

Norm Contestation and the Usage of Rhetoric in China

By Halle Shepard

State University of New York at New Paltz

HON495

Professor Stephen Pampinella

Professor Patricia Sullivan

Political Science

Abstract: This paper explores the type of rhetoric and tactics used by the Chinese government to counter accusations of human rights violations against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. Most of the terminology used involves the principles of sovereignty and nonintervention. By engaging in this discourse with the international community, the state has engaged in norm contestation and a debate about the universality of norms. With these concepts in mind, China has gained political influence and an increasing number of like-minded allies that can challenge the Western order. As a result, this could be problematic for the United States if it wants to retain its perceived status as global hegemon.

Keywords: Norm contestation, nonintervention, universality, norms, sovereignty

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, increased attention to the accusations of human rights violations in Xinjiang has garnered international condemnation. Numerous states, NGOs and IGOs have accused the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of enforcing policies that target ethnic minorities including the Turkic Uighurs who identify as predominantly Muslim. The most well known practice includes forced enrollment in camps that, according to the CCP, focus on counterterrorism. This paper thus questions how does the Chinese government reinterpret and contest international norms of sovereignty to counter these allegations? Due to global scrutiny, it has retaliated by defending its actions based on the principles of territorial integrity and nonintervention. By doing so, it has engaged in a larger scope of debate over norm contestation and moral relativism in a globalized world.

In the international relations field, norm contestation refers to the actions of a state that go against what is considered a “norm.” In a general sense, norms are considered to be the actions or statements that are considered acceptable to the international community relative to a state’s identity and history. In this case, for example, the Chinese government claims the right to have the sovereign and supreme authority over affairs within its own territory. This is challenged by some members of the international community, mostly the Western world, who believe that a boundary is being crossed and should be classified as unacceptable behavior that, as such, requires international intervention. Consequently, this means a perception of overstepping the limits of sovereignty in the pursuit of resolving humanitarian crises. In response, the Chinese government perceives this as a slight against not only against its identity, power, and influence,

but also the framework of the international system itself. It often cites the United Nations' focus on territorial integrity and its founding Charter to then undermine these arguments.

In this paper, I will analyze official statements and speeches made by the Chinese government that address this issue to an international audience. These examples of state behavior could become common for other states to follow in the future in their own handling of domestic affairs. As a result, this inquiry will contribute to further research by examining what kind of legitimation rhetoric is employed in contesting norms while also offering suggestions for how to counter argue it. I will start off by discussing previous research on norms, legitimation, and the construction of a national identity. Then I will discuss my theories on the topic followed by my research design method. After that I will give my analysis on different speeches and remarks made by members of the Chinese government and give my personal thoughts on ramifications for the future to conclude.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to gain such validation, a state's actions must be seen as legitimate, regardless of whether other actors approve or disapprove of the measure itself. While it is such an integral part of the international system, Hurd explains how legitimacy is an underlooked but crucial influencer for following and obeying norms in international politics. While traditional research has focused more on coercion and self-interest in particular, he argues that legitimation is the most important of these three factors. From a realist perspective, the former two have generally been seen as the best for explaining state behavior. Traditional realists would claim that states use their power to force other actors to adjust or change policy. This is because they view their

own security as the number one priority and the maintenance and increase of their influence is more important than others' as well.

However, Hurd demonstrates why these reasons are too simplistic and don't go along with what takes place in practice. For example, he explains how many borders are undefended; this is true especially among many of the most historically fought-over in Western Europe. Therefore, deterrence and establishing control through maintaining territorial boundaries does not explain why states follow the rules of sovereignty (Hurd 1999, 395). In addition, while self-interest may seem like an enticing and motivating factor, the instability of maintaining this condition is costly. He describes how primarily self-interest motivated states are subject to drastic changes because of the potential shifts in payoffs in a continual cost-benefit analysis. Consequently, these states should be more inclined to revisionism. However, in the international system, this does not happen that often because most states have certain partnerships or principles that they stick to (Hurd 1999, 387).

As a result, states act more along the lines of the normative status quo and generally respect each other's sovereignty. Ongoing calculations regarding the interference with the sovereignty of other states is abnormal and time-consuming. This is perpetuated even further when taking the principle of nonintervention into account. In fact, the states who do question these norms become "rogues"/targets of scrutiny by the international community (Hurd 1999, 397). States thus respect each other mostly based on norms associated with legitimate action because they are more beneficial in the long run. If a state were to question or contest many issues beyond what is acceptable at the time, they would not be seen as beneficial to maintain ties with. Therefore, the most important issues, such as respecting sovereignty, take precedence over others.

