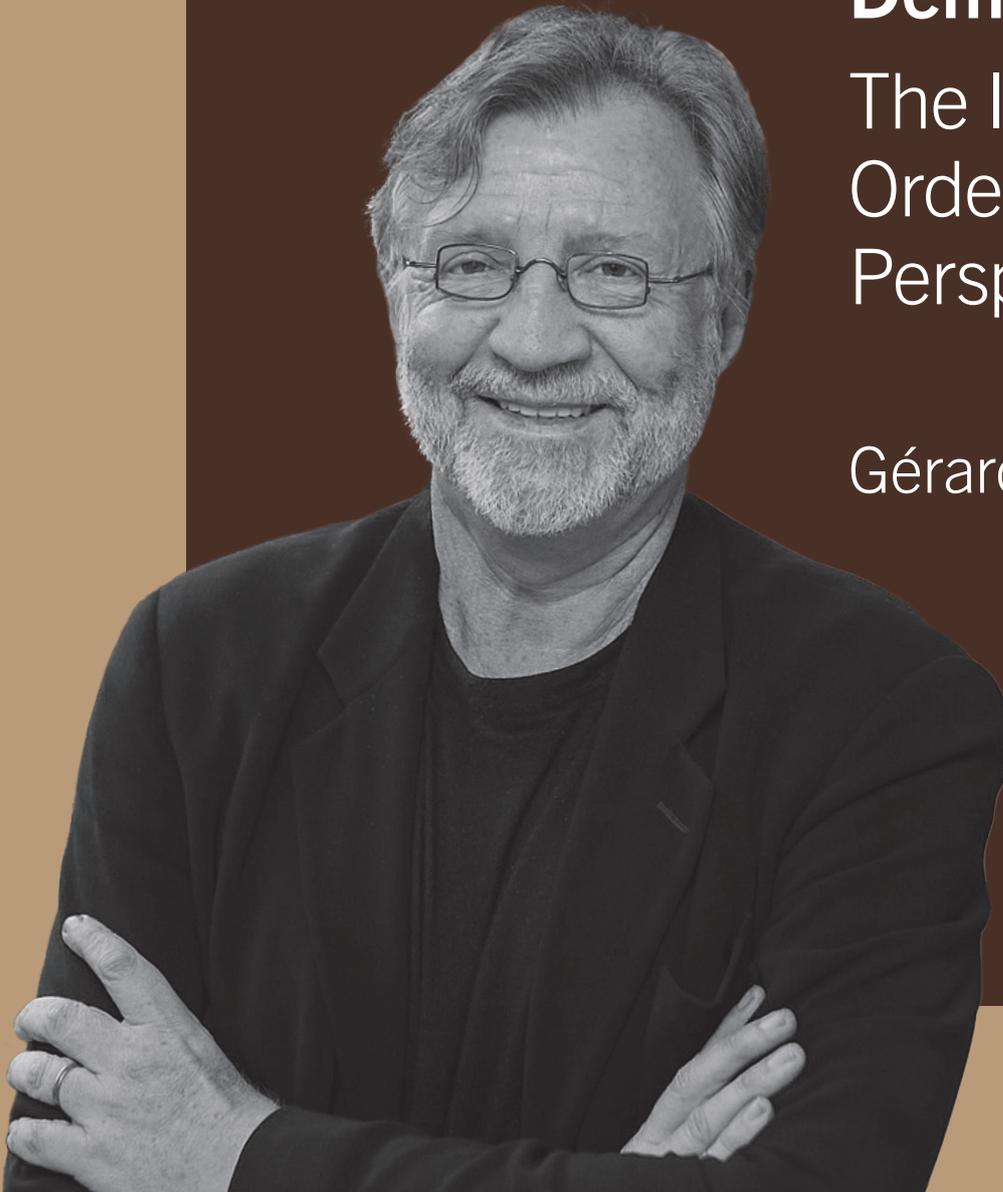


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# Empires, Nation States and Democracies:

The International  
Order in Historical  
Perspective

G rard Roland



**Economics.**  
*For Society.*

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## About the author

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Professor Roland has worked as a consultant for the IMF, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Commission and the Inter-American Development Bank.

## Abstract

In this paper, the author analyzes different political regimes (empires, nation states and democracies) in a number of institutional and economic dimensions: tendency towards geographical expansionism or fragmentation, cultural heterogeneity, focus of public spending and a number of other variables.<sup>1</sup> He uses this setup to analyze the coexistence and interactions between empires, nation states and democracies. While these interactions are source of instability, he argues that modern economic development tends to doom empires that were once the dominant form of political regime in history.

# Introduction

In recent decades, the economics literature has emphasized the importance of formal institutions<sup>1,2,3</sup> and culture<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> on long run economic growth and development as well as on other socio-economic variables. At the same time, much less attention has been paid to the role of institutions and culture on international relations, be it on economic relations such as trade and foreign investment, but also on fundamental issues like war and peace and international relations in general. Some countries have rule of law and democracy, but are engaged in economic and political relations with countries that have either similar or different institutions. The important tensions that have emerged in the last ten years between Western countries and China (since Xi Jinping came to power), the brutal and unprovoked war of aggression launched by Russia's president Putin against Ukraine remind us that these issues are as fundamental, or maybe even more fundamental, than issues of institutions (formal and informal) within countries.

Thinking of institutions at the international level means thinking what are the rules of the game in interactions between countries. Some countries have similar domestic institutions (say like the US and the EU or the US and the UK) but the rules of their interaction are not the same as at the internal domestic level. Other countries have different institutions (say China and the US). What kind of international rules should govern their interaction? Presumably, interactions between sovereign countries that share similar institutions of rule and law and democracy are not necessarily easy to regulate, as can be seen from the experience of the European Union, a supranational institution regrouping most European democracies, not to speak of the sometimes tempestuous relations between

the US and its Western allies. Interactions between countries with fundamentally different institutions and culture are much more complicated and risk evolving into military conflict and war, which is particularly scary in a world with nuclear weapons. There are at least two fundamental reasons why these interactions are so difficult. A first one is that different institutional systems behave fundamentally differently at the international level. In this paper, we will distinguish between three fundamentally different institutional systems in today's world: empires, nation-states and democracies. We will examine in this paper how and why the international behavior of these three different systems differs. A second reason why these interactions are exceedingly difficult is that coun-

**Interactions between countries with fundamentally different institutions and culture are much more complicated and risk evolving into military conflict and war, which is particularly scary in a world with nuclear weapons.**

tries that are sufficiently large tend to project their own internal institutions as a model that they want to impose for international relations, resulting in competing visions of what the international order should look like. These competing visions result in "cultural clashes" over which it is difficult to reach compromises since these visions are based on cultural values that are seen as having existential importance in the respecting countries.

this article, we will analyze in turn the international behavior of empires, nation states and democracies based on their institutional differences. We will also compare the competing visions of the international order of the current Russian leaders in comparison to Western democracies as well as that of the Chinese communist leaders.

The existing literature on international relations provides competing frameworks to understand interactions between countries. A first one is the “realist” school of international relations<sup>8,9</sup> that considers the balance of power between raw national interests as the main force behind international relations. In that view, countries that are militarily and economically more powerful are able to force smaller less powerful countries into submission, forming zones of influence in an international chess play. If everybody understands those ideas, wars can be minimized as relative strengths will determine countries’ bargaining position. In noted media presence since the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, John Mearsheimer blamed the US for expanding NATO too close to the borders of Russia and blamed Ukraine for not respecting Russia’s need for a sphere of influence (which includes Ukraine). If Russia’s big power interests had been respected, it would not have needed to launch an invasion of Ukraine, so goes the argument. It is also well known that Putin shares the views of the realist school of international relations, as he has repeatedly criticized the hypocrisy of Western countries who hide behind moral principles and talk of an international “rules-based order” to engage in big power politics, which he considers to be the only game in town.

