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LEADING THE FREE WORLD

HOW AMERICA BENEFITS

Paul D. Miller

December 2019





SCOWCROFT CENTER
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Atlantic Council
1030 15th Street NW, 12th Floor
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

WHAT IS THE FREE WORLD? 4

THE BENEFITS OF THE FREE WORLD 8

THREATS TO THE FREE WORLD 12

ALTERNATIVES TO THE FREE WORLD 16

PRESERVING THE FREE WORLD 20

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 21

DEMOCRATIC ORDER INITIATIVE 22

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is “world order” and why should Americans care? Less than half of all Americans have a passport, and less than five percent travel internationally. Only 26 percent of US gross domestic product (GDP) comes from international trade. Since the end of the Cold War most Americans probably feel safe from foreign threats most of the time: they feel little sense of danger or threat from the world. Even the terrorist attacks of 2001 have receded into memory and increasingly feel like an aberration rather than a precedent. Americans may feel a sense of unease about the world, but we are confident that even the nation’s wars safely take place “over there,” not here at home. If the United States can afford to tune out much of the world because of its geography, wealth, and power, why should we care?

Ironically, Americans have the luxury of not caring because of the United States’ success actively constructing a world order that reflects our values and that has produced unprecedented wealth, stability, and peace. Americans can ignore the world much of the time because our government has invested decades of effort managing the world’s problems for our benefit.

Americans take for granted a world in which they feel safe. The sense of safety that we feel is not natural; it is the result of dedicated effort by the US government and its allies to maintain a system of cooperative security to head off threats before they materialize. Similarly, generations of Americans have grown up with the privilege of vacationing or doing business almost anywhere with relative ease and safety. We buy iPhones and cars without thought to the complex global supply chains and international manufacturing that make them affordable. The unprecedented spread of wealth at home and abroad did not come about by happenstance. US and allied policymakers enabled it by pursuing a policy of free trade, free travel, and free inquiry.

Americans have been the unconscious beneficiaries of a world order that would not exist without them. Just as we take for granted electricity and

indoor plumbing without thought to the wiring and piping that make them possible, so too we take for granted the peace, prosperity, and stability of our world without thought to the infrastructure of the free world. The free world exists because the most powerful states in the world are open societies: liberal capitalist democracies who largely see the world the same way and have worked together to keep the peace and build wealth.

That order is now imperiled. The United States no longer enjoys an unquestioned advantage over its rivals, Russia and China, as it once did. North Korea and Iran threaten the United States with nuclear weapons and support for terrorism. The Islamic State and al-Qaida have not been defeated; in retaliation for their recent setbacks they continue to plot and plan against American targets. Perhaps most threatening of all: rising nationalist and populist movements around the world, including in the United States, are undermining popular support for international cooperation, free trade, and collective security.

This report is about the free world: what it is, why it is imperiled, why Americans should care, and what we can do about it. Some skeptics have criticized the international order. President Donald Trump regularly criticizes “globalism,” and many Americans seem inclined to believe that the United States is losing its sovereignty and that the world is taking advantage of America’s generosity.

We respectfully disagree. The free world, and American leadership of it, is good for America and good for the world. It helps keep us safe and give us opportunity. Far from eroding America’s sovereignty, it is a tool of American influence. Most importantly, the aspirations of the free world are *just*. It is a system of ordered liberty among nations, a tool or mechanism for allowing nations and individuals to flourish in freedom and safety. Investing in the free world is an investment in our values and our common values.



The Atlantic Charter, signed by the United States and the United Kingdom in 1941, sets forth a common vision for the free world based on shared values.

OFFICIAL US NAVY PHOTOGRAPH

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE FREE WORLD?

The free world is good for America and good for the world. Before we can make that case, we have to explain what the “free world” is. The free world is a type of *world order*. Specifically, it is the world in which the ideals of liberty and equality predominate.

What is World Order?

World order is a broad concept. Some argue the concept is too vague to be useful. Others simply deny that such a thing exists. Still others think it is more practical and useful to focus on specific regions or policy issues rather than the world as a whole.

★ We think it is useful to talk about *world order*: predictable patterns of behavior among

international actors shaped by their ideas, their power, and their institutions.

- ★ “World order” is shorthand for the social system that exists among states, non-state actors, multinational corporations, and intergovernmental institutions. It is a social system shaped by the ideologies and beliefs of its most powerful actors, regulated by thousands of treaties and centuries of precedent.
- ★ World order is practical: because it is global, the character of world order affects and shapes every issue and region in the world. The United States’ ability to pursue any of its interests—from combatting terrorist groups to increasing wealth through trade—is influenced by the character of world order.

What Kinds of World Order Are There?

Some world orders are better than others. Throughout history there have been different kinds of world order depending on who holds the most power and what kind of world they want to build.

For example, power can be diffuse, or it can be highly concentrated among a small handful of great powers. The most powerful states might try to build a hierarchical world that mainly benefits themselves, or a more equitable order for the world. Most orders throughout history have been hierarchical.

- ★ The ancient Roman and Chinese orders in the Mediterranean and East Asia, respectively, provided stability, infrastructure, and peace at the expense of hierarchy, inequality, and imperialism.
- ★ A world order centered on Europe started with the Westphalian Treaties (1648) that codified sovereignty and mutual non-interference among European states, which subsequently imposed imperial rule over the rest of the world over the next three centuries.
- ★ The fascist world order that the Axis Powers tried to build through global conquest in the 1930s and 1940s was so horrific that the rest of the world banded together and fought the most catastrophic war in history to stop it.
- ★ The communist world order that the Soviet Union championed claimed to be one of economic equality and the freedom of the working classes. In practice, it was another example of hierarchical and imperial order that imposed slavery everywhere it was tried.

The Origin of the Free World

After World War II, the Allies, led by the United States and United Kingdom, worked together to try something new. They led the creation of a new order founded on principles of liberty and equality. In doing so, they were living up to their wartime promises.

- ★ During the war, the United States and United Kingdom declared their vision of the postwar world in the Atlantic Charter (subsequently endorsed by 45 other states by the end of the war). If the free world has a founding document akin to the Declaration of Independence, the Atlantic Charter is it.
- ★ The Charter said that the Allies were fighting to preserve “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live” and to ensure that “sovereign rights and

self-government [are] restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”

- ★ The Charter expressed respect for the “freely expressed wishes” of all peoples. It endorsed freedom of navigation, a version of free trade, cooperative security, and the goal of “freedom from fear and want” for all.

