

THE PRUDENT USE OF POWER

IN AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY



Edited by
Stephen Van Evera and Sidharth Shah

THE
TOBIN PROJECT

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For information address

The Tobin Project, One Mifflin Place, Suite 240, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.

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Contents

7 INTRODUCTION

Sidharth Shah

11 **PART I: The American Experience
with Diplomacy and Military Restraint**

13 CHAPTER I

Orphaned Diplomats: The American Struggle
to Match Diplomacy with Power

Jeremi Suri

31 CHAPTER II

Between Power and Partnership: The Prudent Uses
of Multilateralism

Caroline V. Davidson

57 CHAPTER III

Is a Grand Strategy of Restraint Politically Feasible Today?
Major Roadblocks to a Prudent Foreign Policy

Jane Kelleth Cramer

75 **PART II: Nonkinetic Power and
Contemporary National Security Challenges**

77 CHAPTER IV

Using U.S. Leverage to Abate Conflicts
That Harm U.S. Security

Stephen Van Evera

91 CHAPTER V

Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating
with the Enemy

Deepak Malhotra

97	CHAPTER VI	Economic Sanctions and the Prudent Use of Power <i>Kimberly Ann Elliott</i>
115	CHAPTER VII	Cold War Two?: The (Il)logic of a Struggle with China for Resources in the Developing World <i>Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press</i>
129	PART III: Liquidating Military Commitments	
131	CHAPTER VIII	Cutting Losses in Wars of Choice: Obstacles and Strategies <i>Stephen Walt</i>
157	CHAPTER IX	A U.S. Military Withdrawal from the Greater Middle East: Impact on Terrorism <i>Daniel Byman</i>
175	CHAPTER X	How Damaging are Worst-Case Scenarios in the Persian Gulf? <i>F. Gregory Gause III</i>
185	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	

Introduction

In the early months of 2009, newly elected President Barack Obama presented a distinct alternative to the muscular tone that characterized much of American foreign policy for the past decade. In his inaugural address, Obama called for the greater use of diplomacy and the “prudent use” of military power in the conduct of the United States’ foreign policy.¹ The Obama administration’s 2010 National Security Strategy reaffirmed this shift toward more reliance on “non-kinetic” (or nonmilitary) power.² It is unclear what the ultimate implications and results of this approach will be at the time of this writing. However, this shift in policy calls for social science scholarship that tests the underpinnings of a greater reliance on nonkinetic power. In the face of a confounding array of national security challenges, from instability in the Middle East to the emergence of radical transnational actors, good social science can provide valuable insight about the promises and risks of a strategy grounded in the concept of “power through its prudent use.”

Nonetheless, there remains a gap between this turn in national security strategy and much of the contemporary foreign policy thinking in American academic and policy circles. There is an ingrained contention in the U.S. that the use of nonmilitary tools of statecraft, such as negotiations, to deal with adversaries amounts to “appeasement” and a demonstration of weakness. This argument has become so pervasive that many policymakers are reluctant to publicly recommend such strategies. Politicians who want to enhance their national security credentials often invoke their commitments to military spending and willingness to use force, and the public often associates national security with the use of the military. Both in policy and public discourse in the United States, the subject of national security revolves largely around the use of military power.

1 “Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2009; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?pagewanted=all>.

2 “National Security Strategy,” May 2010, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.

It would, of course, be naive to assume that diplomacy is appropriate in all situations involving adversaries. Furthermore, negotiations are often more successful when backed with the threat of force. But the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan illustrate that the utility of military power is limited in the sort of nontraditional or asymmetric conflicts that increasingly concern the U.S. and may be more effective when combined with nonmilitary measures. The military is but one instrument in a foreign policy toolkit that contains other useful tools, from economic sanctions and incentives to negotiations and public diplomacy. These nonkinetic tools are an understudied—and perhaps underutilized—option for maintaining national security and, in conjunction with military force, could help support more effective security policies for the U.S.

In this compendium of ten essays, leading scholars from the fields of political science, history, and management examine the utility of nonkinetic power in U.S. national security policy in both a historical and contemporary context. The scholars also consider the risks and benefits of shifting to a more “prudent,” or restrained, use of American kinetic power in foreign policy. The purpose is to assess the utility of nonkinetic power for addressing security challenges and to discover how and where it can be used most effectively. Are there situations in which nonkinetic power is conventionally ignored by policymakers but could actually prove to be useful? The objective is not to downplay the value of force. Rather, it is to understand how nonkinetic tools can better fit into a broader national security strategy that makes use of all available options, including the military.

