The Trilemma of Hegemonic Order Competition

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Abstract

Current debates over the rise of China center on three questions: Will the United States preserve its influence over the international order? Will the future order promote American interests? Finally, will change be peaceful? Unfortunately, scholars broadly address only one or two of these questions at a time. The problem is that their answers are logically connected in what, I argue, constitutes the trilemma of order competition. Broadly stated, when powerful states compete over international orders, they are confronted with three desirable objectives: 1) to maximize their influence over other states while minimizing the cost of order governance; 2) to promote an order that advances a set of interests aligned with their interests, and 3) to avoid war. The central takeaway is that only two out of these three objectives can be mutually consistent, and order-makers must decide which one to give up. Two case studies—the 1895 Venezuela Crisis and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine—illustrate this important yet thus far unidentified limit on the foreign policy ambitions of great powers. (Word count: 12,576)

"[T]here's going to be a new world order out there, and we've got to lead it."

President Biden, 2022[1]

"[W]e must proactively shape the international order in line with our interests and values."

Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy, 2022

"I want competition with China, not conflict."

President Biden, 2024[2]

The co-occurrence of China's rise, Russia's war on Ukraine, and the surge of populist tendencies in Western democracies (Ferguson, Zakaria, and Griffiths 2017; Lake and Gourevitch 2018; Luce 2017) has lead scholars and policymakers alike to wonder about the future of the post-Cold War liberal international order: Will the United States remain at the helm of the international order?[3] Will the interests promoted by the future international order be the same as those promoted by the current one?[4] Finally, will this undertaking be violent or peaceful?[5] Each of these questions revolves around a desirable foreign policy objective. Yet, while practitioners must contend with these objectives concurrently, scholarly works have largely addressed these items only one or two at a time.[6]

Standard accounts (Organski 1958; Organski and Kugler 1980; Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984) hold that how change manifests is a function of the rising power's satisfaction with the extant system.[7] If the rising power is dissatisfied, then a deliberate systemic war ensues.[8] The victor of this conflict can then establish a new order per its preferences. In contrast, if the rising power is satisfied with the existing order, a peaceful transition is bargained between rising and declining powers.

[1] Remarks Before Business Roundtable's CEO Quarterly Meeting 2022

[2] State of the Union 2024

[3] E.g., Schweller and Pu (2011), Glaser (2015), Glaser and Fetter (2016), Checkel (2018), Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos (2018), Gilli and Gilli (2019), Mearsheimer (2019), Wu (2020), Beckley (2020), Loke (2021), and Chen Weiss and Wallace (2021).

[4] E.g., Schweller and Pu (2011), Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf (2018), Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos (2018), Johnston (2019), Parmar (2019), Mastanduno (2019), Wu (2020), and Chen Weiss and Wallace (2021)

[5] E.g., Glaser and Fetter (2016), Talmadge (2017), Kacowicz and Miller (2018), Shambaugh (2018), Quek and Johnston (2018), Zhang (2019), Goh (2019), and Beckley (2020)

[6] For a rare exception that addresses all three questions, see Nye (2020), who argues China's challenge to the international order may come in the form of free-riding.

[7] In these accounts, shifts in material conditions and, more recently, domestic ideology (e.g., Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018; Chen Weiss and Wallace 2021), serve as permissive conditions for international order competition but say little about whether change will be violent or peaceful.

[8] A rich debate surrounds which state starts this war between the declining and the rising powers. What matters for the purpose at hand is that this decision is deliberate rather than the result of some stochastic process.

These accounts, however, suffer from at least three limitations. First, they assume the existence of a single international order under contestation. International orders, however, are not exogenously determined: they are the product of the strategic considerations of powerful states who create them and of less powerful states who join them. Second, while these accounts do not preclude the co-existence of multiple orders, scant attention has been devoted to the strategic implications of this possibility. Third, this scholarship focuses on large systemic wars as catalysts for change. Yet, the nuclear age has made deliberately waging such wars unthinkable, including to reshape the international order (Schweller and Pu 2011, p. 44). However, as the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrates, smaller-scale wars remain a genuine possibility(Rauchhaus 2009) and these carry the risk of escalation (Talmadge 2017; Wu 2022). Little attention has been given to the relationship between order competition and these smaller conflicts.

In this article, I develop a model of hegemonic order competition between two powerful states. Powerful states in the model 1) decide whether to create a hegemonic order; 2) decide on the particular set of interests their order advances; 3) attract states to their order by providing them with benefits; 4) gain influence over those who join their order; and 5) must manage their members to ensure these comply with their 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.

In the model, two powerful states compete to gain influence over less powerful states. The more members join an order, the more influence its creator accumulates. However, the less aligned members' interests are from those advanced by the order, the costlier it is for order-makers to ensure member-states comply with their obligations. Finally, powerful nations may decide to attack their competitor, either locally or globally, in a bid to prevent that state from further influencing the contested territory.

I demonstrate that hegemonic order competition presents decision-makers with a trilemma. At the most general level, when powerful states compete over hegemonic orders, they are confronted with three typically desirable, yet jointly unattainable, objectives: 1) to maximize their influence over the behavior of other states while minimizing the cost of order management; 2) to promote an order

that advances a set of interests that aligns with their own; and 3) to reduce the risk of war. *The central takeaway is that only two out of the three can be mutually consistent at best, and hegemons must decide which one to give up.*

To reduce the costs of its hegemonic order, an order-maker can strategically promote an order that advances a set of interests popular with other states. Under trivial assumptions, however, these interests are unlikely to match the order-maker's interests. A contrario, if the order-maker promotes an order that advances its interests, members who do not share these interests will be more likely to defect on their obligations, thereby increasing the order-maker's costs. Tragically, strategies that achieve both purposes—such as delegitimizing the other order—increase the risk of war by devaluing the value of peace for the competitor.

1 Hegemonic orders

I define a *hegemonic order* as a *grand bargain* between a powerful state (or a cartel of powerful states) and other states in the international system: in exchange for some benefits, member-states allow powerful states to gain influence over them.[9]

This in line with the "narrow" tradition[10] that understands international orders as following a contractual logic where states, powerful and less powerful alike, are rational actors who engage in cost-benefit analysis to maximize their utility.[11] Military alliances, economic agreements, and humanitarian regimes may all qualify as hegemonic orders if they share this transactional logic[12] and the same applies to international hierarchies, protectorates, suzerainties, empires, and spheres of influence.[13]

[9] My use of "grand bargain" is related to, but distinct from, Mastanduno (2014)'s who uses it to describe a strategy used by order-makers to ensure their order's survival. In contrast, I conceptualize hegemonic orders themselves as grand bargains.

[10] For works that embrace a similar logic, see Lake (2009), Kang (2010a), Ikenberry (2011), Mearsheimer (2019), and Beek et al. (2024). For an overview of other conceptions of orders and hierarchy grounded in the logics of positionality and productivity, see Bially Mattern and Zarakol (2016).

[11] What constitutes this utility may vary, but for the purpose at hand, it suffices to assume it is the result of some domestic process left unspecified.

[12] However, broader conceptualizations of order—as a structural feature of the international system (in comparison to anarchy or disorder), as predictability, or as a characteristic of relations between actors—fall beyond the scope of this project as they do not share this transactional logic.

[13] These forms of order are frequently the result of negative—stick rather than carrot—coercive policies. This is an important dimension of hegemonic costs discussed below.

1.1 Influence

Powerful states create and maintain hegemonic orders to gain influence over other states. Conceptually, influence can be understood as a metacurrency that states can expend to have another state willingly[14] alter its behavior to their benefit. The value of this influence varies depending on the subordinate's strategic and economic value, but it always increases the superordinate's utility. Throughout history, influence has been leveraged in different ways, ranging from tributes (e.g., pre-modern East Asia) to the surrender of specific aspects of domestic and foreign sovereignty (e.g., South Korea accepting military bases domestically and contributing to the US military efforts in Vietnam and Iraq).

Influence has three characteristics. It is (1) rivalrous and (2) excludable—in other words, influence is a private good—and it is also (3) scarce.

Influence is rivalrous because the influence a state owes to a great power cannot be simultaneously owed to another. Multiple great powers can have influence over a state (e.g., one influencing trade while the other influences foreign aid) but they cannot have influence simultaneously over the same policy object. When it came to the deployment of the THAAD anti-ballistic missile defense system in South Korea, Seoul could either please Washington (by deploying the system) or Beijing (by *not* deploying the system) but not both simultaneously.

Influence is excludable because states can refuse to grant influence over their behavior to other states. Similarly, order-makers can take actions, such as military action, to limit their competitor's influence over a given state.

Finally, influence is also scarce, both at the level of individual states and the international system. In the extreme, a powerful state would control every aspect of every state's domestic and international decision-making process. This characteristic is compounded by the fact that the value of influence varies as a function of states' economic and strategic value. These characteristics make order competition a zero-sum game: the more influence an order-maker has, the less its competitor does.

Order-making entails two primary costs for great powers: production and maintenance costs.[15]

[14] Without resorting to brute strength.

[15] Lake (2009)

1.2 Production

Production costs are the costs order-makers must shoulder to provide members with benefits. Broadly defined, benefits are any tangible or intangible good an order-maker provides its members in exchange for the influence it receives. The nature of these goods varies across time and space, but common categories include military security and economic affluence (Webb and Krasner 1989). These goods can be provided on a bilateral basis (e.g., bilateral economic assistance, arms transfers) or a multilateral basis (e.g., free trade agreements, military alliances). In all cases, benefits compensate member states for the disutility of surrendering influence to great powers.[16]

Examples of such costs include expenses related to maintaining a credible deterrent on multiple fronts (e.g., the US "2-and-½wars" standard and its later iterations)[17]; the establishment and maintenance of international institutions; as well as the opportunity cost of not investing more resources domestically. In the context of the US and NATO, these costs include the recurring costs of maintaining a military presence in Eastern Europe, the opportunity cost of not being able to devote as many resources to other regions, as well as the cost of having to intervene in a distant theater if an ally were attacked.