The principles of the Atlantic Charter were accomplished through the defeat of the Axis powers, the liberation of conquered nations, and the democratization of Germany and Japan, two of the world’s most important economic and military powers. Liberal principles were furthered by the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials and the Genocide Convention, which established that government officials could be held accountable for mass violations of human rights.

- ★ But liberal order did not arise spontaneously after the war. The United States and its allies, recognizing the emerging threat from the Soviet Union, saw the need to keep their wartime alliance together and institutionalize and expand their cooperation.
- ★ As a result, the Allied powers built a range of institutions to entrench liberal principles in relations among themselves and, gradually, the rest of the world, including: The World Bank (1944), the United Nations (1945), the International Monetary Fund (1945), the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1947), and, eventually, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949).
- ★ Alongside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Marshall Plan (1948), these institutions, backed by American leadership and power, became the foundations of the free world.

What is Classical Liberalism?

Liberalism argues that political and economic arrangements should protect and serve the freedom, equality, dignity and flourishing of every human individual. Liberalism differs from imperialism, fascism, communism, and other ideologies by rejecting hierarchy and authoritarianism and by emphasizing the inherent and inviolable rights of human beings. Liberalism has several components. They work best together, but they are separable.

- ★ **Political liberalism** is democracy plus human rights; that is, majority rule with minority protections—especially including the freedoms of religion, speech, and press. Political liberalism also includes checks and balances among branches and levels of government to ensure accountable and limited governance and the rule of law.

- ★ **Economic liberalism** is capitalism: private property, free enterprise, some degree of free trade, freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute adjudication, a predictable legal environment, the sanctity of contract, entrepreneurialism incentivized by the profit motive, and the freedom to invest capital in private enterprise.
- ★ **International liberalism** applies the central ideas of liberalism to relations among states. It rests on the sovereign equality of all states. It also highlights that liberal democracies tend not to fight one another: as liberalism spreads, it expands the “democratic peace” that has contributed to unprecedented stability around the world since the end of World War II.
- ★ Liberalism also stresses cooperation among equal states to address issues of common concern—which is why liberal states created a host of intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organizations. These institutions help mediate negotiations for global cooperation and they help develop guidelines and rules for international relations. That is also why the free world is sometimes called the “rules-based” order.

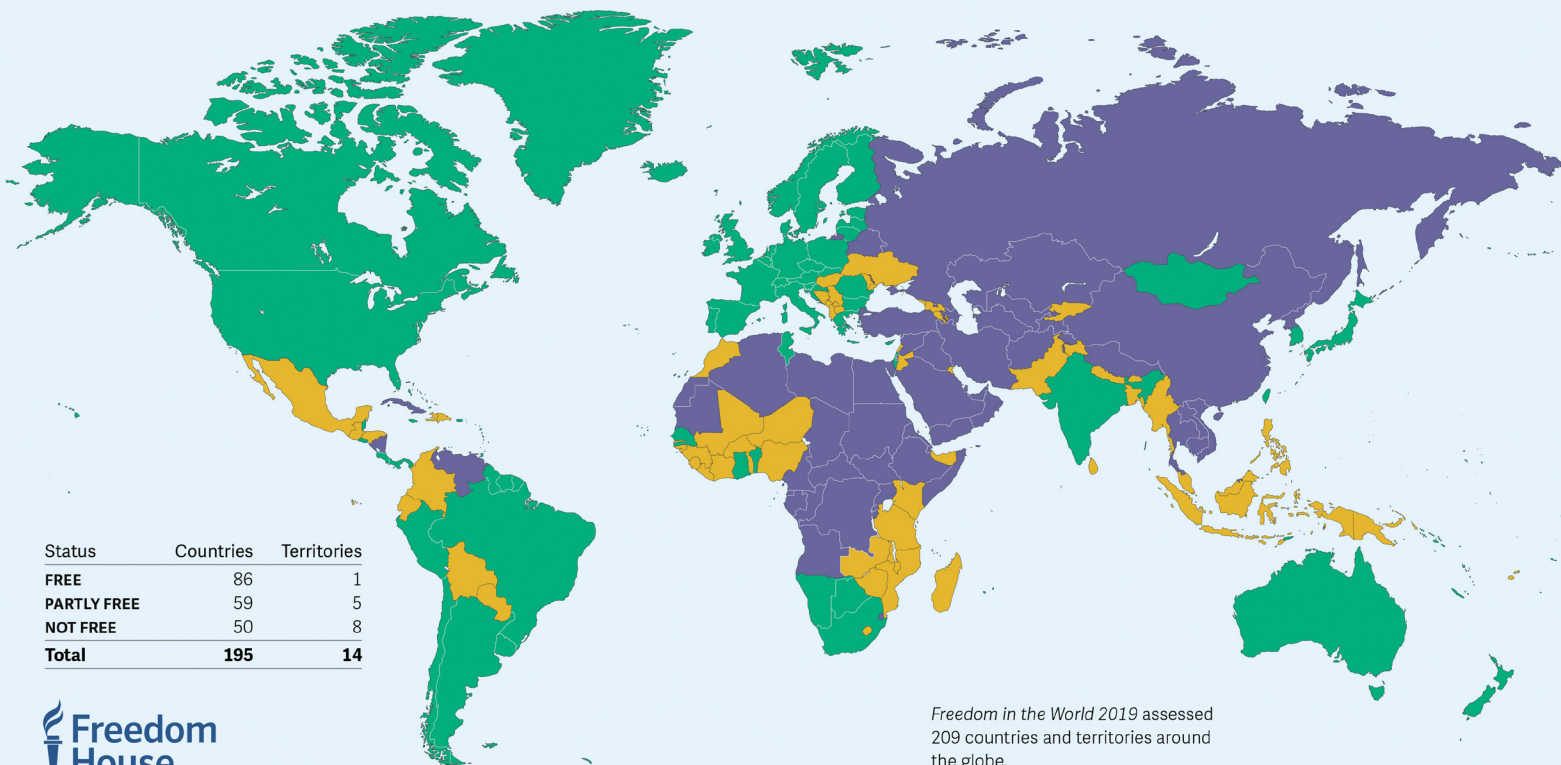
The Map of the Free World Today

The free world is *world order organized along liberal principles*. As the discussion above should make clear, the free world has many layers and it is not evenly spread around the world. Nonetheless, we are living at or near the high tide of freedom in recorded human history. In the post-Cold War era, there are more free states and more people living in free states than in any prior era.