Accordingly, the process of pursuing legitimation is integral in the act of norm contestation. To demonstrate this, Jackson coins the term transactional social constructionism to focus on how outcomes are explained by public rhetoric. He defines three terms: specifying occurs when an actor tries to redefine an already known rhetorical understanding. Breaking occurs when an actor tries to discredit an opponent's position by highlighting all of their argument's inconsistencies. Joining occurs when an actor tries to undermine an opponent's stance by creating a link between a central commonplace (of the opponent's position) to an arrangement pointing in a different policy direction (Jackson 2006, x). Using any of these three mechanisms can be then useful for states to challenge conventional wisdom and the standard interpretation of particular norms. What was previously thought of as a universal Western-inspired goal becomes subject to debate especially as the growth of non-Western states rise to power. This has also developed into a specific issue where American exceptionalism takes center stage. As the global hegemon, values that are not considered in line with American ideals are more likely to receive condemnation and disapproval than those that are not.

Furthermore, states have already engaged in norm contestation regarding the issue of nonintervention even during humanitarian crises. Contessi highlights a particular instance using China's role in handling the situation in Darfur as an example. In order to proceed with strengthening the legitimacy of Chinese grand strategy, reorienting the norms of multilateral intervention would prove useful in the long run. In this case, the Chinese government emphasized and encouraged the return to traditional peacekeeping as a rhetorical method of defense to ensure its own sovereignty in potential future applications. This is principally based on two of its four principles: force can only be deployed after a ceasefire agreement has been reached and the host country must consent to the proposed peacekeeping operation (Contessi

2010, 336). In that specific case, neither of those principles were being upheld. The conscious decision of the Chinese government to not involve itself subsequently went against the norms of proactively intervening during humanitarian crises.

On a domestic level, one of the most important and unnerving threats to a state comes from separatist sentiment. Due to their political opinion(s), these groups can be targeted by the state in an effort to suppress dissent. This can be condemned by the international community under the declaration of violating human rights but can be countered by state officials through strategic reframing. Depending on the situation, separatism can be framed as terrorism in a few ways. First and foremost, since there is no standard definition for terrorism, states have been able to expand the scope of classification to include separatist actions and thus delegitimize the movement. Any public vandalism, posting of politically inspired slogans, or attack on local businesses and people can be formulated into anti-state sentiment even if it wasn't the original intention. In addition, this planned depiction helps to justify using military and potentially lethal force. On an international level, this framework can help legitimize a state's actions and shape public opinion in its favor (Pokalova 2010, 432-433).

Another method of justifying domestic action against a particular group sometimes takes place with paternalistic overtones. It is important to note that this has traditionally been studied more so and justified normatively within the Eurocentric sphere and requires further analysis in non-Western countries. However, on a generalized basis, Barnett defines it as a dominating act of intervention into a person's freedom of action that is justified by reasons regarding welfare, happiness, and needs of the person without their consent. He separates this concept into two distinctions: strong (where force can be used, methods of intervention are lenient, enforcer's actions are seen as legitimate) and weak paternalism (where force and methods of intervention

are restricted, the paternalized can hold the paternalizer accountable) (Barnett 2012, 487-490). He then explains how liberalism can both condemn and condone paternalism at times; it can become a choice between choosing to act versus remaining indifferent. One crucial aspect of this revolves around determining a person/group's capacity and ability to make informed decisions. This creates a dilemma that asks whether assistance needs to be provided for those who cannot. He also points out how there is a structural difference that is made clear between civilized and uncivilized people within a society. This can lead to treating some groups as subhuman or it can lead to treating groups with specialized care and attention (Barnett 2012, 499). Even though it would normally be considered unacceptable on the basis of international law, the intention of bettering the conditions of one of its groups of people counters the argument that the intention is reminiscent of ethnic cleansing.

By creating an "us versus them" mentality, states can focus on segregating their people in order to construct a national identity and solidify a base of support. The dominant population is contrasted with an outsider group and Marx thus argues that this is a form of exclusionary nationalism. One of the biggest examples of this is the unequal application of citizenship rules. Even if citizenship is granted toward all residents of the whole state, civil protections may be unenforced or even ignored for certain groups. He includes historical examples involving the Jim Crow laws against African Americans and the system of Apartheid against Black South Africans as some of the most infamous (Marx 2002, 109-111). With this in mind, the practice of excluding an "other" contributes to a version of nation building that can be perceived as violating the universal interpretation of human rights. Whereas this version believes and states that concepts such as freedom of speech must be applicable to everyone across the globe, the procedure of exclusion, wherein a specific group is persecuted against and discriminated against

systematically, violates this interpretation of international law and goes against an understanding of human rights as a shared norm.