In contrast to the realistic school, the “liberal internationalist” school<sup>10,11</sup> claims that the nature of political regimes (democracies or autocracies) matters for international relations. It emphasizes the need for international cooperation based on rules and international institutions, the role of democracy and trade in maintaining peace. One aspect of the liberal school is “demo-

cratic peace theory”, according to which democracies do not go to war together.

In this article, I will expand on some insights from the liberal school and argue that the geopolitical behavior of states (external and internal war, peace, expansionism, attitude towards trade) is closely linked to the nature of the political regime. The insights from the “realist” school are relevant mostly for empires or aspiring empires but there have been many changes in regime type, especially since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Generalizations assuming similar geopolitical behavior, independent of regime type, can be fallacious.

While there is a very large literature on conflict (including the hypothesis of the democratic peace already formulated by Kant, i.e. that democracies do not go to war with each other), its causes and effects as well as the political economy of international trade and foreign direct investment, and even though there is also a large literature comparing the economic or political trajectories of democracies and autocracies, I am not aware of a literature proposing a systematic comparative analysis of the geopolitical behavior of empires, nation states and democracies.<sup>11</sup>

The paper is divided into 7 chapters. In the following chapter, I examine the key characteristics of empires and why they are inherently expansionist. I also explain the economic reasons for the decline of empires and why they are doomed in the long run. In the second chapter, I examine the key characteristics of nation states and in chapter 3 the characteristics of democracies. Chapter 4 provides a summary table comparing the main characteristics of these main types of regimes. After that, I discuss the special case of American Imperialism. In chapter 6, I address the difficult topic of coexistence between different kinds of institutional systems, followed by a conclusion.

# Empires

Empires are relatively large territories living under autocratic regimes. This is a sufficiently broad definition that fits most empires that have existed in history. The fact that empires are relatively large means that they have the resources to expand their territory if they decide to do so. As one can see, this does not imply any absolute size threshold, but a relative one, that is relative

## Empires have an innate tendency towards territorial expansionism.

to other polities existing at the same time. The autocratic nature of empires is important, because it implies that the interests of the autocrat are driving policy decisions, possibly under some constraints.<sup>III</sup> A very large territory under a democratic regime (the case of the US and India in today's world) is altogether a different object.<sup>IV</sup>

In history, empires generally grew out of territorial states (Egypt, Persia, China, ...), less often out of city-states (Rome is the obvious example of a city-state developing into an empire).

### Empires' inherent expansionism

Empires have an innate tendency towards territorial expansionism. Motivations are complex and variable, but a safe and simple assumption to understand their motivation is that rulers are interested in territorial expansion up to the point where the marginal benefit of expansion equals its marginal cost. The economic theory for this was first developed by D. Friedman who

also noted the many non convexities associated to territorial expansion, which makes it not easy to model in a smooth way. Benefits of territorial expansion typically include taxes on land and land revenue and taxes on trade (land is much less tax elastic than trade). Empires have throughout history typically been extractive states using tax revenues to fund the Army, the police and private goods of the Emperor, such as palaces, tombs, the imperial administration and other goods benefiting the emperor and his surroundings. Costs of territorial expansion are mostly costs of defense against invaders and internal revolts.<sup>V</sup>

Costs and benefits of territorial expansion of empires also depend on actions of other empires. Seen this way, expansionism is a dominant strategy as long as the marginal costs of additional territory are smaller than the marginal benefits. The reason is that a larger empire has, everything else equal, a military advantage over smaller neighboring empires, whether in offense or

## Competition between empires for expansion at the cost of others is an inherent part of international relations in a world full of empires.

defense. In other words, seen in a game-theoretic setup, the benefits from expansion increase when an empire's size is larger relative to rival empires. Competition between empires for expansion at the cost of others is thus an inherent part of international

# Cartoons on imperialism

Fig. 1 The plumb pudding is in danger



Fig. 2 China – the cake of kings and... of emperors



Political cartoons are an important historical source that often sheds vivid light on events. The essence of a political cartoon is that it is not meant to depict an actual event. It is meant to point out aspects that are insufficiently made clear by textual descriptions. They remain memorable because of their exaggeration, which is also true in the case of the cartoons selected here, many readers are sure to recognize.

Figure 1 is entitled “The Plumb-pudding in danger”, or, “State epicures taking un petit souper”, originally published in *The Caricatures of Gillray* around 1818. It shows British Prime Minister William Pitt on the left sitting opposite Napoleon Bonaparte. They are each carving a large plum pudding on which is a map of the world. Gillray’s print is a satire on the overtures made by Napoleon in January 1805 for a reconciliation with Britain during the War of the Third Coalition.

Figure 2 is a cartoon which was published in “Le Petit Journal”, a Parisian daily newspaper in 1898. It shows representatives and a symbolic figure of the four European powers that claimed areas of influence in China. They forced the Chinese government to lease them these territories through their gun-boat policy and the so-called “unequal treaties”. From left to right are: Queen Victoria (Great Britain), Kaiser Wilhelm II (German Empire), Tsar Nicholas II (Russian Empire), as well as the French symbolic figure Marianne standing behind him. To the right, Japan, which had conquered parts of China the year before, is symbolized not by the then Emperor Meiji, but by a samurai. Also China is not symbolized by the emperor of the time, De Zong. The figure in the background represents a lower-ranking Chinese court official.

Source Fig. 1 and 2: Public Domain (via Wikimedia)

relations in a world full of empires. Empires played a big role in the Antiquity and regularly clashed with each other. Closer in time, the age of colonialism (15<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century) was an age of competing colonial empires.

Rival expansionism between empires generally leads to wars, which inflict losses (see Fig. 3 and 4). Russia inflicted losses on the Ottoman empire throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Russia challenged the Austro-Hungarian empire for domination over the Balkans, leading to WWI. Japan inflicted losses on Russia and China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The list of such wars and its winners and losers is a long one.

### **Empires tend to be multi-ethnic**

Given the drive towards expansionism, empires do not seek to achieve ethnic homogeneity. Empires tend thus to be multi-ethnic. The Austro-Hungarian empire is a good example, but also the Ottoman empire and the Russian Tsarist empire (including contemporaneous Russia), and even China today. The Western half of China's territory contains only 7 % of the total population, and is mostly populated by national minorities like Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols and various national minorities.

Because of ethnic heterogeneity, empires do not generally have an interest in developing nationalist ideology, unless one ethnic group is a large majority. This is why universalist religions or ideologies have been used instead of nationalism to try to cement empires:<sup>VI</sup>

- Catholicism in the Austro-Hungarian empire;
- Orthodox religion in the Russian empire;
- Islam in the Califate and the Ottoman empire;
- Confucianism in the Chinese empire;
- Zoroastrianism in the Persian empire

There are obviously religions and ideologies that are restricted to one particular ethnic group (Judaism for example) but