The consensual nature of hegemonic orders is worth addressing before proceeding further. Ikenberry (2011), for example, differentiates between liberal hegemony (rule by consent) and empire (rule by command). If we understand international orders as bargains, then we must accept they are all coercive: they do not rely on pure strength but are instead underpinned by what Schelling (1976) describes as the power to hurt. Order-makers exploit order-takers' wants and fears to ensure membership and compliance: order-takers can either participate in the order and enjoy the associated benefits or stay out and face the consequences. Whether positive ("carrot") or negative ("stick") coercion is used, this process is seldom pleasant for members. This is most evident in the latter case, especially when the threat of military intervention is explicit: just like one may "choose" to hand over their wallet when held at gunpoint, members often "choose" to participate in hegemonic orders. Even when only positive coercion is used, states may still feel like they do not have a choice if they are overly de-

[16] This disutility can come from many sources. A common one is from going against public opinion, as was the case for many states contributing to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan (Kreps 2010).

[17] On the evolution and eventual demise of this standard, see Mitre (2018).

pendent on the order-maker's provision of economic or security goods:[18] "[NATO's Membership Action Plan] is more of a big stick than a big carrot," said Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves, two years after Estonia's accession to NATO. "It forces nations to reform even when they don't want to do it."(Erlanger and Myers 2008)

For order-makers and order-takers alike, hegemonic orders are a means to an end: they create or join hegemonic orders because doing so improves their utility. However, not all states benefit equally from hegemonic orders. Because order-makers set the rules, they can do so in a way that reflects their interests—they can capture the "surplus" of the bargain. In contrast, order takers enjoy more modest benefits and, "at the extreme, the ruler may skew the rules to such an extent that subordinates are indifferent to either remaining in the hierarchy or reverting back to anarchy" (Lake 2009, p. 34). Nonetheless, member-states join orders if doing so yields a greater utility than the alternative.

1.3 Governance

While production costs allow for a grand bargain, governance costs are transaction costs that ensure subordinate polities respect this bargain ex-post.[19] As with other international bargains (Fearon 1998), states have incentives to renege on their order-derived obligations, and the more differences exist between the interests[20] of the super- and subordinate entities, the more likely defection is. (Lake 1996) For example, Western European nations (e.g., Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain) are less likely to comply with NATO's spending threshold than Eastern European members (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, Poland) threatened by a Russian invasion.

How defection manifests depends on the context; some examples include forceful rejections as in the case of wars of independence (e.g., the American Revolutionary War, the Indian Rebellion of 1857); peaceful departures, either by invoking escape clauses or withdrawing altogether (e.g., Japan

[18] Formally, positive and negative coercion are substitutes.

[19] Order-makers may also defect on their obligations and overreach. From the perspective of subordinate polities, this is no different from receiving fewer benefits. If order-makers want to maintain the same influence over member states, they must provide new benefits or pay additional governance costs. Order-makers can exercise self-restraint (Ikenberry 2011) and implement safeguards (Lake 1999) to avoid these increased costs.

[20] The origins of states' interests fall beyond the scope of this discussion. For the purpose at hand, it suffices to assume that some exogenous process translates domestic and international conditions into states' preferences. However, it is safe to say that variables standard in the literature are likely essential considerations, including the distribution of material capabilities in the system, domestic institutions and interest groups, preferences (domestic and international), and international norms.

and Germany leaving the League of Nations in 1933); "footdragging," only partially implementing agreed-upon measures or deliberately delaying the order's activities (e.g., Turkey threatening to veto Sweden and Finland's NATO bids following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine); entrapment, where subordinates drag order-makers into undesirable conflicts (e.g., North Korea with regards to the Soviet Union and China, during the Korean War); or simply free-riding. Although often deliberate, defection can also be due to changes in political conditions or internal friction between the leadership and its administration.[21] Regardless of its form and intent, non-compliance reduces the loss of utility order-takers incur for surrendering influence and undermines order-makers' influence gains.

As with benefits, order-makers can use positive or negative coercion in various domains (e.g., finance, trade, security) to prevent defection, but doing so is costly. Throughout history, different orders have favored various strategies. Historically, economic cooperation orders (e.g., the Bretton Woods Institutions, the Association of Southeast Nations, the European Union) have retained members with the promise of continued trade and financial gains while empires (e.g., the Spanish Empire, the British Empire, and the Empire of Japan) relied extensively on the threat of military force to ensure the compliance of peripheral territories.

In practice, order-makers frequently use multiple strategies to achieve their end. For example, the Byzantine Empire's policy of choice was positive economic coercion. They believed that "every man, and certainly every 'barbarian', had his price; and even the large sums used [...] seemed to them cheaper and less chancy than military operations."(Watson 1992, p.109) At the same time, this predilection did not prevent Constantinople from using other means, including military actions, ruse, and religious proselytizing, to pursue its hegemonic ambitions (Watson 1992, p.111).

Governance costs are related to, but distinct from, considerations of legitimacy. The more legitimate the order-maker, the more likely members are to comply, and thus, the lower the governance costs. As Lake (2009, p.9) puts it: "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."

However, beyond legitimacy, many other factors can also affect governance costs, including the

[21] For example, see Braut-Hegghammer (2020) for a discussion of how friction between Iraqi elites and their subordinates complicated Iraq's compliance with transparency requirements regarding weapons of mass destruction.

rise of nationalism in the subordinate state (Mearsheimer 2019), the social ties between the great power and local collaborators, (MacDonald 2014) economic interdependence (MacDonald 2009), credible commitments on the part of the great power not to exploit its subordinates (Kang 2010b; Ikenberry 2011), unequal distributions of the benefits of order membership within the state (Cooley and Nexon 2013; Lake 2013), the transparency of benefit transfers (McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017), and technology (Van Evera 1990; MacDonald 2009).

Order-makers can use two broad strategies to minimize costs. First, order-makers can refuse to provide benefits to other states—they can restrict order membership. The most attractive members are states with low production costs, high economic or strategic value, and low governance costs, for example, due to having similar interest profiles (i.e., being unlikely to defect from their obligations). Admission requirements, which can be as vague or specific as order-makers want them to be, are a concrete manifestation of this dynamic. The pre-modern East Asian order was famously lax: practically any state could join under the condition of paying lip service to China's dominant position. In contrast, the Concert of Europe only accepted monarchies, while the Cold War Liberal International Order required its members to reject Communism. Currently, the European Union and NATO demand new members to be democratic (among other requirements). From the order-maker's perspective, it only makes sense to accept a new member if doing so is better than the alternative. By restricting membership, order-makers can ensure their order yields a net utility gain.

Second, order-makers can compromise on the interest profile of their order. Because an order-maker sets the rules of its order, it can ensure the order promotes interests identical to its own. However, by compromising on the interests profile of its order—by promoting interests better aligned with those of other states—the order-maker can instead reduce the temptation for member states to defect. This is costly for the order-maker as decoupling the order-maker's interests from those advanced by their order worsens the order-maker's utility and exposes the order-maker to domestic critiques (e.g., the US after World War I). Nevertheless, this process may still be utility-maximizing if a more significant reduction in governance costs offsets this loss. The Western order during the Cold War exemplifies this. Though created by the liberal United States, this order was not focused on promoting liberal values as much as it was devoted to containing and defeating the Soviet Union and its allies: 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.[22] Other examples of order-makers promoting orders with interest profiles not identical to their own include the Achaemenid Empire, the Ottoman Empire (especially pre-Suleiman), and the pre-modern Chinese-led order in East Asia.

Although any state can create an order, most states decline to do so as the costs outweigh the benefits. Local conditions can sometimes allow weaker states to produce their own order in contested zones (Posen 2003). Still, order-making tends to favor wealthy polities with the resources needed to leverage economies of scale that reduce the marginal cost of production and governance. The prospect of competition further detracts some states from establishing their orders.

1.4 Hegemonic competition

I define *hegemonic order competition* as a contest in which at least two powerful states vie for influence over other states' behavior. Competition occurs because this influence is valuable yet scarce.

The traditional account of this competition has focused on war. The classic statements of power transitions, Organski (1958) and Organski and Kugler (1980) emphasize that power—especially population size, industrialization, and political efficiency—underpins order[23] and causes rising powers to challenge the extant order. A related yet distinct scholarship is hegemonic stability (Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984). Both approaches share the same intuition: uneven growth rates among states redistribute power in the international system and, over time, alter the calculus of states. The international order, however, does not change in lockstep with changes in power. This creates a disjuncture between the power of rising nations and the benefits they derive from the pre-existing international order. Eventually, rising powers may "desire to redraft the rules by which relations among nations work" and use war to achieve this purpose (Organski and Kugler 1980, p.23, fn. 1)

More recently, the literature has identified domestic preferences and interests as an alternative

[22] Mearsheimer (2019) makes a similar point—that powerful states do not necessarily use their order to promote their preferences—when discussing "realist" orders. For Mearsheimer, the type of order promoted is solely a function of material considerations and domestic ideology. In contrast, here I focus on the strategic calculus of great power in light of their preferences and those of other states in the system.

[23] International hierarchy is central to power transition theory. For Organski (1958), states derive benefits from the international hierarchy of states (powerful states more so than weak states), and the dominant power maintains this hierarchy by ensuring the satisfaction of other states. This is consistent with my definition of hegemonic order.

cause for change. Early discussions of domestic ideology were reduced to functional or secondary roles (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018) and were mainly present in the form of elites' perceptions and beliefs (Organski and Kugler 1980; Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984). In this tradition, power shifts explain change in international orders, but interests and preferences explain how change manifests. If both order-makers shared the same interests, the leading power could decide to retrench and peacefully concede order-making to the rising challenger. Otherwise, a systematic war would ensue. More recently, scholars have turned to ideology as a cause of change (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Schweller and Pu 2011; Kupchan 2014; Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018).