Adding on to this, Rae focuses on how the construction of a national identity is essential in studying pathological homogenization within a state in order to further legitimate authority. The methods of achieving this goal have been/may be executed through forced assimilation, mass expulsion, genocide, and ethnic cleansing (Rae 2002, 2). She uses Nazi Germany, the Bosnian War, and many other examples to demonstrate how state governments can reshape their own identities and establish control through the forced removal of unwanted groups. In these two particular cases, people were targeted both on ethnic and religious grounds but this is not always what occurs.

In more recent examples until 2002, she points out how NATO's intervention in Kosovo was the only collective intervention that specifically aimed to stop ethnic cleansing. These exclusionary measures invoked norms regarding the protection of human rights but were highly contested by Russia and China; they interpreted the principles of sovereignty strictly and saw this operation as aggressive and unwarranted. They thus contested a norm by using a different legitimization framework. Unfortunately, even though acts like ethnic cleansing are generally considered unacceptable by international law, there isn't a foolproof method of holding states accountable for their actions. In addition to that, challenges to intervention still have weight because the international system was built on a system of territorial jurisdiction (Rae 2002, 247).

Because of all these factors, Cooley and Nexon, under the overall topic of United States hegemonic decline, have hypothesized that states can further challenge the existing order in two ways. They can either contest within (order contestation) or attempt to build a completely new order (alternative order building). States can then gain momentum and support from others in

either option that can pose a substantial threat to U.S.-led hegemony (Cooley and Nexon, 2020, 78). In the past few decades, China has been called into question as one of, if not the most likely rising power that will challenge the Western world. With deep ties to countries such as Russia and Pakistan, the prospect of world order revisionism plays a huge role in future norm contestation debates.

THEORY

Using norm contestation as the overarching framework, I theorize that the Chinese government consistently and tactfully chooses which norms to dispute in order to legitimize its own domestic policy. In general, the Chinese government focuses on these key topics for justification: sovereignty, paternalism, and anti-terrorism. By then addressing the international audience and the United Nations, especially as a Permanent Five Member on the Security Council, it challenges the conventional sense of what has been and should be acceptable under international law. I expect to see that the type of rhetoric used will not only defend its actions, but will also call out and criticize other powers for their own handlings of domestic affairs.

To understand the breakdown of how norms are treated and categorized in international relations, Wiener separates them into three tiers based on their scale. Type 1 focuses on fundamental and universal norms that are subject to negotiation by state governments and are upheld through international charters/treaties; this includes sovereignty and human rights. Type 2 addresses organizing principles that are more directly associated with policy making in states; this includes the Responsibility to Protect. Type 3 is the narrowest and the least negotiable. It is composed of standards and regulations that lay out the specific rules for states to follow; one

example of this includes fishing quotas. The acceptance of this structure thus plays out in three ways: through formal validation, social recognition, and cultural validation (Wiener 2017, 117-120).

To sustain compliance in following norms, she explains what the different avenues of negotiation are and demonstrates how this is the standard for global governance. She also explains what their purpose is in filling the legitimacy gap between those who want to contest and the institutions that would consequently scrutinize these appeals. They are thus separated into four modes and are paired with their dominant contestation strategy: courts (arbitration), regimes and international organizations (deliberation), protest movements (contention), and epistemic communities (justification) (Wiener 2017, 113-114). Due to the varying interpretations of norms, these bodies are constantly at work in order to handle ongoing discourse. In this particular case involving China, Type 1 tier norms are mostly contested and have historically been mostly Western and Eurocentric focused. To counter this, a growing number of non-Western states have begun to push back against these ideals and push the idea of moral relativism. The standard of protecting human rights thus may vary from state to state depending on their own relative interpretation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To evaluate how the Chinese government contests international norms, I will examine the types of rhetoric used by state officials to address and placate the international audience regarding the situation in Xinjiang. I will use three statements made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two from the Chinese Permanent Mission to the United Nations and its bodies, and a

statement made by officials at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). By using government statements as a primary source, there will be no ambiguity or manipulation from outside sources. The period in which I will be analyzing foreign policy statements will be limited starting from the 1990s and ending in the present time in order to primarily focus on the issues related to Xinjiang itself so this could be a limit to the scope of my research.