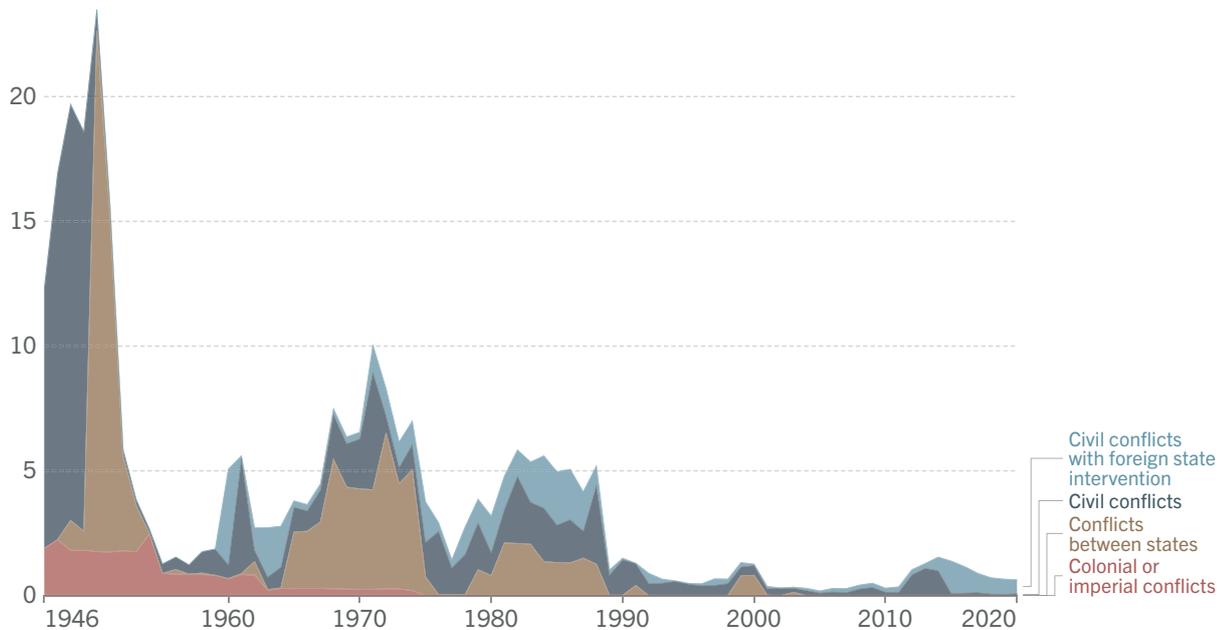
they are generally not adapted to the goal of cementing empires. It is interesting to note that most of the above cited religions have been in existence for many centuries if not millennia. Understanding their longevity is an interesting question<sup>12</sup> but here it suffices to say that their longevity contributes to the stability of empires as they create a strong sense of identity.<sup>VII</sup> Without their inherent expansionism, the religions and ideologies created within empires would in all likelihood contribute to their longevity due to their universalist identity and the state's monopoly over cultural transmission via its educational system.

### **The decline and end of empires**

Empires are not only defeated in wars, they are also often internally weakened by wars, leading to forms of collapse. WWI led to the collapse of four big empires: the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, the German empire. WWII led to the collapse of the British empire, the Japanese empire as well as the Nazi empire (the Third Reich). The collapse of the British empire due to its severe weakening during WWII led itself to the success of the decolonization movement in India, Africa and Asia. The Cold War led to the collapse of the Soviet empire and the loss of satellite states as well as the Soviet Republics (Baltic States, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, ...).

Imperial powers, though generally historically in decline, as I will explain below, may still show aggressiveness. The Soviet empire invaded Central Europe in the aftermath of WWII. Hitler's Third Reich replaced the German empire. China invaded Tibet in 1950 despite being then very weakened by the war against Japan and the Chinese civil war right after the defeat of Japan. Russia's invasion of Crimea and of the Donbass in 2014 and its attempt in 2022 to invade the whole of Ukraine is the most recent example. Such aggressive behavior is likely to backfire. If Russia eventually becomes permanently weakened because of its war against Ukraine, the Chinese empire may benefit from this and

Fig. 3 Deaths in state-based conflicts per 100,000, 1946 to 2020



Note: Parallel to the collapse of the great empires, the number of people killed as a result of colonial or imperial conflicts also dropped significantly after World War II. The figure shows civilian and military deaths in conflicts where the government of a state was a participant on at least one side. The data counts only direct violent deaths (i.e. excluding deaths from disease or famine). It aggregates the sources' 'best' estimates for deaths in individual conflicts, or the mid-point between high and low estimates where no best estimate is provided.

Source: OWID based on PRIO and UCDP

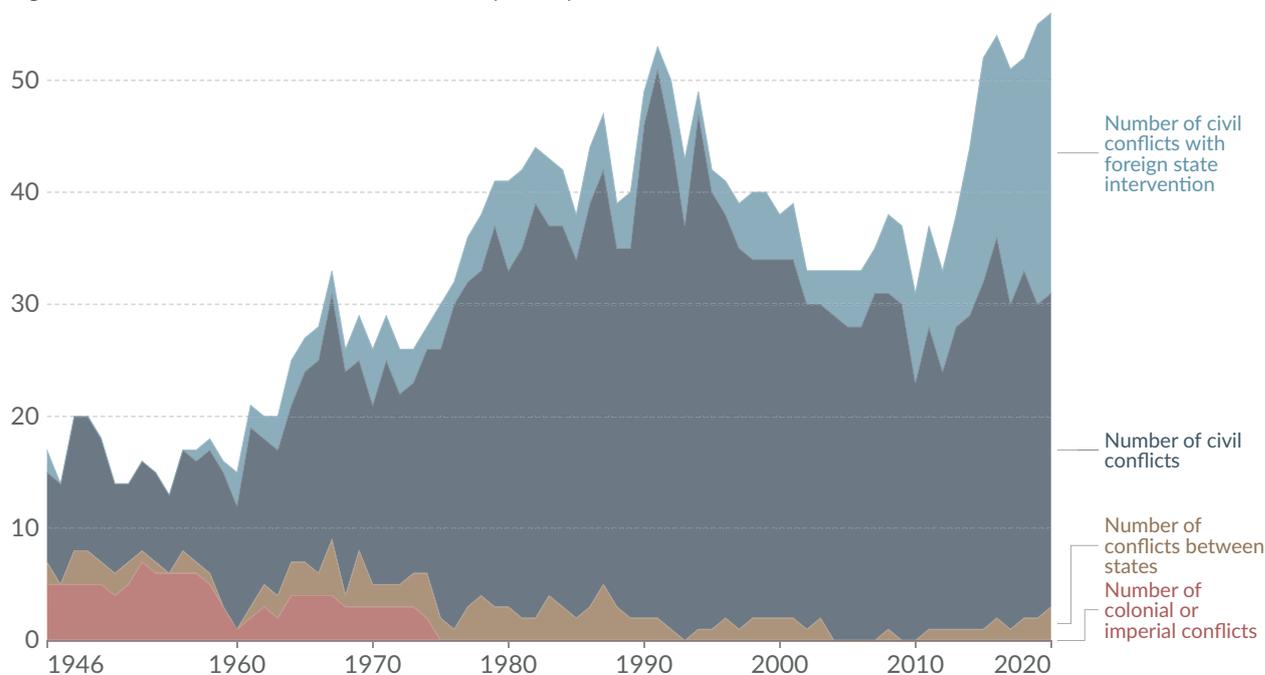
obtain concessions from Russia, but many scenarios are of course possible.

Given the size advantage of empires, it is very unlikely for new empires to emerge in the modern world, because would-be empires will tend to be preemptively squashed. This is the case for example of ISIS that attempted to rebuild a new Islamic Caliphate. Building new empires was much more easy in the Antiquity because transport conditions and communications were much more difficult so that an empire like the Roman empire for example could expand for a while, without being immediately crushed by other empires.<sup>13</sup>

In the past, imperial rivalries would lead to phases of decline and revival. In the modern world, there are good reasons to think that empires are doomed. Why?

For a large part of human history, when agriculture was the largest economic sector, land and slaves were the main reward of imperial expansion. There was thus a direct link between territorial expansion and economic activity. In the modern world, human capital is the main driver of growth and cannot easily be forced to be productive. Slaves can be forced to toil under tight supervision (and even here, there are important exceptions), but human capital cannot be exploited under the threat of physical violence and punishment. Slaves can be caught shirking, but there is no way to detect shirking by an educated labor force specialized in using creative minds for problem-solving. It is virtually impossible to force a well-educated labor force to use their human capital at its maximum capacity, and when human capital has become the main driver of growth in a country, if

Fig. 4 Number of active State-based conflicts, World, 1946 to 2020



Notes: Similar to the declining number of people killed as a result of colonial or imperial conflicts, the number of colonial or imperial conflicts has also declined substantially after World War II. The figure shows conflicts between two parties, where at least one is the government of a state. One-sided violence – such as massacres or genocide – are not included. Ongoing conflicts are represented for every year in which they resulted in at least 25 direct deaths (civilian or military).

