



# A GRAND STRATEGY OF RESTRAINT

---

By **Barry R. Posen**

J U N E 2 0 0 8

**Finding Our Way:**  
*Debating American Grand Strategy*



## A GRAND STRATEGY OF RESTRAINT<sup>1</sup>

By Barry R. Posen

The foreign policy elites of both parties share a commitment to a grand strategy of international activism, including the regular use of military power, which is serving the United States poorly. Since the early 1990s, the United States has used military force habitually, and at considerable human, material, and political costs. The thrust of much of this military action has been the political transformation of other societies in endeavors to produce stable democracies. However, public opinion in much of the world is now hostile to America. Bosnia remains an ethnically divided society, a protectorate of the European Union. The humanitarian intervention in Kosovo still occupies U.S. troops; Serbia remains highly nationalistic and resentful of the two U.S.-led wars against it. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq show no sign of ending; indeed, Afghanistan is deteriorating. Despite this abysmal record, politicians of both parties publicly flirt with the possibility of yet another war, against Iran, a country stronger and more capable than Afghanistan and Iraq combined. This activism has mainly been paid for with borrowed money; the imminent retirement of the “baby boomers” and their looming health care demands in combination with the generally exploding costs of health care will soon swell demands on the public purse.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the American public has grown weary of the war in Iraq and doubts the foreign policy advice of its leaders. This grand strategy is not sustainable. Below I develop an alternative—the grand strategy of “Restraint.”<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I offer a brief definition of grand strategy, discuss the theoretical premises that underpin my own strategic thinking, assess the state of the world on the basis of those premises, review and critique the current grand strategy

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article is “The Case for Restraint,” *The American Interest*, Vol. III, No. 2, (November/December 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid funding is projected to grow from 8.4% of GDP in 2007 to 14.2% of GDP in 2030. See Congressional Budget Office, *The Long Term Budget Outlook*, (December 2007): Table 1–2, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security*, Vol. 21 (Spring, 1997): 5–48.

consensus, and finally offer an outline of an alternative grand strategy, “Restraint,” which is gaining traction among a small group of international relations scholars and policy analysts.<sup>4</sup>

### **What is Grand Strategy and Why Would You Want One?**

A grand strategy is a nation-state’s theory about how to produce security for itself. Security has traditionally encompassed the preservation of sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and power position — the last being the necessary means to the first three. States have traditionally been quite willing to risk the safety of their people to protect national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and power position. A grand strategy enumerates and prioritizes threats and potential political and military remedies to threats. A grand strategy contains explanations for why threats enjoy a certain priority, and why and how the proposed remedies would work. A grand strategy is not a rule book; rather, it is a set of concepts and arguments that need to be revisited regularly. Sometimes nation states write their grand strategies down in one place, sometimes they do not.

A grand strategy is a key component of a state’s overall foreign policy, but foreign policy may have many goals beyond security, including the improvement of the prosperity of citizens at home, or the welfare of people abroad. These are appropriate goals for a foreign policy, but great care should be taken not to conflate these goals with security goals as they have historically been understood, lest one fall into the trap of prescribing security means for the solutions to these goals. Grand strategy is ultimately about fighting, a costly and bloody business. Environmental change, the risk of global pandemics, human rights, and free trade may be important and worthy foreign policy

problems for the United States. There may be a connection, as cause or consequence, between these problems and the massive U.S. defense budget, the peacetime deployment of large U.S. forces around the world, the U.S. alliance structure, and the employment of U.S. military power in war, but this is to be demonstrated, not assumed. And if a connection is found, the right answer may be to sever rather than accept the linkage.

Though states have often gone without clearly stated grand strategies, they do so at their peril. Grand strategies serve four functions. First, resources are invariably scarce. If a grand strategy includes clearly stated priorities, it provides a guide for the allocation of these scarce resources. Second, in modern great powers, several large and complex organizations must cooperate to achieve a state’s security goals. Micro-management of this cooperation is difficult. A clearly stated grand strategy helps these organizations to coordinate their activities. Third, insofar as grand strategies pursue interests abroad, deterrence and persuasion of potential adversaries and reassurance of allies and friends is preferable to the actual use of force. Grand strategies communicate interests. Finally, clearly stated grand strategies assist internal accountability. They permit criticism and correction when they are proposed; they organize public discourse when new projects are suggested; and they allow for evaluation of such policies after the fact. Grand strategies are good for democracy.

### **The Premises of Restraint**

The analysis below is guided by a realist depiction of international politics, an appreciation of the power of identity in domestic and international politics, and a grim respect for the utility and the limits of military power. Together, these premises call for a conservative and cautious grand strategy.

<sup>4</sup> An earlier version of this article is “The Case for Restraint,” *The American Interest*, (November/December 2007). See also my response to my critics, “Restraining Order,” *The American Interest* (January/February 2008).

Realists depict the international political world as anarchy — a realm without a sovereign. In this realm, self-help is the rule. Most states wish to achieve as much autonomy as possible. Any state can resort to armed force, so all will want at least some armed force and the material and human assets that contribute to armed force, to protect themselves against the worst case. States seek power; some pursue what they perceive to be “sufficient” power to defend themselves and some chase all the power that they can. Some chase power recklessly, while others are shrewd and cautious, waiting for opportunities. Ironically, superior relative power is one such opportunity; the strong typically wish to get stronger and their superior capability may allow them to do so.

States wish to survive. They will balance against those who seem too greedy for power, wondering what they intend to do with it. In the face of military build-ups or aggression by others, they will seek to increase their own capabilities, pursue allies, or aim to achieve a combination of the two. States will also “buck pass.” To husband their own power, they will encourage others to deal with international problems, until they are forced to deal with these problems themselves. States will “free ride” and “cheap ride” if another state is willing to do the heavy lifting.

Nuclear weapons profoundly affect the relationships among the states that possess them. Nuclear weapons in the hands of an adversary raise the stakes of any great power clash. Because they are quite small relative to their potential destructive power, nuclear weapons are easy to deliver and easy to hide. They are also relatively cheap. Thus, moderately advanced states ought to be capable of developing an assured ability to retaliate against a nuclear attack by its peers, a “secure second strike capability.” Even a ragged retaliation puts much of an opposing state’s wealth and population at risk.

This is not difficult for statesmen to understand and, thus, they will be very cautious in dealing with other nuclear weapons states. Nuclear powers are difficult to coerce and impossible to conquer. Nuclear weapons strategically favor the defense.

Identity politics is a strong feature of the modern world. Though people identified with and battled for their families, tribes, and clans in antiquity, modern nationalism has raised these inclinations to a larger scale. Since the French revolution, we have seen the propensity for very large groups of people without blood ties to connect their fates together on the basis of shared language, culture, and history. These “imagined communities” seek political power to advance their collective interests and to ensure their collective survival and prosperity. Ambitious politicians find that appeals to nationalism are particularly effective in periods of physical and economic insecurity. Thus is born the nation-state. Nationalism has been one of the most powerful political forces of modern times, providing the political energy that sustained the two world wars, the wars of decolonization, and the numerous conflicts that followed the collapse of Soviet power, including the collapse worldwide of multi-ethnic states that had survived largely due to the superpower dole.

