

Navigating Chinese Hegemony: Assessing its Impact on International Order, State Sovereignty, and Territorial Integrity

Dana Mohammed Danish Aladdin Sajadi

International Relations and Diplomacy Department, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics,
Tishk International University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.
dana.sajadi@tiu.edu.iq

DOI: [10.23918/ICABEP2023p32](https://doi.org/10.23918/ICABEP2023p32)

Abstract:

The international order has been always relying on the fundamentals of states sovereignty and territorial integrity to have a stable and peaceful arena for all the different actors to engage each other, the paper focuses on the period of the post second world war American led order and how they established a system based on liberalism, in terms of human rights and the right of self-determination, with an emphasis on territorial integrity. The United States has sought to navigate these norms by outlining the circumstances in which one principle should be prioritized over the other, creating some sort of fogginess about the destiny of a lot of stateless nations. In addition, the paper seeks to examine through qualitative research framework, the alternative hegemonic system if China once becomes the hegemon and leads the international system, whether it is going to provide better opportunities for a lot of stateless nations, such as the Kurds, for example, to seek independence or it would prioritize territorial integrity over self-determination.

Keywords: International order, China, Self-determination, Territorial Integrity, United States

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Since the end of the First World War particularly since the end of the Second World War, the world has been governed by an international system based on the notion of states whose borders, regardless of how they were established, are regarded as inviolable. Although only a few, if any at all, nation-states have clear international boundaries that include one nation or people, or even multiple nations who decided to become part of one state. Many distinct and recognizable peoples lack their own nation-states, and they find themselves as a separated minority within a state. In some instances, they are distributed across multiple states. The matter of balancing the rights of sovereign countries to maintain territorial integrity and the rights of minority groups to determine their own political future is a multifaceted and controversial matter that has received significant consideration in the fields of global politics and human rights. The inherent clash between the concepts of state sovereignty and the right of individuals to self-determination essentially causes this conflict.

The right to self-determination has emerged as one of the most difficult issues confronting US foreign policymakers and the wider international community as a whole. Since the United States For several decades played a crucial role in establishing a system based on institutions that firmly defended the system of states and at the same time, they have also supported peoples' right to self-determination, as stated in the UN Charter. This combination of sovereignty of states and liberalism as allowing people to choose their own destiny that was designed for the international order that strives, but inevitably fails, to strike an equilibrium between the tensions among sovereignty and liberalism, as well as between state and nation. Specially in the aftermath of the world's rapid political, cultural, and technological shifts, various national entities have raised demands for their own states to the top of their political priorities,

These national entities have fortified the defense of their right to self-determination, whereby the right to independence is seen as an implicit, essential part, The international community has often decided to avoid the matter because it is so complicated and possibly destructive. Nevertheless, as the inconsistencies in the current system become more apparent, this failure to respond is becoming increasingly untenable. As more national groups seek some level of recognition, the international community is at a loss for solid regulations for dealing with this.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the view of the above, the paper seeks to find out the space of uncertainty that created by two custom standards sovereignty and liberalism and despite all the efforts being made by the sole power country in last seven decade to sustain both, it failed and whether if a different superpower hegemon, such as the Chinese hegemon reshape the international institutions and establish an order that reduces conflicts and give a better alternative for various stateless nations, In a comparable way the purpose of this paper is to address and achieve the following question and objective:

- How will China's ascendance affect succession and independent movements?
- To examine the impact of China's ascendance on succession and independent movements

1.3 Research Methodology

For this study, we adopted a qualitative approach, delving into a wide range of secondary sources. These included scholarly articles from well-established journals and news articles obtained from different government agencies, by analyzing this diverse pool of information, we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation. In this study, our main aim was to pinpoint essential themes and patterns related to the Chinese policies and their impact on international system in terms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. We took great care in

selecting data sources that were not only pertinent but also trustworthy, ensuring a comprehensive overview of the assessment and analysis.