Source: OWID based on PRIO and UCDP

that country is invaded, growth will collapse in a dramatic way.<sup>VIII</sup> In a modern economy, natural resources like gas and oil are still of key importance for the economy, but they can be obtained more easily via trade without having to bear the cost of maintaining and defending an invaded territory, especially when the population is hostile to the invaders.<sup>IX</sup>

Human capital not only affects economic efficiency, but also people’s aspirations. Progress of education has been seen to lead to demands for human and civil rights and public goods, albeit with different levels of intensity.<sup>X</sup>

Since human capital has become such an important factor in economic growth but also in the demand for democratic institutions, the benefits of imperial expansion have drastically declined and its costs have

strongly increased. Modern economic development has made empires obsolete. This explains why the age of empires is essentially over. The current Russian and Chinese empires, the two remaining big empires, will likely be doomed by backlash

## Modern economic development has made empires obsolete.

from their expansionism and repression, leading to probable initial chaos and quasi-certain territorial fragmentation. Here, we also see two weaknesses of empires. As much as they have an intrinsic tendency towards expansionism, when faced with internal weakening, they are vulnerable to external aggressions and to internal territorial fragmentation.

# Nation-states

The fragments of empires that collapsed after WWI have been replaced by nation-states, whether under democratic regimes or not. Woodrow Wilson insisted very much during the Versailles Treaty negotiations on the establishment of nation-states in Central and South Eastern Europe.

Nation-states had already started to develop since the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of innovations in military technology that favored centralization and economies of scale in warfare, and thus big armies.<sup>14</sup>

Nation-states were supported by nationalist ideologies. Nationalism developed mostly since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in part encouraged by the development of national literature written in national languages, a tendency that started with the development of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The development of nationalism led to demands for the establishment of nation-states, especially in territories under the domination of empires among ethnic groups that were marginalized, such as Poland in the Russian empire, Bohemia, Slovakia in the Austro-Hungarian empires, the Balkan countries in the Ottoman empire, etc.

A characteristic of nation-states that stands in stark contrast to that of empires is that nation-states fed by nationalism aspire to ethnic homogeneity within the boundaries of the nation. This characteristic is a strong obstacle to the expansionist drive that is the characteristic of empires since the goal of the nation-states is to have country boundaries overlap with the nation's ethnic population. There is no point invading a territory that is occupied by other ethnic groups. The demand for ethnic homogeneity that is characteristic of nation-states leads less to expansionism than to ethnic

cleansing within the boundaries of the nation, especially in non-democratic nation-states. The development of the Turkish nation-state following the collapse of the Ottoman empire led to genocide of Armenians (1.5 million) and the expulsion of Orthodox Christians (more than 1.5 million) from Asia Minor. Ethnic cleansing during the breakup of Yugoslavia can also

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be seen in this light. There are multiple examples of the creation of nation-states associated with ethnic cleansing and repression of minorities to create ethnic homogeneity. Nation-states are in general more likely to experience friction at their borders, because of the imperfect overlap of national boundaries with ethnic boundaries. They tend to be oppressive towards minorities within the borders of the country, but they also tend to be aggressive towards neighboring countries who host ethnic co-nationals.

Hungary under Orban is a very good example of a modern nation-state. It is illiberal inside the country, oppressing minorities like Jews, Slovaks, Germans, Romanians and gypsies, while it is a big defender of ethnic Hungarians in neighboring Slovakia

and Romania. Without those countries all being part of the European Union, the tension with Hungary over its national minorities abroad would risk being much more explosive.

The most terrible ethnic cleansing was done by the Nazis, combining nationalist ideology with imperial ambitions. In their “Drang nach Osten”, the Nazis committed genocide on Jews, but also intended to eliminate Slavs altogether to create a “Lebensraum” for German settlers. Nazi Germany was indeed a hybrid between nation-state and empire. There are similarities to Nazi Germany in today’s China, that is both nationalist and imperialist. The Communist Party of China embraces Han nationalism and its millennial historical roots, but it keeps a tight grip on its colonized provinces such as Tibet or Xinjiang, working to replace the dominant ethnic groups in those provinces by a Han majority through either aggressive Han immigration or policies to reduce the growth of the local ethnic groups, for example via forced sterilization<sup>15</sup>. These imperialist tendencies of nation-states go against the general direction of history, as argued above.

Demands for ethnic homogeneity in nation-states are usually associated to demands for linguistic homogeneity<sup>16</sup>, suppression of dialects and discrimination of minority languages.

Nation-states are compatible with some imperfect form of democracy (the tyranny of the majority to oppress minorities). Israel is an example. It wants to be both a democracy, but also a Jewish nation-state. This leads to the oppression of Arabs and Palestinians living within Israel who are discriminated against in various ways.

Nation-states, especially in their non-democratic form, tend to be more inward-looking and closed to the outside world. They reject immigration, are mostly hostile to economic takeovers by foreign capital, see limited opportunities for international cooperation and generally adhere to the “realist” view of international relations, seen as pure balance of power relations in a Hobbesian world.

Nation-states often have a good capacity of defense against an imperialist aggressor due to nationalist mobilization. Here, the ethnic homogeneity can be an asset in uniting the whole country against a potential aggressor.

Are there foolproof ways to transform nation states into real democracies? It is not clear we have the answer to that question, and much will depend on whether democratic values are deemed by the population more important than ethnic homogeneity.

# Democracies

Democracies were most often born in nation-states, but not always. The UK was for example still an empire when universal suffrage was introduced there after WWI. The UK today is not a nation-state and contains different nations and ethnic groups (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland). Another exception is Italy, which was composed of city-states throughout its history until it became a unified nation in 1861. Because of this tradition of city-states, ethnic groups within Italy were never well defined, in contrast to citizenship. The tradition of citizenship, taken over from Roman civil law, is not based on ethnicity but on rights and responsibilities of individual citizens. Citizenship is a better basis for a stable democracy than national identity.

One thing democracies share with nation-states is the role of a common language used in political communication. In democracies as in nation-states, a common language helps reach economies of scale in public goods provision, whereas multiple languages tend to create diseconomies of scale due to duplication in communication

**It is precisely the redistributive feature of democracies that may lead to secessionist tendencies**

costs. Most democracies have one dominant language and multilingual countries often face linguistic tensions. Multilingual countries reduce linguistic tensions by having federal or confederal institutions whenever geographically possible. The case of Switzerland is a good example for such a solution.

A major difference between democracies and non-democracies (whether nation-states or empires) is related to redistribution policies and the welfare state. Redistribution is an inevitable (and often very desirable) feature of democracies and works to reduce inequality. This redistributive feature of democracies is fundamentally related to universal suffrage and its principle of “one person, one vote”. Poor and rich people all have one vote and as poorer people are in the majority, the median voter theorem tells us that a majority will vote for redistributive taxation, and redistribution will be higher the higher income inequality in the economy, as measured by the gap between median income and the higher average income. Because the income distribution is skewed, a higher gap between median and average income means higher income inequality and thus a higher level of redistributive taxation. The median voter theorem is of course a simple theory and in reality, there are many factors that mitigate its results (imperfect franchise, abstentions, agency problems, lobbying distortions, etc...). Nevertheless, universal suffrage implies pressures for income distribution via the welfare state. It is precisely the redistributive feature of democracies that may lead to secessionist tendencies<sup>17,18,19</sup> as certain territories, not necessarily based on national identity, may choose to bear the cost of secession to reduce redistributive taxation.

The main point of this argument here is that, whereas empires are expansionist and nation-states seek to shape borders according to ethnic boundaries, democracies are much less expansionist than imperialist regimes or nation states and feature instead secessionist tendencies. They are more inward-looking with much (usually peaceful) infighting and are the only regime that

tends, for economic reasons, to secessions and to a decrease in the size of countries and thus an increase in the number of countries. Secession is not automatic in democracies given the costs of secession, but the inherent secessionist tendency of democra-

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cies will often lead to forms of federalism or confederalism. The possibility of having flexible forms of decentralization to accommodate these secessionist tendencies is definitely a strength of democracies.