Political scientists argue vehemently about the sources of nationalism, and whether or not nationalism *per se* is a source of conflict. That said, intensification of nationalism has traveled with conflict quite often, as cause or consequence. Nationalism is a powerful political tool for military mobilization. And nationalism has been resurgent since the end of the Cold-War ideological competition. It must be acknowledged, however, that other identities have likewise proven powerful. Religious identities are often part and parcel of national identities. Some states are inhabited by multiple ethnic groups struggling to determine the content

of a national identity or striving to secede to establish their own nation-states. Most important, the spread of modern nationalism makes states hard for outsiders to conquer and govern.

Though essential for the achievement of security in international politics, military power is a crude instrument. Students and practitioners of war understand that war is costly and not easily controlled. Carl von Clausewitz asserts that war is an extension of politics, and that every act in war should be connected to the ultimate political end. He also observes, however, that war creates an environment of its own — of fear, fog, and friction. War is an intense competition, subject to strong emotions and random events. The achievement of political purposes is thus quite difficult.

The U.S. weapon of choice since 1991 has been the aircraft-delivered precision guided bomb, and the tactical effectiveness of this weapon has created strategic confusion among political leaders. They have become enamored with the airplane flying above the fray, immune to the obsolescent or nonexistent air defense weapons of far less prosperous adversaries, placing weapons on key targets of high value and either disarming the adversary entirely or eliciting his cooperation. The use of force thus seems cheap; its costs are measured mainly in money. The following question, however, remains: How does one turn the destruction of targets into the achievement of political purposes? Where defense of an independent country is concerned, military power is terrific. The purpose is simple and the destruction of useable military power will do the trick. Where purposes are more complex, such as changing the minds of leaders or peoples, or changing the way they will govern themselves, the organization and employment of military power becomes much more complicated. In a world characterized by nationalism, an outsider, however powerful, will face grave difficulties imposing a particular political order on a mobilized people.

**World Politics as We Find It**

Five factors constitute the most important drivers of world politics today and in the foreseeable future: unipolarity — the concentration of capabilities in the hands of the United States; regional balances of power — rough equipoise among the consequential powers on the Eurasian land mass; globalization — the intense integration of much of the world into a capitalist economy that crosses borders and the propensity of that intense integration to disrupt societies; diffusion of power — the spread of military capacity to states and non-state actors; and finally, the de-mystification of nuclear weapons technology, which has permitted even poor states to acquire these weapons, albeit slowly and at considerable cost.

Table 1

2005 International Comparison Program Preliminary Results		
Gross domestic product share of global GDP (%)		
Country	PPP-based	Market exchange rates
United States	23	28
China	10	5
Japan	7	10
Germany	5	6
India	4	2
United Kingdom	3	5
France	3	5
Russian Federation	3	2
Italy	3	4
Brazil	3	2
Spain	2	3
Mexico	2	2

Source: World Bank, December 17, 2007



### GLOBAL UNIPOLARITY

By almost every reasonable measure, the United States emerged from the Cold War as one of the most powerful states in history. Its gross domestic product (GDP) was and remains two or three times that of its closest economic competitor. Even immediately after post-Cold War reductions, U.S. military spending exceeded the combined defense budgets of most of the rest of the larger powers in the world; today, it exceeds the defense spending of the rest of the world combined. U.S. military technology, conventional and nuclear, sets the world standard. U.S. intercontinental nuclear forces remained large and capable. U.S. population size exceeds that of any other great or middle power with the exception of China and India, and U.S. population continues to grow. The American population, though aging, will remain much younger than that of most other powers. The United States had command of the global commons—sea, air, and space—at the Cold War’s end, and retains this command today.<sup>5</sup> U.S. technical capabilities for intelligence collection dominate those of any other state; indeed, the U.S. intelligence budget has roughly equaled the entire defense budgets of Britain or France, two of the world’s most capable military powers, and the only ones other than the United States with any global reach. America enjoys a favorable geographical position, with weak and friendly neighbors to the north and south and oceans to the east and west. The Cold-War network of global alliances, coupled with massive investments in strategic lift, gave the United States the ability to put large forces almost anywhere there is a coastline. In 1991, five U.S. divisions reached Saudi Arabia in four months, and nearly ten in six months. It is no wonder Charles Krauthammer called this the unipolar moment; and it is no wonder that the term has stuck.

### REGIONAL BALANCES

Although the United States is the preeminent power in global politics, consequential powers are to be found in Eurasia, including Russia, China, and Japan, and the principal Western European powers, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, who can sometimes concert their capacity, and that of other European states, through the European Union (EU). India may soon ascend to the club of consequential powers, but it is not quite there yet. In contrast to the bloody first half of the twentieth century, rough balances of power exist at both ends of the Eurasian land mass. The possibility that a Eurasian hegemon could arise and develop sufficient power through internal mobilization and external conquest to match U.S. capability and significantly threaten U.S. security is remote. In the long term, China seems the most likely candidate to do so, but even before confronting the United States, it will need to overcome many difficult obstacles.

Russia is incapable of conquering Western Europe; it does not have the economic, demographic, or military capacity to do so. Independently, the principal western European states are incapable of conquering Russia, and the EU is insufficiently united to concert their power to do so. Europeans possess, after the United States, the second most capable set of military forces in the world. But these forces are divided among the major and minor European powers and they could not easily be coordinated for positive military action on the scale of an offensive aimed at Russia. Indeed, some wonder whether they can be coordinated effectively for modest humanitarian interventions in Africa. Russia, France, and the UK possess strong nuclear deterrent forces, which would make conventional or nuclear aggression suicidal. Europe may be a strategically stable as it has ever been, with or without the U.S. presence.

<sup>5</sup>Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security* (Summer 2003): 5–46.

Much has been made of the rapid growth of China's economic and military potential. If the entire Chinese population can be brought into a modernized industrial economy, the nation's potential power will be truly enormous. That said, Japan, not China, still has the second most potent economy in the world. Japanese science and technology remains ahead of China's. Japan designs and produces more complex, sophisticated consumer and capital goods than does China. It also produces more sophisticated weaponry. Because Japan's population is smaller, its per capita GDP is much higher than China's. Its ability to extract resources from its economy for military purposes is therefore higher. If the two powers shared a land border, China's vastly larger population could permit it to threaten Japan, despite China's relative poverty. Japan and China are separated by water; thus, neither can even hope to invade the other without a massive mobilization and, given the difficulty of large amphibious operations, even that might not work. Further, China is a nuclear power and, therefore, Japan could not challenge it without great risk. Most experts agree that Japan is a "near nuclear" power. A truly hostile China would quickly find itself facing a nuclear Japan, which would then be all but unassailable. Both Japan and China are trading states and are vulnerable to serious economic consequences from a war at sea. Yet, their vulnerability is reciprocal and that vulnerability seems to fall well short of the ability of either truly to strangle the other. Finally, China faces a rapidly growing potential adversary in India. In a competition with Japan, China's rear is not secure. Ultimately, if China is barely competitive with Japan, then it is far from competitive with the United States.