In these accounts, war is the central vehicle for competition. For Gilpin (Gilpin 1981), large systemic conflict concentrates material capabilities in the hands of the victor who can then establish a new order serving its interests; for Ikenberry (2001, p.254, n.134), "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."

This literature suffers from two limitations. First, the focus has thus far been on large systemic wars. Yet, as Schweller and Pu (2011, p. 44) note, the nuclear age makes changing the international order through a deliberately waged systemic war unthinkable. The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrates, however, that smaller-scale wars remain a genuine possibility (Rauchhaus 2009), and these carry the risk of escalation (Talmadge 2017; Wu 2022). Whether intended or not, more minor conflicts may also challenge extant orders. Directly, these local wars may allow an order-maker to limit the influence of its competitors over a state; indirectly, they may also affect hegemonic competition more broadly if one or more great powers find their capability to compete globally hindered by their participation in this conflict (Bueno de Mesquita 1990). There are also few reasons to believe war as a tool for policy is on the decline either (Fazal 2013; Braumoeller 2019). Thus, if we are to understand hegemonic competition in a nuclear world, more attention should be devoted to understanding how order competition affects the onset of these smaller conflicts.

Second, these accounts mainly treat the international system as having a single order (Levy 2008; DiCicco 2017).[24] In this context, wars determine whether a new order will replace the existing one.

[24] An exception is Lemke (1993; 2002), who also considers multiple orders at the local and regional level. However, these orders are nested (orders within orders), while the focus here is on competition between orders.

However, it is not uncommon for international orders to co-exist and compete directly.[25] The Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire competed over Central and Eastern Europe from the 16th through the 18th centuries; the pre-modern Chinese international order clashed with the Western and Japanese ones during the 19th and early 20th centuries; and the US and Soviet orders competed over the entire international system during the Cold War.

Importantly, hegemonic orders often overlap, with some states belonging concurrently to at least two orders.[26] Two common indicators of orders, arms transfers[27] and membership in international institutions, illustrate this point. Although some states purchase weapons from a single seller (e.g., Taiwan), many others benefit from transfers from multiple—and even rival—great powers. For example, between 2016 and 2020, the top two arms suppliers of India, Egypt, Iraq, and Vietnam were Russia plus the US or France (Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman 2021). Similarly, it is not uncommon for states to join competing international institutions. Recently, and despite strong US opposition, several states traditionally seen as belonging to the U.S.-led order (e.g., New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Canada) decided to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a development bank widely understood as challenging the U.S.-led World Bank. During the Cold War, many states of the Non-Aligned Movement fit this pattern regarding participation in the US and Soviet orders. Similarly, when Britain took control of Burma during the 19th century, the local government continued sending tribute to Beijing, thereby participating in two hegemonic orders concurrently.

Hegemonic competition does not necessarily cause wars. Just like economic firms can compete over market shares without violence, so can order-makers compete over influence without using military force. Like firms, order-makers can vary the nature, quantity, and quality of the benefits they offer to attract or retain members to their orders. Doing so, however, is costly. The first reason is

[25] Some scholars acknowledge this possibility but rarely engage with its implications. For example, Organski (1958, p. 316) mentions that: "Sometimes, there is only one such order in the world, but at other times, as at present, there may be two or more competing international orders existing simultaneously."

[26] This is different from Organski (1958, p. 316), who assumes orders are exclusive and who postulates that "nations are *not* free to shift from one international order to another without serious international changes" (emphasis original). The empirical record warrants such a departure.

[27] See Beardsley et al. (2020) for a discussion of the merits of this proxy. For the purpose at hand, two features are most salient: first, the arms trade market is dominated by great powers, with the US, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China accounting for more than 75% of the trade between 2016 and 2020 (Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman 2021); and, second, arms transfers create an asymmetric relation between seller and buyer, as the latter is dependent on the former for maintaining its forces and upgrading them.

that hegemonic competition is a zero-sum game, as discussed previously. Accordingly, any influence an order-maker gains must come at the expense of a rival—who would be better off without competitors. Another reason is that using benefits provision to compete over influence decreases the bargaining leverage of order-makers. In general terms, the emergence of new order-makers increases the supply of benefits, which drives the (influence) price of benefits down. This is detrimental to order-makers who must provide more benefits for less influence but advantageous for member-states who can engage in goods substitution (Cooley and Nexon 2021). This dynamic explains why the US had to provide more aid and got less influence in return when the Soviet Union entered the foreign aid game during the Cold War (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2016) and why this dynamic reversed after the collapse of the Soviet Order (Dunning 2004).

From the discussion above, two important questions emerge: First, how does competition impact the interest profiles of orders? Order-makers have a comparative advantage in recruiting members with interests closer to their own than their rivals. This is because, all else equal, these members will have lower governance costs than their rivals, and the order-maker can feel more comfortable providing more benefits, knowing defection is unlikely. Relatedly, how does competition impact order-makers' willingness to alter their orders' interests profile?

Second, what is the relationship between competition and war? Unlike firms, states can use violence to remove their rivals from the competition—as Russia attempted with Ukraine in 2022. Accordingly, if competition does not replace war as a vehicle for hegemonic change, how does it impact order-makers' incentives for war? To answer these questions, I develop a formal model of hegemonic competition.

2 The Trilemma of Hegemonic Order Competition

Consider an international system of states with a single state powerful enough to establish a hegemonic order. This state, the "hegemon,"[28] has three policy objectives: it seeks to maximize its net influence, promote an order aligned with its own interests, and avoid costly war. Leveraging its re-

[28] I use "hegemon" and (later) "challenger" only for the sake of exposition. This model requires neither an established power nor a rising one. For clarity, I focus on the perspective of the hegemon, but the model is symmetrical, and both actors share the same incentives.

sources, this hegemon can offer a grand bargain to the other states. In exchange for influence over their policies, the hegemon will grant benefits to those who join its order. All states desire these benefits, but from the perspective of the hegemon, not all states are worthwhile members. The greater the distance between a member's interest profile and the order's, the more likely the member is to defect on its obligations. The hegemon can force compliance or tolerate defection but, in either case, suffers a reduction in net influence. The hegemon can minimize this loss by strategically setting its order's profile to reduce the risk of defection, but this also means promoting an order no longer perfectly aligned with its own interests. From these dynamics emerges a tension: order-makers can either maximize their net influence (by setting their order's profile strategically) *or* promote an order with a profile similar to their own (and accept non-optimal net influence gains).

Consider now the emergence of another state powerful enough to establish a rival hegemonic order. This "challenger" shares the hegemon's policy objectives and offers other states a similar grand bargain. This development benefits order-takers but harms the bottom line of order-makers. Members now enjoy leverage because they can make the hegemon and challenger compete. In turn, the hegemon must now pay more for less—provide more benefits for smaller influence returns. Competition undermines the hegemon's satisfaction with the status quo as, whenever competition intensifies, the hegemon's utility worsens.

The temptation for war arises from the desire to reduce this competitive pressure. War is costly, but it allows the victor to remove their rival from contention. Accordingly, if it becomes too dissatisfied with its current gains from hegemonic competition, the hegemon 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 challenger or limit its ability to deliver benefits to other states. Tragically, they also increase the risk of war indirectly. This is because, from the challenger's perspective, the value of the competitive status quo has worsened, and consequently, the temptation to gamble on war has increased.

These concurrent tensions produce the trilemma of hegemonic order competition, in which order-makers cannot maximize their net influence, advance an order aligned with their interests, and maintain peace simultaneously.

3 Model

Having described the general features of hegemonic order competition and introduced the key intuition behind my argument, I now specify a formal model consistent with these.

Two great powers, A and B, select the interest profile of their respective hegemonic orders in the game's first stage. Let the interval $X = [0, 1]$ be the interests space, with each point x in X representing a specific interests profile. I denote great power i's interests profile as $x_i \in X$ and describe these profiles by their distance from the left and right endpoints of the ideological space, respectively: $x_A \equiv \alpha$ and $x_B \equiv 1 - \beta$. Without loss of generality, x_A is assumed to always lie to the left of x_B (i.e., $0 \leq \alpha \leq 1 - \beta \leq 1$). Once great powers have chosen their interest profiles, they observe their rival's choice. Then, in the game's second stage, great powers simultaneously decide on how many benefits they will offer states to attract them to their order, thereby gaining influence over them.

Let a prospective member state's interests preferences be given by $x \in [0, 1]$ and its demand function for order-derived benefits be given by $q(x) = v - p(x)$ where v captures the total influence the state is willing to grant order-makers to join a hegemonic order and $p(x)$ is the lowest amount of influence a state with preferences x it must surrender to join an order. Because great powers are the ones deciding who is worth admission, it is convenient to work with the inverse demand function: $p(x) = v - q(x)$ where $q(x) = q_A(x) + q_B(x)$ is the total quantity of benefits great powers A and B are willing to offer to states with preferences x.[29]

From the perspective of great powers, v is the influence states surrender in exchange for being part of the great power's hegemonic order. Historically, this transfer has taken many forms, including tributes (e.g., the Chinese Tributary order, between the US and the Barbary states circa 1800), surrendering part of their foreign policy autonomy and sovereignty (e.g., states may have an obligation to provide troops to assist the great power's campaigns, as was expected under the Ottoman Empire, or to join conflicts they would have otherwise avoided, such during the 2003 Iraq War); or accepting restrictions on their domestic policies (e.g., Status of Forces Agreement ensuring foreign military personnel are not prosecuted in local courts), among others.

In exchange for this payment, states receive $q(x)$, which captures the benefits from the order as well as the prosperity it generates (Lake 2009, p. 31). Common manifestations of these benefits are

[29] By assumption, great powers may only provide a non-negative quantity of benefits: $q_i(x) \geq 0$.

lowered military expenditures, access to greater economic and financial markets, or even direct economic subsidies from the hierarch (e.g., the Marshall and the Molotov plans).