Another characteristic of democracies is that they have a tendency towards appeasement when other democracies are under attack by imperialist powers. This was the case before WWII, but is also the case with Russia's invasion war on Ukraine since 2014. This is not just a "mistake" but an intrinsic feature of democracies. This was expressed by the pre-WWII slogan among pacifists in France: when Hitler delivered an ultimatum to Poland "Why Die for Dantzig?" The tendency of democracies towards appeasement is related to the fact that people are much less willing to fight and possibly die in helping to defend other countries that are victims of an external

aggression. They will instead be much more willing to defend their own country when it is directly attacked. In empires, the rulers can easily decide to send soldiers to war, because they are not directly accountable to the people and can use their repression apparatus to enforce their decisions. In democracies, it is very different. Politicians are much more accountable to voters, even if imperfectly so. Voters in a country will have limited solidarity with other people who are victims of aggression. This tendency towards appeasement very often leads to myopic miscalculations on the part of voters in a country. The case of WWII has shown that it would have been less costly to go to war earlier with Hitler rather than to continue appeasement until it was too late. Military strategists certainly have important insights about these kinds of calculations, but voters do not. Moreover, war is so horrible that people tend in general to ignore the real dangers, and even tend to deny them. The tendency towards appeasement towards international aggressors is thus an inherent characteristic of democracies, not a simple mistake that one could learn not to repeat.

This tendency towards appeasement makes democracies look weak, encouraging further imperialist aggression. As explained above, democracies do tend to react late to such aggression, but imperialist powers will tend to make the fatal mistake of underestimating the will of people to defend their freedom within their own national borders when attacked. This mistake has obviously been made by Putin in his decision to invade Ukraine in 2022. If he succeeds in that war, which seems increasingly unlikely, he will feel encouraged to attack other former Soviet Republics, like Moldova or Georgia. He may even attack the Baltic states to test the unity of

NATO countries. This would be a test for NATO itself, since the failure to respond to an attack of one of its members might lead to collapse of NATO itself. NATO would probably respond, but Putin may still try to test the waters, because he believes that Western democracies are weak and decadent.

Despite this inherent tendency towards appeasement, democracies have nevertheless the best basis for international cooperation with other democracies based on shared fundamental values of citizenship and universal human rights.

Note that democracies have further key advantages over other political regimes. First of all, democracies are better at protecting human rights, civil rights and property rights. This advantage of democracy is not just linked to the election of leaders which can ensure popular accountability, but mostly to the separation of powers that exists in well-functioning democracies. Election of leaders is not enough as it may be compatible with “illiberal democracy” where the majority can oppress electoral minorities. *As recently shown in Li et al. (2022)*, protection of all human rights of individuals necessitates a fully independent and insulated judiciary branch of government in a modern interconnected society. Institutions of democracy ensuring appropriate separation of powers that help guarantee all rights of individuals take quite a long time to establish and cannot be improvised.

Second, and this is related to the first point, democracy provides a solution, albeit imperfect to the capital levy problem.<sup>20</sup> The capital levy problem is related to the fact that ex ante capital is infinitely elastic but ex post, once an investment has been

made in bricks and machines, capital is quite inelastic. This means that policy-makers face a commitment problem: ex ante, they have an incentive to tax capital as little as possible to attract it to locate in their polity, but ex post, they have an incentive to tax capital, once it has been sunk into physical capital. This commitment problem is a very serious one in industrialized societies where capital plays such an important role in economic development. Democracies can partly solve this commitment problem by protecting contracts but also by putting constraints on tax policy. Obviously, taxes can be changed in democracies, but such changes need to go through a

**The tendency towards appeasement towards international aggressors is thus an inherent characteristic of democracies, not a simple mistake that one could learn not to repeat.**

democratic process, which provides some protection from the capital levy problem.

Third, democracy can also protect against abuses of “techno-autocracy”. We increasingly see how technological progress can be abused by autocracies. China’s “social credit score” is a case in point. Progress in surveillance technology and artificial intelligence allow to monitor Chinese citizens on a scale unheard of in the history of humanity. This technological progress is used by China’s communist regime to give scores to Chinese citizens (positive for good behavior, negative for bad behavior) in a

way that even George Orwell had not envisaged. More technological advances should allow China's communist regime to further strengthen its dystopian control

**As technological progress makes it possible to strengthen totalitarian state capacity in autocracies, only democracies can potentially provide protection of citizens against such encroachment by the state apparatus.**

over ordinary Chinese. As technological progress makes it possible to strengthen totalitarian state capacity in autocracies, only democracies can potentially provide protection of citizens against such encroachment by the state apparatus, as citizens will have a say in determining how to protect their privacy and their human rights in the face of potential abuses of information technology and artificial intelligence.

While imperfect in reality, taken together, the potential of democracies to protect human rights, minimize the capital levy problem and protect against forms of techno-abuse provides clear advantages of well-functioning democracies over non democratic regimes.

# Summarizing

Table 1 summarizes in a comparative perspective the main characteristics of empires, nation states, and democracies as discussed in this paper. As stated early on, these are indeed only ideal-types, but their differences are quite noteworthy, be it in terms of differences in the tendency towards expansionism, the nature of their ethnic mix and ideology, the focus of public expenditures, domestic defense capacity, openness to immigration and a number of economic variables such as openness to trade and FDI and the sources of growth. Note that nation

states are particularly vulnerable to secessions, because oppressed minorities living in particular territories will benefit from seceding to avoid oppression. Both empires and democracies are better at accommodating such moves for different reasons. Empires are able to accommodate coexistence of different ethnic groups. It is less the case for democracies, but they have the flexibility of changing political institutions to accommodate whenever possible secessionist tendencies related to ethnic diversity.

Table 1 **Characteristics of empires, nation states, and democracies**

	Empires	Nation states	Democracies
Tendency towards expansionism	Strong	Limited to ethnic group	Tendency towards secession
Ethnic mix	Multi-ethnic	Mono-ethnic	Multi-ethnic
Ideology	Religion or universalist ideology	Nationalism	Universalist ideology emphasizing freedom and human rights
Public spending favored	Army and emperor's private goods	Privileging majority ethnic group	Redistribution from the rich to the poor
Source of growth	Land and slaves	Domestic output	Human capital
Openness to trade	Usually strong	Usually weak	Usually strong
Openness to immigration	Moderate	Absent	Moderate
Openness to FDI	Strong	absent	Moderate to strong
Domestic defense capacity	Weak	Strong	Strong
Defense solidarity with other countries	Variable	Weak	Appeasement
Vulnerability to secessions	Weak	Strong	Weak

Notes: The table summarizes in a comparative perspective the main characteristics of empires, nation states, and democracies as discussed in this paper.

Source: Own work

# The special case of American Imperialism

Fig. 5 U.S. territorial acquisitions



Notes: The map shows the territorial acquisitions of the United States, such as the Thirteen Colonies, the Louisiana Purchase, British and Spanish Cession, and so on. Since the United States Constitution's ratification in 1789, the country has grown from 864,746 square miles to 3,531,905 through territorial acquisitions.

Source: Public Domain (via Wikimedia)

The modern US started as a number of settler colonies of the UK, Spain, and France. After achieving independence from the British colonizer, the US project can definitely be seen as imperialist. Indeed, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, territories were conquered over native Americans, Spanish (Mexican) and French. Alaska was bought from Russia and Hawaii had been a colony of the US since 1898 before becoming

the 50<sup>th</sup> state in 1959. The US is, however, special compared to other imperialist powers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The US developed democratic institutions much earlier than other imperial powers. It also faced the secessionist tendencies of democracies head-on with the Civil war (1861–1864). Colonialist tendencies of the US were short-lived and mostly unsuccessful. The colonization of the Philippines in 1898 after a

defeat of Spain ended already in 1946 after WWII. While the US colonized the small islands of Guam and Puerto Rico, it failed to colonize Cuba, though it kept a very tight control over the island.

Because of its early democratic governance, isolationist tendencies were always present in the US. It is not exaggerated to say that the US was generally sucked into an alliance with other countries, whether in WWI, WWII or during the Cold War. In other words, US interventions abroad were often determined more by external demand than by internal expansionist plans. The US remained outside of WWI and only joined the Allied forces after the unsummoned sinking of the British ship "Lusitania" by a German submarine and Germany's insistence that it had the right to sink ships in the Atlantic Ocean. Even then, the US troops played only a minor role in the outcome of the war compared to the German exhaustion and the revolutionary movements within Germany against its imperial regime.