An ambitious China could think of going north into relatively under populated, and resource rich, Pacific Russia. It will not be long before Russia

will lose its ability to defend these areas with non-nuclear forces. Whether it would risk nuclear war to hold this land or quietly cede it to Chinese control may turn out to be the most important strategic problem of this century. But it is a problem about which the United States can do little.

#### GLOBALIZATION

Globalization and the closely associated process of modernity are both important facts of global politics. I define globalization as the spread of capitalism across the globe and the intensification of international trade, manufacturing, and investment. This is enabled by the continuing improvements in all modes of transportation for goods and people. The information technology revolution has made possible on a global scale low-cost, high-bandwidth communications. Globalization has largely been embraced by U.S. business and political elites as a good thing and it certainly offers economic opportunity to many formerly excluded from most of the benefits of modernity.

All of this opportunity and change comes at a cost, however.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, it accelerates modernity. The intensification of industrial capitalism in the late 19th century socially mobilized large numbers of people for politics by disrupting their traditional ways of life, drawing them into cities, subjecting them to the new insecurities of industrial capitalism, and exposing them to regular intense political communication. Globalization is likely to have similar effects in many parts of the world. Those socially mobilized for politics in the late 19th century became vulnerable to the appeals of nationalists, communists, and fascists, who all offered simple and powerful ideologies of solidarity and inclusion, especially in times of economic and political uncertainty. Predictions about the pace of population growth and urbanization over the next

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Kirshner, "Globalization, Power, and Prospect," in Jonathan Kirshner, ed., *Globalization and National Security* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 321–338.



several decades suggest that the developing world will see a steady supply of urbanized citizens at the lower end of the income scale, experiencing acute economic and personal insecurity, at the same time that modern technology opens them to intense mass communications and simultaneously permits small independent groups to communicate directly with large numbers of people.<sup>7</sup> These individuals will want political protection and participation and they will be vulnerable to political mobilization on the basis of identity politics. Insofar as the governments of many developing countries will have a hard time keeping up with these demands, political entrepreneurs will find fertile ground for appeals based on the resurrection of traditional values. Globalization adds some new complications to these old processes. The intensity of international trade and investment makes it easy for political entrepreneurs to blame foreigners for local problems. The enhanced ability to communicate and travel makes it possible for like-minded groups in different countries to find each other, to organize, and to cooperate.

To the generic problems posed by globalization must be added the peculiar tinder of the Arab world. There, pan-Arab and Islamic identities overlap, and do so in 22 countries with a combined population of more than 320 million. Population growth and urbanization both proceed apace, but economic growth lags, and the political organization of these countries leaves vast numbers bereft of any sense of control over their political destinies. The oil wealth of some Arab countries, compared with the poverty of so many others, fuels resentment. Oil and gas also bring the interests and presence of the great powers to the region, especially the United States. The emergence of an economically and militarily successful,

Westernized Jewish liberal democracy—Israel—in their midst serves both as a focus of identity politics and a reminder of the extent of Arab political failures since the end of the Second World War. Macro-level economic and technological forces and specifically regional characteristics thus combine to create fertile ground in the Arab world for extremists hostile to the existing international political and economic systems.

### THE DIFFUSION OF POWER

The diffusion of power, especially of military capacity, is a critical development of the last two decades. Although the United States faces few, if any, plausible competitors in the open oceans, or space, or even in the air at medium and high altitudes, nation states and groups have learned how to compete with the Americans on their home turf. In infantry combat, ruthless, committed, and oftentimes skilled Somalis, Iraqis, Afghans, and miscellaneous al Qaeda fighters have directly fought U.S. forces. They seldom “win,” but they do make the Americans pay. Somali, Iraqi, and al Qaeda air defense gunners have shot down dozens of U.S. helicopters, mainly with heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Serb SAM operators, primarily using 1970s technology, shot down few U.S. aircraft, but sufficiently complicated U.S. air operations that most Serb ground forces in Kosovo survived the 1999 air campaign. It is worth noting that all of these opponents profited from the vast arsenals of the former Warsaw Pact—especially its infantry weapons—much of which has since fallen into the wrong hands. At the same time, the ability to manufacture such weapons has spread. Simple long range artillery rockets and more complex anti-ship missiles manufactured in Iran turned up in the hands of Hezbollah in the summer 2006 war with Israel.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2007, Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth* (2007). The urban population of the world is expected to increase by roughly 50 percent, or 1.6 billion people over the next two decades, with most of the growth in the developing world (see page 6). Many of these people will be poor, and young (27). Young people aged 15–24 commit the largest number of violent acts (26–27). The revival of religion, including radical Islam, has been associated with the recent wave of urbanization (26).

According to the U.S. government, components of the Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP), off-route, anti-armored vehicle mines, discovered in Iraq were manufactured and supplied by Iran, which surely has more sophisticated versions of the same weapons in greater numbers in dumps on the other side of the border. Iran is also one of the world's largest producers of new warheads for the ubiquitous Soviet-designed RPG 7 rocket-propelled grenade launcher. More ominously, Iranian arms exporters now offer night vision devices for sale. If these devices work, an area of presumed significant U.S. tactical superiority in infantry combat will soon wane.

More important than the proliferation of low- and medium-technology conventional weapons is the apparent spread of military expertise. The combination of quality conventional weapons, large numbers of committed young men, proven tactics, and competent training that is cleverly adapted to urban, suburban, and rural environments, which favor infantry, has preserved meaningful costs of combat for high-technology U.S. ground forces. Costs escalate if U.S. or other Western forces intend to settle into other countries to reform their politics and are then forced into long counterinsurgency campaigns.

#### NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

Just as conventional military technical and tactical capacity has diffused, so has the capacity to design and build nuclear weapons. U.S. policy makers were surprisingly successful in ensuring that only one nuclear successor state would emerge from the wreckage of the Soviet Union — Russia. Three

states have, however, found their own ways to nuclear weapons capacity since the end of the Cold War: India, Pakistan, and North Korea. Iran may be next and Israel has long been assumed to have developed a nuclear weapon. Though these states vary in their respective economic and technical capacities, they each developed a nuclear capability on relatively thin resource bases. This tells us that nuclear weapons technology is no longer mysterious or particularly costly. The five original nuclear powers set up a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and regime, which has failed to achieve non-proliferation; it has achieved “slow” proliferation. The lesson of these new nuclear powers, therefore, is that proliferation cannot be prevented; it can only be managed.

#### The U.S. Response: The Grand Strategy Consensus and its Costs

Since the end of the Cold War, the American foreign policy establishment has gradually converged on a highly activist grand strategy for the United States. There is now little disagreement among Republican and Democratic foreign policy experts about the threats that the United States faces and the remedies it should pursue.<sup>8</sup> This strategy has produced or will produce an erosion of U.S. power, an increase in U.S. state and non-state opponents, and an epidemic of irresponsible behavior on the part of U.S. allies through acts of omission or commission.