When analyzing these documents, online remarks, or speech transcriptions, I will specifically point out how this rhetoric is used to justify any action taken in Xinjiang. In tandem with this, by using sovereignty as a defense, I will explain how this connects to norm contestation at large. Using the language stated in the United Nations principles and Charter, the Chinese government uses this as a legitimation strategy for its handling of domestic affairs. This strategic interpretation makes it easier to defend itself from international criticism and condemnation. By framing the Uighur people as a terrorist and secessionist threat, any measure taken toward suppressing their efforts can be justified as more permissible.

ANALYSIS

To provide some historical context, it is crucial to note that Xinjiang has undergone much change ever since it was established as an autonomous region in 1955. While it suffered from the negative effects of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, over time, it has also become a key area for investment and focus in the past few decades. This has become increasingly important as China expands its Belt and Road Initiative into Central Asia as a centerpiece of Xi Jinping's foreign policy starting in 2013. The encouragement of Han Chinese, by the state government, to move into the region for work and to live has changed demographics

over time as well. Thus the location of Xinjiang and its jurisdiction under Chinese authority is integral for the state to have a land bridge into the region.

Additionally, China has undergone a gradual change in foreign policy since Xi's arrival. The change in foreign policy tone, rhetoric, and an aggressive style of engagement have been dubbed as "wolf warrior diplomacy" due to its confrontational nature. Compared to the actions and statements of the prior administration under Hu Jintao, this encompasses a much higher level of intensity. To address critics and naysayers from the international public, state officials often post on Twitter and other social media platforms to deny allegations of wrongdoing and to criticize the ways other states, particularly in the West, have handled their own affairs. In tandem with that, the success of the economy and criticism of Western standards have further contributed to a sharp rise in nationalism as a result.

On February 22nd of this year, at a regular press conference, Hua Chunying, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, directly addressed and defended China from US State Department criticism. She stated:

Even today, China still faces a realistic threat from the US flanked by its several allies as they wantonly and grossly meddle in China's domestic affairs and undermine China's sovereignty and security on issues including Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. China remains the only permanent member of the Security Council that has yet to realize complete national reunification...If we look at the US, during its nearly 250 years of history, there were only 20 years when it was not conducting military operations overseas. The pretexts it used can be democracy or human rights or simply a test tube of laundry powder or even fake news. Such a country's understanding of respect for state sovereignty and

territorial integrity is definitely different from ours. The international community can see this very clearly (Hua Chunying 2022).

With this statement, the Chinese Foreign Ministry actually presents itself as subject to violations of its sovereignty by Western powers, namely the U.S. As a victim, this then motivates it to push back and strongly encourage a much stricter interpretation of the norm. It abhors its stigmatization as a state that violates human rights in the first place especially when it sees those standards as being too Western and inapplicable to everyone else. Accordingly, the indirect or direct usage of whataboutism is a common tactic used to counter any criticism.

When taking Jackson's theory of specifying into account, the Chinese government notes the differing interpretations of sovereignty and territorial sovereignty between itself and the U.S. It then implicitly redefines these norms as being absolute by classifying any challenges as a threat to its security while also refusing to acknowledge any criticism of its handling in domestic affairs. In addition, the breaking theory is demonstrated here when the Chinese government uses the United States' own track record of international intervention as a rhetorical strategy against itself. By doing so, it discredits the U.S.' argument by pointing out how the U.S. routinely intrudes into the international affairs of other countries and thus violates their sovereignty. As a result, by including the term "human rights," any criticism aimed at the Chinese government and its actions in those three aforementioned regions is weak and hypocritical since the U.S. has used those same sorts of justifications in the past. To drive this point home, the inclusion of China's reunification goal is used as a joining theory tactic to link the concept of, and endorsement of absolute sovereignty, with protecting domestic plans from international scrutiny and condemnation. This is especially useful for keeping control over a contested area like Taiwan. While the domestic government in charge is different, it is still claimed as part of China.

To address the accusations of human rights specifically, Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, spoke at the High-level segment of the 49th Session of the UNHRC on February 28th of this year as well. He stated:

The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have set a lofty goal for the global human rights cause. It falls on every country to keep exploring an effective way to achieve this goal. Human rights have historical, specific and practical contexts, and the human rights cause can only be advanced in light of each country's reality and its people's needs...In judging whether human rights are upheld in a country, one cannot use another countries' standards, still less apply double standards or use human rights as a political tool to interfere in the affairs of other countries...The Human Rights Council needs to uphold the principles of non-selectiveness and non-politicization. It must not be reduced to a stage for political confrontation (Wang Yi 2022).