2.Literature Review

2.1 the concept of self determination

The persuasive argument for the principle of self-determination is straightforward: it is unquestionably preferable for nations to determine their own destinies rather than have someone else do so for them. The idea of national self-determination seems to reflect the principles of democracy, which uphold the belief that people are most suited to govern themselves. as Hurst Hannum of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy provided a better description “that every people should freely determine its own political status and freely pursue its economic, social, and cultural development has long been one of which poets have sung and for which patriots have been ready to lay down their lives.” (Hannum, 1990), On the other hand, the logic of human rights and the logic of democracy are diametrically opposed. Human rights are intended to protect certain fundamental interests of people from the actions of governments, The principle of democracy legitimizes a specific type of government authority. Human rights are not always respected by democratic governments. In which democratic governments are influenced by strong nationalist beliefs, they are more likely to violate the human rights of their own dissident residents as well as foreigners (Freeman, 2007)

In the late 1700s, during the American and French Revolutions, this fundamental principle made its historical debut on the global stage, up through the first global war, the principle conveys the idea that the power of a government originates from the people and, as a result, should reflect and represent the interests and aspirations of its citizens. in 1863, US President Abraham Lincoln would remark, "and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" (Lincoln, 1863). The historical development with time took another path, after the end of the first world war, World leaders attempted to apply the principle, but unfortunately, its true meaning and effectiveness were eroded when it came to establishing national boundaries in post-war Europe. In the Balkans, for instance, the South Slavic people were grouped together without considering the deep-rooted ethnic tensions that had persisted for hundreds of years. This oversimplification undermined the principle's intent and led to significant challenges in maintaining peace and harmony in the region. After 1919, a nation's entitlement to self-determination found its limits in the imperial powers' reluctance to extend these same principles to their seized colonies. It was challenging for France and Great Britain to grant the same liberties to people living under their colonial authority (Jessica C. Lawrence, 2012) and not until 1945 when the united nation which was newly established and considered one of the fundamental pillars of the new international order,

United Nations Charter officially recognizes the right to self-determination as a principle of international law, marking a significant turning point in the development of the right to self-determination.

The United Nations Organization mainly has to do with the security and stability of the current state system, Due to the rise of fascism and the need to address imperialistic aggression and atrocities, it was founded to ensure the protection of human rights and the right of nations to determine their own destiny, As a result, it included both the conventional rule of international law that states were the main actors of international affairs, as well as the principle that international peace must be founded on the principle of national self-determination. but one of the major shortcomings of the United Nations was that some of its prominent member states were also imperialistic powers, therefore those superpowers redraw the postcolonial world in their own way which also had significant flaws, the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris*, which stated that postcolonial states' territorial boundaries ought to remain the same as those of the territories occupied by the colonies they replaced. The argument behind this doctrine was that it would reduce conflict over land among postcolonial states, thereby increasing their chances of peace (SHAW, 1997). As a result, the United Nations was able to soak up the anticolonial revolution while remaining a privileged group of states. It was widely agreed upon that the right to self-determination applied to those who fought against European colonialism, but there was less consensus when it came to people who felt they were being treated unfairly in postcolonial states.

2.2 Territorial Integrity

The birth of the new international system with its international institution and organization after the end of the second world war reshaped the global affairs and mainly emphasis on sovereignty and liberalism which they are the main principle of the American led order, trying to stabilize and influence most of the states to be committed to such rules and regulations, usually through history of international relations, Powerful states, especially hegemonic ones, have more influence than weaker nations in determining the nature of the global order and creating its rules (KEOHANE, 1984). Territorial integrity is one of the norms of the US led order which maintains that nations ought to have the freedom to protect their borders, and it gained strong support, becoming one of the UN's guiding principles (Fazal, 2007) as per chapter one, article two of the UN charter:” All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations” (Nation, 2023).

The widespread acceptance of the principle of respecting borders has played a significant role in promoting stability in international relations by undermining the legitimacy of territorial conquest.

Also, the cold war era had its own significance in reducing and eliminating territorial disputes, The superpowers became involved in these conflicts while strategically positioning themselves. However, in a political landscape dominated by the threat of nuclear weapons, they shared a common interest in keeping such conflicts under control. as global affairs seemed to be centered around the clash between the capitalist West and the communist East, and therefore national conflicts were framed in Cold War terms alongside the clash between U.N. statism and its own concept of national self-determination was largely hidden by the Cold War. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of its states triggered a crisis in this consensus. Many minority nations found them self's within a larger nation group and squeezed inside the same territory, in which the larger group symbolizes and controls the country's affairs, such as the case with the former Yugoslavia and the disintegration of new independent countries into several smaller countries such as Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia were recognized, However, the principle of *uti possidetis Juris* was utilized for the first time not to post-colonial territories, but to Titoist Yugoslavia's inner republics.