Democratic and Republican strategists alike hold that the most imminent threats are to U.S. safety. Terrorism, basically Islamic in origin, is the key problem. It is caused by something

<sup>8</sup>The three candidates still in the 2009 Presidential race as of March 2008 all published articles on National Security in *Foreign Affairs*. There is a striking degree of commonality among the three strategies. See Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Security and Opportunity for the Twenty-First Century,” and John McCain, “An Enduring Peace Built on Freedom,” both in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86 (November/December 2007): 2–34. See also Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86 (July/August 2007): 2–16. My colleague, Dr. Cindy Williams, reviewed these articles and recorded the following commonalities: All three see terrorism, non-state actors, and weak or failed states as threats to the United States. All are concerned about rising powers. All insist on the need for U.S. leadership. All believe in the use of force to prevent atrocities abroad. All strongly support NATO, though they all want it to do more. Obama and Clinton note that they subscribe to the unilateral use of force; McCain is silent on the matter in the article, but he surely concurs. All rate nuclear proliferation as a very serious problem; all agree Iran must be prevented from getting nuclear weapons; all are open to a military solution to Iran's nuclear programs. Also noting the overlapping positions on Iran is David Rieff, “But Who's Against the Next War?” *The New York Times*, (25 March 2007).

that is wrong with Arab society in particular but also the societies of other Islamic countries, such as Pakistan. “Rogue” states, with interests and forms of government different from our own, a willingness to use force, and, in the worst case, an inclination to acquire nuclear weapons form a closely related threat because they may assist terrorists. Failed states, and the identity politics that travels with them, are also a serious threat not only because they produce or nurture terrorists, but also because they produce human rights violations, refugees, and crime. The possibility of a loss of U.S. influence is an overarching threat and, thus, the rise of a peer competitor is a real but at this time distant problem.

The consensus therefore supports a U.S. grand strategy of activism. The United States must remain the strongest military power in the world by a very wide margin. It should be willing to use force and preventively, if need be, on a range of issues.<sup>9</sup> The United States should endeavor to change other societies so that they look more like ours. A world of democracies would be the safest global environment for America, and the United States should be willing to pay considerable costs to produce such a world. Additionally, America should directly manage regional security relationships in any corner of the world that is of strategic importance, which increasingly is every corner of the world. The risk that nuclear weapons could “fall” into the hands of violent non-state actors is so great that the United States should be willing to take extraordinary measures, including preventive war, to keep suspicious countries from acquiring these weapons.

The key difference between the two political parties lies in attitudes toward international institutions: Democrats like and trust them;

Republicans do not. Republicans accuse Democrats of a willingness to sacrifice U.S. sovereignty to these organizations. This is not the case. Democrats obscure that they like and trust international institutions because they think that the great power of the United States will permit it to write the rules and dominate the outcomes. The legitimacy of any given outcome achieved in an international institution will rise due to the processes that have been followed, but these processes can be controlled to produce the outcomes that the United States desires. Legitimacy will lower the costs for America to get its way on a range of issues. Democrats expect that international institutions will thus produce a net gain in U.S. influence.

U.S. strategists have responded to the facts of the post-Cold War world with costly national security policies that produce new problems faster than they solve current ones. The great concentration of power in America skews the security policy debate toward activism. If the global distribution of power were more equal, U.S. policy makers would have to be more cautious about the projects they choose. The existence of a peer competitor would inject into the U.S. policy debate a persistent question: Will this project help or hurt our ability to deter or contain country X? Moreover, it is tempting in any case to imagine that with this much power, the United States could organize a safe world, once and for all, where America remains the acknowledged military and ideological leader.

A realist international relations theorist (which I am) predicts that this much power will tempt the United States toward activism and that the combination of activism and power is bound to discomfit other states. At the same time, the great concentration of American power makes

<sup>9</sup> This position is now associated mainly with President George W. Bush. See The White House, *The National Security Strategy for the United States of America* (November 2002). However, similar views were expressed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1998. On the matter of attacking Iraq she averred, “But if we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.” See Madeleine Albright, interview on *The Today Show* (19 February 1998).

direct opposition to the United States difficult and dangerous. Nevertheless, other states are doing what they can to protect their own national interests. Some fear U.S. freedom of action and the possibility of being drawn into policies inimical to their interests. They want an ability to distance themselves from the United States if they must, even as they “cheap ride” on the U.S. security umbrella.

The EU has gradually strengthened its ability to run military operations so that they can get along without the United States, if they must. Paradoxically, these same European states, in their NATO guise, under-invest in military power consequently constraining NATO’s effort in Afghanistan. Other states fear that U.S. policies will hurt their interests indirectly and look for ways to concert their power. Russia and China have reached out to each other in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Still others expect U.S. attentions to be directed straight at them and they improve their abilities to deter U.S. military action or directly engage the United States in combat. North Korea and Iran pursue nuclear weapons. Iran also has developed a conventional capability to inflict costs on the United States in the Gulf and has been implicated in inflicting such costs in Iraq. To the extent that the United States continues its current policy path, these reactions will continue and they will slowly increase the costs of future U.S. activism as well as reduce the propensity of others to cooperate in order to share these costs.

Other states take advantage of U.S. largesse to improve their own positions, sometimes against U.S. interests. They are not free riders, but rather reckless drivers. The Taiwanese nationalist party in power for the last eight years seemed bent on

causing a confrontation with mainland China that the United States wished to avoid. America helped make Israel the preeminent military power of the Middle East to assure its security; it has used that position to increase its hold on lands taken in the 1967 war, which the United States believes must revert to Palestinian control. The occupation has harmed the U.S. position in the Arab world.

American activism also interacts with globalization to provoke negative reactions to the U.S. Insofar as the U.S. economy is the largest and most dynamic in the world, the forces associated with globalization — trade, global supply chains, investment, travel, and communications — will often be associated with America by those experiencing the consequences. Political entrepreneurs in the developing world will find it expedient to attribute the difficulties experienced by their target populations to the actions of the United States. An activist foreign and security policy makes the United States the most obvious unkind face of globalization. When U.S. activism turns to direct military intervention in the affairs of other countries, local political leaders can rely on the most elemental of forces, nationalism. Most people who have formed any collective identity strongly prefer to run their own affairs and can generally be relied upon to resist violently those who try to reorganize their politics at gunpoint. Sometimes such movements are weak, but one ought not to count on it.

Aside from Saddam Hussein’s attempted smash-and-grab robbery of Kuwait, the first troublesome conflicts of the post-Cold War world were internal and centered on identity.<sup>10</sup> Given the weakness of the opposition, the United States paid a surprisingly high price to intervene in these disputes. For the U.S. military, this included Desert Storm’s

<sup>10</sup> A still unexplained increase in the number of internal conflicts, many of them about identity, began in the late 1970s, peaked in 1991, and then mysteriously declined to the present level, roughly equal to the level of the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that 118 of the 228 armed conflicts recorded since the end of World War II, occurred after the end of the Cold War. The vast majority of these conflicts were internal. See Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflict and its International Dimensions, 1946–2004,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 42 (2005): 623–635.

unhappy postscript in the rebellions in northern and southern Iraq and civil wars in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. U.S. leadership eschewed military intervention to stop the Rwanda genocide, but those in the Clinton administration who made this decision all regret it deeply and critics of this policy believe that such an intervention would have been easy and successful.

