failed to show internal stability in recent months and can no longer be considered as the pre-eminent global leader and leading example to other states.

TRUMP'S ACCELERATION OF AMERICAN DECLINE

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AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

*Written by a politics student who defined themselves as
“jack of all trades, master of none”.*

The material powerbase of the United States, with her unrivaled military and vibrant economy, is an undeniable fact and there to stay in the foreseeable future. But one cannot be as sure when it comes to the state of American “hegemony” - that is, to rule with the willing consent of other political actors. The United States used to inspire her allies with her success story combining liberal democracy with material prosperity. The recreation of Europe in America’s image through the Bretton Woods system and the Marshall Plan reflected that inspiration and confidence in the values represented by the United States. Today, the same allies only tolerate the American leadership in global politics, and perhaps rightfully so: after the wrath of the Trump administration on century-old American prestige, the United States has the outlook of a political actor divided between her personas of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The Trump administration withdrew from initiatives pioneered by his predecessor such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership deals.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

Under President Trump, the US also threatened to withdraw from NAFTA and engaged in trade wars with China. All these expose deep fractures in the Washington Consensus of the American-led neoliberal order, which is now disparaged as a zombie-ideology even in the mainstream media outlets. These moves by the Trump administration conveyed an unfortunate signal of instability to allies and that of vulnerability to political rivals. Traditional European partners now declare NATO to be “brain-dead” and increasingly emphasize the need for self-dependency for European security. Meanwhile, the Chinese government imposes sanctions on several American senators for “behaving badly” in an almost mocking manner. The American military withdrawal from Syria led to a power vacuum filled by the proxies of corrupt autocracies such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The new stream of isolationism under President Trump led to the abandonment of the Kurds and the Hong Kong demonstrators alike, which is likely to discourage possible US allies in conflict zones in the future.

Even after scandal-filled four years of a parody of a president and a farcical response to the global health crisis which can best be summed by the phrase of “let them drink bleach,” Mr. Trump and his campaign still won more than 70 million votes from American citizens, losing only to razor-thin majorities in favor of Mr. Biden.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

This casts serious doubts on the future of American democracy -the main pillar of American leadership in the globe, and it also signals that polarization in American politics is here to stay, too. Not only internal political polarization but also racial tensions have become shockingly visible again with the murder of George Floyd and following public protests. All these enhance the erosion of trust in the United States and core American values it represents worldwide.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

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PARADISE LOST: THE U.S. INNOVATION LANDSCAPE IN CRISIS

Written by a female, British, London-based Master student

Though there are some salient arguments to be made for the waning of US leadership over the last few decades, the events of the past few years has seen this decline accelerate at unprecedented levels. The pervasive irony is not lost: the US' tendencies towards a set of more inwards-facing, domestically oriented policies has actually resulted in greater protectionism, largely driven by the outgoing Trump Administration.

Locked in an innovation cycle which sees the pace of Chinese innovation fast encroaching on the US' preeminent leadership position, the 'New Cold War' narratives emerging out of US-China relations should be read as a symptomatic of fragmentary global order at large rather than merely domestic issues. This does not, however, completely absolve the US' increasingly protectionist policies; a position which reached new, escalatory heights during the Trump Administration.

Less than a decade of frisson has been sufficient to raise China's profile from economic competitor to "threat." Though rhetoric from the US and its allies across the EEA area and the Five Eyes intelligence community have played a significant role in cementing these perspectives, it is difficult to determine to what extent the US' recent push for extreme trade policies are justified.

PARADISE LOST: THE U.S. INNOVATION LANDSCAPE IN CRISIS

These are policies which ultimately do more harm than good for global supply chains. Rather than fostering a universal culture of innovation the US' tight safeguarding of intellectual property (IP) tends towards the restrictive than the progressive.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown up further fissures in this, with the US' stubbornly exceptionalist stance creating critical vulnerabilities in global supply chains. In an era which sees geopolitics dominated by two superpowers, the US response to the challenge posed by the Asian Century sees the former foist by its own petard. The mainstreaming of a protectionist approach in this moment of a more globalised and connected arena of politics than ever before, poses a risky zero sum game which only serves to harm the US' position as a pre-eminent global leader. Politics may be a continuation of war by other means, but to further echo Prussian strategist Carl Von Clausewitz, perhaps the best measure in instances where peace is elusive is to take truces wherever they can be found.

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YEAH, IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS

Written by an undergraduate politics student

A leader is an entity that controls, directs or influences others in a given group. Now, using Joseph Nye's definitions of hard and soft power, it becomes clear that only soft power can be used in a setting of bi- or multilateral relations. Indeed, on one hand the use of hard power, being both coercive measures and the threat of coercive measures, doesn't make one a leader, it makes one a bully. Because the group eventually tires of the bullying, a polity whose use of power is majorly hard power will struggle being a global leader. On the other end, soft power, the ability to make one want to do what you want to do, is evidence of real leadership.

