

# **U.S. EXCEPTIONALIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

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# Abstract

The United States' foreign policy and attitude towards the rest of the international community has grown increasingly aggressive and uncooperative with others. Often acting through a sense of U.S. exceptionalism, the United States often tries to police the world and have other nations act according to its own morals and values, often causing friction and damage to relations. In its foreign policy, both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama have furthered this exceptionalist behavior, with the former lacking subtlety and utilizing old Cold War era thinking or aggression to get his objectives accomplished, and the latter relying on soft power and subtle yet increasing military presence to achieve U.S. desires. In its usage of drone warfare, the United States routinely ignores the civilian casualties in its usage, ignores international agreements, or ignores the wishes of foreign nations, which has led to damaged U.S. credibility and authority overseas. Finally, the United States has shown to only follow international agreements or organizations when convenient for its plans, often seeking to police other nations who do not follow these guidelines, which leads to worsened relations and possible future conflict. All of these aspects have led to the United States' image and influence being damaged internationally, with its ability to conduct diplomacy with other nations in jeopardy.

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## Introduction

The perception of the United States drastically differs across the globe. If a person is a citizen of the United States, they might think that the U.S. is a beacon of hope and defending democratic ideals, the epitome of protecting and endorsing the Western way of life. Others might view them as a self-righteous bully, telling others how best to run their governments or way of life, or else suffer the wrath of U.S. military might. But precisely how dangerous or antagonistic is the U.S.'s attitude towards the world, and does this aggressive behavior bear any danger for the future of the international community?

The United States' foreign strategies, methodology, and attitudes will be analyzed and critiqued, to determine if this continued ideology of U.S. exceptionalism mixed with a Cold War attitude has negative effects on U.S. diplomacy. Unfortunately, by examining these different aspects, it is shown that the United States, despite various presidencies and political affiliations, has developed an attitude of exceptionalism and seeing itself as the chief authority on the international stage for what is right or wrong.

As a result, its policies have become overbearing and aggressive, often ignoring the laws or rules of other nations and organizations when it is inconvenient for them or its plans. On the other hand, the United States is quick to point out when other nations (often those that it is in direct or indirect conflict with) do not follow said rules, and often make a large issue out of the situation.

Due to this apparent nature, the question being asked by this thesis is if this continued idea of Cold War U.S. exceptionalism has damaged its standing and diplomacy internationally? To answer this, the United States will be examined in its foreign policy directions of recent

presidential administrations, its modern military strategies and policies through unmanned drones, and finally its interaction with international organizations, agreements, and nations in general.

This examination is broken into three different chapters, with the first chapter detailing how the U.S.'s foreign policy has evolved and been shaped in the Bush and Obama administrations. In this chapter, it is found that the U.S.'s international image suffered due to Bush's emphasis on Cold War era attitudes, coupled with a reliance on military action to uphold Western or democratic ideals. Under Obama, this international image was repaired to a degree due to Obama's usage of soft power and diplomacy, while continuing the spread and protection of Western ideals coupled with increased (albeit more nuanced) military action and policy.

The second chapter analyzes the United States' use of drones and automated weaponry in its military tactics abroad. This chapter will show that policy and implementation surrounding drone usage has been heightened and intensified in recent years, regardless of the civilian casualty cost, questionable legality, or opinion of U.S. citizens.

Finally, the third chapter looks at the U.S.'s involvement and cooperation in international agreements or treaties, specifically the New START Deal, the Iran Nuclear Deal, and the Paris Climate Agreement. Through this analysis, it is determined that the United States has become arrogant and aggressive in how it conducts itself with foreign powers, often telling other nations how to adhere to rules and guidelines while selectively following said policies. This reliance on soft power and influence has made diplomacy difficult with other nations, particularly those in a state of opposition to the United States.

This is a very serious issue, with implications for the future of the United States as not only a nation but as a world power and authority as well. The U.S.'s image and ability to utilize soft power for diplomacy has severely decreased in the eyes of citizens across the world.<sup>1</sup> If this image or credibility continues to erode and deteriorate due to the U.S.'s aggression in foreign policy, the world could become a hostile and disconnected place, with the credibility of international organizations such as NATO or the U.N. also suffering from the United States' absence.<sup>2</sup>

What is perhaps the most concerning aspect about this predicament is how these issues and trends will affect the U.S. and its relationships abroad. In our modern world and society of globalization, relationships and diplomacy can make or break a nation, in either economic or security matters. For example, the United States maintained a strong relationship with the U.K., France, Germany, and other members of Western Europe in the past few decades. Not only do these relationships help bolster the U.S.'s economy and trade between these different nations, but also as partners in conflicts overseas and in the fight against global terrorism. NATO operations against ISIS and other terror groups are largely bolstered by a friendly relationship between the U.S. and these allies.<sup>3</sup>

Yet if the U.S.'s trend of coupling U.S. exceptionalism and Cold War attitudes to justify imposing its rules on the world continues, these relationships will suffer. This could leave Western Europe and beyond a hostile environment for the United States and its endeavors. It will be shown that this behavior could compromise the United States' relationships internationally,

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *The Decline of American Soft Power*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006), 419.

<sup>2</sup> Third Way, *Country Brief: North Korea*, (Washington D.C., Third Way, 2019), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Richard N. Haass, *Assessing the Value of the NATO Alliance*, (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 2018), 2-3.

with other nations either losing respect or trust in the U.S. and its efforts. As such, this could dramatically shift the balance of power towards other major players on the world stage.

The notable relationships that could change for the United States could be its interactions with Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. These relationships are perhaps more crucial to analyze and prevent from deteriorating not only due to their antagonistic nature towards the U.S. and its allies, but because of their positioning on the world stage when considered with key international topics. Russia, China, and Iran are the most dangerous to consider in the subject of nuclear arsenal or research, military capabilities, and general attitude towards the United States and the West.

While this subject will be examined mostly in the third chapter, these growing distastes for the United States are present all throughout each chapter, especially considering the leftover policies of the Cold War, as examined in chapter one. U.S. diplomacy and its efforts are crucial to preventing large scale conflict, and with these nations on the rise (especially China, coupled with its economic supremacy beginning to threaten peace with some Western parties) the efforts of these negotiations must be peaceful and successful.

These trends do not change drastically from one political party in office in the U.S. to the other, however. As will be examined in chapter one, Republican presidents like Bush are usually much more upfront and candid about their intentions and the United States' viewpoint on matters, which does tend to anger other nations at the lack of subtlety. With Democratic presidents such as Obama, the reliance on U.S. soft power and persuasion is much more pronounced, with careful and precise military or surveillance operations to carry out the United States' will. These efforts, while under the radar and not as overt as the Republican approach,

tend to outrage international parties in the long run. Additionally, the effects of these policies and approaches are still left unchecked or accounted for, with the image of the U.S. still being damaged abroad. However, it is worth noting that under Democratic presidents in recent years, the United States and its relationships with key allies, particularly in Western Europe, have not suffered and have actually improved, with outright aggression towards allies not as apparent.

However, if the United States is belligerent or tries to act like the world authority on how these other larger nations should operate, this peaceful balance could easily be tipped towards a hostile conclusion, which is the last thing any party would want. As said previously, if U.S. authority is weakened or has a negative response in Western Europe or with international operations, the world balance could lead to these other nations taking advantage of this situation and stepping in to impose its own authority, violently if necessary.

Perhaps this is a byproduct of the United States relying on its soft power for too long. This assumption of no other nation wanting to challenge this victor of the Cold War, or hoping those leftover policies and strategies still hold merit for modern U.S. tactics. In any event, something needs to change in U.S. strategy and diplomacy, whether due to its exceptionalist foreign policy, its aggressive military and drone policy, or its uncooperative or accusatory attitude towards international agreements and cooperation.

## **Chapter 1: US Foreign Policy under President Bush and President Obama**

### Introduction

Modern U.S. history has seen a large part of its nature be defined by foreign policy. Once our nation decided to enter World War I and II, we accepted the role of a superpower on the world stage, ready to defend and spread our ideals of democracy and freedom to every corner of



the globe. Indeed after World War II this mission was put to the test, with the Cold War being as much an ideological war as a physical one, with various conflicts and stalemates alike cropping up in no small part due to our persistent attitude and policies. Certainly foreign policy was crucial during those years.

However, the past generation has been a beast all its own, with various viewpoints and approaches taken to deal with the U.S.'s obstacles and adversaries. September 11, 2001 changed the approach of U.S. foreign policy forever, with the new War on Terror being undertaken by the U.S. and U.N. alike. Current and future leaders would have to have various ideals and plans in place to deal with these foreign foes, and the nations that sponsor and support them. Yet the United States' time as the ultimate "good guy" seemed to be at an end. How could a country, which had been the superpower that helped win World War II and fight against the tyranny of communism, be the one who had its national anthem booed in other countries, and have foreign exchange students afraid to visit or live there? <sup>4</sup>

To answer these questions, this chapter will examine the U.S. foreign policies over the past generation (i.e. 2000-2016) to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and consequences of U.S. actions taken over this time period. This will be conducted by examining and critiquing the attitudes, policies, and public receptions of the George W. Bush administration and the Barack Obama administration. By examining various scholarly literature and reports both during and after these time periods, it will be seen that the U.S.'s foreign policy and image was largely perceived in a negative fashion during the Bush administration due to his emphasis on Cold War tactics and emphasis on Christian norms, and improved its image and effectiveness (or

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power and American Foreign Policy*, (New York, The Academy of Political Science, 2004), 255.

ruthlessness) under Obama, due to effective diplomacy and soft power usage, coupled with an increase in precise military activity.

What will follow in the chapter will be a literature review of different scholars as they examine the policies and their ramifications during the administrations of Bush and Obama. After the literature review, Bush's foreign policy and actions will be examined, with his continuation of Cold War politics along with a negative U.S. world image due to his policies. Secondly, the chapter will show Obama's improvement on Bush's policies, as well as improving the image of the U.S. around the world, as well as starting to engage in Asian politics and world events.

### Literature Review

To understand how the United States' foreign policy has changed over the past twenty years, the best way to analyze and critique its policies is to deconstruct and examine the motivations and ideals of each presidential administration, with the emphasis on how these administrations handled interactions with nations in the Middle East as well as parts of Asia, due to these areas being of the most military or adversarial concern to the U.S.

When looking at the Bush administration, there is a general consensus among scholars about his tactics and feelings on the War Against Terror, and the general discourse with foreign nations. At the beginning of his administration, Mazarr notes that Bush was very much defined by his military realist mindset, believing that power and being feared or respected by your enemies was the proper way to send a message to one's enemies.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen with the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, *George W. Bush, Idealist*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 503.

beginning stages of the Iraq War and deployment in Afghanistan being quite aggressive in its pursuits, with Bush eager to retaliate following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Another facet of the Bush administration's approach was a clear religious and moral emphasis that the U.S.'s approach and side in this conflict was the ideologically and spiritually correct one. According to Devuyt, the Bush administration's religious confidence gave way to a rise and expansion of international relations and policies, focusing on morality and good versus evil.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, many of those in Europe saw the conflict through the lenses of psychological and political issues colliding together on the world stage, whereas those in the U.S. saw the conflict as a new age crusade.<sup>7</sup>

Lindsay notes that perhaps the biggest aspect of the Bush administration was the belief that the world desired and needed U.S. leadership in this burgeoning crisis, taking the offensive and having the rest of the world catch up to this moral mission.<sup>8</sup> This belief was based on the past reality of the U.S. helping to solidify major international events and turning points in history, such as the formation of the United Nations or humanitarian success in Kuwait or others.<sup>9</sup> However, this forcing of U.S. leadership was detrimental to the image of the United States overseas by not just its opposition, but allies as well, as this was something Obama's administration worked to reverse albeit keeping its spirit alive.<sup>10</sup>

Obama took a much more modern and globalist approach to his administration and foreign policy. Lindsay went on to show that Bush had failed to see the effects globalism had on

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<sup>6</sup> Youri Devuyt, *Religion and American Foreign Policy: The Bush-Obama Divide and its Impact on Transatlantic Relations*, (Maria Grazia Melchionni, 2010), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Lindsay, *George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the Future of US Global Leadership*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 765.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the changing world landscape, which Obama capitalized on, along with growing discontent and disapproval of the Iraq conflict in general.<sup>11</sup> As opposed to Bush's blunt force and driving forward regardless of what the U.S.'s allies had to say, Obama instead worked to improve cooperation with the U.S.'s allies, realizing that success overseas is dependent on international cooperation and communication.<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars such as Milne note that another improvement Obama tried to make on Bush's strategies was to be more direct and specific in his foreign relations than Bush. If Bush was the hammer, Obama was a scalpel, moving to step up drone attacks and largely improve the effectiveness of U.S. forces overseas (both at a lower financial and human cost) while simultaneously pulling out of Iraq to appease critics.<sup>13</sup> He was able to achieve this and receive praise from previous Bush critics by detaching from the strict ideological mindset of Bush on the war as a whole, as well as employing policies and tactics that sought to test and probe, opting for a slow, procedural, and methodical approach to war rather than Bush's instant gratification approach.<sup>14</sup>

One aspect of Obama's administration that was not an evolution from Bush, according to Sutter, was the shift in focus towards Asian countries, specifically trade and economic relations with China, as well as the growing threat of North Korea.<sup>15</sup> As the operations in the Middle East became largely automated and ground forces withdrew, the Obama administration focused more on securing economic interests overseas with China, which began to butt heads with the U.S.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 765-766.