- ★ The free world is global in scope. Liberalism first arose in Europe and the free world started among a handful of states after World War II, but the ideology has proven remarkably adaptable. The free world has gradually expanded. Especially since the end of the Cold War, states around the world have worked hard to liberalize.
- ★ There are at least 116 electoral democracies in the world today, according to Freedom House (not counting micro-sovereignties). By another measure, 88 states in the world today are “free” and another 58 are “partly free.”
- ★ These include many non-Western states, like Japan, India, South Korea, Botswana, Tunisia, South Africa, and more. Of all the states in the world, about a third are free or partly free

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2019

FREE PARTLY FREE NOT FREE



non-Western states; 43 percent of all fully or partially free states are non-Western; and 27 percent of all free states are non-Western.

- ★ Some states liberalize unevenly. China and Russia participate partly in economic liberalism because they have opened up their economies to free markets and world trade, but do not adhere to international standards of the rule of law. They also participate in collective security arrangements against international terrorism. But they reject the principles of political liberalism by denying human rights at home, and often do not respect the sovereignty of their neighbors. North Korea participates in no aspects of the free world. The free world is thickest and most developed in Europe, North America, and East Asia.

The United States and the Free World

America has a unique role to play as the chief architect, beneficiary and, in many ways, “first citizen” of the free world. The free world would not exist without the United States.

- ★ The United States led the Allied coalition to defeat the Axis powers in World War II. It played the central role in building the institutions of the free world after the war. And it led the alliance of free nations to contain and defeat the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
- ★ The United States has acted as the leader of the free world for over seven decades. The long duration of American leadership has created habits among many nations of looking to the United States, which extends American diplomatic influence beyond what it would otherwise be. The free world is truly liberal, but in some respects, it is also distinctively American.

The United States is still the “indispensable nation” because of our sheer power and wealth.

- ★ The US economy accounts for between a fifth and a quarter of world GDP and is the largest or second-largest single economy in the world, depending on how we measure.
- ★ The size of our economy ensures we set the agenda and have the first seat at the table in any important international negotiation—assets which help the United States steer such negotiations in our favor and further perpetuate our economic prosperity.

The American military is another important pillar of the free world.

- ★ The US military budget is the largest in the world. American armed forces are the only globally-deployed military. US armed forces help ensure freedom of navigation throughout the world’s oceans, assure allies, deter rivals, and help provide a predictable environment among the world’s great powers.
- ★ The US military is the lynchpin of a network of alliances that span the globe. Our alliance with Europe is a crucial check on Russia. Our alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand deter China and North Korea.
- ★ Since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, there is no comparable alliance network centered on any other great power. The United States military is unique for its role coordinating and planning allied military operations in response to any contingency worldwide.



Pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong adopt the American flag as a symbol of shared values.

CHAPTER 2

THE BENEFITS OF THE FREE WORLD

The free world is good for the United States and for the world. It makes America safer, stronger, richer, and freer.

The Free World Makes America Stronger and Safer

The free world is the outer perimeter of American security. America is safer because of cooperative security with its allies who help fight its battles.

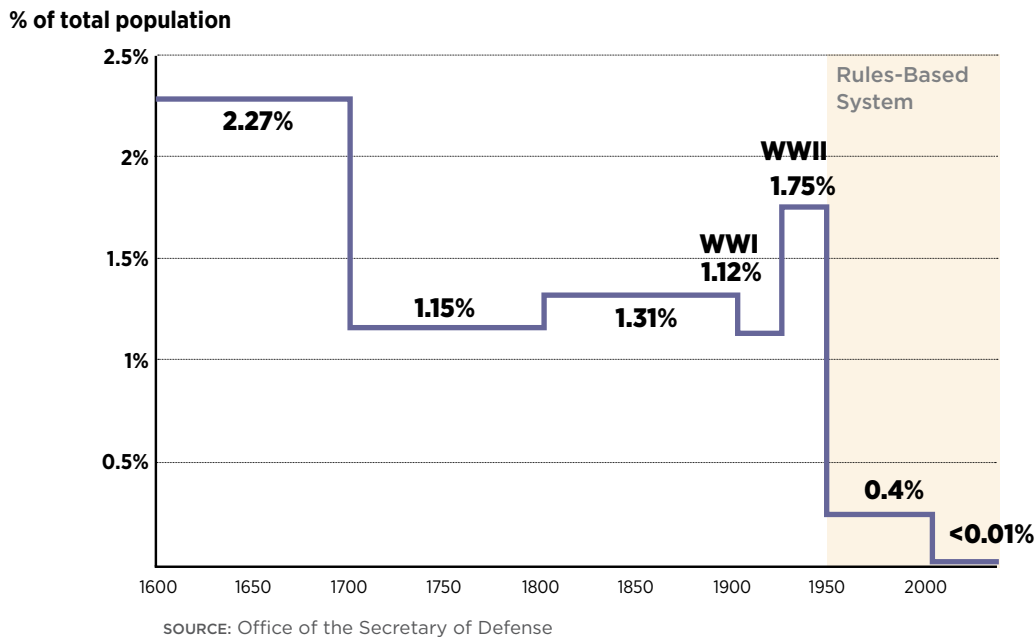
- ★ After the terrorist attacks of September 2001, NATO invoked its mutual-defense obligation for the first time in its history. Every NATO member sent troops to combat al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan; over 1,000 allied servicemen have been killed there since 2001.
- ★ Dozens of states contributed troops to the first Gulf War (1991). NATO contributed to American-led missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya.
- ★ The UN and allied states helped the United States implement our successful effort to contain

the Soviet Union. When North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, the United Nations Security Council condemned the invasion and authorized a multinational mission to defend the South; twenty other states, aside from the United States, sent troops or aid.

- ★ While most allies' military forces are small by comparison to the United States, that does not mean their contributions are meaningless. Many can field small, top-notch special forces units comparable to US Special Forces and Navy SEALs.
- ★ Others have specialized in high-tech capabilities, like intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, making their contributions of outsized importance.

NATO's contribution to American security goes back to its founding. NATO helped the United States fight and win the Cold War.

- ★ European allies gave the United States permission to station American troops, material, and nuclear weapons abroad, making our efforts to deter the Soviet Union more effective.



- ★ Two European allies—the United Kingdom and France—contributed their own nuclear arsenals, and all allies pledged their conventional military forces to collective defense.

NATO's central idea—that an attack on one is an attack on all—was central to deterring the Soviet Union, and remains vital today to deterring Russia. NATO and other allies remain an essential tool for counteracting Russia and China.