This publication offers three broad perspectives on the role of nonkinetic power in American foreign policy:

I. The American Experience with Diplomacy and Military Restraint

Part I explores the U.S.’s historical experience with diplomacy from the perspective of foreign relations as well as domestic politics. Jeremi Suri’s essay argues that the U.S. increasingly marginalized its rich tradition of diplomacy and compromise as it achieved superpower status in the first half of the twentieth century. Carolyn Davidson analyzes how the U.S. has addressed the long-standing tension between engaging in formal multilateral partnerships and a desire to maintain a high level of autonomy in foreign policy. The last essay in this section, by Jane Cramer, examines historical public and elite support in the U.S. for a grand strategy that emphasizes the restrained use of military power.

II. Nonkinetic Power and Contemporary National Security Challenges

Moving from historical analysis to contemporary challenges, the essays in part II discuss how the U.S. could make greater use of nonkinetic power to address present-day national security issues. Stephen Van Evera suggests how the U.S.

can wield its diplomatic leverage to resolve four conflicts that endanger national security: India-Pakistan, Israel-Palestine, Iraq's civil war, and Russia's fractious relationship with Ukraine and Georgia. Deepak Malhotra's and Kimberly Elliott's essays focus on specific instruments of nonkinetic power—negotiations and economic sanctions, respectively. Malhotra shows why under particular circumstances negotiating with an adversary without preconditions may be a productive form of diplomacy. Elliott examines the utility of various types of economic sanctions as a coercive tool. Finally, Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press analyze China's efforts to secure sources of natural resources around the world and argue that this behavior does not require a militarized response from the U.S., as many analysts contend.

III. Liquidating Military Commitments

Whereas part II focuses on the use of nonkinetic instruments of statecraft, part III considers the risks and benefits that are associated with a decreased reliance on military power. Stephen Walt examines how states choose to terminate military commitments abroad and what makes these decisions so difficult; he further explores how states can minimize the negative impact of ending these commitments. Daniel Byman and F. Gregory Gause III study the complex implications of a hypothetical American military withdrawal from the Middle East and arrive at contrasting conclusions. Byman argues that removing U.S. forces from the region would increase the risk of terrorist attacks on American interests and would not induce al-Qaeda to cease its activities. Gause, in contrast, contends that a withdrawal to an “over-the horizon” position (that is, a position in which troops would remain within striking distance of the Persian Gulf States but would not be stationed within their borders) would be unlikely to harm American interests so long as Iran did not obtain nuclear weapons.

In the course of examining a rich collection of topics related to nonkinetic power, these essays highlight new directions for research. For one, Carlyne Davidson's piece raises the question of whether history can inform attempts to reshape and adapt existing alliances to meet future security challenges. Kimberly Elliott's analysis of the efficacy of economic sanctions could be complemented by a similar examination of economic incentives, such as promises of aid. Stephen Walt's study on how states can end military commitments could be extended by research on how institutional structures within governments affect decision making and whether they encourage leaders to favor particular policies. There is also much work to be done on several related topics not addressed here, including the relationship between international institutions and American power, elements of soft power such as public diplomacy, and the potential impact of the recent financial crisis on the U.S.'s global stature.

It is our hope that the essays in this publication will motivate scholars, the policy community, and the public to think more deeply about how nonmilitary means can potentially contribute to U.S. national security. President Obama's inaugural address and National Security Strategy outlined a vision of a foreign policy that could make fuller use of nonkinetic instruments of statecraft. As Obama and his successors continue to face international security challenges, they will have to draw on the very best ideas to underpin their policies. We hope that this collection of essays provides an initial contribution to a wider stock of ideas upon which they can rely.