<sup>13</sup> David Milne, *Pragmatism or What? The Future of US Foreign Policy*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), 935.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 937-938.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Sutter, *The Obama Administration and US Policy in Asia*, (Yusof Ishak Institute, 2009), 189.

over trade disputes and self-serving policies on its behalf.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, North Korea began to rear its head and demanded recognition and fear on the world stage, leading the U.S. to engage in a tricky game of diplomacy with their Korean opposition to this day.

### Bush and Past U.S. Foreign Policy

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, there was a growing sense of nationalism and anger sprouting from the United States, with the nation wanting answers and retribution against those who had attacked them. President George W. Bush was quickly thrust into a position of leadership tasked with seeking out enemies to the United States and bringing them to justice, regardless of their position in the world or which nations protected them. As such, Bush's foreign policy began to take shape in the form of preemptive aggression and world policing. The U.S. would not think twice about striking first and swiftly against those who wish them harm, placing its military might front and center on the world stage.

<sup>17</sup> This uncompromising and aggressive approach quickly earned the ire of critics both domestic and abroad, with said parties warning of an "arrogant and patronizing" power becoming more and more imperial in nature, with the ultimate end goal of the United States being world domination in a sense.<sup>18</sup>

While the critique of world domination seems a bit exaggerated and full of bluster, it is worth noting how the early attitude and approach by the Bush administration set a tone of criticism and worry from both within the United States and without. Bush seemed determined to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 1045.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

root out the enemies of the United States at any cost, willing to take the fight to the opposition rather than be patient or reactive in nature, much to the dismay of international organizations. This mission of Bush's was rooted in the idea of the U.S. spreading its values to those in need around the globe in order to bring peace and liberty. In fact, national security documents for the Bush administration often cited this cause, stating how the nation's mission has always been larger than the defense of the nation itself, justifying fighting for liberty and justice no matter what.<sup>19</sup>

Critics may have taken issue with Bush's preemptive nature and policy, yet this approach was nothing new in U.S. foreign policy. In fact, the United States has been favoring preemptive force and military action for much of its history. As far back as Andrew Jackson invading Spanish-controlled Florida in 1818 or Teddy Roosevelt deciding it was time for the U.S. to intervene in the Western hemisphere and its politics, U.S. foreign policy has routinely been about striking first to deter potential threats.<sup>20</sup> This "prevention of attack" was an age old practice in U.S. policy, and was more in line with Bush reverting back to old U.S. ways, particularly the style of politics and policies used during the Cold War era.<sup>21</sup>

The United States during the Cold War was required to use preemptive force to deter violence and prevent certain areas or nations falling to the sway of communism, a similar rhetoric to protecting and safeguarding freedom that Bush and company used to justify their War on Terror and invasion of Iraq.<sup>22</sup> However, it should be noted that preemptive force and action was not the first and only practice endorsed by the Bush administration, as they held off on

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 1046.

<sup>20</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *Bush's Foreign Policy*, (State Group, LLC, 2004), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

intervening in North Korea or Iran due to the risks being too high.<sup>23</sup> This style of picking your battles and when to intervene shows how Bush was very much channeling historic and Cold War era U.S. policies in his strategy, despite criticisms that this style of politics was outdated or imperial in nature.

A side effect of this aggressive and older style of foreign policy was that many around the world saw the U.S.'s actions during the Bush administration as focused solely on oil and profit, or in the service of George W. Bush's ego and personal mission. Indeed, the Pew Research Center found during the Iraq war that seventy-six percent of Russians, seventy-five percent of French, fifty-four percent of Germans, and finally forty-four percent of British people believed that Bush was purely interested in Iraq for its oil reserves and the ability to control their resources.<sup>24</sup> This claim is unfounded, however, as there would be no feasible way for the United States to make a profit off of Iraq's oil reserves, at least not for a long time down the road. Experts estimated that \$40 billion would need to be invested into Iraq's oil production to boost it to a viable level, in addition to taking care of Iraq's debt of \$100 billion at the time of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> On top of that, the estimated cost of the United States' military action at the times was considered to be around \$140 billion, making any sort of profit from oil impossible for the time being, especially with the notion that all of the oil profits were to be used to rebuild the government and infrastructure of Iraq.<sup>26</sup>

This further shows how the strategy of Bush and the U.S. preemptively intervening in Iraq and trying to bring democracy to it, a la Cold War politics, brought a sizeable amount of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> David Hastings Dunn, *Myths, Motivations and 'Misunderestimations': The Bush Administration and Iraq*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 280.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

criticism and backlash for its efforts. This attitude was taken out on George W. Bush personally, as many around the world began to consider him a tyrant or war monger for his efforts against the Middle East. Fifty-three percent of those polled in Germany during the time of the Bush administration found that he was more dangerous and threatening than Saddam Hussein, with experts claiming the War in Iraq had less to do with the seizing of weapons of mass destruction and more with the arrogance and machismo of Bush and his outdated U.S. politics.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly Bush making speeches both televised and on the road about the importance of spreading freedom as well as Western and Christian values in the Middle East painted himself as a figurehead for this movement, opening himself up to the criticism and attacks that he endured during his presidency for the United States' actions. It is worth noting, however, that Bush was not alone in his beliefs, nor was he alone responsible or in charge of military action. Both his cabinet and Congress itself wholeheartedly endorsed this aggression from the U.S., with both sides of the political aisle agreeing in the need to disarm and "free" Iraq.<sup>28</sup> Yet with Bush so meticulously merging his image with that of the U.S. and its pseudo holy war and world policing image, the two became one, with many around the globe taking out their frustration on either the United States or Bush on both as a whole.

Perhaps what made the Bush foreign policy approach so controversial and contested was Bush's emphasis on Christian values in his military decisions and actions, leading many to believe that the U.S. was on a type of holy war against the predominantly Muslim Iraq and Middle East. Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, President Bush claimed that this newfound war or "crusade" against terror and terror networks was going to take a long time,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 281.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



sparking immediate concerns and criticisms in his verbiage.<sup>29</sup> Many critics around the world were immediately reminded of the medieval Christian crusades to regain the Holy Lands in the Middle East, with Bush's new campaign echoing a modern retelling of those conflicts, signaling a new war between the Christian Western world and the Eastern, more Muslim world.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this criticism, Bush remained steadfast in his blending of Christian values and norms into his foreign policy attitude and decision making, regularly using religious metaphors, references, and even going so far as to refer to the United States as the blessed, more right country in this fight against evil and terrorism.<sup>31</sup> Bush regularly assured citizens and military members alike that the U.S. had a certain righteousness to its cause, that God would not be neutral in this conflict, and surely stand by the U.S. in its quest to bring freedom and justice to a part of the world so filled with cruelty and violence.<sup>32</sup> Many in Europe began to worry and become angered at Bush's remarks and attitudes, as many felt that the United States was beginning to destroy decades of work at intercultural dialogue and goodwill between the Christian and Muslim parts of the world, what with Bush citing a new war against evil that was worryingly married with the idea of Christianity versus Islam.<sup>33</sup>

By the time the Bush administration was coming to a close, the image of the United States was radically different around the world from where it began at the start of the administration. The U.S. had continued its tradition of preemptively attacking its enemies, as well as aiming to spread liberty and democracy to those who needed it, at least in the eyes of the United States. However, this trend was not as accepted by many in world politics, as many

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<sup>29</sup> Devuyt, *Religion and American...*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

foreign nations felt that the U.S. was continuing its self-serving practices of policing the world where it wasn't needed, forcing norms and values on people that didn't want them, and ignoring the rules and wishes of international organizations in the process.

Additionally, the marrying of Bush's image with that of the United States, along with his continuous emphasis on making this conflict against terrorism a religious one, began to worry those around the globe that the U.S. had become a corrupt oligarchy, more focused on conquering nations that held economic interest for them and replacing their "violent or evil" religion with their "just and free" beliefs. As a result U.S. good will and standing was damaged during the Bush administration, and was one of the platforms the Barack Obama ran on in his bid for the presidency. Instead of focusing on "bringing the war to the bad guys," Obama instead capitalized on the public and international disbelief in the War in Iraq and against terror, citing all the physical and ethical problems the conflict had created over the eight years of the Bush administration.<sup>34</sup> During his administration, Obama would work to repair the image of the United States, while still maintaining a presence on the world stage in combating terror around the globe.

### Obama and Reframing the U.S.'s Image and Influence

In 2012, President Barack Obama touted the accomplishments of his administration in front of a crowd in Reno with the hopes of spurring additional support for his reelection campaign against Mitt Romney. When detailing his administration's achievements, President Obama stated how he kept most of the promises he made prior to being elected, notably ending the Iraq war, reinvigorating U.S. diplomacy and perception, rebuilding alliances and partnerships

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<sup>34</sup> Lindsay, *George W. Bush...*, 765-766.

with the United States and its allies, stabilizing and bringing justice to the Middle East region, and helping to bring a global effort together to fight terror and tyranny across the globe.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, for all his talk of separating himself from the policies and actions of the Bush administration, Obama would prioritize the conflict in the Middle East, even warning al-Qaeda in his inaugural address that “you cannot outlast us” and that they will be defeated despite trying to force the U.S. to choose between “safety and ideals.”<sup>36</sup> Despite his claims that his administration would be different in foreign policy from those before, Obama fell back on the same strategies and approaches that his predecessors employed, namely making democracy the major goal and theme of his policy, with its enforcement being a priority and emphasis internationally.<sup>37</sup> This Cold War era type of thinking has plagued U.S. politics for decades now, with numerous presidents finding it hard to break away, from Reagan and Carter to Clinton and Bush.<sup>38</sup>

However, Obama’s success lies in the fact that he was able to achieve success operationally in the Middle East while at the same time toning down the rhetoric that Bush utilized, helping to maintain a benevolent image for the United States, at least on the surface.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, this emphasis by the Obama administration on spreading and fostering democracy coincided with the Arab Spring in 2011, which seemingly reaffirmed this belief for the U.S., during which time Obama stated that the United States will “welcome all elected, peaceful

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<sup>35</sup> Diane Byrd, Komanduri S. Murty, *Foreign Policy Accomplishments in Obama Era*, (New Orleans, Jean Ait Belkhir, Race, Gender & Class Journal, 2013), 148.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Nicolas Bouchet, *The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

governments-provided they govern with respect for all their people.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, the Obama policy of fostering democracy was reinvigorated, aiming to help promote democratic reform all across the Middle East and the affected areas of the Arab Spring.<sup>41</sup>

Obama’s insistence to spread democracy in the Middle East was not at the cost of conflict or war in the region. In fact, Obama stated that he was not morally opposed to war by itself, but that the war in Iraq launched by George W. Bush was rash and far too ideological in nature.<sup>42</sup> Obama went on to say that he was opposed to armchair or weekend warriors and the like, who preferred to shove their ideological and political agendas down the U.S. public’s throats, not taking into account the cost of life or time a conflict would have.<sup>43</sup> Obama would learn from Bush’s failures internationally, more specifically his approach to treat every international issue or conflict in the Middle East region the same. Obama adopted a case-by-case approach to conflicts or issues as they arose, stating that if “you start applying blanket policies on the complexities of the current world situation...you’re just going to get yourself into trouble.”<sup>44</sup>

Coupling this practical approach to foreign policy with Obama toning back the religious or ideological element of the U.S. intervening in the Middle East, we can see Obama adopted a much more pragmatic yet ruthless approach to his policy. He viewed each military action in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, and would not only utilize military means to achieve his goals and demoralize his opponents, but diplomatic or economic means as well. Utilizing both these soft and hard powers, Obama placed strong economic sanctions on Iran where his diplomacy failed (which some considered controversial and imperialistic), while at the same time being

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Milne, *Pragmatism or what...*, 937.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 938.

praised and revered for finally finding and killing Osama bin Laden, a well-documented and public failure of his predecessor Bush.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of military effectiveness, Obama greatly improved upon the usage and effectiveness of drones from the Bush administration, with the legality and morality of these weapons often being brought into question. While the usage of drones was much more cost effective in terms of money and human life for the United States, many cited their usage as infringing on international law and borders. In response, the Obama administration largely ignored these criticisms, claiming the Authorization to Use Military Force, or AUMF, granted them access, albeit in a loosely interpreted way.<sup>46</sup> This disregard for international doctrine was also utilized by the Bush administration to loosely justify their actions, as they cited the AUMF for the military tribunals and deeds performed at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>47</sup>

Obama was certainly practical, but also ruthless when needed to, as he ramped up the use of drone strikes massively from his predecessor, with thirty-four drone strikes against militants in 2008, fifty-three in 2009, and one hundred and eighteen in 2010, a far cry from Bush's nine between 2004 and 2007.<sup>48</sup> This shows that while Obama was practical in his actions and worked hard to restore democracy and the U.S.'s image abroad, he also knew when to be ruthless and smother out any opposition or threat militarily to the United States. As Obama himself stated, he inherited a world stage that could "blow up any minute in half a dozen ways" and that he had

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 943.