For great power i, the utility of offering benefits to a state with interests x is

$$\pi_i = \quad q_i(x)[v - q_i(x) - q_j(x) - c - \kappa|x_i - x|] \tag{1}$$

where c is the marginal cost of producing order, and κ is the cost of governance.

Here, I normalize the marginal cost to $c = 0$ and assume that $v > c$. This assumption is appropriate since the focus here is on the willingness of great powers to produce a hegemonic order rather than their ability to do so.[30]

The order management cost, κ, represents the costs incurred by the great powers to overcome the distance between the interests profile they selected for their order and the state's interests profile, $|x_i - x|$. As discussed previously, this model posits their existence but remains agnostic about their origins.

For great powers, the value of providing order at the level of the international system is the accumulated utility of providing order to states with all possible legitimacy preferences (i.e., at all points $x \in X$), or

$$\Pi_i(x_i, x_j) = \int_0^1 \pi_i dx - \delta|d_i - x| \tag{2}$$

where $\delta|d_i - x|$ captures the penalty great power i must pay for promoting an order that diverges from its own domestic preferences d_i. This penalty captures the utility lost domestically by strategically setting the interests the order promotes.

Many will recognize the distance components, $|x_i - x|$ and $|d_i - x|$, as a staple of spatial models inspired by the canonical works of Hotelling (1929) and Downs (1957). A significant departure is worth highlighting. A common feature of these spatial models is the division of the issue space into connected segments, each exclusively controlled by an actor. In political science, this is most evident in models of electoral competition where voters cast a single vote (e.g., Downs 1957; Calvert 1985;

[30] If this condition is not met, the dominant strategy of great powers is to produce no order at all points in X ($\forall x \in [0, 1], q_i(x) = 0$ s.t. $v \leq c$).

Alesina 1988; Serra 2010). In contrast, here, a state can "purchase" order from multiple great powers simultaneously if both great powers are willing to provide benefits at its location.[31] As discussed previously, orders may overlap over the entire space, over only a segment of the spectrum, or not at all. In all cases, the distribution of order benefits at any point depends on the positions of both hegemonic orders. At any point, the great power that is closer will supply a larger share of order, and the amount of order offered at any point decreases in the distance between the great power and that point.

Finally, before orders are established, great powers simultaneously decide whether to start a global (local) conflict with their competitor to remove their competitor's influence from the international system (the disputed stated). Great powers will wage war only if the war's expected utility exceeds that of continuing peaceful competition. This process is modeled as a costly lottery, and great power i launches an attack if:

$$\frac{m_i}{m_i + m_j}\Pi_i(x_i) - w \geq \Pi_i(x_i, x_j) \tag{3}$$

where $\frac{m_i}{m_i+m_j}$ represents the probability i wins the war as a function of military capabilities, m_i and m_j, of both great powers; $\Pi_i(x_i)$ is the utility i derives from not having to compete with j; and w captures the inefficiency of war.

As is common in location models, I restrict myself to subgame perfect Nash equilibria[32] and solve the game by backward induction, first solving quantities given locations and then determining the equilibrium locations and the temptation of war.

4 Results

Proposition 1 *Under general conditions, great powers that use their hegemonic order to promote an interest profile identical to their own suffer a loss of influence compared to great powers that strategically set the interest profile of their hegemonic order.*

Proof: See Appendix.

[31] This model falls under the broad family of spatial Cournot competition models and builds upon the works of Anderson and Neven (1991) and Chamorro Rivas (2000).

[32] Formally, a Nash equilibrium is a pair (x_A^*, x_B^*) such that $\Pi_A^*(x_A^*, x_B^*) \geq \Pi_A^*(x_A, x_B^*), \forall x_A \in [0, \frac{1}{2}]$ s.t. $x_A \leq x_B$ and $\Pi_B^*(x_A^*, x_B^*) \geq \Pi_B^*(x_A^*, x_B), \forall x_B \in [\frac{1}{2}, 1]$ s.t. $x_A \leq x_B$.

Proposition 1 establishes the central tension between the desire of powerful states to have hegemonic orders that promote their interests and their desire to reduce the costs of order governance.

Proposition 2 *The temptation of war increases with order competition.*

Proof: Note that order competition is inefficient for great powers: $\Pi_i(x_i) \geq \Pi_i(x_i, x_j)$. Recall also that the condition for war is: $\frac{m_i}{m_i+m_j}\Pi_i(x_i) - w \geq \Pi_i(x_i, x_j)$. As competition increases, the value of the right-hand side of this equation war decreases, thereby increasing the likelihood that the condition for war is met.

This is because member states can leverage this competition to secure better membership terms than if there only was a single international order to join. Thus, the more competition there is, the more tempting it becomes for great powers to wage war to suppress their competitors locally and globally.

Proposition 3 *Any strategy that allows great powers to promote an order closer to their interests without also damaging their aggregate influence increases the risk of war.*

Proof: If q_i increases (regardless of the reason), notice that π_j decreases, decreasing $\Pi_j(x_j, x_i)$. As above, for the challenger j, this reduces the value of the right-hand side of the equation, thereby increasing the likelihood that the condition for war is met.

These strategies include delegitimization and hindering their ability to provide benefits to their members. These policies achieve both goals by reducing the competitive pressure imposed by the other great power. Simultaneously, they also reduce the value of the status quo (increase the temptation of war) for the competitor, thereby increasing the risk of war.

5 Illustration

I now apply this framework to shed new light on two crucial instances of hegemonic order competition: the Venezuelan crisis of 1895 in the context of Anglo-American order competition and Russia's

hegemonic approach to Ukraine in the wake of the Cold War and its recent invasion of Ukraine.

Like other major events of international politics, these crises and their outcomes were overdetermined and resulted from a conjunction of causes. My claim is not that order competition and its trilemma were their sole cause. Instead, I argue that the trilemma of order competition can help place these cases in comparative perspectives.

Despite their temporal and geographical distance, these events illustrate the critical dynamics of the trilemma. In each case, order-makers faced the rise of a competitor that challenged their order. Britain's preponderance over Latin America was challenged by the United States; similarly, a century later, Russia's dominance over Ukraine was also challenged by the United States. In both cases, order-makers contended with the same competing policy constraints: maximize their net influence by minimizing management costs, use their order to advance their interests, and reduce the risk of war.

5.1 The 1895 Venezuela crisis

The Venezuela crisis of 1895 was a turning point in Anglo-American order relations in general and in the context of Latin American order competition in particular. In 1895, Britain was the dominant power in Latin America, and the Monroe doctrine was little more than, as Lord Clarendon had stated, "the dictum of the distinguished personage who delivered it" and not "an axiom which ought to regulate the conduct of European states."(Humphreys 1967, p. 162) When the crisis ended in 1896, the Monroe Doctrine had become just that. By refusing to risk war to oppose President Groover Cleveland and Secretary of State Richard Olney's new interpretation of the doctrine, Lord Salisbury's cabinet had accepted that the United States—not Britain—held a special position in Latin America.

The late 19th-early 20th-century Anglo-American transition is a rare example of peaceful order competition. Some argue that war did not materialize because the United States accepted the British-led international order: that the United States neither defeated Britain nor challenged its order, that "it merely passed her."(Organski 1958, p. 323) Others highlight the role of political sameness, shared values, and identities in allowing the United States to grow without threatening Britain or British interests.[33]

[33] E.g., Feng (2006), Allison (2017), and Schake (2017)

These are bird's-eye view accounts of the transition that offer little insight into the context of the Venezuelan crisis. In practice, Olney and Cleveland were proposing an American order that directly challenged the British-led one. Indeed, the British government prioritized reducing the risk of escalation with the US as well as the costs of order governance over promoting an order aligned with its interests.

5.2 England Sacrifices its Influence

Britain's Latin American order was premised on non-intervention but punctuated by spells of coercive diplomacy. In Salisbury's own words, during an 1891 ministerial banquet:

> "[W]e have no intention of constituting ourselves a Providence in any South American quarrel. […] Our duty is to look after British interests, to assert them and to defend them if they are unjustly attacked, but not to interfere in the troubles or the quarrels of other nations…"[34]

Salisbury's "Britain First" approach to Latin America can be traced back many decades prior to Castlereagh and Canning (Humphreys 1967). Unsurprisingly, the defense of British regional interests frequently involved the Royal Navy. One such event occurred in April 1895, when British marines occupied the port of Corinto to pressure the government of Nicaragua to pay an indemnity related to its recent annexation of the Mosquito Reserve.

The Venezuelan crisis started in earnest in the Summer of 1895 when the United States involved itself in the issue. Of course, the boundary dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana had been dragging for decades[35] but, for London, it had remained inconsequential.

However, the intervention of the United States imbued the crisis with significance.

The motives that made Olney and Cleveland so intensely invested in the Venezuelan question cannot be fully explored here. Without a doubt, Britain had been impinging on Venezuelan territory, but no American President before 1895 had cared to take a meaningful stance on the issue.

Likely more influential was US public opinion. In 1894, Venezuela recruited William Lindsay Scruggs, a former United States Minister to Colombia and Venezuela, to help appeal to public opin-

[34] Emphasis added, quoted in "Ministerial Banquet At The Mansion-House" (1891).
[35] See Grenville (1964) and Humphreys (1967) for an in-depth history of the dispute.

ion in the United States.[36] A virtuoso propagandist, Scruggs quickly wrote a pamphlet pleading for the United States to intervene on Venezuela's behalf and widely distributed it to Governors, Members of Congress, and journalists alike—and to Olney himself when he eventually entered office. For Scruggs, Britain's recent bout of gunboat diplomacy in Nicaragua was an unexpected boon: Britain's heavy-handed tactics had outraged the American public, and the Cleveland Administration was now harshly criticized for its subservient attitude. In the public conscience, this attitude confirmed a long-standing critique that Cleveland was pro-British and reinforced the idea that there was something "un-American" about his administration's foreign policy.[37] The Venezuela crisis was then a welcome opportunity for Cleveland: championing the Monroe doctrine would be popular domestically, and it would allow him to finish his term on a strong note (Blake 1942; Grenville 1964, p. 164).

