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the End of the Civilizer State:
Comparing Two Cases
— Mao's China and George W. Bush's United States**

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Collapse of Moral Authority and the End of the Civilizer State: Comparing Two Cases — Mao's China and George W. Bush's United States*

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Introduction

This paper investigates how the moral authority of national leaders in two very different countries in different historical periods collapsed when those leaders, the most prominent in each country, conspicuously linked their foreign policies to a set of fundamental principles which they then violated in practice. I analyse this phenomenon from the perspective of a concept of Civilizer State: a state that claims a civilizing mission in its international relations (Van Ness, 1985).

The first case is Mao Zedong's successful program of global opposition to US imperialism during the Vietnam War, which involved support for third world revolutions, black radicalism in the US, and student-led rebellions throughout the world, including the one in Paris in May 1968 that almost brought down the French government. The collapse came when Mao met with Nixon in 1972. Maoist radicals around the world simply could not understand how the Chairman would make peace with American "devil." In the US case, after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, in September 11, 2001, there was a spontaneous outburst of international public sympathy for the United States and support for President Bush, who had proclaimed a mission to bring democracy and human rights to the world. But a combination of the US invasion of Iraq and, especially, the systematic torture of prisoners taken in the President's "war on terror," began to deflate and finally collapsed that international support for George W. Bush and the United States.

I have spent my professional life as an academic trying to understand the politics of the People's Republic of China and its relationship with the United States. After completing a PhD at Berkeley, where I studied with Chalmers Johnson and Joseph Levenson, both of whom had a major influence on my thinking, I published my first book, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy*, on Beijing's support for wars of national liberation in the third world.

* A working paper; critical comments welcome.



The book came out in 1970, right in the middle of China's cultural revolution and America's domestic convulsions over the Vietnam War. Much of my research centered on trying to understand the impact of Maoist ideas, not just in the third world, but also on the student movement in the United States and Europe. Official Washington at the time was deeply worried about China. For example, during the 1960s, US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara appeared to calculate that the ideological influence of the Chinese revolution and Maoist ideas constituted a greater threat to American national security than the Soviet Union — at a time when the PRC did not even have the material capacity to cross the Taiwan Strait. However, within days after Mao's meeting with Nixon in February 1972, that influence collapsed. Maoist radicals around the world were astounded that their revolutionary hero, Mao Zedong, would make peace with the super imperialist Richard Nixon.

My most recent book is *Confronting the Bush Doctrine* (edited with Mel Gurtov). When Mel and I were working on the book, we mainly wanted to critique the strategic design and the implementation of Bush's "war on terror." Evidence of the systematic torture of prisoners by the US had only just begun to surface, and President Bush was still enjoying much of the spontaneous world support prompted by the 9.11 attack on the US. But later as it became clear that none of the purported justifications for the US invasion of Iraq were true, and the Red Cross and other independent authorities began to document in detail the systematic abuse by the US of prisoners held at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and Bagram air base in Afghanistan, moral support for Bush and his campaign against terrorism began to sink. By the time he left office in 2009, the collapse was so extensive that some members of Congress were calling for his impeachment together with Vice President Cheney; and other opponents wanted to convene a war crimes commission.

In these two books, just by chance, I had the opportunity to observe and to write about the peak of the moral influence of Mao and Bush, and then to examine how China and the United States have dealt with each other in the period that followed.

Understanding a Collapse of Moral Authority

My task in this paper is to explain a phenomenon that occurred in two separate historical periods to two very different governments and leaders, but which surprisingly appeared to have very similar effects. How should we try to understand this phenomenon?

First, we are talking about foreign policy, not domestic politics. The role of moral authority is universally recognized as important for successful governance in domestic politics, but it is more contested with respect to its influence on foreign policy. Second, we note how the same message from a head-of-state or foreign minister is likely to be understood differently by a domestic audience as opposed to a foreign audience, and how



the foreign policy of any country, especially a major power, has many international audiences, some intended and others not, each receiving a particular message in its own way. For example, among Americans, Mao Zedong's call for world revolution in the 1960s was perceived by many activists in the anti-Vietnam War movement as a message of support, while for Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, it was seen as a threat to US national security.