- ★ When the United States and its allies band together in collective security, the smallest states function as a fence—a wall—against Russian or Chinese aggression and imperialism.
- ★ That is how NATO and other allies prevent threats to the United States from growing too strong. Alliances are preventative defense, insurance against possible future danger. And our alliances keep threats “over there” rather than allowing them to grow to the point that we have to deal with them “over here” at home. To repeat, the free world is the outer perimeter of American security.

There is another way that the free world makes America safer. The spread of liberal democracy abroad over the past century has created a “democratic peace” among many of the world's most powerful states.

- ★ Liberal democracies rarely, if ever, fight each other. There is no clear-cut case of two liberal democracies ever going to war against each other in history.
- ★ When liberalism and democracy are adapted around the world, they expand a zone of peace

and stability from which no threats against the United States will emerge.

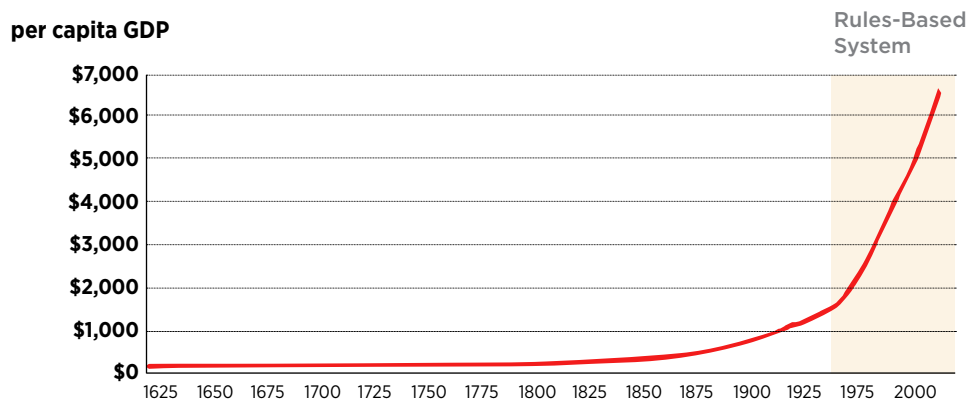
There are many reasons why the democratic peace exists. Regardless of how it works, it functions as an effective shorthand for US policymakers to know which states around the world are most likely to be reliable partners for American interests.

- ★ Liberal democracies tend to view each other as natural partners, if not allies, because of our shared values. We see the world in similar terms and tend to perceive the same threats and dangers.
- ★ Democracies have more checks and balances on war-making powers. And because the population pays for and serves in the nation's wars, we tend to be more selective about which wars to fight.
- ★ Finally, just as the democratic process helps domestic factions share power and resolve disputes peacefully, policymakers from different democracies tend to apply the same habits of negotiation and compromise in relations with each other.

Aside from its direct contribution to American security, the free world also helps extend American influence, clout, and diplomatic power. The United States is able to set the agenda, rally other states to its cause, and pursue its interests with less opposition and more help. Allies and world bodies help smooth the path for American diplomacy and give greater heft and clout to American initiatives.

- ★ In 1975, the United States, its European allies, and others signed the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in

Economic Development from 1600-2000



SOURCE: J. Bradford DeLong, "Estimating World GDP, One Million B.C.–Present"

Europe (the "Helsinki Accords"), which in part reflected liberal values of self-determination and human rights. Activists used the Accords to hold the Soviet Union to account for its authoritarianism and oppression, an important pressure campaign against the Soviet Union during the last phase of the Cold War. The Accords and the activist campaign are another example of international actors helping the US achieve its national interests.

- ★ Examples are legion: the world almost unanimously condemned the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and several states aided the United States' covert operation there. Most of the world has signed on to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological Weapons Convention, which have helped prevent the spread or use of weapons of mass destruction.

The Free World Makes America Richer

The free world extends the reach and depth of the American economy. It indisputably makes the nation as a whole richer and gives American consumers access to a wider array of products at cheaper prices. The American economy has grown almost tenfold since 1945 and produces more than 20 percent of the world's income.

- ★ Free trade includes a rules-based trading regime, low barriers to imports and exports, transparency in trade practices, protection for intellectual property, and adherence to international arbitration in trade disputes.
- ★ Free trade is an extension of capitalism at home to the world at large. It is another expression

of economic freedom, the ability of people to buy, trade, and sell goods in a free and fair marketplace without unnecessary limitations or interference.

- ★ Maintaining this system is largely the job of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which the United States helped create in 1995 as a successor to the Global Agreements on Tariffs and Trade.
- ★ The WTO helps enforce honesty and fairness with America's trading partners. The United States wins the overwhelming majority of cases—almost 90 percent—it brings against trade partners in the WTO.

Free trade has a number of benefits for American companies and American consumers.

- ★ American consumers benefit from free trade. By lowering costs for imports, free trade makes it cheaper to buy goods of higher quality—like iPhones, cars, and televisions. But free trade does not simply mean consumers have better access goods manufactured or developed overseas. American goods are also cheaper and better because they have to compete with imported goods.
- ★ For example, the cost of personal computers is less than a tenth of what it was twenty years ago, even as computing power and speed have risen exponentially over the same period.
- ★ American companies benefit from free trade. They can raise more money with access to global investors. They are more efficient by purchasing the best services from firms around the world. They lower costs through access to global supply chains and labor markets. American companies can do business internationally with more confidence knowing that there are rules to protect them from corrupt or criminal practices.

Free trade has downsides, and a large part of rising discontent with “globalism” is fueled by the uneven benefits and rising inequality of free trade.

- ★ The benefits of free trade are often unequally distributed within the United States because the rich have the most to gain from broader economic opportunities. The US should continue to mitigate this dynamic through progressive taxation, job retraining, and a generous social safety net.
- ★ Free trade forces companies to compete globally and can put downward pressure on wages and benefits when the US competes with lower-cost producers overseas. Selective and temporary trade protection can help cushion the transition to global competitiveness and ensure the pace of economic change does not threaten the overall benefits of free markets.
- ★ On balance, the benefits of trade outweigh the downsides, and we believe the downsides can be addressed and minimized without losing the overall benefits.

The Free World Makes America Freer

There is one more benefit that the United States gets from the free world. The free world makes America freer by reflecting our values.

- ★ Americans are freer to travel, trade, study, explore, and innovate across borders; freer to be an international tourist, entrepreneur, or missionary; freer to enjoy and experience the variety and diversity of the world because of the free world.
- ★ The free world exists to reduce limitations on our freedom—specifically, the kind of limitations that governments impose on international travel, trade, and movement. Americans may be unfamiliar with how often governments used to restrict trade, travel, and movement, because we have largely grown up in a world with fewer restrictions that at any other time in recent history.