The U.S. approaches to these conflicts have certain similarities, rooted in U.S. liberalism, which exalts the rational calculating individual and thus underestimates the power of loyalty to the group. America was usually surprised by one or more of the following: the outbreak of conflict itself, the extent of group ambitions, the intensity of violence, the intensity of group loyalties, and the cost and duration of any U.S. military effort to intervene. This myopia crossed party lines and persisted: Republican security strategists were as surprised and confounded by the bloody, stubborn, and resilient identity politics of Iraq as the Clinton Administration was in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. The interventions of the Clinton years should have served as a warning. The United States is facing a half-trillion-dollar bill for the direct costs of its effort in Iraq, an effort that has seriously damaged the U.S. Army and has served as a school for jihadi fighters.

Despite the great power of the United States, its national security establishment is particularly ill suited to a strategy that focuses so heavily on intervention into the internal political affairs of others. The U.S. national security establishment, including the intelligence agencies and the State Department, remains short on individuals who understand other countries and their cultures and speak their languages. The United States seems to lack sufficient numbers of analysts, diplomats, advisors, and intelligence agents for the array of global engagement opportunities in which it is involved. Moreover, it should be admitted that

a good many people who are capable find their vocations in non-governmental organizations. They are more interested in representing the problems of the places where they work and study to the U.S. government and public than figuring out what the United States should do in these places from the point of view of its own security interests. Additionally, U.S. politicians are reluctant to provide significant funds for non-military projects overseas. Whether or not foreign economic assistance produces much long term benefit in the recipient countries, it is an important tool of an activist foreign policy. Without it, the center of gravity of U.S. foreign policy efforts shifts to the military.

U.S. active ground forces, which carry the weight of efforts to transform other societies, have been relatively small since conscription was abandoned at the end of the Vietnam War. The all-volunteer U.S. ground forces shrunk quickly from their end of Cold War peak of nearly one million, reaching 470,000 in the Army and just under 170,000 in the Marines in 2001. By comparison, the United States had 440,000 Army soldiers and Marines in Vietnam in 1969 out of a total strength of nearly 2 million. Even with the 100,000-person increase now pledged by Republicans and Democrats, U.S. ground forces will remain small. It is difficult to maintain more than a third of a professional ground force in combat at any one time without suffering retention, recruitment, and training problems. Roughly half of American forces are currently deployed and this is understood to be unsustainable. Half of Iraq's land area and population essentially swallowed the Army and Marines over the last five years and the demands of that fight have turned U.S. ground forces into "Iraq only" capabilities. Other possible U.S. adversaries dwarf Iraq in population — Iran is nearly three times as populous and Pakistan is nearly six times. A prolonged period of peace, vast sums of money,



and a suffering economy might allow a significant expansion of U.S. ground forces without conscription but even a return to the Cold War peak would be insufficient to meet the problems raised by an activist grand strategy. If the attacks of September 11, 2001, coupled with the demands of the war in Iraq, have not produced a political consensus for the reinstatement of conscription, it is hard to see what would.

The United States also seems to lack the domestic political capacity to generate sufficient material resources to support its foreign policy over the long term. The American public has been trained by its politicians to be chary of taxes. As a result, the U.S. government has financed much of its security efforts since September 11 with borrowed money. Even obvious security related taxes, such as a tax on gasoline to discourage consumption to help wean America off imported oil, find no political sponsors. It is difficult to believe that U.S. hegemony can long be financed with borrowed money. Economists seem unworried about the mass of foreign debt the United States has accumulated, noting that debt as a share of U.S. GDP is remarkably low compared to other advanced industrial powers. America, however, will soon add the financing of the retirement and health care of a huge cohort of baby boomer retirees to its foreign policy bills.

The activist grand strategy that is currently preferred by the national security establishment in both parties thus has a tragic quality. Enabled by its great power and fearful of the negative energies and possibilities engendered by globalization, the United States has tried to get its arms around the problem; it has sought more control. But this policy injects negative energy into global politics as quickly as it finds enemies to vanquish. It prompts states to try to balance U.S. power however they can and it prompts peoples to imagine that

America is the source of their troubles. Moreover, Iraq should be seen as a harbinger of costs to come. There exists enough capacity and motivation out there in the world to significantly increase the costs of U.S. efforts to directly manage global politics. Public support for this policy may wane before profligacy so diminishes U.S. power that it becomes unsustainable. But it would be unwise to count on this prudent outcome.

### **A Grand Strategy of Restraint**

If security is about deterring or defending against threats to safety, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and power position, what is to be done? The United States should have three overriding objectives: the preservation of its power and power position, the reduction of its political and emotional salience in the eyes of populations suffering the insecurities associated with entry into the modern globalized world, and the weakening of states and non-state actors intent on enacting violence against the United States. It is not easy to pursue these goals simultaneously. An activist solution has been tried and is not working. The United States is getting weaker, albeit slowly; its salience in the eyes of others has increased; and al Qaeda seems no weaker than it was on September 11 and is, in fact, arguably stronger. A less activist strategy would work better.

#### **THE POLITICS OF PRESERVING U.S. POWER**

For now, most threats to America are not threats to U.S. sovereignty or territorial integrity. The country is in no danger of conquest or diktats from those more capable. U.S. territorial integrity is secure. The reasons these dangers are small is because the U.S. power position is excellent—any power position that allows a country to think about running the world ought to provide ample capability for defense. Protecting this power position is an important goal, but intense armed international activism is the wrong way to proceed.



First, the United States should lower its participation in regional security schemes. As argued earlier, a rough balance of power now exists in Eurasia. If and as regional powers grow strong enough to threaten their neighbors, and perhaps ultimately threaten U.S. interests, local actors will wish to balance that power. The United States should preserve an ability to help out if necessary but should remain stingy in this regard. Others should get organized and dig into their own pockets before Americans show up, thus saving U.S. resources for other uses until they are really needed; these other uses may increase overall U.S. capabilities if properly invested.<sup>11</sup> A more distant stance to these regions would likely increase U.S. influence. Currently, U.S. interest is taken for granted and local actors do little to earn U.S. support.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. forward stance pokes and prods other states. If Russia, China, or Iran wishes to make themselves enemies of the United States, it would be better to put the onus on them. As it stands today, U.S. pressure brings these states and others like them together. We should want to keep them divided. They are not all natural allies of one another. Moreover, although these states are not perfect democracies, they must confront their own domestic politics. Why make it easy for them to build domestic coalitions in favor of external assertiveness, masked as resistance to U.S. pressure? As the United States depends excessively on military power to support its diplomacy, others see U.S. efforts as particularly threatening. Americans have

no concept of how others view this. Few Americans know about the Unified Command Plan, which puts U.S. forces in hailing distance of all the consequential powers in the world. Few understand that America is the only power in the world that for all intents and purposes is ready to go to war almost anywhere at any time. Theodore Roosevelt said speak softly and carry a big stick — today the United States only follows half that advice.