Foreign-policy analysts often distinguish between so-called "declaratory policy" and "operational policy," roughly meaning what governments say, compared with what they actually do. What they say is often dismissed as not very important, but in fact declaratory policy often includes important statements of principle, ideological positions, and ethical rationales for operational policy. Mao Zedong during the 1960s and George W. Bush after the 9.11 attack on the US in 2001 repeatedly articulated declaratory foreign policies that had clear operational implications.

Is this just "ideology"? It is indeed ideology, but in addition, Mao and Bush described their countries and their foreign policies as exemplars or ideal models of the ideological position they articulated. Their message was especially powerful for prospective true-believers, those for whom the ideas appeared to provide an answer to their most serious life problems: for Mao, revolutionaries in the third world working to liberate their countries from Western imperialism; for Bush, people hoping for foreign intervention to overthrow tyrants, and activists trying to build democratic societies.

For some, this was almost a religious experience. An example of this kind of commitment, again from a different historical era, is the collection of essays written by prominent Western writers in the famous book *The God that Failed* (Gide et al. 1950). These writers, all inspired by the 1917 revolution in Russia, had become Communists in the 1930s, but later rejected Communism after Stalin made peace with Hitler and signed the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in August 1939. Their commitment reshaped their lives. Arthur Koestler, for one, was prepared to give up his job as a successful newspaper editor to spend his life in service to the Soviet Union, but then felt betrayed when Stalin made peace with Hitler's Fascism. Statements of principle or declaratory policies, repeatedly proclaimed by Mao and Bush as the moral foundation of their foreign policies, had this kind of impact for many foreign listeners.

Is this what Joseph Nye has labeled "soft power"? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, what we are talking about is a kind of non-material influence; but then again, no, moral authority taps a much deeper commitment than the kinds of influence typically referred to as soft power. It is more important immediately in its impact on the viability of the state's foreign policy, but less in the sense that it does not cover all of the many aspects that Nye includes in his concept. Issues of moral authority shape individual identities, affect life choices, and in some cases determine life-or-death decisions. Collapse of moral authority



means a marked decline in influence over people and groups sharing that kind of commitment.

Among specialists in International Relations, Realists, for example, concern themselves with the material capabilities of states, and give little if any attention to moral or ideological influence. Realists assume a world of anarchy, where states struggle to survive, each largely relying on self-help strategies, and typically engaged in zero-sum relations with each other — especially between competing world powers. For Realists, ethical and even ideological dimensions of International Relations are usually given little attention. Material power, economic and military, are seen to be the key defining features. In fact, as we all know, relations among nations, especially today, involve a myriad of connections, material and non-material, and networks of relationships layered one upon another. For example, during the Cold War, usually understood as a typical Realist struggle, moral issues of right and wrong, good and evil were sometimes as important as material characteristics. Recall the political influence, for example, of Vaclav Havel and the Charter 77 movement in Eastern Europe in the 1970s (Havel 1985).

During the 1960s when I was studying the confrontation between Maoist China and the United States, it occurred to me that there was something strikingly similar about the way American and Chinese leaders addressed themselves to the rest of the world — a common sense of superiority, a certain patronizing air, a lack of real curiosity about the workings of other societies, and something of a missionary quality to the manner in which they represented their own way of life to foreigners. Aware of the myriad ways in which American and China were different, I nonetheless began to wonder whether this one similarity might be important, particularly with regard to explaining the relationship between the two countries themselves.

I observed that in spite of fundamentally different cultural traditions and political histories, both Chinese and Americans (many everyday citizens as well as leaders) tended to see their ethos or culture as civilization itself. They held that their particular values, the product of their national experience, defined a superior way of life worthy of emulation by other peoples. Scholars have noted that Americans actively propagated their values abroad (beginning with Christian missionaries), while the Chinese characteristically sought to influence others by demonstration or model effect; but both American and China, at the time, identified with the idea of a civilizing world mission and adopted the pretension of cultural superiority in relations with other nations.

This sort of behavior, which I labeled Civilizer State, was obviously not unique to China or America. Dominant states throughout history had been Civilizer States. For example, William Langer had noted that the sense of a civilizing mission was a common characteristic of dominant nations at the end of the nineteenth century. Comparing Britain, America, France, Russia, China, and others, he described the English as something of a prototype: “The profound conviction of their superiority as a governing race, of their divine



mission to improve the world, was not only a rationalization of other motives, it was in itself a primary moving force” (Langer 1968, 96).