Sidharth Shah
The Tobin Project
August 2010

PART I:
**THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
WITH DIPLOMACY AND
MILITARY RESTRAINT**

I. Orphaned Diplomats: The American Struggle to Match Diplomacy with Power

Jeremi Suri

E. Gordon Fox Professor of History and

Director, European Union Center of Excellence, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Benjamin Franklin spent the American Revolution in Paris. He had helped to draft the Declaration of Independence in the summer of 1776, one of the most radical documents of the eighteenth century—sparking rebellion on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Serving as a representative for the Continental Congress in France during the next decade, Franklin became a celebrity. He was the enlightened idealist from the frontier, the man of principled action who enthralled onlookers in the rigid European class societies of the 1770s and '80s. Franklin embodied the American critique of Old World society, economy, and diplomacy. He was one of many American revolutionaries to take aim at the degenerate world of powdered wigs, fancy uniforms, and silver-service dinners where the great men of Europe decided the fate of distant societies. Franklin was a representative of the enduring American urge to replace the diplomacy of aristocrats with the openness and freedom of democrats.¹

Despite his radical criticisms of aristocracy, Franklin was also a prominent participant in Parisian salons. To the consternation of John Adams and John Jay, he dined most evenings with the most conservative elements of French high society. Unlike Adams, he did not refuse to dress the part. For all his frontiersman claims, Franklin relished high-society silver-service meals, especially if generous portions of wine were available for the guests. Franklin was the closest American friend to the very Old World elite that his revolutionary ideals rejected. He practiced high-society diplomacy better than most of his European peers, especially when it served crucial American interests.²

Franklin's astute, sophisticated, and even manipulative diplomacy allowed him to negotiate the Franco-American Treaty of Alliance in 1778. Despite his orders from Philadelphia to avoid alliance with aristocracy and promote an idealistic "Model Treaty," Franklin made commitments to French interests that helped procure necessary military assistance for the imperiled American

revolutionaries. He subsequently appealed to the vanity and interests of the French aristocracy in procuring Versailles's acceptance of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, creating an independent American nation. Franklin was representative of what scholars have identified as the realist streak in American foreign policy that uneasily coexists with the country's consistent urge for moral perfection.³

Historian Jonathan Dull puts it well when he describes Franklin's "calculated ambiguity" about American aims.⁴ Franklin mixed an idealistic zeal for detachment from what he described as British tyranny with a carefully cultivated commitment to friendship with monarchical France that would serve the mutual interests of the revolutionaries and the Old Regime. Franklin coupled this delicate diplomatic dance with a subtle threat that the Americans would negotiate a separate deal with Great Britain in the event that France did not provide sufficient support. Of course, Franklin, John Adams, and Silas Deane did just that after the Battle of Yorktown, when it appeared that they had achieved their aims on the ground, and the British were poised for retreat from the Thirteen Colonies.⁵

During the two centuries since his death, Franklin has remained an object of historical fascination for Americans.⁶ His place in the American political and foreign policy consciousness has remained ambivalent. Was he an eloquent idealist like Thomas Jefferson? Was he a tough-minded realist like Alexander Hamilton? Was he an advocate of political change through persuasion, like Woodrow Wilson? Was he a practitioner of state power, like Theodore Roosevelt? Was he a wide-eyed optimist about American-led international change, like Ronald Reagan? Was he skeptical of radical international programs, like George Kennan and Henry Kissinger?

Franklin was all and none of the above. Scholars of American foreign policy have struggled to fit him into our standard conceptual dichotomies. When this has failed, they have abandoned him and returned to their theoretical and empirical inquiries about the characters in our past who are much easier to categorize. After all, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt offer what appear to be clearer and more useful contemporary "lessons" than someone as elusive as Franklin.

This is a problem that is deeper than the limits of the scholarly imagination. The American democratic process encourages stark policy dichotomies, rather than extensive deliberation about positions in between. In a two-party system with impersonal mass campaigns, there is a natural devolution to simple, strong, and often unequivocal positioning, rather than complex, contingent, and even contradictory thinking. The world of Obama, like that of Franklin centuries earlier, is filled with contradictions and inconsistencies. The American political system, however, enforces simple logic and consistent claims. This was a problem

in the early days of the Republic, as Alexis de Tocqueville and others observed, and it has become worse with a twenty-four-hour news cycle and instant scrutiny of every policy utterance. American political discourse valorizes Wilsonian eloquence and Rooseveltian realism, but codes a Franklin-like synthesis as weakness, waffling, and confusion. Writing in the shadow of the Vietnam War, Russell Weigley observed that it is easier in the United States to be “for” or “against” a war, rather than to be a proponent of serious but limited uses of force.⁷