Finally, the United States has grown too fond of using military power. This instills fear in other states; some may become more cooperative but they also take measures to better defend themselves and, in turn, weaken the U.S. position. Some military operations have been inexpensive; others have been quite costly. If one wages enough wars, eventually one will go poorly. The Iraq War has proven immensely costly in dollars, moderately costly in lives, and very costly to the U.S. reputation. Even if the endgame in Iraq can be portrayed as a success to the public, this war will not have strengthened the United States; it will have weakened it. Vast resources have been expended for little or no security gain. Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist Iraq had almost no capability to attack the U.S. homeland or its interests. U.S. power to deter Iraq was ample. Containment and deterrence worked against the Soviet Union; a heavily armed state with roughly half of the equivalent U.S. GDP, and equal or greater defense spending. Iraq's whole GDP was considerably less than the U.S. defense budget.

<sup>11</sup> Given politically realistic expectations about tax and spending policy, the United States now risks a rate of deficit spending that is unsustainable, and which could significantly lower U.S. economic output over the next forty years. Tax increases and spending cuts will be necessary to bring revenues and expenditures into a sustainable equilibrium. Though Social Security and health care are the major sources of expenditure growth, it is unlikely that defense can escape the paring knife. See Congressional Budget Office, *The Long Term Budget Outlook* (December 2007): 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. to Bolster Forces in Afghanistan: Pentagon Cites NATO's Failure to Provide Additional Troops," *The Washington Post*, (10 January 2008): A04. See also Data Analysis Section, Force Planning Directorate, Defense Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, *NATO-Russia Compendium of Financial and Economic Data Relating to Defence*, (20 December 2007), for data showing that U.S. allies consistently spent a much lower share of GDP on defense than the United States, even before the attacks of September 11, 2001. This NATO report now includes data on Russia, but has eliminated aggregate comparisons of U.S. and NATO European defense spending, burying the relative weight of European and U.S. contributions to the common defense. The reader must now calculate this. The formerly annual U.S. Dept. of Defense "Allied Contributions to the Common Defense" has not been published since 2004. U.S. citizens now have a more difficult time judging the efforts of their allies.

**PROTECTING U.S. SAFETY**

Today the most imminent U.S. security problem is safety. Here, I agree with the consensus view. The main threat is al Qaeda but if the analysis above is right, there are deeper forces feeding that organization than their interpretation of religious texts, and these forces could give rise to future violent organizations. This threat should not be minimized, but neither should it be exaggerated. Al Qaeda is ruthless, persistent, and creative. It will remain possible for such groups to kill tens and hundreds, if not occasionally thousands, with materials ready at hand. This will not bring down the United States of America and it would be wise to stop conveying to these groups that they can. If such groups get their hands on a nuclear weapon and use it, the costs are obviously much worse. It is important, however, to remind others that America would still go on and that it will hunt down the perpetrators and whoever helped them, no matter how long it takes.

The United States needs to do two things to deal with al Qaeda, specifically, reduce its political salience in the populations from which al Qaeda recruits, and keep al Qaeda busy defending itself, so it cannot focus resources on attacking the United States or its friends.

Two strategies have been suggested to take on al Qaeda. The United States has pursued an expansive strategy of direct action. After September 11, I suggested a different strategy, one more defensive than offensive and more precisely directed at al Qaeda, though I did support the overthrow of the Taliban, and still do.<sup>13</sup> The basic orientation of the Bush Administration was offensive, but their priorities were bizarre. They appropriately went after al Qaeda *and* the organization's most immediate friends, but before finishing the job they quickly turned to Saddam Hussein and Iraq, dubious

future allies of al Qaeda. The respite allowed al Qaeda to recover, by the U.S. Intelligence Community's own admission.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the United States has squandered one relatively constant factor that should work in its favor, the fact that the nature of al Qaeda condemns it to theatrical terrorist attacks against innocent people, since such attacks have a way of alienating potential supporters. By over stressing offensive action in Iraq and, by occupying an Arab country in particular the United States has contributed to the al Qaeda story in the Arab world and has done a terrible job of telling the U.S. story. Some think the United States can do a better job debating al Qaeda in the Arab world. I doubt it, but it is worth a try. The scarcity of U.S. expertise about Arab nations and culture suggests that their pitching staff is larger than ours. To weaken al Qaeda, the United States must first stop giving it debating points for its narrative.

An alternative strategy to fight al Qaeda is to draw as many other states as possible into the effort while avoiding adding new facts to the jihadi narrative. America needs to reduce, not increase, its presence in the Arab and Islamic world. The U.S. military should abandon permanent and semi-permanent land bases in Arab states and should generally lower the profile of its military and security cooperation with Arab states. The fight against al Qaeda should continue, but it should be conducted in the world of intelligence. Cooperation with foreign intelligence and police agencies comes first, but the U.S. intelligence community may need to engage in direct action from time to time. To the extent that America has interests in the Arab world that can only be pursued with old fashioned military power, such as the possible need to defend Arab states from Iranian

<sup>13</sup> Barry R. Posen, "The Struggle Against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics," *International Security*, Vol. 26 (Winter 2001/2002): 39–55.

<sup>14</sup> National Intelligence Council, *National Intelligence Estimate: The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland* (July 2007).

expansionism, the United States should rely on its massive power projection capabilities. The U.S. military should be over the horizon.

To reduce political sympathies for its enemies, the United States needs projects in the developing world that are consistent with U.S. values and permits America to look like the “good guy.” Three steps commend themselves to these objectives.

1. The United States should build on the experience of Operation Unified Assistance, which provided prompt relief to victims of the Pacific tsunami of December 26, 2004.<sup>15</sup> The remarkable “power projection” capability of the U.S. military provides an inherent capability to get into many major natural disaster areas “first with the most.” Admiral Thomas Fargo, then head of U.S. Pacific Command, quickly saw the potential assistance that could be rendered by the U.S. military in the early and desperate days after the disaster. No other country or organization could have done what was achieved. Political results were seen quickly through shifting opinions of America in the countries in question, including most notably Indonesia. Disasters happen, and the United States can earn a great deal of political respect for coming to the aid of those most impacted. Further, and in contrast to peace-keeping and peace enforcement operations, which for many have the same purposes, natural disaster relief efforts have a clear exit strategy.
2. Instead of focusing on the export of democracy, which we lack sufficient cause-effect knowledge to accomplish in any case, let us recommend practices that will allow others to find their own way to democracy, or at least to more benign forms of government. The United States should make itself a voice for the rule of law and for press freedom.
3. The United States should be willing to assist in humanitarian military interventions, but under reasonable guidelines. The most important guideline is to eschew overselling the mission to the American people. Prior to engaging in armed philanthropy, U.S. leaders should not disguise the effort as the pursuit of a security interest. If the latter is required to sell the policy, then the policy is already in trouble. Once characterized as a security interest, the U.S. Congress and public expect that American forces will lead the fight, that decisive military means will be employed, and that victory will be achieved. This raises U.S. military and political costs. Instead, the United States should only engage in armed philanthropy in large coalitions, operating under some kind of regional or international political mandate. America should not insist on leadership; indeed, it should avoid it. On the whole, the United States should offer logistical, rather than direct combat, assets.