George Woodcock, in his thoughtful study of the collapse of the British Empire, adds that the British imperialists “believed that, like the missionaries, they were bringing light into darkness; the very superiority of the way of life they carried into the less advanced parts of the world was a guarantee of its eventual acceptance” (Woodcock 1974, 193). Also, many studies of more contemporary periods in international relations have similarly observed a sense of world civilizing role among the great powers. Ronald Steel, for example, described the post-World War II confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union as “an ideological contest for the allegiance of mankind” (Steel 1970, 12).

During the confrontation between Maoist China and the United States in what we then called “the third world,” essentially meaning the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, both countries claimed to be leading a moral mission. For China, Chairman Mao urged “people’s war” against the domination of US imperialism. For the United States, American foreign policy claimed to lead the world in a fight against Communist tyranny and toward democracy and freedom. Similar in their claims to the high moral ground, both countries took on the position and posture of what I called a Civilizer State.

I defined the concept in terms of three characteristics. A Civilizer State is: 1) a state in which the political leadership describes the nation’s social values and culture as civilization itself, suitable for emulation by other peoples, and defines the state’s role as having a civilizing mission in its international relations; 2) a society in which the claim to an international civilizing mission and the sense of the nation’s culture as a universal civilization constitute a major element in the value basis of the society, linking the leadership to the governed and forming an important dimension of the legitimacy of the established political system; and 3) a state for which the success or failure of the foreign policies of the state reinforce or undermine an important dimension of the legitimacy of the established political system (Van Ness 1985).

Leaders invested their moral authority in this civilizing mission. It fueled their confrontation with enemies and helped to define their differences: for Mao in the 1960s, first against the United States, and then by 1969, against both the US and the Soviet Union. Mao’s claim to lead a world revolution collapsed almost overnight in February 1972. For the United States, it was a longer term process: from Bush’s illegal invasion of Iraq, to Abu Ghraib, to call for the President and Vice President to be indicted for war crimes in the American Global War on Terror.



Mao Zedong and World Revolution

In 1965, the year that the United States deployed combat units in their attempt to stop a Communist victory in the southern half of a divided Vietnam, China supported national liberation armed struggles against eighteen independent third world countries: five in Asia (Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and South Vietnam), one in Africa (Congo), and twelve in Latin America (almost the entire continent). Beijing had established relations with revolutionary organizations in most of these countries. Some of these organizations were communist parties, and almost all of them professed a Marxist ideology. Delegations from these organizations visited China, and several even were permitted to maintain permanent missions in Beijing (like the Thailand Patriotic Front and the Vietnamese National Front for Liberation) (Van Ness 1970).

This was the peak of the contest between the Maoist and American civilizer states, in a proxy war fought in Vietnam. For the United States, it was a battle against Communist tyranny to save democracy and the Free World. They described the conflict in Indochina in terms of the Domino Theory, that if Communists won in Vietnam, the rest of Southeast Asia would also fall to Communist revolutionary movements, like a row of dominoes. For President John Kennedy, Vietnam was the epitome of the American moral crusade against Communism — “a proving ground for democracy in Asia,” as he put it.

Peng Zhen bluntly stated the Chinese position in an article in the official journal, *Hongqi*: “Since World War II, US imperialism has taken the place of German, Italian and Japanese fascism, and become the principal enemy of the people of the world.” As Mao saw the world, only one major imperialist power, the United States, had emerged unweakened from the horrors of World War II, and taking advantage of its world pre-eminence, the United States sought to “enslave the world.”

As early as 1963, the Chinese Communist Party in their polemic with the Soviet Union, had argued that, “The anti-imperialist revolutionary struggles of the people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are pounding and undermining the foundations of the rule of imperialism and colonialism, old and new.... In a sense, therefore, the whole cause of the international proletarian revolution hinges on the outcome of the revolutionary struggles of the people of these areas.” For Mao, the success or failure of world revolution depended on the third world.

Differences between China and the Soviet Union had begun even before 1949, when Mao and Stalin differed about the Chinese Communist Party’s strategy for taking power in China. They were prompted again after Stalin’s death in 1953, this time between Mao and Nikita Krushchev over the Soviet de-Stalinization campaign. Mao and Krushchev differed about relations with the United States — should it be peaceful coexistence or world revolution? — to the point that Moscow reneged on a commitment to assist China to build an atomic bomb, and abruptly withdrew its much-needed foreign assistance programs in 1960.