<sup>46</sup> Michael J. Boyle, *The Legal and Ethical Implications of Drone Warfare*, (Philadelphia, La Salle University, 2015), 108.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, Grégoire Patte, *"What is that Buzz?" The Rise of Drone Warfare*, (Singapore, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, 2012), 11.

“some powerful but limited and perhaps dubious tools to keep it from happening,” which he certainly utilized often and effectively, without any second thoughts or hesitation.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of affecting the rest of the Middle East region, most notably U.S. allies in the area as well as abroad elsewhere, Obama and his administration felt that all of the relations with these nations were intertwined and influenced the other. In fact, President Obama was universally lauded for his efforts in both significantly weakening the hold of al Qaeda on the Middle East as well as his restoring of the United States’ image internationally.<sup>50</sup> Yet while his achievements with restoring European relations (with slightly repairing the relations with Russia) or reigniting negotiations with China and North Korea, Obama struggled to fully manage the Muslim world and its political climate as efficiently as he could have, namely with his overreliance on “soft power” and non-military action.<sup>51</sup>

President Obama was criticized for his lack of military intervention in Syria and its conflict with both Hamas and its own government, as many felt that his reliance on diplomatic or economic measures (more “soft power”) was not effective or enough needed to help the situation.<sup>52</sup> In Iran, he was seen as being too soft on their government by merely enacting nuclear sanctions on their nuclear research programs, leading to potential problems with one of the U.S.’s biggest allies in the region as well as globally, Israel.<sup>53</sup>

With Iran’s nuclear research potentially growing and evolving, the physical threat to Israel would grow as well. However, Obama’s interactions with Israel over his administration’s tenure have been less helpful than prior U.S. administrations. Despite promising to pledge \$30

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<sup>49</sup> Milne, *Pragmatism or what...*, 943.

<sup>50</sup> Byrd, *Foreign Policy...*, 154.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 155.

billion in support to Israel and to help their defense against threats, Obama instead butt heads with Israeli leadership.<sup>54</sup> Instead of siding with Israel over territorial issues or against Iran, the U.S. under Obama instead reprimanded Israel, asking for the government to relinquish certain territories gained in the war of 1967 or to avoid military engagement with the ever growing and aggressive Iran.<sup>55</sup> With many believing that Iran would simply ignore these warnings by the U.S. and would simply bide their time until nuclear weapons were ready, U.S. and Israeli relations suffered quite a bit under Obama, despite considerably economic aid to Israel.

Finally, Obama's policy in Asia was a mixed bag of sorts. Economically, the U.S. was heavily indebted and reliant on China and its economy, which led to a strain on both trade and political negotiations.<sup>56</sup> Obama was again criticized for not being tough enough on China, who was perceived to be manipulating its own economy and thereby gaining yet another advantage over the western economies and the United States in particular, with talks between Obama and China's Vice President Xi Jinping seemingly going nowhere.<sup>57</sup>

Sutter believes that Obama's mediocre dealing with China and its economic domination was more to do with the fact that much of Chinese or Asian politics in general were an afterthought or secondary to Obama and his foreign policy, with the main focus shifting later in his presidency from the Middle East to North Korea.<sup>58</sup> Amidst playing catch up to Asia-Pacific politics in the second half of his presidency, Obama had to begin to deal with the growing threat

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 155-156.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>58</sup> Sutter, *The Obama Administration...*, 189.

of North Korea and its rising nuclear program, similarly to Iran and its nuclear research program beginning to take shape.<sup>59</sup>

However, President Obama and his usual tactics of sanctions and unilateral diplomatic action routinely failed against the North Korean government, and typically only served to spur their actions even further, such as instigating multiple long range nuclear missile ballistic tests.<sup>60</sup> When his usual “soft power” tactics failed, Obama instead went to the surrounding powers in the region to help assist, namely China, Japan, and South Korea. Fortunately, China was heavily involved in peace talks between the U.S. and North Korea helping to apply some pressure to achieve peace in the region, although the extent and effectiveness of its involvement is still debated.<sup>61</sup>

When examining the foreign policy actions of Obama during his presidency, a few trends start to appear. If confronted with a nation that held little international sway or hardly posed a serious threat to the United States and its security, Obama seemed to go all in with his military intervention, often utilizing whatever methods were available to him to wipe out the opposition, no matter how ruthless or imperialistic he was accused of being. Yet when faced with more established and sovereign nations, Obama liked to rely on his usage of “soft power” and international organizations to handle the problem. For instance, when dealing with a terrorist cell in the Middle East, Obama had no issue ordering as many drone strikes as needed to eradicate that pocket of terrorism.

However, when dealing with volatile foreign nations that fundamentally disagreed with or opposed the United States and its values, Obama took a much more passive approach in going

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Byrd, *Foreign Policy...*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



after their diplomatic or economic channels first, as if to whittle away their stature. If compared to the strategy and policy of Bush, Obama can be seen as a clear evolution and adaptation of Bush's old policies. Obama adapted much better to the issue of fighting terror in the Middle East while drastically cutting back on the public relations side of the conflict, with the image of the United States slowly being repaired and seen as going through the proper international channels this time around (at least for the most part).

### Conclusion

In this chapter, the foreign policy and actions of both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama have been examined and compared with one another. Under President Bush, U.S. foreign policy was continuing its Cold War era roots, spreading the ideals of democracy and Western freedom to every corner of the globe, backed by proactive and aggressive military action. However, an emphasis on Christian and Western values against Eastern, more Muslim values coupled with unilateral action and a lack of cooperation with other nations left the United States appearing like an imperialistic bully of sorts.

With President Obama, this image was largely repaired, while still continuing to maintain the spread and protection of Western norms and Cold War policies. The act of involving more nations and international organizations with the fight against terror improved the image of the U.S. immensely, and possibly helped to offset the heightened use of drone strikes and an increase in ruthless military action. Additionally, Obama began to slowly acknowledge Asian politics and the rise of China and North Korea, although his reliance on "soft power" usage may have prevented any lasting changes being made. Still, the precedent for the U.S. intervening globally

as it wishes was still set, and the nature of military aggression and presence has only worsened, leading one to wonder how far the U.S. is willing to go.

## **Chapter 2: U.S. Unmanned Superiority and Oppression**

### Introduction

The role of surveillance and ranged combat in warfare has become immensely advanced in the past generation with the rise of drones and other forms of automated weaponry and vehicles. Modern Western militaries, with the U.S. in particular, have the capacity to bomb and strike at enemy combatants over a mile high in the sky with infrared cameras, all with their soldiers and personnel safe and sound away from the battlefield. No expert denies their effectiveness on the battlefield on paper, able to wipe out entire enemy platoons or companies with one or two units, as opposed to placing entire companies of our own soldiers at risk to complete the mission. Yet with the abundance and effectiveness of drones present in decision making today, what are the long term effects of their usage for the U.S. and its image, and have we seen them so far? Since there are fewer and fewer needs for boots on the ground with drones flying in the sky, military doctrine may shift to be more aggressive or brutal in its operations, or legislation and public opinion may support a dehumanized form of warfare.<sup>62</sup>

The goal of this chapter is to determine the exact effects drone usage has had on collateral damage and human casualties, as well as its implications in both international and domestic doctrine and politics. This will be measured by examining the frequency and amount of civilian casualties and collateral damage, the extent to which it violates international laws and norms, and how drones have changed public perception and legislation at home. This will show how policy

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<sup>62</sup> Daniel Byman, *Why Drones Work: The Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice*, (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 2013), 32-34.

and legislation has changed or is changing, whether becoming more ruthless and colonial in nature or just plain sloppy and inconsistent. The current prediction of this chapter is that with the heightened level of drone usage in warfare, the policy or doctrine of the U.S. will become more selfish and single minded in its approach, caring more about taking out its enemies and achieving its mission goals, rather than respecting international laws and borders, as well as a lack of regard for civilian casualties and other forms of collateral damage, thus damaging its image and relationships abroad.

### Literature Review

When researching the topic of drones and their usage/effectiveness on the battlefield, it became abundantly clear that the vast majority of sources found were negative and critical in nature, citing the numerous ways drones can and have violated international law and human rights.<sup>63</sup> In fact, the only sort of overall positive research found was that laying out drones' effectiveness as weapons and the technological capacities of them<sup>64</sup>. Yet when comparing all of these different reports or journal articles, three distinct themes or schools of thought formed surrounding drones. These three schools of thought can be summarized as the following: noting the effectiveness of drones, but criticizing the amount of civilian casualties and lack of empathy associated with their use; pointing out the justification of drone usage as "anticipatory self-defense," which is often used to bypass or circumvent regional or international laws; and pointing out the vagueness of legislative policy, the exploitive nature of drone legislation and policy, as well as problems that could arise in the future from their abuse.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Laleh Khalili, *Fighting Over Drones*, (Tacoma, Middle East Research and Information Project, 2012), 18.

<sup>64</sup> Matt Delmont, *Drone Encounters: Noor Behram, Omer Fast, and Visual Critiques of Drone Warfare*, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 193.

<sup>65</sup> Byman, *Why Drones...*, 32.

For the first approach, it is abundantly clear that nearly all scholars and experts recognize the potential and effectiveness of drone warfare. The chief issue is that often times this effectiveness comes at the price of civilian lives, and a change of attitude by the United States that leaves them unfeeling and uncaring to the situation. Lewis mentions how civilian casualty numbers and collateral damage were much higher in Pakistan and Afghanistan than the U.S. government claimed, which in turn created more animosity and hostility towards the U.S. in terms of resistance and enemy recruitment.<sup>66</sup> Watts and Cilluffo echo this concern, when examining why terror groups were still active and thriving despite constant drone strikes, with resentment to the U.S. playing a factor in constant recruitment.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the threat of civilian casualties and the negative image they convey, there is an argument to be had on how this usage and normality of collateral damage has begun to shift the U.S.'s mentality on the subject, leading to negative character and morality changes. Manjikian points this out, stating how it is worth studying the character of an individual or society that uses these automated weapons, and ways in which this relationship can become toxic or problematic, as well as the relationship between a combatant and their adversary.<sup>68</sup> This concern is also addressed by Walsh and Schulzke, who found that the use of UAVs, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and other automated weapons made U.S. civilians more willing to support warfare and

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<sup>66</sup> Larry Lewis, *Drone Strikes in Pakistan: Reasons to Assess Civilian Casualties*, (Alexandria, CNA Analysis and Solutions, 2014), 1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Clinton Watts, Frank J. Cilluffo, *Drones in Yemen: Is the U.S. on Target?*, (Washington D.C., Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at Auburn University, 2012), 7-8.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Manjikian, *A Typology of Arguments About Drone Ethics*, (Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2017), xi.

military action, yet it is worth mentioning that there were other factors involved and should not have its importance over exaggerated herein.<sup>69</sup>

The second school of thought deals with the idea that drone usage violates regional and international laws and borders, yet justified as a form of “anticipatory self-defense.” Keene notes how the Obama administration bypassed claims and accusations that its drone usage violated International Humanitarian Law by asserting that the drone strikes were self-defensive actions in response to terror threats and acts, with their justifications and proof leaving much ambiguity in its wake.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Eduardo dos Reis Peron states that both the Bush and Obama administrations utilized this language and loophole to engage in surgical and unchecked wars, without their legitimacy being investigated or considered seriously, despite evidence to its illegitimacy and illegal basis.<sup>71</sup> This argument isn’t just debated at home with legal experts, but also a point of contention and controversy with foreign leaders. Schörnig notes how U.S. experts try to hide behind the veil of self-defense and the concept of war with al-Qaeda to justify its actions, as well as allowing increased action and presence in Pakistan, not only violating their borders and laws, but souring relations with the Pakistani government.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, the last school of thought states how vague and open ended existing policy and legislation is surrounding drone usage, how it is often exploited by lawmakers and officials, and the future issues that could arise from further abuse. U.S. citizens are not as educated about

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<sup>69</sup> James Igoe Walsh, Marcus Schulzke, *The Ethics of Drone Strikes: Does Reducing the Cost of Conflict Encourage War?*, (Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2015), xiii.