Another way of describing the free world is as a framework of “ordered liberty” among nations and peoples. It enhances—it does not violate—national sovereignty and self-determination by encouraging international comity and providing a framework in which free people and free nations can flourish.

- ★ In that sense, Americans are freer to be ourselves, freer to explore and develop our individual and national lives without fear of interference or threat—just as every other nation

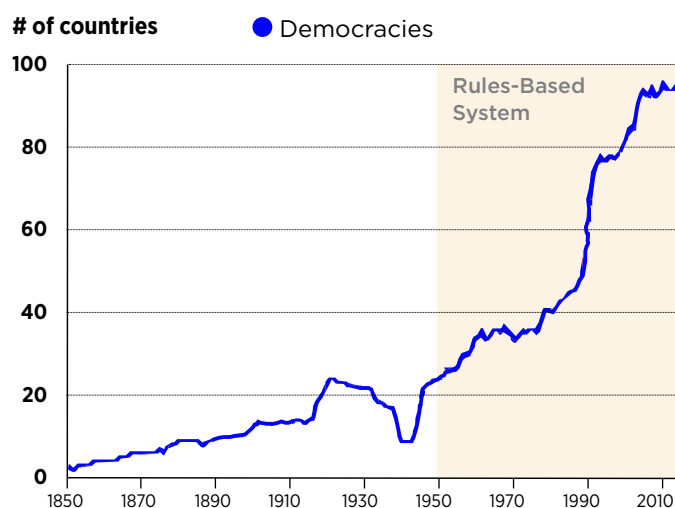
that participates in the free world enjoys the same freedom.

- ★ Ordered liberty is at the heart of the American experiment, rooted in the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The same ideals have been at the heart of the free world since 1945, reflected in liberal arrangements for our security, liberty, and prosperity. That is a world order Americans—and all people—can celebrate and from which we benefit.

It may be difficult to see the benefit of the global deployment of American military forces. Many Americans are concerned about the high cost of the military budget, do not want to be the world's policeman, and fear they are being taken advantage of by other allies. Some international critics accuse the United States of bullying other states with its military, if not engaging in outright imperialism. We acknowledge this is a difficult debate because the relative costs and benefits of underwriting the free world are literally incalculable.

- ★ We know the cost of the US military budget, but we cannot calculate the economic benefit of a stable international environment to which the American military contributes. Nor can we calculate the cost of wars which the US military successfully prevents from happening, but which would likely happen if the United States were to withdraw.
- ★ The value of the free world is beyond calculation, and thus certainly worth the expenditure necessary to sustain a global military posture.

Trends in Democratic Governance, 1800–2017



SOURCE: Center for Systemic Peace



Under Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin has often found common cause with authoritarian leaders like North Korea's Kim Jong Un to undermine the free world.

CHAPTER 3

THREATS TO THE FREE WORLD

The free world is at risk today. The system from which the United States has benefited for over seven decades is under strain, fraying from challenges from within and without.

Great Power Rivals

The free world has rivals and enemies, Russia and China preeminent among them. Russia has a long history of violating international norms. Russia (and, before it, the Soviet Union) has consistently preyed upon small neighboring states. If left unchecked, Russia (or China) could pick off individual states one by one until either or both dominated Europe and Asia. The concentration of the wealth and power of all Eurasia in the hands of hostile, authoritarian, nuclear-armed rivals would be a major threat to the United States.

- ★ Russia interfered in the 2016 and 2018 US elections by spreading disinformation, denigrating some candidates, and promoting others—the latest in a long line of election meddling by Russian intelligence services across Europe in recent years.
- ★ Russian leaders have persistently sought dominance over their neighbors. Russia—and, before it, the Soviet Union—invaded Ukraine (2014), Georgia (2008), Afghanistan (1979), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Hungary (1956). Russia cyberattacked Estonia in 2007 in what was likely a trial run of its emerging cyber capabilities.
- ★ In 2015 Russia withdrew from the Conventional Armed Forces Treaty in Europe. That treaty, signed in 1992, codified the end of the Cold War.

Russia's withdrawal was a clear signal of its intent to undo the Cold War settlement.

- ★ Russia consistently aids America's rivals and enemies and undermines the free world. While it has cooperated against al-Qaida in Afghanistan, it also helped Iran develop its nuclear facilities, supported Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria (where it maintains a naval base), and opposed US and allied military action in Libya and Serbia.

While China's ambitions are still unclear, it may pose a greater long-term threat than Russia. Russia's shrinking population and poor economic prospects suggest that it is a declining power. China, by contrast, has continued its impressive record economic growth—matched by an equally rapid increase in its military budget and regional aspirations.

- ★ Chinese leaders have consistently advocated for a revision of world order in their favor. They regularly criticize the institutions of the free world as unfairly stacked against them and, in some cases, have tried to thwart, replace, or work around them.
- ★ For example, China is involved in a long-running dispute over territorial waters with several of its neighbors across the South China Sea. In recent years China has tried to solidify its claim by constructing artificial islands—some with potential military use—in violation of international norms and in violation of a 2016 ruling against it by an international court.
- ★ In 2007 China tested an anti-satellite weapon, again in violation of international norms. Specifically, it tested the weapon without giving advance warning or consulting any other state or world body. The resulting explosion threw a cloud of space debris into orbit that could harm the world's satellites.
- ★ China has also weakened the liberal economic order through its own underhanded dealing. China has long turned a blind eye to intellectual property theft, is widely accused of corporate espionage and other unfair trade practices, and has sometimes engaged in currency manipulation.

Regional States with Ambitions

North Korea and Iran are smaller and weaker autocratic rivals but may pose a more immediate threat because of their unpredictability.

- ★ North Korea is the most oppressive government in the world, having starved, enslaved,

imprisoned, and indoctrinated its population under a totalitarian cult of personality over the past seven decades.

- ★ North Korea has never agreed to terms ending the Korean War and still maintains one of the world's largest standing military forces at high alert across the demilitarized zone (DMZ) from South Korea. It has a long record of provocation, support for terrorism, currency counterfeiting, and intimidation, including by sinking a South Korean submarine in 2010.
- ★ The situation has gotten dramatically worse in just the past few years. North Korea built nuclear weapons in 2006 in violation of nearly 40 years of various agreements and accords, giving it the capability to inflict vastly more destruction than before. North Korea is the only state in the world to test nuclear weapons in the past 20 years. It also built and tested intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in 2017 and 2018, likely capable of striking anywhere in the United States.