When he became State Secretary in June 1895, Olney's task was to strengthen American foreign policy and draft a document that would, once made public, absolve the administration from its pro-British reputation. The result was long, rhetorical, confused, and ill-tempered (Grenville 1964, p. 57-61) dispatch to London. In it, Olney presented what he believed to be an indisputable history of the dispute and reading of the Monroe Doctrine. He explained that the controversy was far within the scope and spirit of the doctrine, which entitled and required the United States to "treat as an injury to itself the forcible assumption by an [sic] European power of political control over an American state."("Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard" 1896) Since negotiations between Britain and Venezuela had failed, the entire dispute needed to be submitted to arbitration, for this was the only way to satisfy the rights of all *three* parties. Finally, Olney presented Britain with an ultimatum: agree to his demand or have the President lay the whole subject before Congress in his following annual message. Cleveland was pleased with the dispatch and later described it as Olney's "twenty-inch gun."[38]

This was a challenge to the British-led order reaching far beyond the territorial stakes of the dispute.[39] Seventy years prior, then-Foreign Secretary Canning had written, "Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English, and 'novus saeclorum nascitur ordo."'—a new order of the ages is born (Lloyd 1904, p.93). Now, Olney was proclaiming the existence of an

[36] For more on this colorful character, see Humphreys (1967) and Blake (1942).

[37] Pro-British accusations came from within and without the President's party. For more on public opinion, see Blake (1942).

[38] For the full dispatch, see "Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard" (1896).

[39] Ironically for Venezuela, Olney's dispatch unwittingly undermined the Venezuelan claim, thereby making it all but certain England would be vindicated in the event of arbitration (Grenville 1964; Humphreys 1967).

American order: "To-day the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition."("Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard" 1896)

Worse, Olney also challenged Britain's position in the broader Americas. He asserted that "any permanent political union between an [sic] European and an American state [was] unnatural and inexpedient" ("Mr. Olney to Mr. Bayard" 1896) and, in doing so, rebuffed Britain's right to imperial possessions in the Caribbean islands and Canada.

Salisbury's response was unambiguous: not only was Olney wrong in his reading of the Monroe Doctrine, but there was no American order to speak of. "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 in his November reply. He then continued by rejecting the American order Olney had advanced ("Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote." 1896):

> "The Government of the United States is not entitled to affirm as a universal proposition, with reference to a number of independent States for whose conduct it assumes no responsibility, that its interests are necessarily concerned in whatever may befall those States simply because they are situated in the Western Hemisphere."

Finally, Salisbury also rejected the notion that the union between Britain and its American possessions was "unnatural and inexpedient" (Grenville 1964, p. 64). Every dispute involving an American state did not necessarily concern the United States, nor was its Government entitled, Salisbury concluded, "to claim that the process of arbitration shall be applied to any demand for the surrender of territory which one of those States may make against another" ("Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote." 1896).

Olney had fired first, but Salisbury's response made it clear that Britain was willing to take up his challenge. The Prime Minister had taken a strong stance, and the Cabinet had approved it.[40]

On 17 December 1895, Cleveland's message to Congress was "among the most crudely assertive ever issued by responsible American statemen" (Blake 1942, p. 259). Praised as "sturdily American"

[40] Few read Olney's dispatch, even within the Department of State. In contrast, the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, and even the Law Officers of the Crown shared their thoughts on the matter, concluding that the only response Britain could offer was that "she declines to submit to any arbitration the bogus claims of Venezuela" (memorandum from the Colonial office quoted in Humphreys 1967, p.152)

(Grenville 1964, p.65), this address contained 3 critical points: First, it reasserted the Monroe Doctrine and the United States' right to intervene in the Venezuela dispute. Second, it emphasized that it was the United States' responsibility to settle the dispute and that it would do so through a unilateral commission of investigation. Third, and finally, once the commission's report was accepted, it would be "the duty of the United States to resist by every means in its power as a willful aggression upon its rights and interests" any action by Britain that opposed the report's findings ("Message of the President" 1896). The President then concluded that "there is no calamity which a great nation can invite which equals that which follows a supine submission to wrong and injustice and the consequent loss of national self respect and honor beneath which are shielded and defended a people's safety and greatness." In short, war rather than shame.

Today, it is difficult to imagine an Anglo-American war, but, at the time, such a conflict was plausible. In the United States, Cleveland was marching "with the martial music which had been stirring American spirits" (Blake 1942, p.275)[41] and all understood that the President's message implied war if Britain did not back down. "The Venezuelan crisis which is raging here makes all other questions appear ancient history. … [N]othing is heard but the voice of the Jingo bellowing out defiance to England" writes the British Ambassador in Washington (Campbell 1960, p.16). "A war with America—not this year but in the not distant future—has become something more than a possibility," advances Salisbury in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "It is much more of a reality than the future Russo-French coalition" (Grenville 1955, p.41).[42]

Salisbury was more than willing to oblige if Cleveland wanted to engage in a bout of brinkmanship over Latin America. For the Prime Minister, the President's message changed nothing: the extension of the Monroe Doctrine was still unacceptable, and Britain could do nothing but reject it. Since the President had addressed Congress—not to the British Government—Salisbury was content to wait. The crisis would "fizzle out" (Humphreys 1967, p. 156), 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 (Grenville 1964, p. 67).

However, the botched Jameson Raid and the Kruger telegram changed British priorities. On 3

[41] This is not to say that there were no dissenting opinions. Some groups were horrified at the thought of war with Britain. These, however, neither controlled the administration nor were likely to win the upcoming election, widely predicted to be won by "jingo" Republicans (Campbell 1960, p.19).

[42] The Chancellor of the Exchequer concurred with Salisbury's assessment in his response (Campbell 1960, p. 31).

January, Kaiser Wilhelm II sent a telegram to the President of the Transvaal Republic congratulating him on defending its independence from British forces. Not only did Britain not recognize the South African Republic, but the telegram also implied that the German Empire could have intervened on behalf of the Transvaal Republic had it been called on to do so. For many members of the British cabinet and public alike, the telegram revealed a German hostility thus far unbeknownst to them. Until the Kaiser's communication, France had been Britain's traditional antagonist, while the German Empire—ruled by Queen Victoria's grandson—was seen as friendly. "In his telegram to Kruger," the Princess of Wales writes, "my nephew Willy has shown us that he is inwardly our enemy" (Massie 1991, p. 231). This revelation—in conjunction with the US public's belligerence, the continued enmity of other continental powers, and the impending Turkey crisis—required a shift in priorities.

The Cabinet's reaction was immediate: change was needed on many fronts, including the Venezuelan issue. The very next day, the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, sent a telegram to Salisbury suggesting accommodating the United States' position and its commission (Garvin 1934, p.95-6):

> "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."

In a following letter, Chamberlain further argued that concessions regarding the Venezuela issue might induce the Cleveland administration to support Great Britain's position on Turkey and the Armenian massacre, which, if successful, would be "the greatest coup ever made in English politics" (quoted in Garvin 1934, p.96).

Finally, on 9 January, William Harcourt, the Opposition co-leader, called Chamberlain late to discuss the ongoing crisis with the United States. Harcourt made it clear that the Cabinet needed to accept unrestricted arbitration immediately to eliminate all risk of war. If the Cabinet did not comply, he would then be obligated to indict them.

As a result, when the Cabinet met again on 11 January 1896, Salisbury found the Cabinet no longer

willing to stand behind him. The correspondence between the Secretary of State for India and future Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, then-First Lord of the Treasury, illustrates the mood of the Cabinet (Lowe 1965, p. 108):

> "I have great sympathy for Salisbury [...] 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. [...] We cannot keep Russia out of Constantinople but our futile efforts have consolidated friendship between Russia and France and brought us kicks from Germany and from other nations. We must alter our action, but we have been so blind in the past that a mere recital of our past policy is a heavy indictment of the policy pursued."

Succinctly, brinkmanship with Washington was no longer acceptable, and neither was Salisbury's refusal to negotiate. Chamberlain relates in his diary that, after reporting Harcourt's interview, Salisbury said that "if we were to yield unconditionally to American threats, another Prime Minister would have to be found." However, "it was quite clear that the great majority—if not all—the Cabinet would be glad of any honourable settlement" (quoted in Garvin 1934, p.161). Salisbury did not resign, but this Cabinet council set a new trajectory for Britain's Latin American policy.

Britain had accepted Olney's new reading of the Monroe Doctrine and conceded that the United States, not Britain, held a special position in Latin America. Once the Cabinet conceded the United States was entitled to intervene in the boundary dispute, Salisbury's focus was to ensure the resulting arbitration would yield a positive outcome for Britain. The details of the ensuing negotiations fall beyond this project's scope but are a stark reminder that the weak suffer what they must.[43]

The transition between Britain and the United States was peaceful because Britain prioritized peace over its influence over Latin America. There is no reason to believe that war would necessarily have taken place if Salisbury had not been undermined by his cabinet. The American and British governments would have had multiple opportunities to back down from their positions before the first shot was fired.[44] What matters, however, is the fact that on 11 January 1896, the British Cabinet

[43] The arbitration process mostly ignored Venezuela. Its government was eventually allowed to nominate a single commission member, though not from Venezuela. Ironically, the Unsurprisingly, the British position was nearly entirely vindicated.

[44] Various scholars have highlighted the presence of a "velvet glove beneath [Cleveland's] gauntlet of mail" (Humphreys 1967; Grenville 1964).

made the conscious decision, in Salisbury's own words, to "decline any step that might lead to war" (Grenville 1964, p.68)—even if that meant sacrificing Britain's position in Latin America.[45]

5.3 The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This was a dramatic escalation from the two countries' conflict over the Donbas region, which had been mostly dormant since 2015. What explains Russia's decision?