When addressing the HRC, the Chinese government engages in the mode of deliberation at the Type 1 tier that Wiener posited. This is an explicit declaration that human rights must be subject to each state's interpretation; universality is unacceptable. It also encompasses the Type 2 tier since it wants the HRC to be more deferential to sovereign states who thus engage in self-determination as they see fit and defends itself through those aforementioned areas of social recognition, formal, and cultural validation. The interpretation of defending human rights, from the Chinese perspective, is subject to its own interpretation while still upholding the basic tenets of the UN charter. As a result, in its view, this is an example where cultural relativism should take precedence over moral absolutism. This goes against the general consensus that human rights organizations have sought to encourage.

On the internet, Chinese politicians also share their views and responses to criticism of the state. At a 2018 Cambridge Forum entitled: “Is Capitalism Devouring Democracy?” Yanis Varoufakis, a Greek politician and founder of the MeRA25 party, addressed the concern that China had been investing “too much” into African infrastructure amidst concerns of debt trapping. In response to these accusations, he pointed out how China has not acted as an interventionist power, had not sent troops into any of these countries, and did not colonize or take over local populations in the region as the West had done in the past. Consequently, in response to Varoufakis, Zhao Lijian, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, took a clip of the exchange and posted it on Twitter on September 8th, 2021 stating: “They can’t fathom that, how possibly could a country rise in a totally peaceful and non-interventionist way. Because they themselves are pure interventionists” (Twitter 2021).

In this situation, Hurd’s explanation of legitimate action is important to note here. Not only is coercion not used in this scenario by the Chinese government at all, but the method of expanding soft power into Africa is seen as legitimate, in theory and practicality, by the international community as well. Additionally, even with self-interest as a potential motivator, it is not as sufficient when explaining China’s behavior. By acting in accordance with its principles of nonintervention, China is not acting as a revisionist power and is actually maintaining the status quo. While one could argue that this power play is self-interested in nature, the rhetoric used and method of attaining this leverage are better explained by the role of legitimation in the first place. In maintaining its non interventionist principles, China is able to legitimize its role in economic development in Africa and further growth as a country in its own right. Zhao Lijian’s post and accusatory rhetoric portrays opponents as interventionist, with historical context in

mind, to weaken their argument and quash any claims that China is acting without the bilateral economic consent of foreign governments.

On May 4th 2012, The Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations stated:

Terrorism emanates from a complicated set of political, economic and social factors. Measures to combat it should focus on promoting development, eliminating polarization and social injustice, and appropriately resolving regional conflicts. Terrorism is often accompanied by the spread of separatism, extremism, violent hatred and intolerance. It should therefore be addressed in a holistic manner... In the effort to combat terrorism, we must abide by the United Nations Charter and the basic norms of international law and respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States... China is the victim of terrorism and is facing various terrorist threats, primarily from elements of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement at home and abroad, as well as from other international terrorist groups and individuals” (Li Baodong 2012).

The self-portrayal of the Chinese state as a victim of terrorism is important to note here. First of all, by taking the history of terrorist attacks in China into account and who the perpetrators are over time, the Chinese government uses this to prove anti-state sentiment. Previous attacks in Xinjiang in 2011 were claimed by the Uighur Turkistan Islamic Party (somewhat synonymous with the East Turkistan Islamic Movement title), whose goal was and is to establish an independent state to replace Xinjiang as a whole. As Pokalova mentioned, the attack on civilians and the political ownership of said incident by this one particular minority China aims to continually combat can then be framed as terrorism. When fighting it, states may take extraneous measures to sort out the root causes; in this case, the Chinese government chose to enroll

Uighurs into camps that would “deradicalize” them and their thought processes. It framed these occurrences in a certain way to push a specific domestic agenda.

On March 2nd 2020, the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva launched a photo exhibition entitled “Home: Glimpse of People from Various Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang.” In their remarks to the guests it stated:

These remarkable achievements in Xinjiang won’t be possible without a safe and stable environment. Xinjiang prioritizes safeguarding the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups and has taken a series of counter-terrorism and deradicalization measures, including setting up vocational education and training centers. These measures have greatly improved the security situation in Xinjiang and protected human rights of people from all ethnic groups. No terrorist attack has occurred in Xinjiang for more than three years. Trainees of the deradicalization program at vocational education and training centers have all graduated. With the help of the government, they have got stable jobs and are reintegrated into society

(Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations Office in Geneva 2020).