The United States must also develop a more measured view of the risks of nuclear proliferation. It will not be possible, without preventive war, to physically stop all potential new nuclear weapons programs. Nuclear weapons are no longer mysterious, but neither are they easy to get. It is costly and technically difficult to produce fissionable material in quantities sufficient for nuclear weapons and only a few countries have this capability. It has taken a good bit of time for those smaller states who wished to develop nuclear weapons to get them. Though an imperfect regime, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) do provide obstacles to the development of nuclear weapons and some early warning that mischief is afoot. Good intelligence work can provide more warning

<sup>15</sup>Bruce A. Elleman, *Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy's Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia*, Center for Naval Warfare Studies Newport Paper 28, (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2007).

and presumably some intelligence operations could slow the diffusion of nuclear know-how, slowing the progress of national nuclear programs, if need be.

It is worthwhile to keep proliferation relatively costly and slow because other states require time to adapt to such events and extra time would be useful to explain to the new nuclear power the rules of the game they are entering. American policy makers feel compelled to trumpet that all options, including force, are on the table when dealing with “rogue” state proliferators. True enough. The United States is a great military power and on security matters its forces are never off the table. But preventive war ought not to be casually considered. It has serious and probably enduring political costs, which the United States need not incur. Deterrence is a better strategy. America is a great nuclear power, and should remain so. Against possible new nuclear powers such as North Korea, or Iran, U.S. capabilities are superior in every way. In contrast to the Cold-War competition with the Soviet Union, where neither country would have survived a nuclear exchange, it is clear which nation would survive such an exchange between the United States and North Korea or Iran. Indeed, these states should worry that they will be vulnerable to preemptive U.S. nuclear attacks, in the unhappy event that they confront the United States over important issues. In addition, new nuclear states ought not to be encouraged through loose talk to believe that they can give nuclear weapons to others to use against America and somehow free themselves of the risks of U.S. retaliation.

#### ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBILITY

Finally, U.S. security guarantees and security assistance relieves others of the necessity to do

more to ensure their own security and enables others to pursue policies that counter U.S. interests. The United States should stop this; as part of a strategy of restraint there must be a coherent, integrated, long-term effort to encourage long-time wards to look after themselves. If others do more, this will not only save U.S. resources, it increases the salience of other countries in the discourse of political entrepreneurs hostile to globalization. The other consequential powers benefit as much from globalization as does the United States, and they should also share political ownership of the political costs. If others need to pay more for their security, they will think harder about their choices. Virtually all existing U.S. international relationships need a rethink. Below I offer some examples, but there are surely many more relationships and policies that should be reconsidered. These changes must be implemented as a package to produce the desired effect. It would not be prudent to launch these policies overnight; a governing rule should be *not* to so rapidly or decisively alter regional politics that windows of vulnerability or opportunity are opened to tempt or compel military action.

- The effort to preserve and expand NATO, a project aimed at ensuring U.S. power and influence in Eurasia, enabled the excessive drawdown of some European military capabilities, notably those of Germany and Italy, and stood in the way of possible improvements in European military capacity in the EU. This also has had the effect of allowing members of the EU to postpone decisions about how to integrate Turkey into Europe. They can consign this task to NATO and the United States. The United States should develop a ten-year plan to turn NATO into a more traditional political alliance. America should withdraw from military headquarters and commands in Europe, which could migrate to the EU, if Europeans actually find them useful. Most U.S. military forces still in Europe today would return home.

- U.S. military assistance to Israel makes the occupation of the territories inexpensive for Israeli political leaders and implicates America in these efforts. This does not help the U.S. image in the Arab world. Occupation of the West Bank does not seem to be good for Israel either, but Israeli society can decide its security priorities for itself. The United States should develop a ten-year plan to reduce U.S. government direct financial assistance to Israel to zero. Israel is now a prosperous country. It is surrounded by military powers with no capacity to conquer the state. These countries can find no superpower patron to back them with great new supplies of modern conventional offensive weapons sold on credit or offered as gifts, including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, fighter aircraft, and attack helicopters. There is no producer in the world today with the capacity that the Soviet Union once had to suddenly alter material military balances. Israel can then decide how much the occupied territories matter to its security and how to allocate security spending accordingly. Israel is not an enemy of the United States and it will not become one; friendly relations should continue. Israel should be permitted to purchase spare parts for existing U.S. military equipment and new military equipment to the extent that these are needed to assure a regional military balance. To ensure that the reduction of military assistance to Israel is perceived as fair in American politics, and to ensure against the creation of any windows of vulnerability or opportunity, U.S. assistance to Egypt should be put on the same diet, with an allowance for Egypt's comparative poverty. The United States should practice restraint in its arms sales to the region, and encourage others to do the same. If other states decide to disrupt the new regional military balance, U.S. leadership can reconsider both decisions and should convey the message that it would do so.
- The United States also needs to reconsider its security relationship with Japan. This relationship allows Japan to avoid the domestic political debates necessary to determine a new role for itself in Asia. In particular, it allows Japan to avoid coming to terms with its own past and relieves it of the necessity to develop diplomatic strategies to make it more "alliance worthy" in Asia. The modalities of a change in the alliance with Japan are trickier than they are in Europe because Asia is a more unsettled place due to China's rapid economic expansion and concomitant military improvements. Nevertheless, some change is in order. U.S. policy in recent years has endeavored to bind Japan ever more closely to U.S. global concerns. America seems to be consolidating its military base structure in Japan and integrating that base structure ever more tightly into its global warfighting capability. Japan cooperates in order to protect the one-way U.S. security guarantee embedded in the U.S.-Japan security treaty. The United States is obliged to come to Japan's defense, but Japan is not obliged to do anything. Japanese military cooperation is doled out by the thimble full, just enough to keep America engaged. Confidence in the U.S. security guarantee limits the necessity for Japan to launch an intensive diplomatic effort to reconcile with its former enemies and persuade them that today's Japan will not repeat the rampages of the last century. Thus, as with its activist grand strategy elsewhere in the world, the United States does more; others do less; and U.S. responsibilities mount.<sup>16</sup> Under a grand strategy of restraint, America would reverse its military orientation in Japan and aim for the minimal military relationship necessary to implement the security treaty. Some U.S. forces would be withdrawn from

<sup>16</sup>Christopher W. Hughes, in *Japan's Emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power*, (London: IISS, 2004): 368–9, observes that Japan has significantly improved its military capabilities in recent years but at the same time, "the JSDF force structure is becoming ever more skewed to the point that Japan cannot defend itself without U.S. assistance."



Japan entirely in the near term. Other bases should be slimmed down.<sup>17</sup> Japan must be made to understand that the U.S. commitment is no longer to defend Japan, but to help Japan defend itself, in extremis. The U.S. willingness to do so in the future will rest greatly on the extent and wisdom of Japan's military efforts at home and diplomatic efforts in the region.

