

Rules of the Game

Charles Kupchan and Adam Mount should be applauded for acknowledging that the Western model of democratic capitalism and liberal internationalism is no longer the only game in town ["The Autonomy Rule," Issue #12]. But despite the authors' sober-eyed analysis of the current state of international politics, their prescriptions fall prey to precisely the type of wishful thinking that they try to avoid.

Their first error is in presupposing that rising powers need or seek America's permission to exert influence in international affairs. The authors urge U.S. policymakers to "make room for the competing visions of rising powers," as if America has a choice in the matter. The fact is that there are new and burgeoning sources of norm-building and rule-making in the non-Western world—such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the China-Africa Cooperation Forum—over which the United States has little or no influence.

The authors further conclude that American recognition of non-Western powers would somehow erase the serious and significant disagreements among leading countries about how the world ought to be governed. They write that, "Having affirmed the rights of all responsible states, Washington would be more likely to enjoy the backing of many of the world's states" in confronting rogue and predatory regimes. There is simply no evidence for this claim.

The real choice facing American policymakers is far more insidious than Kupchan and Mount are willing to admit: Namely, should the United States confront rising powers, or is it willing to accept the consequences of handing over authority to illiberal and aliberal regimes? The authors punt on this gut-wrenching decision, and instead offer a version of liberal internationalism-lite, in which building a bigger tent will necessarily lead to an assimilation of multilateral goals with respect to issues such as genocide, weapons proliferation, and trade. This expectation is naïve at best.

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War Over the War

It is a pity that Spencer Ackerman ["Passing on Petraeus," Issue #12] wraps his writing in a cloud of invective, like a retreating squid shooting ink. Ackerman seems to argue that because Iraqis don't want to be occupied (a point no one is debating), the shift in Iraq strategy was not... not what? Effective? Morally correct? It is hard to claim that we are not leaving Iraq today more stable, and with a greater chance of success, than if we had left

Davy Jones's Logic

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