Iran is less erratic and less overt in its hostility to the free world, but it remains a serious threat.

- ★ Iran is an authoritarian state that espouses a revolutionary ideology hostile to the United States, Israel, and the free world.
- ★ Iran is one of the leading state sponsors of terrorism. It supports and funds Hezbollah, a terrorist group avowedly devoted to the destruction of Israel. Iran has also sponsored other militants and proxy groups in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
- ★ Iran has the capability, and probably the intent, to eventually build nuclear weapons. It has a long-running nuclear energy program, which almost certainly doubles as a nuclear weapons research program. Over the course of decades Iran has been caught repeatedly lying about the nature, scope, and details of its nuclear activities.

Non-State Actors

Aside from Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, the free world is also threatened by a wide range of hostile, armed non-state groups. Even when they do not directly attack the United States, these groups—including terrorists, pirates, cartels, slavers, and others—undermine the free world. They impose a steep cost on the world by forcing everyone to pay for heightened security and by slowing the pace of business.

- ★ Jihadist groups, like the Islamic State and al-Qaida, have not been defeated and continue

to attack—and inspire attacks—on American, Western, and allied targets. There are likely tens of thousands of jihadist fighters scattered across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

- ★ Piracy remains widespread on the world's oceans. Pirates are especially active near strategic waterways, like the Straits of Malacca and off the coast of Somalia. They regularly launch hundreds of attacks on ships each year to steal cargo or kidnap and ransom the crew, costing the world economy billions in military operations, higher security costs and insurance premiums, and more. Piracy is a direct threat against life and property, but it is also an attack on the free world—in this case, the principle of the freedom of the seas, a prerequisite of open markets and a liberal trading regime.
- ★ Drug traffickers are another non-state actor that threatens the free world. The cocaine and heroin kingpins of Columbia and Afghanistan are fabulously wealthy and powerful, they oppose US interests, undermine US allies, enrich America's enemies, and they are headquartered in some of the most strategically important areas of the world. The global market in cocaine and opiates was worth some \$153 billion in 2010. Drug lords spread corruption, undermine the rule of law, foster and fuel state failure.

Illiberal Nationalism and Populism

The free world is under threat at home by a growing loss of faith in its benefits and its fairness. Citizens around the world, including in the United States, have come to doubt the value of trade, democracy, and the free world. Some versions of nationalism and populism, which have surged in recent years, are xenophobic and authoritarian. While the post-Cold War era is still the high point of freedom in world history, we have seen a democratic decline or recessions since around 2005.

- ★ Over 50 percent of citizens in the United States and Europe expressed a willingness to consider nondemocratic forms of government, according to a 2017 poll across 38 countries worldwide. Only 37 percent of respondents in western states, and 23 percent worldwide, were committed to representative democracy to the exclusion of alternatives, such as military rule, authoritarianism, or rule by experts.
- ★ Democracy is not invincible. Venezuela, which had been an electoral democracy since 1958, slid into authoritarianism since the 1999 election of Hugo Chavez. Turkey has since seen its democratic institutions recede under

the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan since 2003. Poland and Hungary have experienced significant setbacks as well, while several other democracies, including Brazil and the Philippines, are facing challenges due to the rise of right-wing populism.

- ★ Coups have unseated elected governments in Egypt in 2013, Fiji in 2006, Guinea-Bissau in 2003 and 2012, Mali in 2012, and Thailand in 2006 and 2014. Democratic norms have deteriorated in the Central African Republic since 2003, Bangladesh since 2007, and Sri Lanka since 2010.
- ★ Some of democracy's decline is because of the success of Russia's disinformation and political warfare campaigns. More than the election or defeat of individual leaders, Russia's interference in western elections aims simply to discredit the democratic process itself—a goal at which Russia has enjoyed considerable success.

Similarly, the world economy and attitudes towards international trade have recovered only slowly from the Great Recession of 2008-9. The rise of economic protectionism and the fraying of the world's most important trading blocs threaten to unwind the economic component of the free world. That would make the world poorer by raising the cost of transportation, imports, and exports; by slowing innovation; and by creating barriers to investment.

- ★ The United States' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was a step back for the free world, one that allowed China to enhance its economic clout and influence at America's expense. The Trump administration's threat to leave the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would have had similarly damaged the US and global economy.
- ★ The full consequences of the British withdrawal from the European Union are still unknown, but it has at least strained the cohesion of one of the world's largest trading blocs and is likely to cause more economic harm in the long run.
- ★ Americans' attitude towards trade has improved in recent years—74 percent believed it was good for the country—but a downward spike during the Great Recession showed how fragile domestic support is for international trade.

The decline of democracy and free trade have been accompanied by the rise of nationalism. Sometimes nationalism is accompanied by xenophobia, authoritarianism, protectionism, or militarism, all of which undermine the free world.

- ★ Some nationalist movements go beyond preserving cultural distinctiveness. They champion chauvinism, racism, and xenophobia. Similarly, many nationalist movements naturally gravitate towards



REUTERS/SHAMIL ZHUKATOV

Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents a fundamental violation of the principles of the free world.

strongman rule, authoritarianism, or “illiberal democracy,” as Hungary’s Victor Orban has advocated, all of which undermine the foundations of the free world.

- ★ History is replete with examples of nationalist movements that see the world as an arena of international competition for prestige, power, and influence—competitions that easily turn into military rivalry. The current wave of nationalist movements around the world has made the world an alarmingly more dangerous place because governments that used to view each other as partners and allies increasingly see one another as rivals and enemies.

Nationalism does not have to conflict with the free world. President Donald J. Trump regularly criticizes “globalism” because he believes it erodes American sovereignty and identity, and he champions nationalism as the alternative. If “globalism” means imperialism, world government, or the suppression of cultural distinctiveness, we join him in rejecting it.

- ★ The free world supports—it does not conflict with—national sovereignty, independence, and cultural particularism. The free world exists to enable nations and individuals to develop independently and free from interference or foreign threat. If that is what nationalism aims for, it is entirely consistent with the free world.



REUTERS/JASON LEE

China's President Xi Jinping and Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena inspect honor guards during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, March 26, 2015. China's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to make smaller states economically dependent on itself.

CHAPTER 4

ALTERNATIVES TO THE FREE WORLD

The United States and its allies have the opportunity to revitalize, adapt, and defend the free world. If they do not, the world will become more dangerous, less free, and poorer. There are several ways the world could deteriorate without American and allied leadership.