This resulted in an enormous Serb minority in Croatia and a variety of ethnic groups in Bosnia. Western powers tried to maintain equilibrium and justify this new reality by tying recognition of new states to respect for human and minority rights (Freeman, 2007). The issue lies in a paradoxical relationship between the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity, although the idea of self-determination has its roots in the thinkers of the Enlightenment era, but it gained prominence in its modern form through the contributions of Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's perspective emphasized that "all well-defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded them." (WEITZ, 2015)The "Wilsonian Moment" fueled nationalist aspirations all over the world. Furthermore, the resurgence of the United States after the second world war as a superpower and especially the subsequent formation of the United Nations played a significant role in strengthening the principle, However, as a consequence of the self-determination norm, a remarkable surge of independence movements emerged during that time (Griffiths, 2014).And as a result, the norm of self-determination gained further strength, leading to an extraordinary increase in the formation of new states. In the post-1945 era, the number of sovereign states more than tripled, soaring from 64 to over 192 (Griffiths, 2017) the argument is whether the state should be privileged to protect its own borders and to keep its sovereignty or the nation determine their path of independence and de attach themselves from the bigger nation that they are incorporate it in. Typically, when it comes to applying the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity, the decision on which one to prioritize is determined by selecting the most suitable solution for a particular situation. Some nations they were awarded with independence while others had no chance like the Kurds for example, a diaspora nation, within multiple countries, although they have all the

local factors. when trying to understand why a group seeks sovereign independence, it is logical to start by examining the specific conditions of that group and its relationship with the larger state. Explanations of this kind often emphasize economic grievances and ethno-national disparities as key factors; Secessionist movements tend to gain traction when groups perceive economic deprivation or exploitation. Elites can capitalize on identity-related concerns to advance their political and economic objectives. Additionally, linguistic, and cultural distinctions from the majority population of the state further contribute to the likelihood of secessionism (Blattman, 2014).

Other cases like the situation in Kosovo brings to the forefront the clash between self-determination and territorial integrity and raises concerns about potential accusations of hypocrisy. Many people view Kosovo's ability to gain international support as a triumph for the principle of self-determination, for some, Kosovo's recognition represents the closest we have come to acknowledging a justifiable right to secession when faced with human rights violations perpetrated by the controlling state. According to the former secretary of the state Condoleezza Rice: The unique blend of circumstances presents in Kosovo, such as the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a history of ethnic cleansing and atrocities against civilians, and the prolonged period of UN administration, sets it apart as a distinctive case (Rice, 2008). in 2008, Kosovo proclaimed its independence despite Serbia's objections, and to date, 108 nations, including the United States, have acknowledged its status as an independent and sovereign state (Meester, 2012) The United States made a deliberate decision to consider Kosovo as a unique case, rather than setting a general precedent.

They emphasized certain conditions under which the principle of self-determination could take precedence over territorial integrity. On the other hand, the situation of Crimea and Ukraine was not settled for so many year until eventually the war broke out. Vladimir Putin referred to the example of Kosovo and highlighted what he saw as Western double standards when he backed the self-determination of Crimea, even if it meant undermining Ukrainian sovereignty (Ker-Lindsay, 2012). This tension between norms has shaped the international order, leading to a situation where we see a controlled yet ongoing increase in the number of states. In response, the international legal community has sought to strike a balance by outlining specific conditions under which minority nations can assert their right to independence. Lastly, as observed in the case of Kosovo, the right to independence can be acknowledged under vaguely defined circumstances when influential states determine that there are valid reasons to recognize the seceding region. The outcome is a dynamic and ambiguous set of standards for joining the community of independent nations. The entrance is not broad enough to accommodate all contenders, nor is it precisely defined enough to effectively differentiate between those who meet the criteria and those who do not (Österud, 1997)