Part of the answer, I argue, is that Russia, which had preserved its influence over Ukraine since the end of the Cold War using peaceful—if coercive—means, saw a prohibitive increase in maintenance costs following the events of Euromaidan in winter 2013-2014. Overnight, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's mismanagement of the protests transformed a simple exercise in hegemonic management into a disaster for Russia's order. As the dust settled, Ukrainian ethnonationalism dominated the new Ukrainian administration, and the strongly anti-Russian, far-right Svoboda party controlled a third of the ministers (Charap and Colton 2016, p.126-7). Worse, Russia's intervention to prevent the loss of Sevastopol also damaged its popularity among Ukrainians, further hindering Moscow's ability to control Kyiv.

By early 2022, Putin had realized that Ukraine was determined to leave Russia's order and that the US and its allies were unlikely to defend Ukraine. Ultimately, these considerations led him to believe that war with Ukraine was the best path forward for the Russian order.

War, however, was not preordained; it was the regrettable outcome of Russian priorities. Russia deliberately sacrificed peace in a bid to restore its waning influence over Ukraine.[46]

Through the lens of the trilemma of hegemonic order competition, Russo-Ukrainian relations can be separated into two phases. From the end of the Cold War until 2014, Russia compromised on its order's profile to preserve peace and maintain its influence over Ukraine. After Euromaidan and the invasion of Crimea, Russia found itself unable to maintain Ukraine within its order. Unwilling

[45] The American experience of this crisis also conforms to the trilemma: the U.S. order could expand in Latin America without sacrificing U.S. interests nor increasing governance costs because Washington adopted policies that increased the risk of conflict with Britain.

[46] I focus here on the Russian point of view. From the US perspective, war was an unfortunate externality of the US inability to surrender Ukraine to Russia's order without undermining the legitimacy of its order (and thus its costs of maintenance).

to accept such a loss of influence or to alter its order's interest profile any further, Moscow forswore peace in the hope of reasserting its power over Ukraine.

5.3.1 Russia Compromises on its Order's Profile

On the eve of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg asserted on the eve of the invasion warned that Moscow was attempting to "recreate its spheres of influence"[47]. This was not a new development: although the end of the Cold War had brought an end to the *Soviet* order, it had not reduced Moscow's appetite for a *Russian*-led order.

1991 was a challenging year for Russian order aspirations, but it is readily apparent that Moscow had never intended for Ukraine to be genuinely independent. On 7-8 December, Russian President Boris Yeltsin met with his Belarus and Ukrainian counterparts in Belavezha Park to discuss the future of the Soviet Union. His objective was to have Ukraine join the New Union Treaty, a confederation of states dominated by Russia. 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.

This is in part due to the fact that Yeltsin had overplayed his hand. In late November, seven states (including Russia and Belarus, but not Ukraine, pending its independence vote) had been expected to initiate a popular new draft of the Union Treaty. However, in a bid to secure additional powers for Russia, Yeltsin objected at the last moment, and states referred the resulting text to their parliaments. Had the treaty been initialed, Yeltsin could have presented Ukraine with an ultimatum: join the union (on Russia's terms) or stay isolated. Instead, Yeltsin's attempt to move the new union's interest profile closer to Russia's position had inadvertently made the existence of the union itself subject to Ukraine's approval.

In contrast, his Ukrainian counterpart, Leonid Kravchuk, had just been elected with a substantial majority (61%). Kravchuk favored Ukrainian independence as he believed he would not be able to govern Ukraine if it belonged to a supernational state controlled by Russia (D'Anieri 2019, p.35). This was in line with the national sentiment, which overwhelmingly (92%) voted in favor of independence. Consequently, when Kravchuk arrived in Minsk, he could deadlock any attempt to keep the Soviet Union going with reforms.

[47] *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Munich Security Conference Session "Hand in Hand: Transatlantic and European Security"* (2022)

For Yeltsin, keeping Ukraine in Russia's order was paramount[48] and he had warned Gorbachev that if he "did not succeed in drawing Ukraine into the proposed Union [he] would have 'to think about something else"' (Garthoff 1994, p.483). This "something else" took the nebulous form of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an entity that was explicitly "neither a state, nor a super-state structure" (Fedor 1995, p.195). Unable to convince Kravchuk to join a Russian-led order in the form of the New Union Treaty, Yeltsin instead moved the Russian order's interest profile to whatever common denominator would keep Ukraine associated with Russia (Garthoff 1994, p.484). On paper, the CIS looked like a confederation with the features Russia had hoped for, but to satisfy Ukraine, none of its requirements were legally binding (D'Anieri 2019, p.35).

Over the following months, Kravchuk's focus on Ukrainian independence led him to refuse to sign the Collective Security Treaty[49] and to reject the IMF's suggestion to establish a single central bank—likely dominated by Russia—to manage the monetary policy of the ruble, still used by all successor states at the time.

Ukraine's economy and severe dependence on Russian energy would soon weaken Kyiv's bargaining leverage with Moscow. In January 1992, Russia moved to raise the price of fossil fuels—subsidized until then—to world levels. The sharp price increase was immediately felt in Ukraine and contributed to the collapse of its economy. Initially, these policies were part of Russia's domestic economic reform plan and not necessarily meant to undermine Ukrainian independence (D'Anieri 1999, p.78). Moscow, however, was quick to notice Ukraine's weaknesses and eager to exploit them to reassert Russia's original interest profile.

The linkage between energy and other issues became explicit in 1993 when Russia informed Ukraine that subsidized energy would be contingent on accepting Russian demands regarding the Black Sea Fleet, the establishment of Russian military bases in Ukraine, and the rights to export oil and gas (to Europe) through Ukrainian pipelines.

Later that year, a summit was held in Crimea to resolve the issue of the Black Sea Fleet and nuclear disarmament. By then, Russian threats were no longer concerned with subsidies but with plain cutoffs. In Kravchuk's words:

[48] "We must without fail work out a viewpoint that will prevent our three Slav states from splitting apart, no matter what happens," remarked Yetlsin upon arriving in Minsk (quoted in Garthoff 1994, p.483).

[49] The Russian equivalent to NATO and its Article V and the predecessor to the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

> "In the Crimea [Massandra], it was said in no uncertain terms [...] that if Ukraine did not find the means to settle its debt and make payments for energy carriers, that are due now, Russia would be forced to suspend oil and gas deliveries to Ukraine entirely."[50]

Ukrainian negotiators were also informed that Russia would be willing to accept the Black Sea Fleet, the base in Sevastopol, and the surrender of Ukrainian warheads in lieu of payment. As Russia expected, this was a deal the Ukrainian government could not refuse, and Kravchuk reluctantly accepted:

> "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." [51]

Ukrainians, however, were dismayed at the deal. Most parties denounced the deal in the Rada and accused Kravchuk of betraying Ukraine (Popeski 1993). Faced with public outrage, Kravchuk reversed his stance, and the agreements were never implemented.

By the end of 1993, three fundamental dynamics had emerged: First, in the years following the end of the Cold War, Moscow quickly developed a taste for energy politics. Over the following decades, it would become a staple of Russia's order governance toolbox with Ukraine.

Second, energy concerns had succeeded against Ukraine's government but not against its people. Faced with a choice between prosperity and independence, Ukrainians had vociferously chosen the latter. Additionally, it revealed that coercive events, like the Massandra episode, could be met by opposition even from those in favor of closer ties with Russia (D'Anieri 2019, p.42).

Finally, during this period, there is no sign that Moscow stopped promoting a Russian-led hegemonic order. "If not openly imperial," Brzezinski writes at the time, the objectives of Russian policy were "at the very least proto-imperial" Brzeziński (1994), and Russia worked hard to confirm its hegemonic status while relegating Ukraine to the role of a member state. "The time has come," Yeltsin asserted, "for distinguished international organizations, including the UN, to grant Russia special powers of a guarantor of peace and stability in regions of the former USSR."[52] The Russian ambas-

[50] Quoted in D'Anieri (1999, p.79)
[51] Quoted in Tkachenko (1993).
[52] Remarks from February 1993, quoted by Fuller in Mandelbaum (1994).

sador to Ukraine privately described Ukrainian independence as "transitional;" political advisors to Yeltsin emphasized that Ukraine (and Belarus) fell well within Russia's sphere of influence, and East European countries were told it was futile to establish large embassies in Kyiv since they would be downgraded to consular sections within 18 months (Freeland 1993).

In 1994, Kravchuk was defeated by Leonid Kuchma, one of his former prime ministers, who would serve two terms as President. Traditionally described as "multi-vector," attempting to balance East and West, Kuchma's foreign policy could be summarized as pro-West while Russia was hostile, then pro-Russia when the West became disillusioned with Kuchma's domestic policies.

Although he had run on a pro-Russia platform, Kuchma quickly realized that engagement with Russia would be challenging. The only currency Russia would accept was Ukrainian sovereignty, and Kuchma was initially unwilling to pay this price. In reaction, Kuchma proactively sought out 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 visit to Kyiv, President Clinton explained:

> "For America, support for an independent Ukraine secure in its recognized borders [...] is a matter of our national interest as well. We look to the day when a democratic and prosperous Ukraine is America's full political and economic partner in a bulwark of stability in Europe."[53]

In a matter of months, Ukraine signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and joined NATO's Partnership for Peace to become the third largest recipient of US aid (Kuzio 2005, p.65).

Washington's new interest in Ukraine likely contributed to Moscow's decision to accommodate some of Kyiv's demands (D'Anieri 2019, p.82) When the Black Sea Fleet deal and the Friendship Treaties were finally signed in 1997, Russia formally acknowledged the existence of an independent Ukrainian state for the first time with Article 2 of the Treaty stating that "[Russia and Ukraine] shall respect each other's territorial integrity and reaffirm the inviolability of the borders existing between them" (Sorokowski 1996).