By 1963, the two communist parties had engaged in open polemics, and when Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, counter-revolutionary “revisionism” was the principal target. By its very nature the Soviet political and economic system was seen by Maoists as presenting a mortal challenge to the future of China. As a result, the USSR replaced the United States as China’s Public Enemy Number One, and revisionism superseded imperialism as the primary issue around which both Chinese domestic and foreign policies revolved. Mao’s Cultural Revolution foreign policy called for a militant confrontation with both the United States and the Soviet Union, the world’s two most powerful states.

The political face-off with the Soviet Union led to military skirmishes at their common border on the Ussuri River in 1969, and a threat that Moscow might launch an attack on China’s nuclear capability, which had begun in 1964 with the PRC’s first nuclear test. Under the banner of the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, the Soviet Union claimed the right to intervene in fraternal socialist countries, using force if necessary, to bring straying Communist governments back into line. The fact of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 made Moscow’s effort to intimidate China especially credible (Luthi 2012).

Richard Nixon’s failure to win victory in America’s Vietnam War, and Moscow’s threat of a military attack on China, together provided the necessary conditions for a US accommodation with the PRC. Mao and Nixon each faced a grave problem that only the other one could help them solve. Challenged by a growing anti-war movement at home, Nixon needed to find a dignified way to withdraw from his losing battle in Vietnam, while Mao needed the US superpower’s pressure on Moscow to deter a Soviet military attack.

Despite deploying over one-half million US military to the Vietnam conflict, the US kept losing the war. The Tet Offensive of January 1968, a simultaneous Communist attack on over 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam, shattered the American official claims of making progress in the war, and encouraged anti-war protests at home. In May, student-led protests in France and a general strike involving over 11 million workers in that country, almost brought down the French government.

Two years later, in 1970, when the US invaded Cambodia in an effort to destroy Communist sanctuaries in that country, anti-war protests in American erupted on virtually every major university campus, and the streets filled with demonstrators. In Richard Nixon’s own words: “The war was tearing American society apart.” At the same time, The US was afraid that a further escalation of its Vietnam offensive might bring the Chinese in. Nightmare memories of the bloody war with the Chinese in Korea, in 1950-1953, where the US lost 54,000 dead and more than 100,000 wounded, were still fresh.

Richard Nixon had been elected President in 1968, promising that he had a plan to withdraw from Vietnam. On a visit to Guam in July of the following year, Nixon announced a new policy, sometimes referred to as the Nixon Doctrine. The US would continue to honor its treaty commitments and provide economic and military assistance to allied



countries, and it would deter the involvement of any foreign nuclear power in domestic conflicts, but it would expect local governments to take responsibility for domestic insurgencies without direct US intervention. Nixon's message was that he was serious about leaving Vietnam, and the United States would not directly intervene in future civil conflicts.

Nixon was facing a re-election campaign in 1972 and had promised "peace with honor" in Vietnam, but the United States could not withdraw in a face-saving fashion without the cooperation of the Communist enemy. His answer to this dilemma was to make credible to the Communist side his commitment to get out of Vietnam by actually beginning a phased withdrawal of US troops, while at the same time taking initiatives to both the Soviet Union and to China to bring pressure to bear on Hanoi to agree to a negotiated conclusion to the US intervention.

Hanoi wanted to humiliate the American aggressor, but it was dependent on both the Soviet Union and China for weapons and material support. Hanoi played the two feuding Communist powers against each other to maximize supply. The Soviets had been willing to give some assistance to the United States in its effort to achieve a negotiated conclusion to the war, but without China's cooperation, the war might go on forever, it seemed. Nixon's opening to China was motivated by an effort to obtain the assistance of both Moscow and Beijing, separately but concurrently, to pressure their Hanoi ally to agree to a negotiated settlement of the war.

Even before the 1968 election, Nixon had signaled that he would like to strike a deal with Mao. Mao, for his part, was signaling as well. Finally, in July 1971, Henry Kissinger made his famous secret trip to China, and then, when Nixon flew to Beijing to meet Mao in February 1972, the deal was done. Maoist radicals and revolutionaries around the world looked on in disbelief: Chairman Mao and Richard Nixon smiling and shaking hands in Beijing. As many commentators noted: "this was the week that changed the world" (MacMillan 2007).