<sup>70</sup> Shima D. Keene, *Lethal and Legal?: The Ethics of Drone Strikes*, (Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2015), xi-xii.

<sup>71</sup> Alcides Eduardo dos Reis Peron, *The “Surgical” Legitimacy of Drone Strikes? Issues of Sovereignty and Human Rights in the Use of Unmanned Aerial Systems in Pakistan*, (Tampa, University of South Florida Board of Trustees, 2014), 81.

<sup>72</sup> Niklas Schörnig, *Robot Warriors: Why the Western Investment into Military Robots Might Backfire*, (Frankfurt, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2010), 13, 16.

drones as military officials or policy makers, leading to confusion and a potential for future exploitation in that regard. Schneider and Macdonald studied how the average U.S. citizen was unable to correctly identify the exact armaments and capabilities of a drone, whereas the news media merely asks for a yes or no if drones should be used, showcasing a dangerous ignorance among U.S. citizens.<sup>73</sup> If this lack of education and understanding of drones is not addressed or improved in U.S. citizens, further drone usage could be abused without the average citizen knowing the full implications of said actions.

This myth and allure surrounding drones spreads to Congress as well. Schulman points out how many policy makers in Washington view drone usage as a cure all, such as sending in a drone instead of a fighter jet in order to avoid controversy or monetary issues.<sup>74</sup> This carelessness in Congress spreads even further, as Schulman in another study points out how policy makers underestimate the cost, profile, and availability of drones, as often times they are used as a crutch by policy makers, allowing them to be part of situations that were originally off limits or too dangerous to be part of.<sup>75</sup>

Such ignorance and abuse of these drones has a high likelihood to lead to problems down the road for the U.S., which has the attention and worry of many scholars. Drones are politically and militarily attractive options for counterinsurgent operations, yet their abundance and overreliance may hurt their overall effectiveness and lead to uncertainty regarding their usage in

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<sup>73</sup> Jacquelyn Schneider, Julia Macdonald, *U.S. Public Support for Drone Strikes: When Do Americans Prefer Unmanned over Manned Platforms?*, (Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, 2016), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Loren DeJonge Schulman, *Weird Birds: Working Paper on Policymaker Perspectives on Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Their Impact on National Decision-Making*, (Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, 2018), 2.

<sup>75</sup> Loren DeJonge Schulman, *Behind the Magical Thinking: Lessons from Policymaker Relationships with Drones*, (Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, 2018), 1.

the future.<sup>76</sup> Yet a broader and strategic framework needs to be put into place for an effective future for drones, with drones presenting long-term challenges that are not yet fully considered or cared for by U.S. policy makers.<sup>77</sup>

Based on all of these viewpoints and studies converging, a common theme begins to take shape. It is generally agreed upon that drones are an effective tool at counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, and certainly protect the U.S.'s own troops from harm. Yet this superiority in firepower and opposition could have a corrupting effect on the U.S., both physically and mentally. Physically, their usage results in an exceedingly high number of civilian casualties and collateral damage, yet government officials either ignore or try and tweak the numbers to lessen the blow. Mentally, non-radicalized individuals are scared and outraged at the imposing drones overtop of their homes, and thus join terror groups to save their home, creating even more opposition for the U.S. These countries are even further outraged by the U.S.'s disregard for international laws and borders, which the U.S. claims is all well and good since they are merely being proactive in their self-defense, which upon further examination doesn't hold up. This behavior could be made worse by the existing policy on drones being extremely vague and prone to exploitation by the military and Congress alike, who utilize these weapons as the go to solution for their problems, unaware or ignoring the potential long term costs or problems associated with their use, such as monetary strain or negative public image to allies and opponents alike.

#### Civilian Casualties, Problems with Measuring, and Attitude Changes

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<sup>76</sup> James Igoe Walsh, *The Effectiveness of Drone Strikes in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Campaigns*, (Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013), xi.

<sup>77</sup> Joshua Foust, *Understanding the Strategic and Tactical Considerations of Drone Strikes*, (Washington D.C., American Security Project, 2013), 1.

Civilian casualties and collateral damage represent a large consequence of drone usage and criticism in modern warfare. Part of the attractiveness of their use comes with the belief that drones are much more surgical and precise than traditional counterinsurgency methods, resulting in greater operational success and fewer hiccups such as collateral damage along the way. In fact, President Obama and other experts have gone on record to say that while civilian casualties are possible with drone strikes, their likelihood is extremely low and in fact works towards lessening the human cost of these violent operations.<sup>78</sup> After all, high civilian casualties in military operations often results in political or recruitment motivation for insurgencies and terror organizations, capitalizing on innocent civilians getting killed by the counterinsurgents and using it as a rallying cry for more members and troops.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, using these accidents as leverage allows terror networks to appeal to more people outside of their usual recruitment range, able to use elements such as ethnicity, politics, and nationalism as a driving force for anti-counterinsurgency sentiment.<sup>80</sup> Before the how, why, and consequences of drones and its civilian casualties are examined, first an actual example must be analyzed.

In a 2010 study, Niklas Schörnig charted the number of civilian casualties in drone strikes and similar air raids as opposed to total deaths from 2004 through 2010.<sup>81</sup> What he found was that on average, civilian casualties made up anywhere from 23.2% of all casualties in Pakistan to 25.1%, with low and high estimates as the parameters.<sup>82</sup> The civilian casualties, as well as total deaths, rose progressively from 2004 up until 2009, until decreasing a bit in 2010, at

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<sup>78</sup> Walsh, *The Effectiveness...*, 17-18.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>81</sup> Schörnig, *Robot Warriors...*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



the time of said survey.<sup>83</sup> It is unknown why these numbers dropped seemingly out of nowhere in 2010, whether due to government forces reigning in drone usage or just a lack of operations to be had.

However, recent studies and evidence seem to rule out the former possibility, as statistics stated by Reuters show that civilian casualties in Afghanistan have steadily increased from 2009 to 2019, with 2,446 injured and 1,336 dead in Afghanistan through July of 2019.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, U.S. drone strikes show a trend of increasing in frequency compared to traditional operations, as well as the number of people affected by them to this day.

Furthermore, the very nature of how the U.S. performs these drone strikes is aggressive and destructive in its execution. Reports show that the U.S. engages in what is called a “double tap” action with these drones, in which they attack a strike site multiple times in succession.<sup>85</sup> The reasoning for this strategy is that after the initial strike on the site is done, the U.S. waits for reinforcements or rescuers to arrive to the site, then attacks again, in order to maximize the amount of enemy combatants taken out.<sup>86</sup> As to be expected, this is extremely dangerous to civilians who not only live in the surrounding area, but also to those civilians who try to be good Samaritans and help those who are hurt, and then subsequently mistaken as an enemy combatant. As a result, these areas are often abandoned and difficult for humanitarian elements to settle into, as well as making it extremely hard to collect accurate data on civilian casualties by journalists or government experts on either side of the conflict.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ahmad Sultan, Abdul Qadir Sediqi, *U.S. Drone Strike Kills 30 Pine Nut Farm Workers in Afghanistan*, (London, Reuters, 2019).

<sup>85</sup> Delmont, *Drone Encounters...*, 197.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

This concept of areas of civilian casualties being hard to survey and report accurately on is echoed by Foust in his report on drone strikes. Because of this dangerous element, journalists often have to rely on governmental entities and agencies to supply these numbers and statistics.

<sup>88</sup> This is further exasperated in cases such as Pakistan where government officials and forces prevent researchers and journalists from entering these areas, leading to much guesswork about the characteristics of the various strikes. <sup>89</sup> What is even more troubling, is that often times the governments that record these numbers have only themselves to account to, leading to wildly different numbers estimated from the conflict on both sides, as is the case between the U.S. (who often times has an extremely low estimate of casualties) and Pakistan (who claims an extremely high estimate of casualties). <sup>90</sup>

In addition to environmental hazards and governmental interference, as well as tampering, there are a few other elements that make measuring civilian casualties inconsistent. First, it is difficult to identify combatants in warzones in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Due to the combatants being located alongside civilians in an urban environment as well as their lacking of matching uniforms or standard equipment leads to these insurgents seamlessly blending in with the local population, taking human shields, hostages, and otherwise creating civilian casualties of their own. <sup>91</sup>

Second, as touched upon with the ability of the combatants to blend in with civilians, misidentification occurs frequently. Because civilians live in such close proximity to these insurgents and conflict zones, often times civilians are either mistakenly fired upon or

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<sup>88</sup> Foust, *Understanding the Strategic...*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Lewis, *Drone Strikes.*, 17.

categorized as a combatant killed, only being fixed much later after the fact.<sup>92</sup> Finally, much of the information gathered from these strikes and engagements is from aerial surveillance. While this does protect U.S. soldiers and operatives from danger in the field, this removal from the battlefield leads to limitations on its intelligence capabilities, which often leads to either of the two complications listed above.<sup>93</sup>

This failure to distinguish friend from foe in these environments leads into another consequence of drone use, in that their distancing from the battlefield leads to sociological as well as psychological problems. In terms of sociological issues, it creates an idea of civilian disposability.<sup>94</sup> This concept aims to explain why civilian casualties are still so rampant despite experts and policymakers claiming avoiding said incidents are hardwired into the drones' nature. What it states is that global inequality deems some segments of society undesirable, in terms of political, military, or economic conditions.<sup>95</sup> As such, those outside of this global inequality sphere deem these segments of people to be disposable and acceptable losses or collateral damage, operating much more relaxed or sloppily as opposed to if they were operating in a much more socially accepted part of the world.<sup>96</sup> This results in military doctrine deciding to use force even when civilian lives are in the way as it is deemed an easier mission with less risks than in a more desirable environment.<sup>97</sup>

In terms of psychological issues, drones affect both sides of the conflict. With their very presence, drones invite an atmosphere of war and conflict, inciting fear and anger into the local

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>94</sup> Ann Rogers, *Investigating the Relationship Between Drone Warfare and Civilian Casualties in Gaza*, (Tampa, University of South Florida Board of Trustees, 2014), 97.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

population of a region that it is occupying, which could result in more civilians joining ranks with insurgent forces.<sup>98</sup> On the side of the drone operators, research has shown being so far removed from the conflict and only needing to press a simple button to take out multiple hostile forces has led to many of these operators developing a “god like” perspective on the battlefield, as well as distancing themselves from the humanity of the enemy.<sup>99</sup>

When examining all of this literature on aspects about drone usage in terms of civilian casualties and its impact, a few conclusions can be achieved. First, the concept that drones are clean and efficient weapons in terms of collateral damage and civilian casualties is a fallacy, as the numbers of dead steadily increasing in number and frequency over the last two decades. The assertions of government officials and policymakers that these weapons are designed to avoid civilian deaths and are successful in this fact are completely misled at best and outright lies at worst.

Second, measuring these civilian casualties in the first place is an extremely dangerous and difficult undertaking, due to the environment they occur in leaving little evidence behind or from external danger from either insurgent or drone forces lingering in the area. This is further exasperated by the fact that journalists and researchers are then forced to rely on governments and their agencies to relay casualty numbers, resulting in said numbers being skewed for a political purpose. This shows just how politicized drone usage has become, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to gain complete accurate numbers on either side of the conflict. The situation becomes more of an effort to curb how many civilians have been killed, as opposed to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

an effort to stop their deaths altogether, seemingly normalizing this occurrence on both sides of the conflict.

Lastly, this repeated unchecked usage of drones is starting to warp and change mindsets on all sides of the conflict. Because insurgents are so easily able to blend in with civilians and become indistinguishable from them, often times civilians are mistaken for insurgents and killed in the crossfire. This problem is unlikely to be fixed however, as surveillance tools are so far removed by being high in the sky, that it is near impossible to fix without removing drone usage altogether. Additionally, research shows how drone operators are becoming more and more detached from their jobs to the point of the human cost no longer being a factor. This is proven by military doctrine being willing to send drone strikes in an area high with civilians as long as operational success is likely. Drone strike tactics prioritize enemy casualties over civilian safety or regard, as seen by the double tap methodology. However, studies have shown that drone strikes do not actually lessen the amount of terrorist attacks, instead prompting more resistance and recruitment due to outrage over said casualties.<sup>100</sup> The question remains then, why are these weapons utilized so often and touted as safe, humanitarian options, when research and literature points to the opposite for both aspects? Perhaps the answer lies in how drone usage affects and intersects with international laws of countries and the world stage as a whole.