2.3 The Chinese hegemony and the birth of states

The rise of China as a global force has significantly shaped the course of contemporary international affairs. Over the past thirty years, China has transitioned from being a developing nation on the fringes of the global stage to a formidable competitor, nearly on par with the United States. There has been a lot of work in the research and scholarly field about the role of China and how it will use its own power to influence the globe, but in this article, I will try to analyze the Chinese role by taking a closer look at China's current inclinations concerning self-determination and territorial integrity and in my view, it is reasonable to expect that these preferences will continue to be upheld throughout the duration of Chinese hegemony. Since the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, Chinese policy has demonstrated a more cautious approach towards supporting minority nations. China tends to acknowledge secession only when it is based on mutual agreement and consent. and Beijing appears to be firmly against separatist movements elsewhere to gain support for its own opposition to separatist movements within China. Officially, Beijing regards separatism as one of the "three evil forces," along with terrorism and extremism. This reflects its unwavering commitment to preserving territorial integrity at all costs, China has recognized the existence of five autonomous regions: Ningxia, Tibet, Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. However, when it comes to complete independence, the Chinese government maintains a firm line (Aris, 2009). China asserts that self-determination does not necessarily imply seeking national independence, and it does not believe that stateless nations must necessarily establish or be granted their own states. China's more cautious understanding of self-determination is influenced, in part, by its internal worries regarding potential fragmentation. Embracing self-determination fully poses challenges for countries with diverse populations and multiple nationalities., therefore China acknowledges the rights of stateless nations in a restricted manner, emphasizing the importance of granting them increased autonomy. During the early 2000s, the unrestricted activities of Uighur groups and sympathizers in the Central Asian Republics raised significant concerns in Beijing, particularly regarding the situation in Xinjiang, and is a major motivator for China's promotion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization mechanism and its focus on the "three evils within the central Asian countries. In the past few years, China and it's Central Asian neighbors have worked together, both bilaterally and through the SCO, to target Uighur activists within their borders, with 'Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan agreeing to assist China in any way in its battle against separatists from Xinjiang, and have on multiple occasions struck against Chinese rebels in direct military operations (SWANSTRÖM, 2005).

Therefore the Chinese position on the international arena opposed any independent movement without the central state consent, China expressed its criticism towards the United States for its

recognition of Kosovo, highlighting the potential risks associated with setting a precedent in such matters. Moreover, China adopted a comparable stance regarding the recent secession of South Sudan, emphasizing that recognition should only be granted if there is a formal and mutually agreed separation from the larger Sudan. From China's perspective, there are genuine concerns about setting precedents by recognizing regions seeking independence without the consent of their respective governments. These concerns are evident in the political discourse and public sentiments surrounding both domestic and international secessionist movements. One of the reasons put forth for rejecting Taiwanese independence is to prevent a ripple effect, as the achievement of independence in Taiwan could potentially strengthen the resolve of separatist movements in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia (Stockman, 2007).

4. Findings

4.1 the impact of China's ascendance on succession and independent movements

China once they have the chance to become the preeminent power or a hegemon, they will reshape the international order, but in terms of the borders territorial integrity they will be very cautious and restricted and the acknowledgment of new states would be contingent upon the consent of existing states, making it less frequent in occurrence. China has often found itself at odds with the United States and other Western nations when it comes to situations like Kosovo, South Sudan and even Kurdistan Region of Iraq where differing perspectives on the matter of self-determination emerge. China's stance on the Kurdish issue is interconnected with its broader approach to Iraq, which is further shaped by its overall strategy in the Middle East and ultimately aligned with its global foreign policy. Therefore, China is concerned that the establishment of an independent Kurdish state will cause instability in the region, jeopardizing its economic and strategic interests, and also could act as a catalyst for other separatist movements, particularly among Uyghurs and Tibetans who may be inspired to pursue their own aspirations for self-determination. China is also concerned that the Kurdish independence movement's success will encourage other ethnic groups within its borders to intensify their struggles for autonomy, posing significant threats to China's stability and territorial integrity.

The Chinese foreign policy is always linked to its internal affairs; therefore, the territorial integrity norm is primary application is aimed at internal regions. to maintain hegemony and dominance on the globe for China's best interest is to keep the birth of new states at its minimum and sustain the current borders and territorial stability of the states in order to keep its model and the China one policy longevity and legitimacy. Although the birth of new nation states is possible only by the consent of the sovereign. Historically China when it was imperial the Chinese centered international order that emerged from 14th to 19th century in east Asia was distinguished by the notion of stable

borders and relatively rare instances of conquest wars, therefore a predicted Chinese hegemon system will maintain the same old confusion norms that emphasizing on strong and stable states with little tolerance to succession movements and the rights for independence.