The US also tended to remain neutral in the beginning of WWII, and it is only with the Japanese attack on the US base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii that the US entered the war. The US played a much more important role compared to WWI, especially in the Pacific in the war against Japan. The Soviet success in defeating Hitler and in taking over countries from Central Europe later led to the Cold war where the US was the dominant force and led the alliance of Western democracies.

The cold war led to imperialist-like interventions of the US in Asia, Latin America and Africa in the name of anti-communism. During the cold war, the US defended capitalism first, not democracy, and eagerly

supported right-wing anti-communist dictatorships, even helping some of these right-wing dictatorships to be established, as was the case in Latin America, but also in Asia.

US democracy has many flaws. It was born as a country where slavery was legal, and even after the defeat of the confederate states in the civil war, African Americans were discriminated against in the Jim Crow era until the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s. Even today, the racist history of the country has left open scars that have not yet healed. A large part of the political class (previously the southern democrats, but now the Republicans in southern states) fights to disenfranchise minority voters in the US and limit universal suffrage. Compared to other democracies, the welfare state, generally brought about in conjunction with universal suffrage, is much more limited in the US compared to Western Europe, the UK or Canada. Moreover, special interest politics is much more prevalent in the US compared to other democracies, which gives big business a much more powerful voice within US government compared to other advanced democracies.

On the international scene, the US lost much of its credibility when it invaded Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of the Weapons of Mass Destruction. US governments alternate between forms of democratic isolationism (Trump's isolationist foreign policy, Biden's chaotic withdrawal of US troops in Afghanistan) and interventionism using their military power. It alternates between a willingness to introduce a "rules-based" international order and unwillingness to submit to international rules like rulings of the WTO, unwillingness to recognize the International Criminal Court in the Hague, etc.

Despite its numerous flaws as a democracy, the US is nevertheless currently the biggest international counterbalancing power to the current Russian and Chinese empires. It will in all likelihood continue to be sucked in various conflicts outside its borders, when called by allied countries. There is nevertheless reason to believe that isolationism will become stronger over time. Political polarization inside the US has been very important in previous decades and is only growing. This trend will make a further move towards decentralization quite likely within the US. This alone should increase trends for Isolationism over time. Moreover, the American public is less and less willing to accept the deaths of its soldiers on foreign soil.

**Political polarization inside the US has been very important in previous decades and is only growing. This trend will make a further move towards decentralization quite likely within the US.**

# The challenge of co-existence between imperialism and democracy

This is one of the most difficult questions of our time given the aggressive assertiveness of Russian and Chinese imperialism. After thinking a lot about this, I came to conclude that the general answer is that such coexistence is difficult and unstable, and will lead to very dangerous clashes that could easily escalate in World Wars, killing billions and making the planet less

and less inhabitable. These tensions need to be managed carefully and thoughtfully. Empires will not disappear overnight and one cannot escape addressing those questions. At the cost of a lower level of abstraction, I prefer to address the question, on a case-by-case basis and discuss separately the case of the Russian empire and that of the Chinese empire.

Fig. 6 Russian expansion in Eurasia



Notes: The map shows the Russian expansion in Eurasia between 1533 and 1896.

Source: Public Domain (via Wikimedia)

## Russia

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian imperialism has been keen to get better access to the Baltic sea in the North and the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to the South. Indeed, while Russia has acquired the largest territory in the world, its access to the sea, critical for maritime transport, has always been limited as Russia's Northern coasts are frozen for most of the year. While Russian imperialism also expanded in the Far East, competing with Japan over Chinese territories, the main expansion effort was towards the West. In the 18th and 19th century, the Russian empire progressed and took former territories from the Ottoman empire, such as Crimea and the Caucasus.

The Soviet Union, especially after WWII, made a lot of progress towards these imperialist goals: in the North with renewed annexation of the Baltic States, the domination over Poland and Eastern Germany,

**The European Union represents an existential threat for Russia. The EU, as a haven of democracy and prosperity, has a great attractive power throughout Europe.**

the neutrality of Finland and Sweden; in the South, with domination over Bulgaria and Romania, but the renewed move to control the Balkan partly failed as the Communists lost the civil war in Greece. Moreover, Tito's Yugoslavia that had been liberated from the Nazis without major help from the Soviet Union asserted its strong independence from Moscow as soon as 1948. Additionally, Turkey which controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles strait linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, decided to join NATO to protect itself from the Soviet Union.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1992 led to a drastic shrinking of the Russian Empire. Today's Russia is demographically and economically weak even if it is militarily relatively strong. Russia's population is now 145 million compared to 289 million in the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia's GDP in 2019 was 1.687 trillion USD, which is less than Italy and barely above Benelux or Spain. On the other hand, Russia is still the second military power on the planet but far behind the US. It, however, has more nuclear warheads than the US and possesses roughly half the nuclear warheads in the world.

Despite the strong economic and demographic decline of Russia, Putin has been trying to revive the Russian Empire, first by crushing Chechnya in the second Chechnya war (1999–2009),<sup>XI</sup> attacking Georgia in 2008 and then Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. After the failure to reconstruct the Soviet Union via the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Putin launched the initiative of the Eurasian Economic Union, which does not seem more successful.

Against those imperialist ambitions, the European Union represents an existential threat for Russia. The EU, as a haven of democracy and prosperity, has a great attractive power throughout Europe. The aspiration to join the European Union was behind the Euromaidan movement in Ukraine that led pro-Russian president Yanukovich to flee Ukraine after the Berkut, his special forces, killed over 100 peaceful demonstrators (the Heavenly hundred) and failed to terrorize the protesters. The protesters against the rigged 2020 election in Belarus shared a similar aspiration even though dictator president Lukashenko managed to cling on to power. Putin has tried repeatedly to sabotage the European Union, first by intervening in the UK's Brexit referendum, second by supporting and financing extreme-right anti-European nationalist parties in European countries like France,

Germany, Italy or the Netherlands.

Putin wants return to 19<sup>th</sup> century international relations where big powers can bully and submit smaller countries. From his point of view, Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine early 2022 is entirely legitimate as it conforms to 19<sup>th</sup> century power politics and also to the thinking of the "realist" school in International Relations. Seen this way, the outcome of the war with Ukraine will be determinant both for the future of Russian imperialism and that of surrounding democracies.

## China

After abandoning its socialist economy and successfully embracing capitalism with the economic reforms launched after 1978, Chinese communist leaders sought strong integration into the world economy, thinking that economic success provides legitimacy for keeping the Communist Party in power<sup>21</sup>. Market reforms in China have been an astounding success, as average growth rates around 10 % per year transformed China from a poor rural economy to the world's largest economy, in terms of GDP (PPP). As long as growth was the main objective of the Communist Party of China, coexistence with the rest of the world was relatively easy. Both China and the rest of the world benefited from China's integration in the world economy. As China, however, becomes the world's dominant economy, ambitions to be the world's leading power and to redesign the world order according to China's views are a source of international tension.