While not mentioning a specific group directly in this particular statement, the Chinese government makes it clear that certain values and traditions are more inclined with Han Chinese culture than others. This is reminiscent of what Marx mentioned earlier with exclusionary nationalism. Citizens of China as a country that do not fit the standards of what the CCP wants are segregated on a justifiable basis in the opinion of the Chinese state. Turkic groups, such as the Uighurs in question, are persecuted against especially in regards to Islam as their predominant religion.

In this scenario, the Chinese government has acted in a paternalistic manner, as Barnett mentions, by enforcing a standard of specialized care for certain groups within its borders. Between the two categories that he describes earlier, this would be considered a strong form of paternalism. Force has been used to enroll people into these camps and they cannot hold the Chinese state accountable while within the country whereas those who live outside of China have attempted to expose what actually goes on. Under the guise of helping and deradicalizing, the state government aims to placate criticism by emphasizing the positives such as higher overall levels of safety, better employment, and societal reintegration. This is exacerbated by the mention of an absence of terrorist attacks since the program started.

CASE STUDY: TIBET

Along with Xinjiang, Tibet also remains under Chinese control, but whether this should be the case at all remains disputable. Some Tibetans have also been accused of holding separatist sentiments and have been framed as terrorists in some cases just like the Uighurs. However, it is interesting to note that, even though Tibetans are more ethnically related to the Han Chinese than the Uighurs, the practice of Tibetan Buddhism as their dominant religion makes them a target for the Chinese government. This is exacerbated even further when discussing the status of the current and future Dalai Lama.

This year, on April 26th 2022, Wang Wenbin, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson stated:

We firmly oppose the US side's interference in China's internal affairs on Tibet-related issues under the pretext of religious freedom...For the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Erdeni and other grand Living Buddhas, a

complete set of methods and procedures have been established over the centuries, and the religious rituals and historical conventions as well as the Chinese laws need to be complied with in this process. The 14th Dalai Lama is an anti-China separatist under the cloak of religion. Twenty-seven years ago, when he was abroad, he took the liberty of declaring a child as the reincarnation of the Panchen Erdeni in order to carry out anti-China separatist hype to the detriment of religious rituals and in disregard of historical conventions. This is illegal and invalid (Wang Wenbin 2022).

The Chinese government specifically labels and categorizes the current Dalai Lama as having made an invalid decision regarding a successor. By doing so, this aims to delegitimize his word and influence not only within Tibet, but China as a whole. Combined with the fact that he has fled from the country, it is much harder for him to appeal to the entire country. Rather, this gives the state the opportunity to physically determine what happens in the region where its spiritual leader is unable to retaliate. Therefore, it is deemed as an internal affair that should remain under national government jurisdiction and should not be debatable by foreign powers. For the most part, any territory that remains disputed falls in line with this and is defended from intervention on the basis of sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Chinese government makes it very clear that any attempts to question its actions and sovereign power will not be acceptable. Those who do so on a routine basis are subject to direct call outs from state officials who see these incidents as unfriendly to Chinese

interests. By framing its argument as one of defending its absolute sovereignty, it attempts to legitimize its domestic actions against the Uighurs and other ethnic minorities. However, it is important to note that, had China not been so powerful economically, this bargaining tactic may not have worked. Its status as Permanent Five Member in the Security Council grants privileges to its ability to counter arguments as well. Had it been a smaller power, it may have been able to be coerced into acting a different way. This is why the precedence being set by its actions has ramifications for the future.

With all of this in mind, it will be critical for the Western world order to address and combat these interpretations of norms. As seen with the rhetoric used by the Russian government's invasion of Ukraine regarding Donetsk and Luhansk, the Chinese government could also pursue military operations based on the goal of national reunification in Taiwan and/or Hong Kong among other territories. This means the West must take a stronger stand that possibly calls for military intervention and prevention. President Biden's promise to defend Taiwan from a potential Chinese invasion further polarizes the differences between a world that supports Chinese foreign policy versus those that do not. While optimistic at best, keeping this promise would be quite difficult in practice without escalating into full-on war.

On the other hand, the Western world could alternatively step down and let other powers rise. While not ideal in a potentially multipolar world, the commitments to allies in the region could prove to be too costly in the long run. To prevent armed conflict, there is one option to consider. Maintaining the status quo of not physically intervening would protect everyone involved and keep globalized trade in order at the expense of the territories remaining under Chinese control. Even though this is not ideal for some states involved, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine may act as a deterrent from diplomatic arguments escalating further.

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