A Chinese-Led World Order

China has ambitions to expand its influence and revise world order to accommodate its demands. China has the world's largest or second-largest economy and its fastest growing military. China's military is increasingly

sophisticated, technologically capable, and developing doctrine and strategy to deny American access to the western Pacific. A Chinese-led world order would be hostile to American values, American freedom, and American prosperity.

What would a Chinese-led world order look like? Americans already face increasing limitations on their free speech—not from the US government, but from the Chinese government and from corporations dependent on access to the Chinese market. An incident in late 2019 demonstrated how China's market power already has leverage over Americans.

★ Daryl Morey, manager of a professional NBA American basketball team, tweeted his support

for protesters in Hong Kong. In response, Chinese celebrities announced boycotts of the NBA, Chinese brands pulled their sponsorship of NBA games, and Chinese state-run media called for a reexamination of the NBA's \$1.5 billion streaming deal with China. Morey was compelled to delete his tweet and apologize, and fans at NBA games *in America showing support for Hong Kong protesters have been kicked out or had their signs confiscated*.

- ★ Similarly, Hollywood already routinely vets American-made films to ensure they are not offensive to Chinese censors because they want to preserve access to the second-largest box office market in the world. In one film, *Red Dawn* (2012), for example, replaced their original depiction of Chinese invaders of the United States with North Koreans.
- ★ As these incidents illustrate, a Chinese-led world order would see Chinese censors increasingly in a position to police the American marketplace of ideas, entertainment, and media. The First Amendment provides no protection against the commercial influence of a foreign power.

In addition to its influence on American perceptions, China would use its economic clout around the world to suppress views that denigrate China, compel changes to other countries' diplomacy, and create rival institutions that undermine the free world.

- ★ China launched its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 to develop infrastructure and trading ties across Eurasia. The Initiative has enabled China to make smaller, neighboring states economically dependent on itself, creating the beginnings of a Chinese-led order. Observers have warned that recipients of BRI funding find their interests—including environmental and human rights concerns—subordinated to Chinese priorities.
- ★ China spearheaded the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2013, a rival to the World Bank. The AIIB is likely to be more beholden to Chinese priorities and has so far not held itself accountable to international standards of transparency.
- ★ China uses its clout to coerce other countries into rescinding their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Since 1990, the number of countries that recognize Taiwan has fallen from 28 to 15.

If allowed to grow over the next few decades, a Chinese-led world order would be hostile to free speech, human rights, financial transparency, environmental stewardship, and the rule of law. Most importantly, it would be hostile to the US-led network of alliances that preserve the balance of power and American influence in East Asia.

- ★ In a Chinese-led world order, the United States could be excluded from markets across Eurasia, or granted access on unfavorable terms, crippling Americans' economic freedom and undercutting American firms' competitiveness and opportunities for growth.
- ★ In a Chinese-led world order, China could resolve disputes in the Korean Peninsula, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan on its terms. That would further strengthen China, reduce the number of American allies, and end freedom in a crucial part of the world.
- ★ In a Chinese-led world order, Americans will have less freedom. They will not have the freedom to express views critical of China for fear of economic retaliation against their employers, especially as more and more Americans and others in the West find themselves working for Chinese-owned companies. They will have less freedom to travel, trade, or engage in tourism, diplomacy, proselytism, or charitable and humanitarian work.
- ★ A Chinese-led world order—at its most extreme—could amount to a global embargo or siege against America. Just as President Roosevelt worried about the consequences of the Axis conquest of Eurasia, so too we should understand the prospect of an increasingly aggressive, authoritarian China holding sway over the wealth and power of half the world would be extraordinarily hostile to the American way of life. If the free world is the outer perimeter of American security, a Chinese-led order would tear down that perimeter and bring global threats much closer to home.

Spheres of Influence

In the absence of American leadership of the free world, world order might devolve, not to China, but to several great powers who exercise domination over their portions of the globe under the banner of rising nationalism. A world characterized by nationalism and a division of global leadership into spheres of influence would—like the other scenarios considered here—make America less safe, poorer, and less free.

- ★ Rising nationalist sentiment around the world has emboldened statesmen to assert national sovereignty and reject or undermine the foundations of international cooperation. It has also motivated some to seek regional dominance at the expense of the free world order.
- ★ This scenario is more likely if nationalism continues to gain ground in the United States. American officials in the post-Trump era,

responding to persistent calls by the electorate, might fully withdraw US military forces from abroad, pull out of the United States' mutual defense treaties, or otherwise divest from the responsibilities of leading the free world.

- ★ The United States could continue to lead a reduced version of the free world, albeit one limited to the Western Hemisphere and dedicated less to the free world than to a narrow version of American interests.

In this scenario, the United States, Russia, China, and perhaps India and Germany would each exercise leadership in their respective regions in exchange for recognizing each other's prerogatives.

- ★ American withdrawal would enable Russia to continue its efforts to create a Russian-dominated zone over its neighbors through intimidation, economic blackmail, invasion, and annexation, most likely starting in the Baltics and including the Caucasus and Central Asia and, possibly further westward into Europe.
- ★ European defense would fall to German leadership—which could renew historical European tensions over Germany's role on the Continent—or to a Franco-German arrangement, if that relationship survives the rising tide of nationalism. German and Russian tensions over central Europe would become a leading source of global instability.
- ★ China would continue its campaign of building artificial islands and use them to coerce Taiwan into accepting reunification while turning the rest of East Asia into economic dependencies. Japan, no longer protected by its alliance with America, would likely renounce its pacifist constitution and possibly pursue nuclear weapons to preserve its independence from China.
- ★ India, the other rising economic superpower in Asia, might feel emboldened to use firmer measures against terrorism, refugee flows, or Pakistani aggression, which could escalate tensions or lead to military conflict.

The resulting international order would be different from the free world order because small states would have little say in how they are treated, the United States' sphere of influence would be dramatically smaller than it is at present, the international economic order would fragment, and great powers would be more likely to fight over where their respective spheres of influence begin and end.

- ★ Americans might be initially drawn to this scenario because they might believe that, with American troops out of harm's way, the United States would be unaffected by and uninvolved in disputes around the world.