Xi Jinping has been reviving the Chinese imperial view of the world (Tian Xia: everything under heaven) with a China-centric view of a Confucian hierarchy of tributary states ranked in a precise order with China at the top. The Chinese view of the world is indeed profoundly Sino-centric. Everything is seen through the prism of China as the center of the planet. This should not be surprising given the length of Chinese civilization

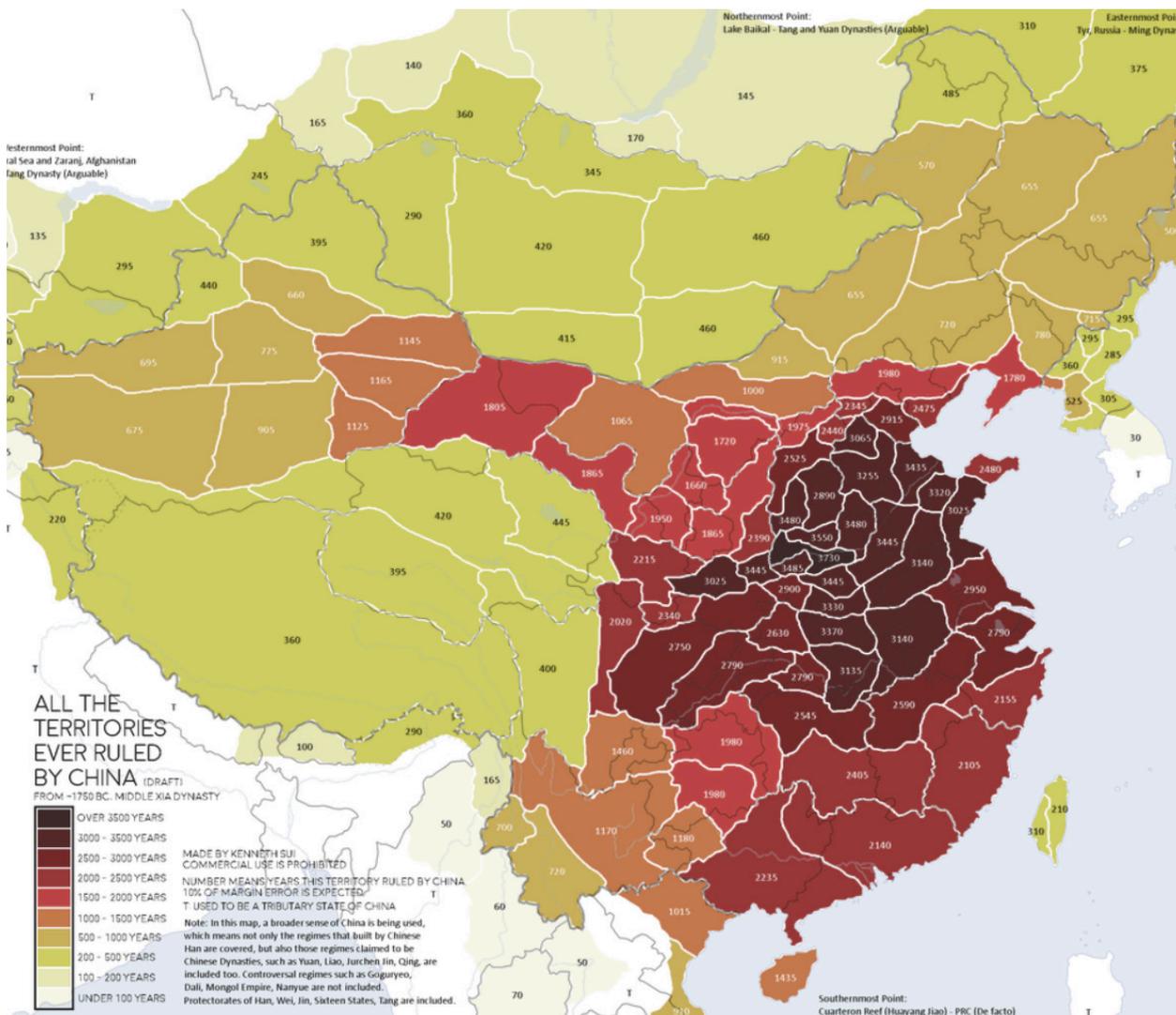
and the depth of its culture. The Sino-centric vision of the world has nothing to do with communism and is simply a continuation of the Chinese Empire's Sino-centric view of the world.

Until the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, China's system of international relations was based on a "tributary system". The existing world view in China was that of a

## The outcome of the war with Ukraine will be determinant both for the future of Russian imperialism and that of surrounding democracies.

Confucian world order where China occupied the central place. Diplomatic relations between China and other nations were based on this Sino-centric world order. Like is the case for officials inside China, other countries were "ranked", some countries being seen as higher ranked than others. Given China's centrality and its place at the top of this hierarchy, other countries were required to pay tribute to the Emperor to acknowledge his superiority and precedence in ranking. Tributes in relations between nations, tribes or ethnic group have always existed. They were a kind of tax paid by a tribe, nation or territory to the government of the dominant tribe, nation or territory. In exchange for the tribute, the dominant tribe, nation or territory promised protection against a foreign aggression. The European feudal system was such a system, but by far not the only one in the world.<sup>XII</sup> The specificity of the Chinese tributary system was related to the Sino-centric Confucian vision of the world order. Tributary states were allowed to trade with China and have a diplomatic mission in the Empire's capital. As a rule, China did not interfere in the governance of tributary states and only expected them

Fig. 7 All the territories ever ruled by China



Notes: In this map, a broader sense of China is being used, which means not only the regimes that built by Chinese Han are covered, but also those regimes claimed to be Chinese Dynasties, such as Yuan, Liao, Jurchen Jin, Qung, are included Too. Controversial regimes such as Goguryeo, Dali, Mongol Empire, Nanyue are not included. Protectorates of Han, Wei, Kin, Sixteen States, Tang are included.

Source: Keneth Sui via Reddit

to behave as good and submissive subordinates. Many Asian countries were tributary states throughout history. This was the case of Korea and Vietnam, but also of Thailand as well as other states.<sup>XIII</sup> In general, non-Han polities in Asia were treated as tributary states. Note that Tibet was a tributary state at least under the

Ming dynasty, until it was occupied by the Qing dynasty, but liberated itself after its collapse in 1911 until it was invaded again in 1951.

This concept of tributary state is important to understand China's ambitions. Contrary to Nazi Germany, there is since

Fig. 8 The Qianlong Emperor in court dress



Notes: This image shows Qianlong Emperor, also known by his temple name Emperor Gaozong of Qing. He was the fifth Emperor of the Qing dynasty and reigned from 1735 to 1796.

Source: Public domain via Wikimedia

the death of Mao no will any more among Chinese leaders to invade foreign countries and submit them to communist rule, but the tradition of tributary states gives a hint at China's ambitions. There are good reasons to think that China will use economic dependency (through trade and/or foreign direct investment) and threats to force countries to behave in a way demanded by Chinese leaders. Recent pressures on Australia (but also the Phil-

ippines, South Korea, Lithuania, ...) are a good illustration. These facts are consistent with the idea of China trying to build concentric circles of tributary states.

Chinese leaders do not consider their behavior bullying, but more reminding smaller countries of the hierarchy of nations in the Sino-centric vision of “multilateralism” just like parents need to remind their children to show them respect.

China would not impose direct forms on governance on them but would expect instead some form of commitment to economic ties but also some form of expression of loyalty towards Beijing, the silencing of criticisms of China, i.e. partial exporting of China's censorship system and demand of support or at least neutrality towards Chinese foreign policy initiatives.

In the eyes of the Chinese government, smaller nations that are dependent on China should “show respect”, i.e. refrain from angering Beijing. In the Confucian philosophy, children owe respect to their parents and should thus abstain from criticizing them. The Confucian vision of government and the people is similar and so is its vision about relations between small countries and China. In that sense, Chinese leaders do not consider their

behavior bullying, but more reminding smaller countries of the hierarchy of nations in the Sino-centric vision of “multilateralism” just like parents need to remind their children to show them respect. Other Asian nations understand this better than countries of Western culture.

When the Dutch wanted to trade with Imperial China several centuries ago, they presented themselves as a tributary state of China and paid tribute to the Emperor. They did not believe a word of what they

## Chinese leaders will try to transform foreign countries in tributary states and create concentric circles of tributary states in a Confucian hierarchy modeled on the experience of tributary states in history.

were saying, but managed to achieve their goals with this hypocrisy. In hindsight, this was probably wise behavior. Be it in international relations or even in domestic politics, bringing up culture wars and clashes of culture is a sure way of creating conflicts that can often be avoided by rational negotiation. The Chinese world view will not change anytime soon, and neither will the Western view of the world. While the Chinese vision of the world is profoundly Sino-centric, it is still reassuring that Chinese leaders have no plan to conquer or invade non-Chinese countries. This should leave enough room for diplomacy. A note that must be made in that context is that it is more costly for a communist regime like China to invade a country, because, in order to establish its political regime in a stable way, it needs to control all of society through Communist Party cells. Putting in place party cells in

firms, associations, government institutions, apartment blocks, etc.. is a very costly investment. Chinese communist leaders are already facing a similar problem in sparsely populated Tibet, Xinjiang and inner Mongolia, provinces that have been under communist control for decades, but where the CPC has had a hard time to weave its apparatus within the interstices of these societies.