George W. Bush and the Global War on Terror

When George W. Bush was elected president in 2000, the United States was at the pinnacle of its global power. The Soviet Union, its post-World War II adversary, had disintegrated a decade earlier, and there was no debate about the fact that the United States was the dominant world power, the lone superpower. The popular term for the French was "the hyperpower," a super superpower. President Bill Clinton had left office in 2001 with a record of federal budget surpluses and expectations from the Congressional Budget Office for large surpluses in the future. The United States was prosperous, overwhelmingly powerful, and at peace.

George Bush staffed his administration with conservative Republicans, who, especially



on defense and security issues, articulated a hardline, unilateralist position. Their strategic priorities included: missile defense; withdrawal from the ABM Treaty; creation of a high-tech, rapid-reaction military with overwhelming scope and power; and a revitalizing of the US nuclear weapons industry. Their worldview was a combination of a Manichean ideology about pitting good against evil, and a Realist commitment to the construction of such overwhelming capabilities (military, economic, and technological) that no other state or coalition of states would dare to confront the United States.

When terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, killing almost 3000 people, the world reacted with support for the United States and its people. Governments and individuals around the world denounced the brutal attack on civilians, and offered their condolences and encouragement to the United States. President George W. Bush was riding a high of international moral support.

When he addressed the Congress and the American people several days later, on September 20, (Bush 2001) Bush proclaimed that “freedom itself is under attack.” He insisted that “what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.” “The civilized world is rallying to America’s side,” Bush argued.

“Freedom and fear are at war,” he said, and “the advance of human freedom, and the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us.” “We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism,” Bush declared, and “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” The United States attacked Afghanistan in October when the Taliban government refused to give up Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda militants.

As he mobilized the country to fight his war on terror, President Bush enjoyed almost unanimous support within the country, and international moral support, not just from allies, but also from a diversity of governments, including the Chinese, and from people around the world who made known their sympathy for the United States in its hour of need.

The next seven years are a story of the astonishing collapse of the moral authority that President Bush and the United States enjoyed at the end of 2001, to the point that by the end of his second term as president, Bush was being charged with war crimes, and critics in Congress were calling for his impeachment. Not as precipitous as the Mao collapse, this was a much longer process over several years, a gradual erosion of Bush’s moral authority.

The leading “hardliners” in the Bush Administration (Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, John Bolton, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle) were often called neoconservatives or “neocons,” but such a label is misleading. These men were radicals, not conservatives. Conservatives leaders of the most powerful country in the world would ordinarily be determined to protect and sustain that country’s immensely privileged global position. But these men were not simply trying to preserve the US position in world affairs; they wanted to transform it. Some, like Paul Wolfowitz, were visionaries in a nineteenth- century,



imperial mold. Dreaming of bringing civilization to the non-Western world, Wolfowitz was convinced that the United State could democratize the Middle East in the American image by force.

David Hendrickson, writing in *World Policy Journal* in autumn 2002, characterized what came to be known as the Bush Doctrine as a “quest for absolute security”. Hendrickson pointed to Bush’s unilateralism and a strategic doctrine of preventive war as key elements of a futile search. He concluded his essay with a quote from Henry Kissinger that summed up the basic flaw in a search for absolute security: “the desire of one power for absolute security means absolute insecurity for all the others” (Hendrickson 2002).

During 2002 and early 2003, the Administration prepared the way for an invasion of a second country, Iraq. This adventure was much more controversial, both domestically and internationally. Bush and allies like Prime Minister Tony Blair in the United Kingdom charged that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction that threatened the United States and its allies, and that Iraq had operational links with Al Qaeda --- allegations that were subsequently proven to be false.

The United States-led coalition launched a successful invasion in March 2003, despite domestic protests against the war and the opposition of a global anti-war movement. Without authorization from the United Nations and without actually declaring war, the United States attacked another sovereign state in a so-called preventive war. Expecting to be welcomed as liberators from Saddam Hussein’s tyranny, the US occupation soon deteriorated into an insurgency and battles between Sunni and Shia militants. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, among others, documents the remarkable arrogance, ignorance, corruption, and incompetence of the Bush administration occupiers (Chandrasekaran 2006).