5. Conclusion

the international system is an association of states that needs some set of rules to regulate the relations between them therefore throughout the history of international relations there has been always a dominant power or a hegemon state that create and establish the norms for that international system to keep it functioning and durable that fosters harmony among all of its international actors and participants, thereby the international order is important because it influences diplomatic conduct and behavior. It establishes the game's rules. we have examined the post second world war American led order over the last seven decades which emphases on the international norms of sovereignty and liberalism as in term self-determination an essential part of human rights that system supported by international organizations such as the United Nations. And it turned out to be a failed to ask that was not implemented clearly and transparently these norms were applied unjustly which separates the fortunate states who were offered a chance of independence from those who are unfortunate. Given the complexities of politics and the conflicting principles in international affairs, as well as the ever-changing nature of normative arguments, it is inevitable that inconsistencies, ambiguities, and accusations of hypocrisy will arise.

The resulting political landscape introduces uncertainty for both states and nationalist movements regarding the circumstances in which self-determination applies and when it should be prioritized over territorial integrity. Cases such as Kosovo's independence, to separatist Luhansk and Donetsk region of Ukraine that ended up in a drastic war, to the case of Kurdistan region of Iraq, it raised doubt about the double standards of the American policy, the Kurdish people has all the requirements to become an independent state yet they were unlucky and the international community did not support, Washington had punished Russia for annexing Crimea However, they turned a blind eye to Armenia's similar conduct in Karabakh. Uncertainty like this can make states feel vulnerable. As per the second alternative if China once become a hegemony their polices might look more transparent in term of showing solid determination about the territorial stability rather than support any separatist movement only in rare cases where the sovereign is accepting and recognizing the right of in depend of its own minor nation within its border. For the international order it might be better when the territorial integrity is reserved this will lead to less conquest wars more stable environment, It is crucial to note, however, that this increase in territorial protection would come at the cost of liberal rights. Stateless nation would have a law chance of getting their independent.

Overall, whoever superpower or hegemon taking control over the international system will consider its own interest over the international norms, The core of today's national self-determination problem is that the political system is still structured around the belief that its main actors are states, and its main objective is peace. The concept is dangerous because the majority of the world's states are multinational, and some nations demand new states. This demand jeopardizes the current members of the states club's integrity, status, power, and wealth.

References

- Aris, S. (2009). The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: 'Tackling the Three Evils'. A Regional Response to Nontraditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 457-482.
- Blattman, S. B. (2014). Economic Shocks and Conflict: Evidence from Commodity Prices. *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, 1-38.
- Fazal, T. M. (2007). *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation*. Princeton University Press.
- Freeman, M. (2007). National Self-Determination, Peace and Human Rights . *Journal of Social Justice* , 157-163.
- Griffiths, R. D. (2017). *Age of Secession The International and Domestic Determinants of State Birth*. Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, T. M. (2014). Membership Has Its Privileges: The Changing Benefits of Statehood. *International Studies Review*, 79-106.
- Hannum, H. (1990). *Self-Determination. In Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* . Pennsylvania : University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jessica C. Lawrence, J. (2012). *human right*. Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute.
- KEOHANE, R. O. (1984). *AFTER HEGEMONY Cooperation and Discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press.
- Ker-Lindsay, J. (2012). *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States*. Oxford univeristy press .
- Lincoln, A. (1863, Nov 19). *The Gettysburg Address*. Retrieved from Abraham Lincoln online : <https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>
- Meester, D. H. (2012). Remedial secession: a positive or negative force for the prevention and reduction of armed conflict? *Canadian foreign policy* , 151-163.
- Nation, U. (2023, 06 19). *United nation charter*. Retrieved from United Nation: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

- Österud, Ö. (1997). The Narrow Gate: Entry to the Club of Sovereign States. *Review of International Studies*, 167-184.
- Rice, C. (2008, 02 18). *U.S department of state Archive*. Retrieved from U.S. Recognizes Kosovo as Independent State: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/02/100973.htm>
- SHAW, M. N. (1997). The Heritage Of States: The Principle Of Uti Possidetis Juris Today. *The British Year Book of International Law*, 75 - 154.
- Stockman, A. I. (2007). Chinese Attitudes Toward the United States and Americans. In *Anti-Americanisms in World Politic* (pp. 157–95). Cornell University Press.
- SWANSTRÖM, N. (2005). ‘China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?’. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 569–84.
- WEITZ, E. D. (2015). Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right. *The American Historical Review*, 462-496.