Clearly, the USA is no longer a global leader. There is little debate over the military superiority of the USA which comes as no surprise considering the amount of funds it gets. However, there is very little evidence of the USA being a major user of soft power since the beginning of the war on terror. The USA clearly is no longer such a central actor in development and aid, giving only 24% of the world's aid, which represents about half of the EU's donations. And this does not even consider the rising influence of China and the cash it brings to the development world. The days of the Marshall plan are long over.

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Of course, the supremacy of Hollywood can be argued to be a good source of soft power. But again, the odds are changing. The rise of the Indian and Nigerian film industries, the persistence of the French and the British, and the heavy state investments of the Chinese government into culture will gradually weaken that influence. Besides, contrary to the French and the Chinese, most sources of culture are not coming from governments but private companies, and many of the productions are critical of their own country. How strong at convincing are they then compared to the Chinese propaganda movies ?

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U.S. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IS DECAYING BUT CAN BE REVITALISED

Written by an Indian law graduate from Panjab University currently working as a Legislative Assistant to a Member of Parliament.

After the end of the Second World War, the U.S.A. assumes the leadership of the world by creating a system that helps in creating prosperity for millions of people. However, the giant has gone into some kind of hibernation in the past few years. The coronavirus has shown that the world today has no global leader to tackle challenges. The U.S. is fast losing its role as the preeminent leader of the world. The COVID 19 pandemic has just fastened the process. The real abdication of global leadership started in the second term of Obama.

This process of renunciation of leadership is a self-goal by the U.S. The five most compelling reasons for retracting from global leadership are as follows. One, the notion that global good conflicts with the national interest. Recently, hyper-nationalism has swayed a lot of countries and the U.S. being one of them. Second, the U.S. has lost interest in the system it has created earlier for the benefit of itself and its allies. Three, the U.S. has significantly lost the confidence of its allies in the commitment to their protection. Four, the rise of China and the acceptance of authoritarian means throughout the world. Despite this, the U.S. has not posed a serious ideology based counter-narrative to take on China.

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Fifth, the poor economic policies by U.S. leadership. Multilateralism and trade agreements have shown that they have increased the per capita income of the people. On the contrary, the trend is to sideline multilateralism and look at open trade as an enemy to the national interest.

Like radioactive material, U.S. global leadership will slowly vanish in thin air. But the recent election of Joe Biden as President has put some halt to the decay. Biden has promised to go back to multilateralism and more engagement with the world. But it would be difficult for him due to the local political situation of the country. The call of Biden to resurrect the U.S. global leadership is in reality going to fail. The rise of a demographic and economic market factor in favor of Asian countries in the first half of the 21st century will make it extremely impossible for the U.S. to come close to the hegemony it used to enjoy in the past.

However, the U.S. has multiple options open before it. A few of them are as follows. One, the U.S. can develop global political leadership by developing an alliance with its partners. These would result in collective leadership. Asian and African countries can be part of this new system. Second, ideology based counter to authoritarianism could be provided by Washington. Three, technology is the key to global leadership in the future. Innovation in technology and scientific methods could make it difficult for other nations to attract a global talent pool.

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Thus, U.S. global leadership can be only revitalized if the proper ideology-based challenge and collective leadership can be developed in the coming years. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for China or any other country to be an alternative to the U.S. at least in the first half of the 21st Century.

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TO LEAD OR NOT TO LEAD: THAT IS A QUESTION OF TRUST

Written by an anonymous author

Fukuyama's end of history was meant to materialize in the American unipolar moment. The end of the Cold War seemed to confirm the victory of the United States of America, and the success of its liberal and capitalist model. However, this hegemony soon started to be challenged by new rising powers and the perspective of a multipolar world. This new power sharing obviously reflects economic, political and military aspects. Nevertheless, the decline of the United States of America in terms of global leadership, clearly implies consideration on legitimacy and trust.

Indeed, it is not only the raw strength of the US that is relatively declining, in favor of China for instance. A study by the Pew Research Center revealed that the perception of the US abroad has drastically deteriorated in the last year. With its image, it is also its ability to influence world politics that is crumbling. A representative example of this slump is the lack of support to the US during the 75th UN General Assembly. Its accusations directed at China in regard to the management of the pandemic have indeed not been very welcome and did not receive any backing. On the contrary, it only provoked more criticisms.

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This isolated event has to be read as part of a bigger picture. A picture in which the trust and backing given to the US is finally an option. Rising powers do not feel forced anymore to seek for American approbation, or at least pretend to. Many factors come into play, including the appearance of new patrons, offering an alternative, despite the still considerable strength of the American military-industrial complex. Indeed, this allows the “international community” (if one wants to call it this way) to finally question a long succession of American scandals, going from violation of human rights on American soil and abroad, to violation of international law and UN rules.

The list could be long, but the point is simple : trust in the world leader has been declining and with it, its room for manoeuvre on the international stage. But maybe the upcoming administration will bring back a leap of faith?

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