The last of the US troops left Iraq in December 2011. Estimates of the human cost of the conflict run from 150,000 to over one million civilian and military fatalities; 4,800 US-coalition military deaths; and a financial cost of at least one trillion US dollars --- critics argue that the real financial cost is closer to three trillion dollars (Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008). From 2003 through 2011, more than 150,000 Iraqis were killed; and some 2 million fled the country as refugees (Iraq Body Count 2012).

The staggering human cost of the illegal Iraq War was only part of the price that George Bush paid for his war on terror. The war, supposedly begun to save civilization, to advance democracy, and to bring terrorists to justice, was conducted with a savagery that shocked the nation and destroyed any credible claim by the President to be leading a moral mission. The abuse of prisoners taken in Afghanistan and Iraq destroyed any claim to a higher moral purpose than his Al Qaeda enemy. The systematic torture of prisoners, their detainment without due process, and their “rendition” to cooperating countries where they would be further abused, all violated the most cherished US values. This behavior was not the “civilization” that US citizens so deeply valued, and it was definitely not a moral mission that people around the world wanted to join.



As the facts of US human rights violations were revealed, the Bush Administration denied, tried to divert attention, and blamed low level prison officials for the atrocities. Condoleeza Rice, Bush's national security advisor and later secretary of state, repeatedly insisted that "The United States government does not authorize or condone torture of detainees." "We do not torture," they kept saying, but the facts showed that they did. Incontestable evidence from a variety of authoritative sources documented a policy of sustained and outrageous abuse (Cohn 2011; Cole 2009; Danner 2004; Greenberg and Dratel 2005; Hersh 2004; Mayer 2008). By the end of Bush's second term, Vice President Cheney, an administration proponent of turning "to the dark side," publicly supported the use of torture as an efficient and effective strategy in the war on terror.

The collapse of moral authority was obviously not President Bush's only problem. The cost of the two wars had bankrupted the nation. The financial crisis begun in 2007 only added to the problem. At this writing, the federal debt of the United States stands at 16 trillion dollars. Paul Kennedy in his book, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, speaks of "imperial overstretch," when a country's international strategic and political ambitions reach far beyond its material capacity to support them. When Bush handed over the presidency to Barack Obama in 2009, the United States of America was a classic example of what Kennedy meant.

The End of the Civilizer State

Collapse of moral authority in China and the United States was similar in that those particular foreign constituencies that had taken Chinese and US declaratory policy most seriously felt betrayed. Their support, which was often critically important for the success of the Chinese and the US foreign policies at that time, disappeared. The longer term impact on American foreign policy is yet to be seen, but for China, the impact has been surprisingly beneficial.

Chairman Mao lost the support of foreign revolutionaries in February 1972 when Nixon visited, but as a result of the accommodation with the US, China gained a deterrent against a possible Soviet military attack and, as a result, a more secure nation. The People's Republic of China was finally admitted to the United Nations, and third world governments, that had earlier feared Chinese support for revolutionaries in their countries, now looked forward to building peaceful relations with Beijing.

Mao's failure also gave Deng Xiaoping, after Mao's death in 1979, an opportunity to take China in an entirely different direction. During China's Cultural Revolution, Mao had denounced Deng for "taking the capitalist road," but I don't think that Mao, even in his worst nightmares, would have dreamed that Deng would lead the Chinese Communist Party to build and to manage the most successful capitalist economy in history, achieving



annual growth rates of nine percent for over three decades (Vogel 2011).

For the US policy-makers, the defeat in Vietnam in 1975 was traumatic. Many analysts concluded that the days of Pax Americana were over. But then the sudden breakup of the Soviet Union inspired a new triumphalism in the United States. Francis Fukuyama spoke of an “end of history” and how the United States had defeated all challengers, first Fascism and now Communism (Fukuyama 1992). Yet while Samuel Huntington warned of a still possible “clash of civilizations,” there was no debate in the United States about which country was Number One (Huntington 1996).