Because of this, Chinese leaders have very little appetite for invading other countries. This does not mean they are not interested in establishing some form of control over foreign countries, but it reinforces the argument that Chinese leaders will try to transform foreign countries in tributary states and create concentric circles of tributary states in a Confucian hierarchy modeled on the experience of tributary states in history.

This Sino-centric view of the international order as tributary states gravitating around China works only if countries accept it and submit to China’s power. As stated above, this can be achieved via economic pressure like in the cases of Australia and Lithuania, but cannot visibly work for the US, which cannot fit this world view. Some nationalist voices have called for the “inevitable destruction of the US”,<sup>XIV</sup> but this is very premature and many other paths are possible. There is nevertheless no doubt that there will be future clashes about China’s vision of the international order.

# Conclusions

The coexistence of empires, nation-states and democracies is problematic and is likely to lead to instability. One of the key messages of this paper is that it is important to understand the nature of each country's regime in order to understand its external and internal behavior.

Whereas empires were dominant in most of world history since the emergence of states, they have been declining strongly since the 20th century and with the advent of nation-states and democracies. Remaining empires should further decline in the future. The Russian empire is much smaller and weaker than the Soviet empire in all dimensions. It

**It is important to understand the nature of each country's regime in order to understand its external and internal behavior.**

will further weaken economically and demographically. The Chinese empire is in expansion mode but is facing huge costs of maintaining the empire in the provinces of Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Yunnan and Ningxia, among others. Moreover, the costs of invasion by communist empires are higher than for traditional empires given the need to install communist party cells throughout the fabric of society. Absorbing Hong Kong after the National Security

Law is proving very costly. Absorbing Taiwan may prove to be a tipping point. China is still militarily quite inferior to the US and is facing major demographic challenges as the "One child" policy has led to a rapid aging of the population.

A world of small democracies building supranational institutions to regulate their relations on the basis of commonly accepted rules and threats from empires seems, in my view to be the path for the distant future. I emphasize the advantage of smallness, because democracies tend to split due to secessionist internal tendencies and also because large powerful democracies like the US that acted like empires in the past may still face imperial temptations, in the face of flaws of their democratic system. The election of Trump, a would-be dictator, has done a lot of damage to US democracy, and one cannot exclude a crisis of US democracy and forms of creeping authoritarianism. Moreover, a part of the US elite still favors using its power to bully other countries. The other democratic country of a major size is India. India has been a rela-

**Large powerful democracies like the US that acted like empires in the past may still face imperial temptations, in the face of flaws of their democratic system.**

tively well-functioning democracy since its independence in 1947. It faced authoritarian tendencies under Indira Gandhi, in particular with the state of exception between

1975 and 1977, but the biggest challenge to India's democracy came in recent years from Prime Minister Modi who is trying to turn India into a kind of a nation-state based on Hinduism, with Muslims being discriminated against. India is still too poor to behave like an empire and Modi's Hindu nationalism does not (as yet) favor a willingness to invade neighboring Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The European Union is a good example of a supranational institution regrouping mid-size and small countries. It has been functioning relatively well in the economic sphere, but has depended so far on the US for its military protection. While small democracies will continue facing empires in the foreseeable future, it will be vital for them to create multilateral commitment devices to defend each other. This will be particularly important given the tendency of democracies towards appeasement when other democracies are under attack. NATO can provide such a multilateral commitment device provided European countries play a larger role in the alliance. Multilateral commitment can be created not only by written commitments, such as Article 5 of NATO considering an attack on one NATO country to be an attack of other NATO countries, but also by concrete steps such as having NATO troops of all member countries present on the territory of each member state.

While small democracies will continue facing empires in the foreseeable future, it will be vital for them to create multilateral commitment devices to defend each other.

# Notes

- I. This paper is based on a lecture, the author gave at the UBS Center in Zurich on April 7 2022. I am grateful to Yuriy Gorodnichenko for useful comments.
- II. Indeed, a basic tenet of the formal literature on international relations is that relative military power between countries determines their bargaining position. Since war imposes unnecessary losses, the starting point of many formal models of conflict is to ask why conflict takes place at all if efficient bargaining can determine relative outcomes<sup>22,23</sup>.
- III. Note that this classification, while appropriate for most functioning states, may not capture the problems facing countries with very low state capacity. Nevertheless, the literature on state capacity has focused on the difference between failed states and states with sufficient state capacity. It has not focused on the differences between states with sufficient state capacity.
- IV. In any case, whatever these constraints are, they are by far less binding than those facing the executive branch in a democracy.
- V. Section 5 will discuss the special case of the US.
- VI. For a general analysis of empires, and in particular the role of geography and military technology<sup>24</sup>.
- VII. Karl Jaspers (1951) noted that most religions and philosophies that have survived for a long time developed during the axial age, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the third century B.C. This is also roughly the period in which relatively large empires emerged.
- VIII. Grosjean (2011) interestingly notes that European localities that were part of the same empire for more than 200 years are also culturally much closer than a simple gravity model of cultural distance would predict<sup>25</sup>.
- IX. A case in point is Hong Kong where the imposition of the “National Security Law” in June 2020 de facto suppressed freedoms. As a result, there has been a massive brain drain, but its effects are likely to be mitigated by migration of educated labor from the mainland. Nevertheless, Xi Jinping’s crackdown on the tech sector is likely to have long run negative effects on growth, possibly even transforming China’s economy itself into a stagnating economy resembling the late Soviet economy before its collapse.
- X. Some empires, like Russia, have large natural resources and can use this to “blackmail” other countries that depend on import of these natural resources. In a “greener” world based on renewable resources and where natural resources play a less important role, there should be less potential for such opportunistic behavior.

- XI. This is the object of modernization theory<sup>26,27</sup>. In Gorodnichenko and Roland (2021), we showed that cultural differences affect the intensity of demand for living in a democratic and free society<sup>28</sup>.
- XII. The first Chechnya war launched by Yeltsin failed.
- XIII. On the historical creation and evolution of tribute systems, see e.g. Flannery and Marcus (2012).
- XIV. Japan was for a while a tributary state to China during the Ming dynasty.
- XV. See e.g. the remarks made by Prof Qiao Xinsheng from Zhongnan university: “The world will never be at peace as long as the US exists”  
<https://www.kunlunce.com/e/wap/show2022.php?classid=176&id=159437&b-classid=1;>

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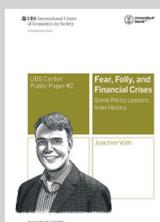


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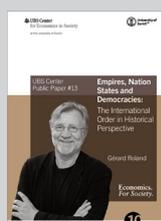
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## About us

The UBS Center for Economics in Society, UBS Center in short, is an Associated Institute at the Department of Economics of the University of Zurich.

It was established in 2012, enabled by a founding donation by UBS, which the bank made on the occasion of its 150th anniversary. In view of the generous donation, the university named the UBS Center after its benefactor.

The UBS Center serves two main aims. First, it enables world-class research in economics on all levels, to be conducted at the University's Department of Economics. It thereby supports the department's ambition to become one of the top economics departments in Europe and to make Zurich one of the best places for research in economics. The UBS Center's other aim is to serve as a platform for dialogue between academia, business, politics, and the broader public, fostering continuous knowledge transfer. Delivering on these aims will also strengthen the position of Zurich, and Switzerland more generally, as a leading location for education and business.

For more information, please consult [www.ubscenter.uzh.ch](http://www.ubscenter.uzh.ch)