#### MILITARY STRATEGY

A grand strategy of restraint suggests changes in U.S. military strategy. There are things that America should do, and things it should not do. First, the United States must maintain "Command of the Commons," an ability to use sea, air, and space when it needs to do so. This is the essential enabler for the United States to practice balance of power strategies on the Eurasian land mass, to employ military power to keep non-state enemies such as al Qaeda on the run, and to assist in humanitarian military operations in the rare occasions that these are deemed reasonable investments of U.S. power. Command of the Commons also permits "over the horizon" strategies in places where the United States may have interests that it wishes to defend, but where it does not want to incur the possible political costs of having forces ashore. The best example would be the Persian Gulf. Realistically, the United States may, from time to time, require access to land bases in various parts of the world in order to preserve an ability to move its forces globally. The model developed in the Global Posture Review should dominate. The United States should secure quiet agreements for access, and piggy back on existing national facilities that it can improve against the possibility that the capacity would be needed later. The United States should avoid the appearance of permanent presence and permanent bases. Some states will find it

in their interests to cooperate with America in this endeavor, and some will not. The United States should avoid the temptation of having visible permanent installations abroad whenever it can.

To ensure that states that might consider the acquisition of nuclear weapons consider carefully the risks they run by doing so, the United States must maintain a viable nuclear deterrent. This includes letting others know that the United States would retaliate if nuclear weapons were used against U.S. soil or U.S. forces. America would also need to let other states know that its intelligence agencies both have and prioritize nuclear forensics, or the determination of "return addresses" after a nuclear attack. Nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence are a terrible business. It is improbable that the Treaty-delineated nuclear weapons states will succeed in controlling entirely the technology that permits others to build nuclear weapons. The United States must take the world as it is—which means making crystal clear our willingness and ability to retaliate.

Finally, the United States needs to avoid pitting its weaknesses against others' strengths. This means avoiding protracted ground force engagements. Where U.S. ground forces are needed to help defend important allies from invasion, they should be used. Where they are needed to recover important ground, they should be used. Occasionally, it may be reasonable to "raid" areas that U.S. enemies are using to organize attacks against us. On the other hand, projects that involve long occupations for peace enforcement, nation building, and/or counterinsurgency should be avoided. U.S. ground forces are not large enough for most operations of this type. These operations run the greatest risk of direct collisions with aroused nationalism in populous countries. Moreover, though "doctrine"

<sup>17</sup> Chris Preble, in *Two Normal Countries: Rethinking the U.S.-Japan Strategic Relationship* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, April, 2006), offers a systematic plan for how the United States should proceed in order to transform the U.S.-Japan relationship into a more equitable alliance.



has been written to guide U.S. forces in these contingencies, this is at best a codification of best practices, not a recipe for success. Politics matters more, and we have no political cookbooks to deliver stable, friendly democracies.

### **RESTRAINT: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

Grand strategy is a set of general principals. Grand strategy provides guidance for specific contingencies, but not detailed plans. Elsewhere, I have explored the reasons for and modalities of an exit strategy from Iraq. Here, I only sketch out an approach to Iraq.<sup>18</sup> The principal U.S. security interests in Iraq are negative: limiting the prospects for a comfortable and well-funded base for al Qaeda, and limiting the prospects for a regional war that could significantly reduce the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. These goals can be achieved at lower U.S. costs in blood, treasure, and reputation by pulling U.S. forces out of Iraq and employing U.S. military power in the region to contain whatever problems Iraq may continue to create. Some also worry about the risks of civil war and intervention by outside powers into such a war. In my judgment, the costs of these two outcomes fall mainly on others. The United States should diplomatically engage all regional powers to explore common interests and concert action in an effort to avoid these unpleasant outcomes.

From offshore with naval power, from informal land bases in the region for special operations forces, from Diego Garcia, and through prepositioning and bare base agreements with local states, the United States can deal with the risks of greatest concern to America and others in the region. It is clear that the nightmare scenario of an al Qaeda takeover of Iraq cannot happen; the Shiites are now too strong. It is possible that a current U.S. exit from Iraq would leave bin Laden sympathizers able to operate in that country, as they can now.

From outside, the United States can, with intelligence operations and occasional raids, continue to observe and harass such people. There are plenty of people in Iraq who hate Bin Laden sympathizers and, in exchange for money and weapons, will be willing to pursue them. Neighboring states will have a greater interest in watching their borders with Iraq than they do now, because bin Laden sympathizers are a threat to all the regimes in the neighborhood. They could no longer count on U.S. forces to bear the bulk of the burden of controlling these threats so they would have to do more in their own interests. Many worry about the possibility of civil war in Iraq and the possibility that such a war would not only draw outside powers in, but escalate to a more general regional war. Civil war and outside intervention to support Iraqi clients is possible, but escalation to a general war is improbable, and it is only general war that much threatens the region's energy exports. The Gulf states and Iran both depend on vulnerable oil installations and export routes for the bulk of their national wealth and would have a great deal to lose from escalation. Some mutual deterrence may prevail. From an offshore military position, the United States ought to be able to generate sufficient military power to deter Iran from escalating to general war and reassure Saudi Arabia that its basic security is intact.

The overthrow of the Taliban regime was a necessary response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Taliban had been warned many times prior to the attacks to sever their relationship with bin Laden. U.S. leaders cannot allow other states to believe that they can host violent conspiracies against it, and could not allow al Qaeda to continue a safe existence in Afghanistan. The war itself was mismanaged; too little military attention was focused on bin Laden and his immediate circle and on key Taliban

<sup>18</sup>Barry R. Posen, "Exit Strategy: How to disengage from Iraq in 18 months," *Boston Review* (January/February 2006).

elements. Because both Taliban and al Qaeda elements survived the war and took refuge across the border in the tribal areas of Pakistan, there is a grave risk that, absent a U.S. presence, these elements could return to Afghanistan and their old ways. Thus, the United States is stuck managing a counterinsurgency and state-building exercise in Afghanistan.

Restraint still has some advice for the Afghan war. First, the United States must resist the temptation to keep adding forces to Afghanistan. Too many forces in country would probably energize nationalist resistance and help turn Afghans against America. Second, the problem of building a competent Afghan state and associated security forces needs to be treated more seriously. The best is the enemy of the good; the purpose is not to build an exemplary democracy but rather to build a state that can deliver some services, and keep some order. One reason not to increase the U.S. troop presence is to remind the Afghans that they do need to assume more responsibility for their security. Third, the United States must resist the temptation to expand the war to Pakistan. Although the Pakistan base areas of the Taliban and al Qaeda are a major problem, the United States must not energize Pakistani nationalism against it. Current discussions of quiet and sustained efforts to improve Pakistan's police forces seem the right way to go. Finally, the United States will need to significantly reduce its forces in the region well short of a decisive victory. The goal should be to help move the Afghan and Pakistani governments to a point where they can contain al Qaeda and Taliban fighters on their own. Staying longer also runs the risk of turning more local forces against the United States.

## **Conclusion**

Presidents William Clinton and George W. Bush have been running an experiment with U.S. grand strategy for nearly sixteen years. The theory to be tested was, "Very good intentions, plus very great power, plus action can transform both international politics and the domestic politics of other states in ways that are highly advantageous to the United States at costs that the United States can afford." The evidence is in; the experiment has failed. Transformation is unachievable and costs are high. America needs to test a different grand strategy: it should conceive its security interests narrowly; it must use its military power stingily; it should pursue its enemies quietly but persistently; it should share responsibilities and costs more equitably; and ultimately, it must patiently watch and wait more.