#### Borders, International Authority, and Human Rights

Another sizeable issue with conducting drone strikes on foreign soil for the United States is infringing on foreign nations' sovereignty. In order for the U.S. to survey or attack enemy combatants in other countries, they must have the permission of said country to operate there.

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<sup>100</sup> Walsh, *The Effectiveness...*, 38.

However, the terms of this permission are often suspect and vague. While some nations have expressly given consent to the U.S., some like Pakistan fall into an unclear grey area, refuting the U.S.'s assertion that it received permission from the Pakistani government to operate within its borders.<sup>101</sup> Some assert that this uncertainty stems from the Pakistani government being unwilling to publicly support drone strikes, as the general public would not approve of supporting U.S. drone strikes.<sup>102</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that this is a United States perspective on the matter, and may be subject to bias in terms of U.S. military action and policy.

Part of how the U.S. justifies their usage of drones around the world is a type of self-defense against terror elements at war with them. Indeed in 2014 the New York City Bar Committee on International Law reported that the United States had the right and jurisdiction to attack enemy elements on foreign soil.<sup>103</sup> However, the Committee also stated that the U.S.'s retaliation must be to a proportionate attack, meaning the threat offered by a terror element must be able to commit lasting and serious damage to the U.S., and that the 9/11 attacks no longer substantiate a continued unchecked war of aggression on al-Qaeda and its elements.<sup>104</sup> This means that while the U.S. has been using the post 9/11 war on terror sentiment as a blank check for unchecked drone usage, this era seems to be at an end, with many urging stronger guidelines for drone usage.

The main authorization the U.S. has had in the past for drone and automated warfare fell under the Authorization to Use Military Force, or AUMF.<sup>105</sup> Passed shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 the doctrine permits the president to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against

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<sup>101</sup> Keene, *Lethal and Legal...*, 13.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>105</sup> Michael J. Boyle, *The Legal and Ethical Implications of Drone Warfare*, (Philadelphia, La Salle University, 2015), 108.

nations, terror organizations, or dangerous individuals that engaged or are engaging in terrorist activities against the U.S.<sup>106</sup> Both the Bush and Obama administrations largely interpreted this doctrine in a broad sense, allowing for worldwide operations against terror elements and operatives with little regard for existing legal rights or human rights debates, such as citing the AUMF as legal authority for military tribunals at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, the Obama administration used the AUMF as grounds to pursue successor groups to al-Qaeda even though they did not exist prior to 9/11, as well as it citing the AUMF as grounds for supporting Libyan rebels with air strikes, due to Gaddafi supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.<sup>108</sup> In relation to drone warfare, the U.S. executive branch continues to cite the vague and outdated terminology and powers of the AUMF to justify further intensifying drone strikes all over the world, in places like Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.<sup>109</sup> While Congress routinely criticizes the executive branch for exploiting this outdated legislation, and calls for the bill to be reworked, no substantial change has been achieved as of yet, leading many to wonder how much Congress is serious about reigning in drone usage.

Another loophole that the executive branch exploits with drone and automated warfare is avoiding legal and ethical procedures. While the U.S. government and military claims that automated weaponry can move faster and deploy quicker in a hot zone than any top Special Forces squad could, it is speculated that drone usage helps the U.S. avoid taking any prisoners of war, and consequently being responsible for their fair treatment and well-being.<sup>110</sup> While impossible to prove due to its controversial nature, critics of drone usage have argued that the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Hashim, *"What is that...",* 10.

Obama administration favored using drones for targeted strikes and killings due to said operations largely avoiding taking al-Qaeda and other terrorists as detainees, and subsequently having to worry about holding them with proper humanitarian care.<sup>111</sup> This criticism seems to line up well with the preferred policy of the U.S. government seeking to kill high value targets as opposed to capturing or interrogating them.<sup>112</sup>

Based on the literature so far, the United States has not outright broken international law or doctrine with its drone usage, but it has certainly skirted near illegal territory, and continues to push the limits of what it can get away with in that regard. The U.S. may not blatantly violate the sovereignty of other nations, yet it doesn't seem too worried about seeking their approval either, opting to carry out operations regardless if permission has been granted or not. When asked about their authority and what justifies their aggressive nature in such combat, the U.S. resorts to legislation drafted after 9/11, still using the war on terror sentiment as just cause for its aggression. However, this doctrine is outdated, with the U.S. ignoring the limitations and boundaries it presents in modern day, using the AUMF as a blank slate to justify increasing drone occupations and strikes all over the world.

While these facts aren't expressly illegal in international terms, we can see how the U.S. has adopted a trend of heightened imperialism with its drone capabilities, sidestepping protocol and chains of command in order to ensure their targets are taken out as quickly and efficiently as possible. As it is, this may seem like no big deal to U.S. interests, as its enemies and targets are routinely taken out. However, we can see the beginnings of souring relations with other countries the U.S. interacts with, such as Pakistan. The current ideology of the U.S. ignoring nations' laws

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



and permissions could set a dangerous precedent in which international counterinsurgency cooperation suffers, which could lead to reduced effectiveness overall in the long term. Experts suggest that in order to change or mitigate this outcome, the U.S. should embrace a more transparent policy, being open with the actual data numbers on their strikes and deployments and respecting current legislation, as well as leading international efforts to regulate and clean up drone usage.<sup>113</sup> In order for these changes to take shape however, we must examine public policy and legislation on the home front of the U.S.

### Political Attractiveness and Public Opinion of Drones

Perhaps the biggest advantage of drone usage is the inherent lack of risk associated with them. From a military viewpoint, there's virtually no risk of a "Blackhawk Down" situation in which lives are on the line and could embarrass the U.S.'s capabilities and policies.<sup>114</sup> But even more interesting is their political risk and attractiveness. Due to their lack of operators in the field, drones are viewed as a solution to every problem that arises in traditional combat. For example, U.S. intervention in Libya was only made possible due to the nature of drones being automated and without possibility of casualties, due to the intense air defenses of Libyan forces.

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Due to this increased attractiveness than traditional forces, government officials and policy makers may consider to use drones and other automated weapons much more frequently, ramping up military involvement and intervention around the globe.<sup>116</sup> For a policy maker or official, there is no risk of life on the line for a questionable operation, drones are much lower

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<sup>113</sup> Manjikian, *A Typology...*, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Mike Fowler, *The Strategy of Drone Warfare*, (Tampa, University of South Florida Board of Trustees, 2014), 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

profile than traditional aircraft or reconnaissance vehicles, and much cheaper to replace than other aircraft.<sup>117</sup> Because of these advantages, drone and automated vehicles are much more likely to be approved for missions that would otherwise be refused, making their usage extremely beneficial and sought after by military leaders and policymakers.

These advantages may be blown out of proportion and abused by policymakers, however. Because this technology is relatively new, there are still misconceptions and growing pains to be worked out with their utilization. As Schulman points out, many policymakers under the Obama administration routinely underestimated the cheap cost of these drones as well as their low profile, eventually leading to drone shortages and a change in international perception of their usage.<sup>118</sup> With Washington became increasingly comfortable with drone usage, their doctrine and strategy began to form around it, namely a light-footprint, reconnaissance form of warfare.<sup>119</sup> As a result, the drones were used too frequently and too much, resulting in a sharp decrease in effectiveness with their absence in operations.<sup>120</sup> As one official pointed out, “the policy mythology of ‘drones’ actually degraded their effectiveness and efficiency,” resulting in “senior experts believing their understanding was solid enough to micromanage from afar.”<sup>121</sup>

Moving away from policymakers in the U.S., the average citizen also has their fair share of misconceptions surrounding drones and their capabilities. A study was conducted to see just how much the United States public knew about identifying drones and their capabilities on the battlefield and abroad. Of those surveyed, 54% were unable to correctly identify the profile of a

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid 112-113.

<sup>118</sup> Schulman, *Behind the Magical...*, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 9.

drone, with 66% being unable to determine if a drone was armed or unarmed.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, even 21% mistakenly identified a manned F-16 fighter as a drone, showing how out of touch with military technology the average U.S. citizen is.<sup>123</sup>

Although the average citizen may be ignorant to the exact technological capabilities of drone usage, they are not ignorant to the human cost in their use. In another study, U.S. citizens were surveyed on to what capacity they approve of drone usage. With all but two out of the ten scenarios, U.S. citizens preferred unmanned aircraft over manned aircraft, citing the decrease of risk to United States military personnel as the chief reason.<sup>124</sup> However, in those two scenarios U.S. citizens preferred manned aircraft when it came down to minimizing the amount of civilian casualties.<sup>125</sup> This shows that U.S. citizens are apprised of the inherent civilian casualty risks that are associated with drone usage, and are unwilling to compromise their principles for more military success and activity.

The sentiment that United States citizens are wary of war and civilian deaths is echoed in another report by Schulman. While this study corroborated the sentiment of unmanned aircraft being preferred only when civilian deaths were minimized, it was discovered that this did not correlate with an increased desire to use drones and unmanned platforms in general.<sup>126</sup> In other terms, U.S. citizens do not approve of rise in drones in the sense of increased military action overall, in fact they desire the opposite. The only saving grace for drones in the view of the U.S. public is their ability to protect the lives of U.S. soldiers and military personnel, not as a means to engage in limitless military operations as the government seems to believe in.

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<sup>122</sup> Schneider, Macdonald, *U.S. Public Support...*, 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Schulman, *Weird Birds...*, 5.

This hesitation and caution on the part of the U.S. people is reassuring to see, as many experts have warned that the abundance of drones and distancing from warfare may create a “moral hazard” for U.S. citizens, in which the consequences of war and violence are forgotten and left meaningless.<sup>127</sup> Without the risks of war (i.e. U.S. soldiers dying in combat, destruction of property, boots on the ground being driven back, etc..) U.S. citizens and soldiers alike may see war through a much easier lens, seeing it as a cheaper and more effective solution to problems than in the past.<sup>128</sup> By relaxing their views and morals on war, peaceful diplomacy may suffer and fade from usage, resulting in wars and conflicts occurring more often.<sup>129</sup> This is not only likely, but becoming more and more prevalent, as we can see with politicians and military officials seeing drones increasingly attractive and useful for their goals.<sup>130</sup> While it is merely speculation at this time, some experts infer that if this problem is not addressed soon, politicians could wage private wars or military operations without public approval, due to the covert and speedy nature of drones and automated warfare.<sup>131</sup>

When analyzing the literature above on not only the policymakers in the U.S. on drone usage, but the general public as well, we see an interesting split of opinions. On the side of policymakers, officials appear enamored with their usage and characteristics. Drones represent a highly successful method of achieving operational success overseas, with minimal risk of life on behalf of the U.S. and a cheaper alternative to traditional aircraft or counterinsurgency methods. However, Washington appears heavily focused with their usage of drones, using them whenever

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<sup>127</sup> Walsh, Schulzke, *The Ethics...*, 9.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 10.

they can, resulting in an altered image of drones while in short supply of the machines, which the newly altered U.S. strategy suffering in their absence.

On the side of the public, the average citizen may not be as privy to technological or functional knowledge as Washington, yet they seem more responsible and hesitant in their implementation. The public's approval mainly stems from safety for U.S. soldiers, and not from their operational effectiveness, which is backed up by their desire for the least amount of civilian casualties possible. What is most fascinating though is that with these two viewpoints, the two groups appear to be headed for a collision course in terms of how best to utilize drones. Congress and government officials would be wise to read the mood of the nation and tone down the abundance of drones in military use. Not only will this help public relations and image of the military, but cut down on overreliance and abuse of drone usage in terms of doctrine and strategy.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the various effects of drones in terms of humanitarian, international, and domestic capacities. Civilian casualties unfortunately have become an everyday occurrence with drone usage, and even their documentation and recording is subject to the political whims of a nation. As a result, drone warfare has become a highly controversial and politicized topic, resulting in many nations and populations demonizing the United States and its counterinsurgency efforts. Internationally, the United States and its drone program continually skirts the line of illegal action, hanging onto outdated and vague legislation to justify its actions, which in turn allow them to bypass respecting human rights and laws of war through loopholes. Finally, at home policymakers have fallen in love with drone usage, focused on the upsides and

efficiencies drones bring to the table. Meanwhile, the average U.S. citizen is hesitant of their use and is fearful of the United States turning into a warmongering society that is increasingly comfortable with civilian casualties. These fears are well justified, as even experts warn that these behaviors need changing soon to be avoided. If not, these behaviors and practices could paint the United States as overly aggressive and seeing itself above the law, potentially damaging diplomacy abroad.

