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GA1: Disarmament and International Security (DISEC)

Research Report

Topic 2: The question of acknowledging the rise of autarchy, and thereby the threat to international security.

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Introduction

As of 2025, members of the UN, including Secretary General António Guterres have expressed their concern about the rise of autocracy, authoritarianism, and the erosion of human rights[1]. Autocracy and authoritarianism pose a significant threat to international security by perpetuating the idea that certain states, despite their reliance on international trade, policy, and cooperation, are above the guidelines of international law. Often, the idea of national sovereignty is called into question in the attempt of a state to distance itself from international legal & political bodies, claiming that states should be free from UN interference on the basis of their sovereignty. However, the purpose of the UN body is to maintain international peace, foster friendly relationships, and facilitate international cooperation to solve economic, social, and political issues[2]. Therefore, the rise of autocracy poses a threat to said relationships, endangering international security.

Definition of Key Terms

Autarchy: A system of government revolving around a state or country's self-sufficiency; their independence from the rest of the world.

International security: Measures taken by states and organisations to ensure mutual safety.

Background Information

Autocracy is one of the earliest forms of government – before the gradual spread of democracy, most of the world's countries lived under authoritarian rule, each relying on its own resources to thrive. However, since the first wave of democracy in the early 19th century, and the more recent establishment of the League of Nations followed by the United Nations, democracy and international cooperation have been on the forefront of global politics.

Despite this, however, 40% of today's countries (as of 2016) are still ruled by dictatorship[3]. These are characterised by opaque political processes and economic mismanagement.

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[1] Mishra, Vibhu, 2025
[2] UN Charter (Chapter I, Articles 1-2)
[3] Frantz, Erika, 2016

Historically, waves of democracy have been followed by periods of intense backsliding and major reverse waves restoring authoritarianism globally[4]. This pattern is a major concern, signalling that the rise of authoritarianism is not just a coincidence, but an inevitable response to the spread of democracy throughout the world.

As various states have recently taken steps to step away from international scrutiny and monopolise their industries – for example through China's MIC25 plan and the USA's withdrawal from the Paris agreement and the UPR – it is easy to see how concerns about autocracy and authoritarianism have emerged. In order to ensure international safety and cooperation, it is in the best interests of all states to be as transparent and […] as possible.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

China: Beijing's MIC25 plan (Made in China 2025) involves boosting the technological industry to take China from being a low-cost manufacturing centre to being a leader in high technology such as AI and other advanced technology. This enables China to drastically decrease its reliance on imports, while the EU and US are increasing their dependency on Chinese exports[5].

USA: The Trump administration has already in 2025 withdrawn from various international treaties and agreements and imposed heavy tariffs on nearly all foreign imports, and is facing strong criticism internationally for aspiring to authoritarianism.

Russia: Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine represents a significant breach of international security protocols and has violated international law, for example leading to the UN voting to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. Russia is a functioning authoritarian state as of Freedom House's verdict in 2025.

Belarus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Myanmar: These countries remain some of the strictest authoritarian states in the world with some of the lowest freedom scores as of 2025. (7/100, 3/100, 7/100 respectively)[6]

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[4] Huntington, Samuel P., 1991
[5] Brown, Alexander & Max. J. Zenglein, 2025
[6] Gorokhovskaia, Yana & Cathryn Grothe, 2025

Relevant UN Resolutions

1. A/HRC/RES/60/6 Promotion of a democratic and equitable international order
   https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/60/6
2. A/HRC/RES/19/36 Human rights, democracy and the rule of law
   https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/725358?ln=en&v=pdf
3. A/RES/78/208 Strengthening the role of the United Nations in the promotion of democratization and enhancing periodic and genuine elections
   https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/208

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The issue of autarchy at large hasn't been officially addressed by the UN due to a number of reasons. Direct intervention in a state's system of government is not allowed due to national sovereignty, so often other measures are used to pressure states to change something internally. Additionally, it is difficult to create a framework for tackling such a large and nuanced issue globally, so the UN has often focused on action directed at specific situations and states, for example the condemnation of events during the 2021 Myanmar coup.

The Myanmar coup: Example of the UN making condemnatory statements about an authoritarian state and moving to discuss peacekeeping attempts, but a deadlock was reached in the Security Council (SC) for fear of a joint Chinese/Russian veto[7].

Human Rights Council: The HRC has applied international pressure to authoritarian states or states experiencing democratic backsliding in order to try and prompt internal change, but are once again facing the issue of Chinese and Russian opposition.

Possible Solutions

- Establishing an international framework for helping states out of autocratic rule
- Highlighting the importance of international trade and cooperation
- Enforcing free and fair elections in all countries
- **Finding a solution that a majority will agree to – earlier attempts have been deadlocked by the Chinese/Russian bloc**

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[7] Currie, Kelley, 2021

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