When George W. Bush was elected president in 2000, he had staffed his administration with neoconservatives, members of the Project for the New American Century. Their objective was to “seize the unipolar moment,” and to establish a permanent global leadership. Full of moral certainty, they evoked the image of US exceptionalism, “a City upon a Hill,” a shining moral example for the world of the good society. But by the end of his second term, all of that was gone: two failed invasions, thousands of American military dead and more thousands wounded, trillions of dollars in debt, and US claims of moral superiority stamped with images of Abu Ghraib and videos from Wikileaks showing US military machine-gunning Iraqi civilians. It is too early to know what will come next for the United States. Barack Obama has attempted a new beginning, but he is still dogged by Guantanamo and the war in Afghanistan.

During the forty years since Nixon’s meeting with Mao in 1972, however, the world changed. Empires are no longer in fashion, and insistent claims of moral superiority are typically met with skepticism, if not amused disdain or contempt. Maoist China and Bush’s US may turn out to be the last two civilizer states in modern history. There are none in sight, and it is unlikely that there will be new ones. The world has changed. Claims of moral superiority and a civilizing mission would ring hollow in today’s globalized world. For example, despite the international importance of Islam, no contemporary state appears eager to launch a jihadist Islamic crusade, and even if there were such a state, its constituency would be limited to Muslims.

We should not mourn the passing of the Civilizer State. When the world’s most powerful states no longer make claims to represent world civilization, and no longer challenge each other in moral crusades to save the world in the name of good and evil, a different kind of International Relations becomes possible. The costs of conflict suddenly appear much higher, and the benefits of cooperation more substantial.

A confrontation between two Civilizer States is inevitably zero-sum: a gain for one side is a loss for the other. The moral contest energizes the political and strategic confrontation, either in a direct encounter or indirect confrontation, like in a proxy war. However, when major powers compete without this moral and ethical dimension, there emerge opportunities for cooperation and a motivation to seek relations based on mutual benefit instead of zero-sum.

Pundits often suggest historical analogies to help us understand the relationship



between the United States and China: Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War, World War I, or World War II. But today's nuclear-armed superpowers find themselves in a very different kind of world than that of Thucydides or even of President Franklin Roosevelt. States today are enmeshed in networks of communication, transportation, trade and investment like never before; and even the security threats they must deal with are of a different sort than those of earlier times.

Unlike Thucydides, we live in a nuclear-armed world. The most binding constraint on a possible US-China conflict is the fact that both the US and China are nuclear-weapons states. Their leaders are well aware that a war between them could escalate into a suicidal nuclear exchange. This fact also suggests that working together to establish procedures for avoiding an accidental launch, or misunderstandings about military deployments, would make good sense for both countries. Even during the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union were able to conclude a number of agreements like that.

Other contemporary security threats also appear to require a cooperative solution. For example, how can any country by itself deal with problems of global warming, climate change, and environmental degradation? Similarly, with respect to economic security, autarky is no longer an option for any industrialized country in our increasingly interdependent world. Even Mao's attempt at economic self-reliance in the 1960s, after the break with the Soviet Union, was immensely costly for China (Loehr and Van Ness 1989). Today, it would be disastrous.

Or take public health: how can any one country alone adequately defend its citizens against pandemic diseases like bird flu H5N1? Defense against terrorism is another example, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons yet another. The search for energy security may lead to competition and even confrontation among states, but in many cases, governments have found that cooperation is more fruitful.

For good or ill, we live in a globalized world. As all states become increasingly interconnected and dependent on relations with other states for export markets, investment capital, and technological innovation, they become, day by day, more vulnerable to any disruption of those international ties, hence more likely to value strategic stability. Relations among countries must remain stable and peaceful for us to derive the promised benefits of such an international order. Given the changing nature of security threats, cooperation rather than confrontation appears to be the more realistic approach.

Historians warn that the likelihood of war has been especially serious when a dominant world power is challenged by a rising power, like the situation today between the United States and China. But one of the advantages of today's world compared to the past is that globalization provides an opportunity for the rise and fall in power of competing states without military conflict. In the past, dominant states competing for power fought wars over the control of territory, but in today's globalized world, a rising state, like China, can increase its relative power and enhance its global stature by means of economic competition



without going to war.

When the competition between great powers is no longer a contest about good and evil, right and wrong, the quality of their relationship changes. Opportunities to achieve mutual benefit appear more realistic, and the costs of conflict more obvious. A globalized world without Civilizer States invites a new International Relations, a discipline designed to understand how major powers might work together when they can, while resolving their disputes in institutions like the World Trade Organization, instead of on the battlefield. ■



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Articles

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