### **Chapter 3: U.S. Superiority and the Damaging of Foreign Relations and Cooperation**

#### Introduction

When examining U.S. foreign policy over the past few decades, a trend has begun to emerge. U.S. politics and decision making have come to the point of adopting a stance of superiority and double standards, electing to lecture other nations or organizations on how to conduct themselves, while simultaneously ignoring these rules when they don't suit U.S. needs or desires. Most notably, United States politics have recently seen a departure from the creation or adherence to international organizations and agreements on matters of global security, nuclear armament, or climate change and preservation.

There are many arguments on how best to explain this behavior, or even justify it. One could argue that this departure is more partisan in nature, with a president of a Democratic nature being less inclined to detach from international politics than a Republican president. Another could say that the world is a different place, and that these treaties or agreements are outdated and unfair to the United States in a modern setting, with nations that oppose U.S. interests blatantly disregarding said agreement in the process. To truly understand this recent occurrence, and to determine if the fault lies with the various agreements or the United States, three key

agreements will be analyzed. U.S. involvement or criticism will be analyzed in its relationship with Russia, China, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (or New START), its relationship with Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (or Iran Nuclear Deal), and its relationship with Western Europe and the Paris Agreement (or Paris Climate Accords).

By analyzing the United States' role in these key agreements, criticisms and flaws of the agreements will be looked at (both U.S. and foreign critiques), the level of real interaction or contribution on the U.S.'s part in these treaties will be examined, and finally international U.S. efforts and relationships will be analyzed, with both allies and adversaries alike. Through this examination, it will be shown that U.S. involvement in international affairs and relations between the nations affected has worsened dramatically, with the United States' desire to police the other nations of a given treaty damaging U.S. relations with both allies and enemies alike. As a result, the international interactions between the affected nations of these policies has led to a hostile environment of mistrust and accusatory behavior, with the actual enforcement or cooperation in said agreement a moot point after the fact.

#### Russia, China, and the New START

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (or New START) was designed to help keep the arms race in check between the United States and Russia, while trying to avoid the type of escalation and paranoia that arose during the Cold War. In addition to limiting the number of active nuclear warheads that the two nations could have at any one time, the New START

allowed for increased transparency between the U.S. and Russia, leading to some form of stability and assurance to be had for the world stage.<sup>132</sup>

By allowing for a more predictable and stable state of nuclear armament between the two nations, the United States and Russia could focus on other parts of their military and diplomatic efforts, without the need for constant surveillance on the other due to a newly formed third party to investigate and monitor both nations' nuclear capabilities and endeavors.<sup>133</sup> While Russia held a sizeable advantage over the U.S. in regards to nonstrategic nuclear weaponry, the treaty allowed the United States to be in a much better position to negotiate on nuclear security matters, as well as overall nuclear proliferation and the attaining of nuclear materials and matter.<sup>134</sup>

On paper, this agreement seems quite reasonable, and would be well received by all parties. However, in recent years, the United States has become disillusioned with the treaty, and often has many criticisms and critiques on the agreement. For example, U.S. officials often claim that the treaty is outdated, especially when it comes to technology and the longer-range strategic weaponry that Russia currently has or is developing at the moment.<sup>135</sup> President Trump and the White House at the time also noted how they would like to renegotiate the deal to try and reduce the number of nuclear devices overall, rather than just limit the future creation of said devices.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, the White House also pushed for a renegotiation or restructuring of the deal to

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<sup>132</sup> Mary Kaszynski, Daniel Painter, *American Security Enhanced: The Benefits of the New START Treaty*, (Washington D.C., American Security Project, 2012), 1-2.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Kingston Reif, *Bolton Renews New START Criticism*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2019), 28-29.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 29.



include China in these talks as well, as its nuclear arsenal has grown substantially since the drafting and adoption of the treaty back in 2011.<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps the most worrying factor surrounding this treaty controversy is that talks between the U.S. and Russia have hit a low in recent years, with diplomatic talks either non-existent or short and amounting to little of substance in the negotiation.<sup>138</sup> Klotz notes that even during the Cold War, talks between the two nations were still regular and diplomatic, often resulting in meaningful negotiations and policy being achieved.<sup>139</sup> Additionally, these frequent talks and diplomacy laid the groundwork for future relations to be based on, which unfortunately is being squandered and ignored at the moment between the two nations.<sup>140</sup> With talks over the treaty breaking down and both sides losing their touch diplomatically, the relationship between the U.S. and Russia is certainly in doubt.

This recent attitude by the U.S. has left somewhat of a divide not just between the U.S. and its allies, but also between the politicians of the United States itself. For those in Congress, the treaty has become something of a political debate, with many going back and forth on the merits of extending or remaining in the treaty. Representatives in Congress often remark how the attitude of Russia and the continued breakdown of talks and diplomacy is enough reason to back out and approach new agreement talks.<sup>141</sup> These politicians often state that Russia also has

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Frank Klotz, *Extending New START is in America's National Security Interest*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2019), 11.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Kingston Reif, Shervin Taheran, *Trump Arms Control Plans Draw Criticism*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Today, 2019), 26.

disdain for the treaty and would like it gone, as they have created false narratives about the U.S. not complying with the rules of said agreement, and are perhaps looking for a way out.<sup>142</sup>

Additionally, politicians are clamoring and demanding that China be roped into these talks as well to curb their military expansion, alongside their continued economic growth on the international stage as well.<sup>143</sup> However, this has begun to sour talks between the U.S. and China, with representatives from China flat out refusing to be included in this deal, claiming that its nuclear arsenal is much smaller than that of Russia, and especially that of the U.S.'s.<sup>144</sup> As such, these differing opinions on how best to improve or replace these agreements has led to disagreements and soured relations not just between fellow congressional officials, but between the U.S. and foreign entities as well, especially with the introduction of China in said talks.

With China refusing to enter nuclear talks within the New START Treaty or any other talks for that matter, it places the U.S. in a difficult position. When the New START was originally drafted, President Obama and the U.S. foreign policy approach was heavily reliant on the usage of soft power and subtle persuasion to try and get other nations to see things the U.S.'s way. As such, short after the ratification of the New START, President Obama encouraged China to engage in a dialogue on its nuclear aspirations, strategies, and capabilities, in order to sustain a healthy level of armament control.<sup>145</sup> Similarly with what happened with this approach on Russia and its other supplies of nonstrategic weapons, these talks never occurred, and the approach of U.S. soft power diplomacy created future issues for the nation to deal with.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Frank G. Klotz, *The Military Case for Extending the New START Agreement*, (Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2020), 17.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 17.

Since then China has ramped up its production and diversification of nuclear based weapons, opting to maintain said weaponry in a small but tactical and survivable manner.<sup>147</sup> At the same time, however, China has improved its ground as well as submarine based nuclear capabilities, such as improved nuclear capable ballistic missiles.<sup>148</sup> This, coupled with China's lack of transparency and rampant secrecy regarding the exact size and specifics of its nuclear programs, makes the United States' approach to this issue quite complicated, especially considering the worsened relations of late with economic trade issues and trying to force China into New START talks.<sup>149</sup> The United States so far has tried repeatedly to invite China to talks on the matter, yet is always refused and reprimanded instead. China often uses the argument that Russia and the U.S. should instead downsize their existing armament to come down to its levels in order to qualify for negotiations.<sup>150</sup>

The U.S. is often angered by the fact that they appear to be the only ones adhering by the treaty. Klotz indicates that Russia has a spotty track record at best with adhering to international doctrine, and that no real authority has seriously investigated or confronted Russia about its adherence to the New START.<sup>151</sup> With relations between these three nations souring every time the issue is brought up, it appears that the U.S. often has the choice of simply shutting up and listening to the rules, or leave altogether but risk instability on the global stage.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway for this issue, however, is the fact that President Biden did in fact renew the extension on this treaty through 2026. Many experts agree that this was the smart move, not just for diplomacy but for the U.S. itself. When arms control is dealt with in a

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 18.

proper manner, this allows for the U.S. to improve its economic or security prospects in other areas of focus, while simultaneously making it harder for its greatest adversaries to strike at the United States.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, the notion of globally reducing the amount of nuclear weapons and stockpiles is often an attractive one, and works to help improve public image and cooperation for all parties included.<sup>153</sup>

On a more practical note, nearly all military leaders and experts in the U.S. agreed on renewing the New START. Besides the obvious notions of using any tools available to increase transparency on Russia and its arms capabilities, military experts noted how if the U.S. were to withdraw completely from this treaty, relations with NATO and allies could suffer considerably, risking the image of the U.S. being hypocritical in its stance against nuclear weapons.<sup>154</sup> This move could worsen the global arms race not only between the United States, Russia, or China, but across a global scale as well. While the U.S. may take issue with many of the provisions or outdated elements of the New START, as well as the lack of cooperation or honesty from Russia or China regarding matters of nuclear armament, it is still the best possible solution at this time. While the U.S. definitely does not approve of its current state, it is more of a question of placating each side to avoid outright conflict, while all parties quietly mull over the best possible way to get ahead on the other.

#### Iran and the Iran Nuclear Deal

In a similar case of nations taking issue with joint agreements, the United States and Iran have been at odds over the specifics of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, more commonly

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Countryman, *Russia, China, Arms Control, And the Value of New START*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Today, 2019), 15.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Jim Golby, *Rearming Arms Control Should Start with New START Extension*, (Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020), 14-15.

referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal. Under this deal, Iran would drastically reduce its stockpile of nuclear materials, and be subject to investigation by the newly created International Atomic Energy Agency (or IAEA) at any given time to verify these guidelines.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, Iran would be able to still research nuclear technologies with certain isotopes and nuclear materials, with newer tech and materials being allowed after a period of eight to ten years.<sup>156</sup> For a period of fifteen years, Iran would be unable to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, use heavy-water reactors, accumulate heavy water itself, or go through the Joint Commission to approve construction of certain hot cells or shielded glove boxes.<sup>157</sup> In exchange for these new guidelines and restrictions (as well as agreeing to reform and reign in its military forces and actions), Iran would be free of economic or nuclear sanctions by both the U.N. and the United States.<sup>158</sup>

Given the complicated and difficult past between the U.S. and Iran, finding a way to put an end to these sanctions was hopefully an end to hostilities between the two, in the eyes of the international community anyway. However, as with its issues with Russian or Chinese compliance, the United States did not seem convinced that Iran would follow the policies, and still took issue with other aspects of the agreement it helped create.

Many opponents of the deal theorized that it did very little to actual halt nuclear progress and research in Iran, with critics like Mitch McConnell saying that Iran would be “empowered as a nuclear threshold state armed with billions in sanctions relief.”<sup>159</sup> Patman argued that the previous sanctions before the deal were not hurting Iran in the nuclear department, and that this

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<sup>155</sup> Kelsey Davenport, *Congress Considers Iran Deal*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2015), 28.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Patman, Laura Southgate, *The Upsides and Downsides of the Iranian Nuclear Deal*, (Wellington, New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 4.

move would only serve to help aid Iran in the shadows.<sup>160</sup> Due to this fact, many in the U.S. are concerned as to the state of Iran's nuclear capabilities when the deal expires, with this agreement postponing the inevitable confrontation between Iran and the West.<sup>161</sup>

Additionally, the extra sanctions relief was feared to help play into Iranian efforts in the Middle East region, with critics worrying that the money would fund Iran-backed groups like Hezbollah or fostering other terror groups, with the U.N. and U.S. basically funding terrorism in the region they are combating it.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, the primary criticism was the fact that the United States should have pushed for a better deal, yet was pressured to accept this deal out of fears of antagonizing Iran any further, especially given the nuclear context.<sup>163</sup>

Perhaps the biggest issue the U.S. takes with the Iran Nuclear Deal is Iran's attitude and aggressive stance towards the guidelines laid out in the agreement. After the IAEA issued guidelines and protocols of transparency and suspending all uranium enriching activities in 2015, Iran refused to meet those requirements and continued their operations.<sup>164</sup> As a result, the international community as well as the United States placed additional sanctions on Iran in an effort to discourage this type of behavior.<sup>165</sup> However, Iran rebutted that it was a double standard by those in the international community, that nations like China, Russia, and the U.S. all had much larger nuclear operations and research ongoing at the time, claiming that the U.S. and its allies had a "neocolonial nuclear repression" against nations like Iran.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>164</sup> George Perkovich, *Looking Back: Compliance Versus Bargaining: An Implication of the Iran Nuclear Deal*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2016), 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

Iran also noted that it felt it had no choice but to continue its operations against guidelines in order to compensate for sabotage of said activities by Israel and the United States, further making the issue of Iranian compliance in the Deal an issue for the U.S. and its allies.<sup>167</sup> Perkovich claimed that while the agreement itself is well thought out, Iran has always had an issue with compliance on international matters and reprimands, and there is little the international community or NATO can do to stop them as they lack either an official physical force or the will to force the issue.<sup>168</sup> As such, the U.N. opts for more of a laid back, slap on the wrist approach, declining to use any sort of punishment on Iran and simply hope for them to change their ways. As one might expect, this did not sit well with the United States.