American diplomacy came of age in this context. The nation’s most experienced and sophisticated international negotiators have struggled to fit their complicated policy practice within the simple lexicon of domestic politics. Since the Second World War, they have consistently failed. George Kennan gave up, and argued for more policy insulation from public opinion. Dean Acheson endeavored to beat the public over the head with strong rhetoric, making the needs of policy “clearer than truth.” Most controversial Henry Kissinger mixed obsessive secrecy with long, ponderous reflections on the purposes of policy that almost no one had the stamina to read. American democracy has largely orphaned the nation’s diplomats. Unfortunately, their behavior has frequently reinforced this process.⁸

This essay will examine what this orphaning of diplomacy has meant for American foreign policy since the Second World War. How did American discomfort with compromise and contradiction contribute to an overextension of U.S. commitments in the Cold War? How did it hinder effective alliance management? How did it transform a country founded on principles of democracy into an overmilitarized society? Diplomacy did not offer obvious solutions to any of the major postwar challenges confronting the United States, but that is precisely the point. An unwillingness to mix idealism and power with compromise and contingency left the nation overextended, overmilitarized, and somewhat alone in a world of multiplying challenges.

Cold War Overstretch

As late as 1960, leading American policymakers did not intend to fight a global Cold War. It would have astounded (and revolted) men such as George Marshall, George Kennan, Dean Acheson, and Dwight Eisenhower to imagine a time when American forces were fighting on the “front lines” of the Cold War in sub-Saharan Africa and the Southern Cone of South America. They would have found it equally difficult to conceive of a time when industry and education within the United States became so focused on American Cold War purposes that federal research dollars dwarfed all counterparts, erasing many of the divisions between the public and the private economy. This was not a conspiracy.

The Cold War extended the reach of the U.S. government farther at home and abroad than anyone seriously expected or advocated.⁹

Marshall, Kennan, Acheson, and Eisenhower might have lamented this process, as they all did, but they contributed to it as well. Many historians have made that point. In particular, the logic of containment strategy, as articulated by all four statesmen, left few geographic and institutional limits on the expansion of American power. The communist enemy was expansionist and only responded to force, according to containment. Short-term successes for the adversary, even if limited in value, would encourage more expansion, subversion, and conflict. The searing experience of failed efforts to appease Japan, Italy, and Germany in the 1930s made it difficult to see each apparent enemy advance as anything but the promise of more war and suffering in the near future. Signs of weakness anywhere seemed to open the door for danger everywhere.¹⁰

The authors of containment rejected Old World diplomacy. They did not view distant territories as commodities to trade for peace, as Bismarck and Salisbury conceived a half century earlier. They did not treat poor and faraway lands as areas where American interests were minimal, at best—where the nation had little interest in searching for monsters to slay, as John Quincy Adams explained decades before. Instead, the authors of containment viewed “peripheral” areas as ticking time bombs, about to explode in their faces if captured and reprogrammed by communist totalitarians. This was not a point of analytical reflection as much as it was an emotional response to the generational trauma of the world’s most destructive war. Expansion, toughness, and commitment, rather than careful consideration of alternatives, became the default containment reaction to perceived threats. Time and again, cooler heads did not prevail.¹¹

Kennan and Eisenhower, in particular, understood the perils of this position. They warned repeatedly that the United States could not respond to communist advances everywhere. Acting in all corners of the globe, the country would deplete its resources, distort its domestic economy, and inspire more enemies. That was clear to citizens who had come of age in the Great Depression and doubted the wisdom of the new deficit-driven economics espoused by John Maynard Keynes. Caution also appealed to the traditional antic cosmopolitan and fiscally conservative streak that continued to run through American political thought, especially in the Midwestern and Western sections of the country. As Fredrik Logevall has reminded us, many Americans—including influential figures like Walter Lippmann—looked skeptically at the militaristic elements of containment doctrine in the late 1940s. They advocated less expansion and more compromise, even with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.¹²

This traditional effort to remain strategically aloof, rather than deeply and extensively committed, was destined to lose public support. It appeared too confident and even passive in a world filled with threats and evils. It appeared too ambivalent about the purposes of American power. It appeared to legitimize godless and evil enemies. Frequent criticisms of Franklin Roosevelt's alleged naiveté about "Uncle Joe" Stalin during the Second World War were the kinds of attacks on diplomatic compromise that undermined support for this position in the early Cold War. Feeling both more powerful and more vulnerable than ever before, many Americans would not accept the permanence of an imperfect world where the Benjamin Franklins and Franklin Roosevelts had to dine with the devil.¹³