This period saw significant transformations in Ukrainian domestic politics, opening the door for

[53] Quoted in (United States: National Archives and Records Administration: Office of the Federal Register and Clinton 1995, p. 684)

Russian influence. By the decade's end, internal divisions had kept the state weak, and Kuchma had centralized executive powers away from the Rada. Oligarchs had taken control of the government and parliamentary leadership and formed Kuchma's power base during his second term. Profits, rather than ideology, motivated this new oligarchic class, and with it came a strong preference for close economic ties with Russia and an authoritarian domestic regime to facilitate rent-seeking.[54]

This turn to authoritarianism disillusioned the West. In exchange for their financial assistance, the US and Europe were expecting Kuchma to continue Ukraine's democratization. Instead, he had brought Ukrainian politics closer to Russia's superpresidentialism. Corruption was at an all-time high, and in consolidating his power, Kuchma enforced increasing restrictions on the media. The release of tapes from Kuchma's office caused two scandals that cemented the West's negative perceptions of him. The first scandal, "Kuchmagate," revealed that Kuchma had ordered an opposition journalist to be dealt with. The second revealed, in 2002, that Kuchma defied UN sanctions and authorized the sale of sophisticated Kolchuga passive sensors to Iraq two years prior (Kuzio 2003, p.24-5). In reaction, Washington made it known that Kuchma would not be welcome at the 2002 NATO summit and that the NATO-Ukraine Commission would only be held at the level of foreign ministers. Washington noted that this snub was targeted at Kuchma personally (Krushelnycky 2002).

Isolated from the West, Kuchma proceeded to "return to Europe with Russia," as some (oligarchic) centrists had been advocating (Kuzio 2003, p.65). This turn was not difficult. In Moscow, Putin, who had come to replace the ailing Yeltsin, emphasized the "near abroad" and found various venues for further integration between the two nations. Energy continued to be Russia's go-to strategy to ensure Ukrainian compliance and was a driving factor in Kuchma's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Community (the CIS alternative to the EU)[55] and, later, the less stringent Single Economic Space.

In 2004, Kuchma did not seek reappointment but instead supported the candidature of Yanukovich, his Prime Minister. Yanukovich's platform continued Kuchma's pro-Russia politics, and Moscow strongly backed him. In contrast, his primary opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, was committed to Euro-Atlantic integration. Yanukovich initially "won" the elections, but these results were quickly

[54] See Balmaceda (2008) for a more in-depth discussion of how domestic politics and rent-seeking have affected Russia's ability to use energy as a tool for coercion in Ukraine.

[55] Kuchma later backpedaled when the Rada objected, and Ukraine never went past an observer status (D'Anieri 2019, p.111).

challenged by Yushchenko and international observers who argued the elections had "fallen far short" of the standards needed for democratic elections."[56] Peaceful mass protests, the "Orange Revolution," ensued; the Ukrainian Supreme Court invalidated the results, and Yanukovich was eventually elected during the re-run ballot the following months.

Yushchenko's victory paved the way for closer ties with the West. Yet, his presidency proved to be a palimpsest: Kuchma-era politics, in the form of rampant corruption, oligarchic opposition to domestic reforms, and energy spats with Russia, were still very much visible beneath the democratic veneer and pro-Western rhetoric of Yushchenko and his government. Yushchenko was also hamstrung by the near-immediate collapse of his power base, the Orange Coalition, and his bitter rivalry with his former ally, Yulia Tymoshenko. Good words, however, were not sufficient to integrate the US-led order: in exchange for financial assistance, the West expected Ukraine to take meaningful steps towards democratization. José Manuel Barroso, the European Commission president, summarized Western fatigue with Ukraine when he told Yushchenko:

> "I will speak honestly with you, Mr President. It often seems to us that commitments on reform are only partly implemented and words are not always accompanied by action. Reforms are the only way to establish stability, closer ties with the EU."[57]

It is to be noted that, during that period, the US was unwilling to incur substantial costs to integrate Ukraine within NATO. During the 2008 NATO summit, President George W. Bush lobbied to extend NATO membership to Ukraine (and Georgia) but failed to convince key partners to agree. German Chancellor Angela Merkel justified her decision by pointing to the chaotic nature of Ukrainian politics and the authorities' cleavage over the question of MAP, but avoiding angering Russia was clearly a priority. France's Prime Minister was more candid, stating that this process would upset the balance of forces in Europe and should be discussed with Russia.[58] Whether Washington was unwilling or unable to pay the costs necessary to induce compliance in his allies, the summit concluded with no formal offer and only the promise that Ukraine could one day join NATO. As Freedman (2019, p.58) notes, this was the worst of both worlds: NATO would not expand immediately, but the firm statement of intent was provocative.

[56] "UPDATE 1-EU Calls for Investigating Ukraine Elections." (2004)
[57] Quoted in Olearchyk (2009).
[58] "NATO Summit Failure for Ukraine, but Victory for Russia - Weekly" (2008).

Unsurprisingly, Russia disliked the Western leanings of the Orange leadership. During Yushchenko's presidency, Moscow and Kyiv had multiple disputes. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev succinctly summarized these in a letter of grievances addressed to Yushchenko the summer before the following Ukrainian elections. From Russia's perspective, the Ukrainian government had demonized Russia for seeking NATO membership; sided with and provided equipment to Georgia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war; interfered with Russia's Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol; disrupted gas deliveries to Europe; and engaged in historical revisionism by glorifying Nazi collaborators (Rumer and Kramer 2009).

At the same time, Moscow was able to exploit Yushchenko's overall inefficiency and Ukraine's energy dependence to maintain its influence over Ukraine. For example, in January 2009, a bout of energy coercion allowed Moscow to extract three unfavorable provisions from Ukraine: a pricing formula for gas that ensured Ukraine would have to pay more than other countries, a minimum quantity of gas that Ukraine would have to pay for regardless of whether it used it or not; and a ban on reexporting Russian gas to other nations (D'Anieri 2019, p.160).

5.3.2 Russia Forsakes Peace

Ukraine's multi-vector policy ended abruptly in 2013 when conditions forced Yanukovych to choose, once and for all, East or West—whether to join the (Western) Association Agreement (AA) or the (Russian) Eurasian Economic Commission. As negotiations regarding the AA progressed between the EU and Ukraine, Russia became increasingly more willing to find a workable format to encourage Ukraine to join Russia's Customs Union. At the end of the 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 (Charap and Colton 2016, p.118). Although the memorandum was non-binding, it did require Ukraine to refrain from taking any action directed against the Customs Union (Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk 2015, p.79).

Kyiv understood the Memorandum differently and still moved forward with the AA. On the day the memorandum was signed, Yanukovych called Barroso to confirm that it would not hinder progress on the AA. As the meeting between Ukraine and the EU in Vilnius approached, both sides started showing signs of flexibility regarding selective justice. Moscow might have tolerated a slow

Ukrainian integration into its order but not one subordinated to Ukraine's membership in another order (emphasis original Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk 2015, p.79).

With the ratification of the AA—and the prospect of Ukraine leaving Russia's orbit for good—Moscow shifted its strategy to a more heavy-handed one. In July, the Kremlin started a trade war with Kyiv. It first cut off imports of confectionery products[59] and Ukrainian agricultural products; soon after, new customs procedures were created to throttle Ukrainian exports to Russia altogether. Although trade resumed soon after, the implicit threat was evident: do not proceed with the AA or suffer the consequences. The month before the Ukraine-EU meeting, this threat became explicit: "[T]o the extent that Ukraine eliminates import tariffs with Europe, we will introduce import tariffs with Ukraine" (quoted in D'Anieri 2019, p.200).

At this point, it is worth noting that there were fears that Ukraine might default on its debts after years of corruption, lack of economic reforms, and financial mismanagement by consecutive administrations. Temporary measures were taken to delay the inevitable[60] but, by the summer of 2013, it was apparent that the situation was not sustainable. If Yanukovych wanted to have a chance to be re-elected in 2015, he needed an urgent financial injection. Salvation, for Yanukovich, would have to come from the EU or Russia.

By then, the EU had invested significant political capital to bring the Eastern Partnership to fruition. Yanukovich thought it might also be willing to compensate Ukraine for the cost of contradicting Russia. Brussels, however, refused to pay the inflated number Kyiv presented (Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk 2015, p.85-6). Another possible venue of Western support was a loan from the IMF. Such a loan would have conditions, but these were not inconsistent with EU expectations. Neither Yanukovych nor his coalition were overly enthusiastic about it: IMF reforms risked undermining the regime's rent-seeking prospects and would prove unpopular domestically. Moscow, in contrast, was eager to provide immediate relief, "free of conditionality," but also reminded Kyiv that the retaliatory tariffs Russia would impose if Ukraine signed the AA would cause Ukraine to default. "Who will pay for Ukraine's default, which will become inevitable?" asked a Russian presidential advisor attending a conference in Yalta (Spillius 2013). Additionally, the Russian deal not only ensured that Yanukovych could run for re-election in 2015 unhindered by unpopular domestic reforms but also that Russia

[59] The Petro Poroshenko, the "Cholocate King" and future President of Ukraine, was firmly pro-AA.
[60] For an overview, see Aslund (2013).

would assist him as it had in 2004 (Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk 2015, p.87).

It is not difficult to understand why Yanukovych went East: together, the EU and the IMF were proposing to bail out Ukraine; Putin was offering to save Yanukovych.

In many ways, this event is typical of hegemonic order competition. Order-makers offer benefits (here, financial assistance) in exchange for sovereignty concessions (influence), whether political or economic. In the same way the Kremlin had won over Armenia a few weeks prior, it had simply advanced a more attractive offer—one laden with threats and bribes, but an offer nonetheless—to the Ukrainian regime than the West had. That Yanukovych may have to pay some domestic cost, here in the form of the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv, was not unusual either. Protests are a relatively common cost domestic leaders must pay for their membership[61] and moving towards the EU was popular among Ukrainians. What was entirely unexpected, however, is how poorly Yanukovych handled them. As journalist Shaun Walker (2018, p.129) summarizes:

> "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. He was held in contempt by Western leaders for his undemocratic impulses, and by Moscow for his unwillingness to take them far enough."