Amidst tensions in the U.S. under the new Trump administration, there were talks that perhaps the U.S.'s time in the Iran Nuclear Deal should be at an end, due to the United States being tired of constantly playing by the rules while Iran was able to avoid them without repercussion. Indeed, President Trump went on record saying that the Iran Nuclear Deal was “one of the worst deals ever negotiated,” with many in Congress debating to stay in the pact.<sup>169</sup>

Following this quote, the Trump Administration began to consider additional sanctions and economic actions against Iran in order to dissuade them from further wrongdoings in the eyes of the Deal, with worsened relations between the two nations.<sup>170</sup> Further worsening relations was the report that the White House branded Iran's security and military organization, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (or IRGC), as a terrorist organization due to its activities

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>169</sup> Kelsey Davenport, *Trump Faces Risks with Iran Sanctions*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2017), 30.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

with supporting terrorism acts, all while avoiding sanctions or investigations by the U.N. or the international community.<sup>171</sup>

Many in the international community criticized this line of thinking by the U.S., claiming that sanctions or branding Iranian government entities as terror groups would have major political and economic implications for Iran, which would drastically complicate U.S. efforts in the Middle East as well as the broader topic of nuclear disarmament.<sup>172</sup> Under this sanction of the IRGC, any entity or body that comes into contact or interacts with the IRGC, which accounts for a vast portion of the Iranian economy, could be subject to U.S. sanctions, which could cripple said economy.<sup>173</sup> As well as damaging and destabilizing the surrounding region such as trade with Iraq or Russia, Iran considered these notions as aggressive and demeaning, and continued its antagonistic behavior towards the U.S.<sup>174</sup>

One of the last grievances came when Iran continued testing of nuclear materials, much to the dismay of the U.S. and U.N.<sup>175</sup> While not expressly forbidden in the Iran Nuclear Deal, this action was dangerously close to other forms of testing that were banned, and Iran's continued disregard for the rules did not sit well with the White House.<sup>176</sup> Finally in 2018, the U.S. decided to withdraw from the deal and resume harsh sanctions and a firm stance against Iran.<sup>177</sup>

Naturally, Iran did not take too kindly to the U.S. backing out of the deal and resuming, in its eyes, unjust economic sanctions. In 2019, Iran began moving closer and closer to its limits

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 30-31.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Third Way, *Country Brief: Iran* (Washington D.C., Third Way, 2019), 2.



on their nuclear programs, even going so far as threatening to break these caps if further sanctions were placed.<sup>178</sup> In May 2019, following the U.S.’s decision, Iran stated that it would no longer follow the limits on its stockpiles on low-enriched uranium or heavy water, stockpiling 174 kilograms of enriched uranium, up from a February IAEA report of 168.<sup>179</sup> This stockpile is less than 202 kilograms short of the limits set out by the deal, and many investigative reports by the IAEA noted that if its activities continued, Iran would be breaching the limits of the deal by that June.<sup>180</sup>

The United States quickly added that Iran’s actions have put them in a “clear violation of the deal” and are further antagonizing the West (despite the nature of the deal in doubt due to the U.S.), while other nations still perceived Iran to be in more of a grey area.<sup>181</sup> Further complicating this divide between the U.S. and Iran was a report by Russian investigators claiming that there were no violations found of Iran’s nuclear programs and would investigate with other nations still involved in the Deal, except of course the United States.<sup>182</sup>

With relations between the United States and Iran rapidly deteriorating and the agreement in place beginning to fall apart, the EU and ensuing organizational bodies desperately tried to hold things together. In an effort to help repair the damage done to Iran by U.S. sanctions, the EU established a trade mechanism in order to facilitate transactions and commerce with Iran.<sup>183</sup> Iranian leadership was quick to point out that the economic sanctions on its nation made exporting or trading oil much more difficult, with economic progress in that area in “dire straits.”

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<sup>178</sup> Kelsey Davenport, *Iran Moves Toward Breaching Nuclear Limits*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2019), 24.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>183</sup> Kelsey Davenport, *EU Trade Tool Seeks to Save Iran Nuclear Deal*, (Washington D.C., Arms Control Association, 2019), 33.

<sup>184</sup> However, this move by the U.N. to intervene in this deal was purely on an economical level. Officials were quick to point out that they were strictly acting in a humanitarian sense, and had no plans to either counter U.S. sanctions or interfere in U.S. affairs against Iran. <sup>185</sup>

After all the threats and anger at each other has settled a bit, it has become clear that the United States and its actions concerning Iran and the Iran Nuclear Deal have led to destabilization and deterioration between the two nations. In an exercise used to predict U.S.-Iran relations in the upcoming years, given recent events and political attitudes, experts came up with some interesting predictions. While neither side outright wants conflict or confrontation of any kind, the worsened relations and communications between the two nations makes any misinterpretation of action a potentially dangerous one. <sup>186</sup> Given the vindictive, back and forth foreign policy relationship unfolding between the two nations, this behavior if continued could lead into a vicious cycle that causes relations and communication between the two nations to break down completely. <sup>187</sup>

This destabilization affects not just the U.S. or Iran, but Israel and Saudi Arabia, who have gone on record multiple times to voice their uneasiness and issues with the feud between the two nations. If either of these two nations were to conduct a unilateral action or attack on either nation, it could erupt in a massive conflict with wide reaching consequences. <sup>188</sup> With the United States and Iran refusing to back down and cease their antagonistic behavior toward each

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>186</sup> Elisa Catalano Ewers, Ilan Goldenberg, Nicholas Heras, Kaleigh Thomas, *Escalation or Negotiation?: Conclusions of a Tabletop Exercise on the Future of U.S.-Iran Relations*, (Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, 2019), 1.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

other, it would now fall on the EU, NATO, or Russia to act as negotiator or peacekeeper between the two.<sup>189</sup>

Ultimately, the actions and policies of the U.S. towards Iran have led to a worse political state for the two nations than in years past. According to security reports and briefs, this newly nuclear armed and antagonized Iran is a grave threat to the U.S. and its allies, with more of a desire to lash out than before the United States' aggressive stance towards Iran or its departure from the Iran Nuclear Deal.<sup>190</sup> Coupling Iran's countering-aggressive behavior, its disregard for policies or guidelines set out by the Iran Nuclear Deal (albeit with the U.S. first walking away from), their fostering and support of terror groups or activities, and finally their research and development of nuclear ballistic missiles, Iran has quickly become a grave national security threat to U.S. interests.<sup>191</sup>

Many experts claimed that the U.S.'s firm aggression and stance to criticize and hold Iran accountable has only worsened the Iranian relationship, with Iranian leaders criticizing the U.S.'s superiority complex and double standards. While each arguments have their merits and evidence to support, if one draws a parallel between the relationship and legislative negotiations between the U.S. and Iran, and the U.S., Russia, and China and the idea of nuclear disarmament, this attitude of the U.S. being the end all be all authority in the world seems to often backfire in recent years. This destabilization is certainly dangerous, but what about when the U.S. applies this behavior to nations who are much friendlier to them, who call themselves allies?

### The U.S., Paris Accords, and European Ramifications

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Third Way, *2020 Country Brief: Iran*, (Washington D.C., Third Way, 2020), 1.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

On the surface, the Paris Agreement seems like a no brainer for modern nations and their advanced methods of operation. Within the agreement, it is laid out that said nations included in the agreement all agree to be monitored while reducing their carbon emissions and ultimately have a greener footprint on the world. Additionally, these modern and economically well off nations would donate money and resources to still developing countries in order to help foster better environmental practices as they ramp up their industry. However, as we see in the following section, as the agreement was implemented and put into practice, it did not run as smoothly as intended, with the United States taking offense and issue with its finer points.

In 2017, President Trump announced that the United States would depart from the agreement, citing unfair standards and judgments being given to the U.S. as opposed to others in the agreement.<sup>192</sup> Trump stated that he, and by extension the United States, felt the economic burdens of the agreement were drastically unfair and “draconian” to U.S. economic interests, with the United States paying a large bulk of the funds allocated to the agreement.<sup>193</sup> Additionally, according to Trump, the restrictions and guidelines for greener emissions and operations was projected to cost the U.S. 2.7 million lost jobs by 20205, with 440,000 fewer manufacturing jobs as well.<sup>194</sup>

What was perhaps the biggest factor for the U.S. was that it was one of the nations being punished the most for greenhouse emissions, while other nations like China kept increasing emissions and pollution without any investigation or repercussions in the agreement.<sup>195</sup> With nations like China and India being allowed to build coal plants in their nation, while the U.S. is

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<sup>192</sup> The American Journal of International Law, *United States Announces Plans to Withdraw from Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1037.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

forbidden to do so (while simultaneously discovering a sizeable amount of clean coal in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, etc.), the perceived hypocrisy and conflict with China was too much for U.S. interests, and the U.S. subsequently backed out of the agreement.<sup>196</sup>

Regardless if one agrees with the United States' decision to leave the agreement or not, it seems this is one of the few times presented thus far that the U.S. is not wrong about China and their emissions under the agreement. In a study tracking the national carbon emissions from the Paris agreement countries from 1970 through 2014, the data shows that China has a sizeable amount of carbon emissions in recent years than the other nations specified.<sup>197</sup> China was approaching upwards of 12,000,000 kilotons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while the U.S. and other EU nations were hovering somewhere between 3,000,000 and 6,000,000 kilotons.<sup>198</sup> While India's levels were under this level, it still should be noted that their levels were trending upwards to rival and perhaps exceed those of the U.S. and other EU countries.<sup>199</sup>

It should be worth noting, however, that China led the other nations in investments in renewable energy and research, with \$83.3 billion (U.S. dollars) to Europe's \$57.5 billion and the U.S.'s \$35.8 billion.<sup>200</sup> One could argue China's industry is too sizeable to reign in currently, and their research into greener emissions and methods is still developing to a usable state. However, it is clear that they are the biggest offender of pollution under the agreement, yet received nowhere near the level of repercussions that the U.S. did, seemingly validating the U.S.'s criticisms of the agreement while also driving yet another wedge between all nations involved.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Anthony H. F. Li, *Hopes of Limiting Global Warming? China and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, (Hong Kong, French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, 2016), 50.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 52.

The United States was not the only entity to criticize the hypocrisy of the Paris Agreement or its failing guidelines laid out in its agreement. Many grassroots and Indigenous groups from both the U.S. and Canada joined together to express their displeasure at the agreement's guidelines.<sup>201</sup> The groups claimed that the agreement was a “dangerous distraction that threatened us all” and had far too many oversights to achieve real climate change or progress.<sup>202</sup> For example, the agreement and its various protocols never mention anything about curbing extractive energy nor does it set adequate climate change goals in order to help heal the planet and avoid catastrophic events.<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, the agreement is more placating towards nations than anything, with every action being voluntary and giving nations the option to continue dangerous emissions and activities if they purchase offsets for their behaviors, like a get-out-of-jail-free card.<sup>204</sup> Essentially, this behavior allows nations to pollute as much as they want and buy their way through the pact without actually helping the agreement whatsoever.<sup>205</sup> Finally, the agreement fails to recognize complaints and objections from various Indigenous Peoples and groups from all over the globe who take issue with this agreement, claiming that the policies are ignoring their research and progress over the years in favor of good publicity and self-assurance.<sup>206</sup>

Regardless of whether the Paris Agreement was doomed from the start or the U.S. and other critics were overly harsh, the United States' withdrawal from the deal had a few wide spreading consequences to it, and to its relationships with European nations. For starters, the U.S. leaving the agreement has set a precedent for other nations to follow suit, and could

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<sup>201</sup> Jaron Browne, Tom Goldtooth, *Paris Agreement is “Dangerous Distraction”*, (Oakland, Reimagine!, 2016), 92.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 92-93.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 93.

devastate climate efforts in the long run.<sup>207</sup> One analysis predicted that if other nations were to follow the U.S.'s example and disregarded adhering to climate guidelines for eight years, the world would double its cumulative CO2 emissions, making a decrease in global temperatures impossible.<sup>208</sup>

But perhaps the most damaging effect of the United States' withdrawal from the agreement was the split it created not only within the U.S., but with its allies as well. Many companies and corporations from the U.S. (ranging from Google, Apple, Facebook, Disney, Walmart, PepsiCo, Tesla, Microsoft, Chevron, etc.) did not agree with this move, and formed a coalition of their own to help climate change, known as the "We Are Still In (or WASI)." <sup>209</sup> The scientific community expressed its dismay at President Trump's decision, if not outright appalled, which did not help approval ratings for the U.S.'s image both foreign and domestic. <sup>210</sup> Rhodes argued that the United States' presence in the agreement would have no negative effect on U.S. interests, as all legal and financial obligations aren't directly tied to emissions as many believe. <sup>211</sup> The main takeaway to these analysts, however, was that the U.S. withdrawing from the agreement could "make the USA into a climate pariah" and could allow for China and other parts of the EU to "take control of the climate regime and significantly boost their international reputations and soft power." <sup>212</sup>

It should be noted that prior to the U.S. pulling out of the agreement, clean energy research and industry was well on its way to prominence, with the United States relying more on

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<sup>207</sup> Christopher J. Rhodes, *US Withdrawal from the COP21 Paris Climate Change Agreement, and its Possible Implications*, (London, Sage Publications, Ltd., 2017), 414.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 413.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

wind and solar energy as opposed to coal, as well as cutting their greenhouse gas emissions down twelve per cent prior to 2016.<sup>213</sup> Now, with the coal industry recently revitalized thanks to President Trump's efforts both during and after his campaign, these emissions and focus on green energy are almost certainly in doubt.

