

This house believes we're doomed - proposition

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Hello everyone. I hope you're all prepared for five minutes of constant doom-mongering, because that's pretty much the purpose of the proposition in this debate. There's certainly no shortage of suffering in the world and it's going to be difficult to do justice to that. And indeed, we won't attempt it. Instead, we'll focus on a few, huge, long-term issues we believe are going to doom almost all of humanity. The opposition may go on about all sorts of wonderful events in the world, but as long as there's just one existential issue humanity fails to deal with, the motion holds. I would like to talk in particular about the resurgence of authoritarianism and my colleague, Laura, will discuss climate change.

I'm sure we're all aware that as I speak, in excess of a 100 000 troops are poised on the Russian border with Ukraine, ready to attack at any moment we're told. But we've been here before. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008. It annexed Crimea in 2014. Yet, its international relations were largely unharmed in both cases and sanctions from the latter wiped out a mere 1.5% of its GDP. Despite the annexation, Germany still went ahead with Nord Stream 2.

And to me, this is really just a continuation of the West being ignorant to the hold that autocratic regimes are having over us. Fukuyama's "end of history" never eventuated and we see inaction in the name of economic benefit all around us. Nowhere is this more salient than in our relationship with China. Right now, the CCP has locked away a million Uighurs in concentration camps, just because they are Muslim. And yet, the political class seems less concerned with passing sanctions and more concerned about repairing relations. I disagree with that objective. We're doomed because our thinking is incorrect. Instead, I argue the West - and anyone who claims to care about democracy - shouldn't maintain a relationship with China at all - or any other dictatorship.

But, we're doomed again, because we squandered the option to dissociate from these regimes a long time ago, not to mention we have to cooperate on issues like climate change. In our pursuit of globalisation, we let human rights take a back seat to economics. We let China become the world's factory. We let so many dictatorships become indispensable to our way of life. Mao killed millions in the Cultural revolution of the 60s, and yet Kissinger opened up to China in the 70s. Deng Xiaoping massacred his own citizens in Tiananmen Square and yet in about 10 years the Clinton administration granted China permanent normal trading relations. More recently, the Trans Pacific Partnership incorporates countries like Brunei and Vietnam.

Our ability to reverse this trend has become hugely diminished. For the first time in a long time, the majority of the world does not live under any kind of democracy according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. Freedom House estimates 75% lived in a country with eroding liberties last year. Democracy is not just being challenged by the economic miracle of China, it is also rotting from within in countries like India, Poland, America, Bulgaria and Hungary.

And our adversaries are certainly willing to use their new-found collective clout. As an example consider that in 2019, 22 UN ambassadors - from Australia, the UK, France, Germany and several others - wrote a joint letter to the UN human rights council decrying China's abuses towards Uighurs. Remarkably, 37 weak democracies and dictatorships - including many Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia - came to China's defence with their own counter letter and went on to "commend China's remarkable achievements in the field of human rights."

Today, we see increasing cooperation between such regimes - founded upon an alliance between Russia and China and the latter's Belt and Road and other financing all across the world. If these countries claim hegemony over the world, we're all doomed. But I'm afraid that's exactly what will happen if we continue the way we are.

I'd like to finish by going back to Ukraine. There has been an enormous amount of diplomacy attempting to

de-escalate the situation and politicians have understandably not been too forthcoming with the details of their meetings. But, one point America, the UK, Australia and others have been quite clear on is that they will not be sending any troops to defend Ukraine if it's invaded. I'm not advocating for war, but it does beg the question of when we'll actually act and say enough is enough. What I fear is not that there will be a major war or a major war that we lose. What I fear is that we won't ever try to fight. Slowly, by a thousand cuts, our way of life risks being eroded and I don't see any doom that could befall humanity greater than that.

Thank you for your attention.