When Yanukovych's oppressive approach to the protests backfired, Moscow was faced with the prospect of a reversal of Ukraine's economic integration in the Eurasian Economic Commission *and* the fear of losing Sevastopol and Crimea.

It was Yanukovich who had negotiated the extension of the lease on Sevastopol[62] and, worse, there were flashes of fascist and strongly anti-Russian sentiments on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). Far-right activists were never more than a small minority of the movement (and they only had a minor political role afterward) but they were conspicuous: portraits of Stepan Bandera, including a large one hanging on the Kyiv city council building (the headquarters of the Euromaidan revolution), and the black and red flags of his organization were readily visible on the Maidan.

[61] E.g., in the early 1980's, protests took place in the Netherlands and West Germany against the deployment of Pershing II missiles.

[62] In exchange for lower gas prices that Russia never delivered

In light of these dynamics, there are good reasons to believe that Putin's decision to intervene in Crimea was an attempt to ensure the continued control of the Black Sea Fleet hosted in Crimea and that the annexation of the region was Putin's attempt to salvage the situation ex-post (Treisman 2018, ch.11). Notably, the costs for these actions were either unforeseen or ignored altogether.

In the aftermath of Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, three intertwined developments damaged Russia's ability to maintain its influence over Ukraine (i.e., its governance costs increased sharply).

First, Russia's approval in Ukraine dropped nearly instantaneously, never to recover. At the same time, more Ukrainians approved of joining NATO than opposed it for the first time. These patterns are visible in Figure 1 and 2, respectively.[63]

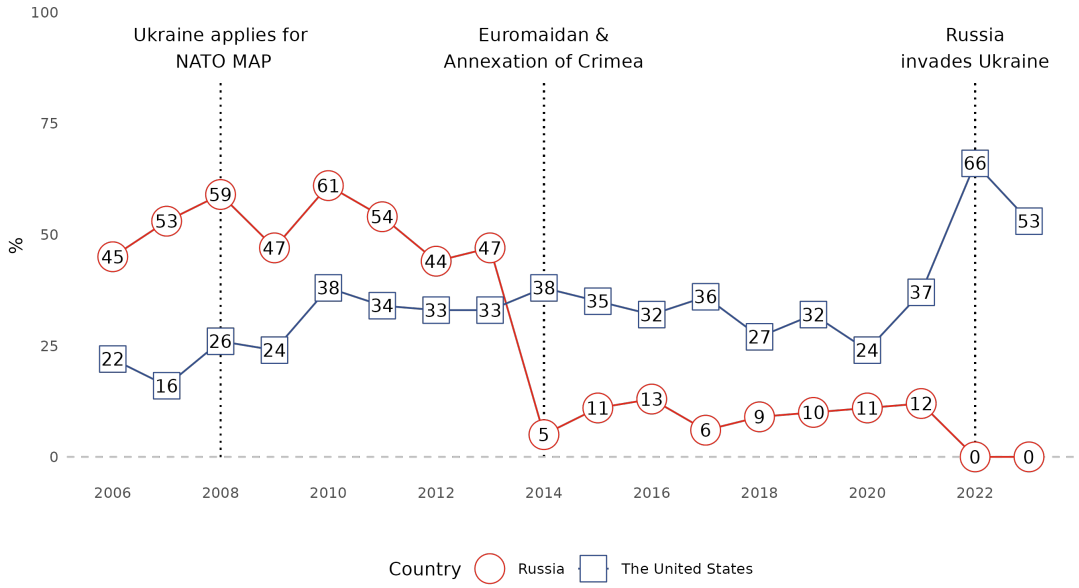

Figure 1: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of the United States/Russia?" (2006-2023)

Second, empowered by the mood of the people, the government of the newly elected Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, immediately reversed Ukraine's trajectory and took what he later described as the "first but most decisive step" by signing the AA in June 2014.[64] This move placed Ukraine firmly inside the Western order but undermined Russia's ability to compete. Economic—and especially, energy—coercion had been a critical tool in Putin's arsenal to ensure Ukrainian compliance with its order. However, now that Ukraine had joined the AA (and that Russia's image in

[63] Refer to the appendix for more information on these figures.
[64] Quoted in *Ukraine Ratifies EU Trade Pact* (2014).

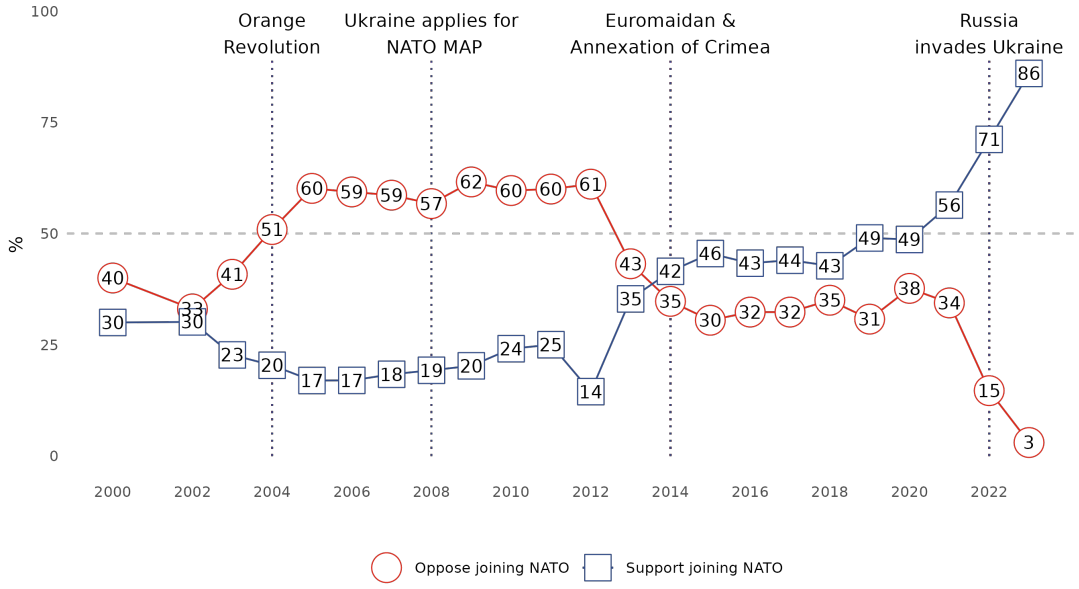

Figure 2: Ukrainian public support for Ukraine accessing NATO (2000-2023)

the West had plummeted), the West was considerably more amenable to help insulate Kyiv from Moscow's strong-handed tactics.

Third, post-Euromaidan Ukraine became less amenable to Russian interests as Poroshenko's regime pursued various policies to hinder the reach of the Kremlin's discourse in Ukraine. It banned Russian television stations and social media, encouraged the use of Ukrainian in media and schools, and facilitated the creation of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church (at the expanse of Russia's) (Karatnycky 2019). In his speech announcing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Putin decried that "in territories adjacent to Russia [...] a hostile 'anti-Russia' is taking shape" ("Transcript" 2022)—yet he omitted that this was something of his own doing.

These changes have made it impossible for Russia to keep Ukraine within its order. Unfortunately, this also meant that, as Moscow's influence over Kyiv decreased, the temptation to rid Ukraine of Western influence—the temptation of war—also increased.

In 2022, Putin ordered an offensive against Ukraine to replace, "denazify," its government. In 2014, the cost of ensuring Ukrainian compliance suddenly became prohibitive. Yet, war was not preordained. Putin could have altered the Russian order's interests profile, accepted the loss of Ukraine, or even bid his time until a new opportunity presented itself. On the eve of the war, Ukraine remained the third most corrupt state in Europe (after Russia and Azerbaijan) with various scandals implicating Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (Rudenko 2022). Instead, on the 24th of February 2022,

Vladimir Putin chose the Russia-led order—and thus, war—over peace.

6 Conclusion

During his 2023 and 2024 State of the Union Addresses, President Biden emphasized that the U.S. seeks competition with China, not conflict. This project introduced a theory of how great powers compete over hegemonic orders. In the process, it has identified—and formally demonstrated—the existence of an important limitation of foreign policy: that when it comes to hegemonic order competition, great powers cannot have their cake and eat it, too. Only two of three desirable objectives are achievable concurrently: maximizing influence and reducing the cost of order management, advancing interests aligned with one's preferences, and avoiding wars. I illustrated how this dynamic manifests with the Venezuela Crisis of 1895, during which England conceded some of its influence to ensure peace, and with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, where Russia once was no longer willing to compromise on its order profile, started a war to rid Ukraine of Western influences.

This project suggests that continued peace between the U.S. and China, though not impossible, may require deliberate efforts from both leaderships. The nuclear status of both countries may deter them from initiating a systemic war, but it is unlikely to do much to prevent local conflicts. Taiwan is currently the most likely apple of discord, but we should not hope for a repeat performance of the Venezuelan crisis. In the case of the Anglo-American transition, peace was favored because the British Cabinet was distracted by European affairs. Yielding was but a small cost to avoid any risk of military conflict across the Atlantic. In contrast, there is a growing consensus in Washington that China should be America's first foreign policy priority—a view increasingly more popular among the public as well. Additionally, the legitimacy of the US-led order is tied to its defense of democracy. It is thus implausible that the US would be distracted enough to tolerate a direct Chinese challenge in East Asia. Had London refused to give ground in 1896, it is plausible that Cleveland's administration might have attempted to back down and defuse the situation: Venezuela carried little strategic or symbolic value for Washington and the U.S. was not prepared to wage a war. In contrast, Taiwan is central to Beijing's domestic legitimacy and it has been developing its military capabilities accordingly.

At the same time, a Sino-American conflict is likely to 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 of China's order among democracies. Similarly, the U.S. may prefer to compromise over Taiwan as a conflict would increase the costs of order production with regard to regional allies. As long as these concerns remain, the desire for greater influence may continue to facilitate, rather than hinder, peace.

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