However, just as Trump worked to undo the policies and actions of the Obama Administration, President Biden looks to be undoing the effects of the Trump Administration, which makes any real progress or firm stance on the Paris Agreement tough for U.S. citizens to discern, not to mention those abroad. With an agreement that was viewed as paramount to our future as a planet and global society, the U.S. backing out of it has the potential to not only weaken relations with EU countries (who see the United States as arrogant and refusing to cooperate with others) but could weaken our influence in international matters while simultaneously giving nations who are part of the agreement more influence such as China, who the United States had an issue with being in the agreement in the first place.

### In Summation

When looking at U.S. involvement in all three of these international agreements, it becomes clear that the United States has an image of itself being a higher authority and judge of these mandates, and feels that it can dictate how best to enforce, criticize, join, or leave the bodies at will. Whether dealing with existing nuclear stockpiles and disarmament (Russia, China, and the New START), ongoing nuclear research (Iran and the Iran Nuclear Deal), or climate change policies and enforcement (EU, China, and the Paris Climate Agreement), the U.S. examines each agreement and weighs the pros and cons of that body of policy in a very selfish

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<sup>213</sup> Joshua Busby, Nigel Purvis, *Climate Leadership in Uncertain Times*, (Washington D.C., Atlantic Council, 2018), 5.



light. It seems as if the United States is quick to point out when other nations are trying to bend the rules or avoid penalties and tries to create a big fuss over the issue, yet acts surprised when there are political ramifications.

The United States has gotten so used to its use and reliance on soft power that it assumes that other nations or organizations will see it from their perspective and respect their “correct choice” on the matter. What follows are worsened relations between allies and antagonists alike, with relations between Russia, China, Iran, and the EU in a much worse place now than years ago. Despite the action to stay or withdraw from these different agreements or treaties, the U.S.’s attitude of supremacy and authority towards other nations or international organizations has left the U.S.’s image in an ill received light, with future negotiations or diplomatic endeavors between these affected nations in a dubious position.

### **Conclusion and Ways to Improve**

#### **Summation**

The effects of the U.S.’s image and attitude towards the rest of the world have been picked apart and critiqued, in order to determine if a stance of U.S. exceptionalism mixed with old Cold War era attitudes have worsened the United States’ image and relationships internationally. In examining U.S. foreign policy across the presidential administrations of Bush and Obama, this belief of U.S. exceptionalism and imperialism was reinforced in the Cold War when the nation felt it was the last bastion of hope and Western ideals against the USSR and communist values. This ideology carried its way into modern political events with the United States, with the War on Terror painting the U.S. in a very poor light, both from its enemies and other nations that originally supported them. This image was briefly repaired and retooled to be

more of a reliance on soft power, but the belief of the U.S. policing the world and appointing itself the defender of freedom and Western values remained, with modern U.S. attitude a mix of that strategic military aggression and on soft power influence.

For the United States' presence overseas with unmanned aircraft and drones, this strategy has led to countless civilian casualties and damages being done, with the United States rarely taking responsibility for said tactic. Not only has this approach caused physical damages and loss of life, but it has led to the image of the U.S. being presented as something of an overbearing, imperialistic presence overseas. The United States routinely ignores or finds loopholes in the existing legislation surrounding drone usage, which allows them to continue their crusade of policing the world and enforcing its values wherever and whenever it pleases.

Finally, when looking at U.S. involvement and cooperation with international agreements and organizations, it is shown that in recent years the United States continues its attitude of exceptionalism and wanting others to play by the rules, never mind how strictly they follow the guidelines. When these other nations do not, however, the U.S. reacts very aggressively, willing to chuck diplomacy out the window and intimidate the other nation into submission. While this overt application of soft power may have worked in years past, in recent times it has allowed for relations and communications between the U.S. and other nations to deteriorate rapidly, with the notion of peaceful interaction between nations in jeopardy. When the U.S. comes face to face with a nation that either doesn't respect the United States' stance or isn't intimidated, the U.S. doesn't know how best to respond. This often results in creating a new enemy for the U.S. while simultaneously alienating or outraging its allies domestically and abroad.

When combining these key takeaways from all three chapters, it is a worrying conclusion that forms. No more are the days of the Cold War when the U.S. was this towering superpower whose authority was meant to be just and absolute. Many nations have closed the gap in their power and influence, and don't appreciate being babysat or dictated by U.S. interests. It seems that the U.S. is moving towards a trend of not caring about diplomacy or cooperation with other nations, and instead wants to just rely on its sizeable and advanced military capabilities. If other nations decide to meet this belief of being the biggest around, conflict could brew in the near future.

The problem with this approach, however, is that the U.S. may be overestimating its chances in open conflict with other nations, or the notion that no other nation is willing to go toe to toe with them. In order to repair relations with key nations or those that are on the verge of becoming problematic in any sense (such as Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, etc.), the United States should revert back to a sense of subtle soft power and negotiation. This would have the U.S. move away from the stance that it is the ultimate power and authority on the planet, either militarily or idealistically. Even if the United States' military might could back up this claim, this attitude is driving away allies and enemies alike, which could complicate matters of negotiation or diplomacy in the coming generations.

This behavior of aggression and U.S. exceptionalism was last touted under President Trump, who tried to bring U.S. foreign policy back to the attitude of Bush's enforced idealism. By trying to exude that overwhelming military might and presence internationally, many relationships with the United States suffered internationally. These repercussions have become evident in places such as the agreements examined in chapter three. Under President Biden, the United States seems to be moving back towards the attitude under President Obama, with less of

an overt military presence and a more nuanced approach to persuasion or influence. With Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and other attitudes reflecting this pulling back U.S. influence, it seems that the United States is on a better trajectory in regards to its exceptionalist thinking and behavior. Only time will tell if this behavior will continue, or if it will be enough to repair the damage already done to U.S. diplomacy.

### Limits of Research

While this thesis has been researched extensively and to the best of ability, there are some drawbacks inherent within. For example, President Trump's presidency and his policies have been omitted from the first chapter. Many of the policies and attitudes under Trump and his administration have either been reversed or overruled under President Biden. As seen earlier with the Paris Agreement, the "U.S. first" mindset under Trump has been scaled back in recent months under Biden, opting to paint the U.S. in a much more diplomatic light. Rather than pushing the narrative of the U.S. being above certain ideas or cooperation, the U.S. is attempting to reconnect with its allies internationally, willing to rejoin such agreements and work together again. Second, the Trump administration does not have enough time separated from it yet to truly account for its lasting effects thus far. This almost makes the research around Trump an unreliable data point at this time, and therefore was not considered for said examinations.

### How to Improve and Take the Research From Here

Given the conclusion of this thesis being how the U.S. has grown too aggressive and full of itself, operating on an attitude of U.S. exceptionalism to other nations and needs to change its ways to preserve its diplomatic ties, a logical next step of research could be on looking at the various relationships the U.S. has with key allies or enemies, and how best to maintain and

improve them in the future. If this research is to be continued or improved in the future, there are several ways to get started and make it better for consumption as well as analysis.

For starters, additional research would be appreciated from different sources. Journal articles and research reports are certainly a great place to start and form the bulk of the research used for this thesis, yet with the trajectory of this research topic a more hands on approach could benefit the work. Looking at actual political or government documents on matters of security or negotiation could be the key to begin the analysis.

For example, a researcher could look at Russia and the United States in one section of a future thesis. In addition to looking at various journal articles or research reports on the relationship between the two nations, one could look at official treaties or agreements between the two specifically. Perhaps specific language hidden in one of the sections of said treaty could be expanded upon or looked at to analyze where the relationship between these two nations could go. Interviews with heads of state or government leaders could be analyzed and compared with one another to see if there is any animosity or similarities between how the nations conduct themselves. Furthermore, if a researcher wants to look at the tone perceived by actual citizens of either side of an argument, surveys or questionnaires could be used to accurately gauge just how aggressive one nation is with another, although this could be a gigantic undertaking in itself alone.

Another avenue this research could take would be back to the military side of things, and look at how big the United States' military actually is, where it's deployed overseas, its technological capabilities and research, and other aspects of it when compared to a nation that is aggressive towards the United States. This comparison can be coupled with the conclusion of

this thesis and U.S. aggressiveness, and could be used as a cautionary prediction of what could happen between these two nations. For example, Iran or North Korea could be specifically looked at and contrasted with the U.S.. Similarly to the proposed point about Russia and the United States, one could instead look at military plans and tactics used by either side in both conflicts with each other or with others. One could examine military strategy used by the United States in both the War on Terror and earlier, more traditional warfare from the Cold War, to see if these tactics could be applied in a modern setting. Additionally, the nuclear and technological capabilities of both nations could be examined, and analyzed to see how devastating a conflict between these two could be.

A future researcher must also be careful of some biases inherent when it comes to research on the U.S., both positive and negative. Criticizing or praising U.S. policies tends to be a slippery slope in research, with the attitude of the stance changing with political parties and their prominence. For example, the literature on the United States from the U.S. was much more critical of itself and its plans under a Democratic president, while the research was full of self-praise and criticism for other factors or nations under Republican presidents. To ensure this does not affect the research, perhaps journals or reports on the U.S. should come from foreign sources to avoid such biases, yet this may be difficult as many of the sources that are accurate and work for these topics come from places such as Washington D.C. and the like.

Either of these approaches would be a good place to take the research from here, but the main takeaway is that the research itself become more specific and almost scientific in nature. To accurately gauge and predict the pattern of behavior studied here, it needs to be looked at from a new perspective. While one could supplement the new research with more journals or literature,

it would just be more of the same and merely showcasing the issue rather than finding new ways to fix or improve said problems.

### Closing Thoughts

In summation, this topic has been extremely rewarding and enjoyable to start and finish with. The topic itself is broad enough that allows a researcher to go in a multitude of directions and topics to avoid getting bored and feeling stale. By the same token, the message and question posed by it is applicable enough and focused enough that finding research on it is relatively easy and plentiful. While the conclusions and problems stated are nothing to shy away from, they are still thankfully hypothetical for the most part and allow for a plethora of approaches on how best to fix and illuminate their shortcomings.

Thankfully, under President Biden so far, the current trajectory of U.S. foreign policy seems to be on an upward trend in regards to its diplomatic relations. The United States has recently made an attempt to reengage in diplomacy and interaction around the world, rather than withdraw and try to influence according to its own desires. Under Biden, the U.S. has rejoined the Paris Agreement, plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and even aims to send out COVID-19 vaccines to foreign nations in need.

This is a far cry from the isolationist or exceptionalist attitude of Trump and Bush in years past, and does paint a better image of the U.S. going forward. This active yet passive role for the United States in international relations goes a long way to help dispel those fears of the U.S. being an overbearing force in international matters. If President Biden continues this behavior of subtle influence and diplomatic cooperation, these fears of an imperialistic or

exceptionalist U.S. could fall by the wayside and open up a plethora of beneficial relationships and opportunities for the nation and its allies.



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## **Curriculum Vita**

Ian Adamson was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 24, 1995 and later moved to Richmond, Virginia in 2005. He attended Virginia Commonwealth University from 2013-2017 and graduated with a major in Political Science, with a concentration in International Studies and a minor in Religious Studies. He then attended Johns Hopkins University from 2019-2021 and plans to graduate with a Masters in Government with a concentration in Security Studies.