- ★ But—just to start with—Americans would almost certainly be less well-off because great powers would organize trade in their respective regions to benefit themselves, not the global market. American businesses would have far fewer opportunities than they do today and American consumers would have far less choice. Like the previous scenario of a Chinese-led world order, Americans are likely to have less freedom to travel, trade, or engage in tourism, diplomacy, proselytism, or charitable and humanitarian work.
- ★ Subsequently, because the division of the world into spheres of influence would hit Americans' pocketbooks, any wars between great powers would almost certainly see American involvement. As during World War I, World War II, and the Cold War, American security and prosperity would be directly at stake in any contest between great powers elsewhere in the world.
- ★ But any American involvement in future wars would be harder and costlier and America would be less likely to win because, in this scenario, our enemies would set the pace, control the agenda, and pick the time and place to fight. The United States would be reacting to events, not controlling them. We would fight at the time and place our enemies choose.
- ★ Again, the free world is the outer perimeter of American security. That outer perimeter keeps threats far away and allows us to choose when and where to confront them. A world divided into spheres of influence would do away with America's outer perimeter; threats would be able to come much closer, become much stronger, and become harder to defeat before we were able to act against them.

An Anarchic Era

A third possibility is that, in the absence of American leadership, there is no clear successor to the United States as the global leader and no world order. Without an organizing structure, the world would devolve into an era of unpredictability, violence, and lawless competition within and among states. Quite simply, the world might become increasingly ungovernable.

- ★ Institutions and treaties that help regulate state behavior and make their interaction more predictable and transparent have already started to decline in importance. In recent years, Russia withdrew from the Conventional Forces Treaty in Europe, North Korea from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Britain from the European Union, and the United States

from the Paris climate agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, while China simply ignored a key ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Institutional irrelevance will make world politics less predictable and more volatile.

- ★ Enduring competition between the great powers might prevent any one of them from providing global leadership but also prevent agreement on collective leadership or spheres of influence. This would reinforce, and be reinforced by, institutional decline, as competition among great powers would make them less likely to agree on how or whether to salvage institutions of global governance, and their decline in turn deprives states of opportunities to build trust or transparency.
- ★ Advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and facial-recognition software, might continue to empower non-state groups, including multinational corporations and organized criminal networks, to act on a global scale with little oversight, regulation, or accountability to public authorities. People's daily lives would be increasingly dominated by actors outside the effective control of states consumed by their own competition and global institutions paralyzed and weakened by their growing irrelevance.

There is no single scenario for an anarchic era of world politics: it could be relatively peaceful, if uncertain; or it could involve low-level but omnipresent violence amidst institutional decay; or it could be the pathway to global conflict.

- ★ Global uncertainty is likely to accelerate the rise of populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, jihadism, and other movements that seek to provide assurance and clarity in a confusing age.

Demagogues and opportunists will seize on rising anxieties to advance their visions of order and purpose; few of them will be compatible with the ideals of the free world.

- ★ States are likely to reinvest in their military establishments as a hedge against uncertainty. Global rearmament increases the chances of security dilemmas, arms races, and the reawakening of old suspicions and fears. At best, this scenario likely involves rising tensions with opportunities for miscommunication and conflict; at worst, war.

An era of unpredictability and anarchy would make America poorer, less safe, and less free, for many of the same reasons as discussed above.

- ★ An unpredictable environment is bad for business. Investors and entrepreneurs depend on stability, predictability, and the rule of law to decide where to grow their business and where to trade.
- ★ An unpredictable environment is bad for freedom. States around the world, including the United States, are likely to increase barriers to trade, travel, and tourism, and increase intelligence, surveillance, border controls, and policing to mitigate risk. Nations need safety and confidence to allow freedom to flourish and to open themselves to the world.
- ★ Finally, an uncertain environment is, by definition, riskier for Americans' safety. The institutions of the free world are guarantors against breakdown and war. They are the guardrails or safety net of public life. Without them, Americans are at greater risk to harm from terrorism and war.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Paul D. Miller is a Professor of the Practice of International Affairs at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He serves as co-chair of the Global Politics and Security concentration in the MSFS program. He is also a non-resident Senior Fellow with the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security.

As a practitioner, Dr. Miller served as Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan on the National Security Council staff; worked as an intelligence analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency; and served as a military intelligence officer in the US Army.

His most recent book, *American Power and Liberal Order: A Conservative Internationalist Grand Strategy*, was published by Georgetown University Press in 2016. In his first book, *Armed State Building* (Cornell University Press, 2013), Miller examined the history and strategy of stability operations. His next book, tentatively titled *Just War and Ordered Liberty*, reinterprets the just war traditions in light of contemporary security challenges. Miller taught at The University of Texas at Austin and the National Defense University and worked at the RAND Corporation prior to his arrival at Georgetown.

Miller's writing has also appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Survival*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Orbis*, *The American Interest*, *The National Interest*, *The World Affairs Journal*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, and elsewhere. Miller holds a PhD in international relations and a BA in government from Georgetown University, and a master in public policy from Harvard University.

He is a contributing editor of the Texas National Security Review, a contributing editor of *Providence: A Journal of Christianity and American Foreign Policy*, and a research fellow at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

DEMOCRATIC ORDER INITIATIVE

This publication is part of the **Democratic Order Initiative**—an Atlantic Council initiative aimed at reenergizing American leadership and strengthening democratic cooperation to defend democracy and reaffirm support for the core principles of a free world.

In February 2019, the Atlantic Council, under the auspices of a bipartisan task force led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former US National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, and former Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawauchi, prepared a *Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Prosperity, and Peace*—a framing document intended to provide a clear and compelling statement of values, a “north star,” around which political leaders in the United States and democracies worldwide can coalesce to reaffirm their support for a free world.

In October, the Atlantic Council released a new strategy paper, *Present at the Re-Creation: A Global Strategy for Revitalizing, Adapting, and Defending a Rules-Based International System*, co-authored by Ash Jain and Matthew Kroenig, that sets forth a comprehensive blueprint for advancing a rules-based system based upon the principles set forth in the Declaration.

These publications are available at www.atlanticcouncil.org.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES FOR FREEDOM, PROSPERITY, AND PEACE

- 1 Freedom and Justice:** The right of all people to live in free and just societies, where fundamental rights are protected under the rule of law.
- 2 Democracy and Self-Determination:** The right of all people to make decisions about their own affairs through elected governments that reflect their consent, free from foreign interference.
- 3 Peace and Security:** The right of all people to live in peace, free from threats of aggression, terrorism, oppression, crimes against humanity, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- 4 Free Markets and Equal Opportunity:** The right of all people to engage in economic activity based on free market principles, with equal opportunity to contribute to and the ability to share in the benefits of national prosperity.
- 5 An Open and Healthy Planet:** The right of all people to enjoy free and open access to the global commons and a safe and healthy planet.
- 6 The Right of Assistance:** The right of national sovereignty, while recognizing that sovereignty obligates governments to uphold these principles.
- 7 Collective Action:** The right of all people to cooperate in support of these principles and to work together to advance them.

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