Force and idealism trumped diplomacy. Expanded strategic commitments abroad replaced the wisdom of restraint. This appeared the safer political approach, at least for the short term. Leaders who prepared for the worst and made conspicuous efforts to deny the enemy any advances would not face accusations of incompetence, even treason. The opposite was true for the advocates of restraint. After the success of the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, Dean Acheson and many of his subordinates in the State Department learned how difficult it had become in postwar American society to defend the simplest of propositions: some countries were not worth fighting for, and the United States could not fight effectively for these countries, even if the communists were poised to assume power. This wise and realistic position appeared weak and defeatist. In areas that Americans had allegedly "lost," diplomacy looked like a poor substitute for the righteous use of force.¹⁴

For all their later statements to the contrary, Kennan, Marshall, Acheson, and Eisenhower enabled (and often encouraged) this expectation of reactive force, or what Acheson called "situations of strength."¹⁵ These men and their counterparts always emphasized foreign threats and military needs more than necessary limits and potential areas of compromise. They rarely used the latter word in their public statements about foreign policy. When confronted with a communist advance, their instinctive reaction was to respond with some kind of force, or threat of force. They voiced frequent worries about "overextension" and a "garrison state" in private, but never at the key moments of public action and public mobilization—during the Berlin Crisis of 1948 to 1949, the Korean War, the two Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s, or the Berlin Crisis of 1958 to 1961. The logic of their commitment to restraining communist expansion by force, and the tendency of their rhetorical appeals to strength, contributed to escalating pressures for growing American military, economic, and political commitments around the globe. "Negotiating from strength" in each of these crises meant, in practice, building strength and issuing ultimatums. The only compromise was expected to come from the enemy.¹⁶

Vietnam is the most revealing case. An entire generation of detailed historical scholarship has shown that few Americans were optimistic about the opportunities for long-term political stability and capitalist economic development in South Vietnam. A small cohort of optimists—social scientists and religious activists—argued strongly for an American-supported “miracle” in Southeast Asia, but they never persuaded the key political decision makers in Washington, or the American public for that matter. Instead, presidents from Eisenhower to Nixon gradually and consistently escalated the American military and economic presence in South Vietnam with grave reservations. These men never really believed they were poised for “success” in Southeast Asia, whatever that would mean. There were few “true believers” in the prospects for Vietnam, from the early days after the Geneva Conference through the dark days of the final American withdrawal.¹⁷

Despite their grave reservations, American policymakers firmly felt that they had no alternative but to increase force for the purpose of containing communist advances—even in territory distant from core American national interests. The logic and the politics of containment pointed inexorably in that direction. Advances for the communists far from home would only encourage their strength and aggression in more vital neighborhoods such as Japan and Germany. The communists would only respond to clear evidence that they could not steal territory from the free world. Images of “falling dominos” and “salami tactics”—where the enemy sliced away at the meat of the free world—drove presidents and their advisers to see diplomacy as delay and immediate force as a necessary reaction.¹⁸

Even in his most clairvoyant moments about the problems in Vietnam, John F. Kennedy, like his counterparts, recognized that perceived weakness in Southeast Asia would have enormous political and perhaps strategic costs. He would face accusations of tolerating another Democratic party “loss” in Asia. He would confront foreign allies—such as Konrad Adenauer and Chiang Kai-shek—who would now question the reliability of America commitments to contain communism where the stakes were much higher. The irony, of course, is that Kennedy’s strong and eloquent advocacy of “paying any price” to force the retreat of communist power had reinforced this political bias to military containment.¹⁹

Lyndon Johnson fell into the same trap, particularly in the wake of Kennedy’s perceived victory through strength during the Cuban Missile Crisis. (Observers at the time did not give sufficient attention to the careful diplomacy that brought the Cuban Missile Crisis to its peaceful denouement.) Johnson’s graphic phone conversations from 1964 and 1965 reveal his profound pessimism about Vietnam. “I don’t see what we can ever hope to get out of this” he

exclaimed to his national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy. Echoing the apparent lessons of appeasement, Bundy reaffirmed the president's axiomatic belief that he could not give the communists a victory of any sort. Johnson agreed, warning that if the communists advanced in a region they would soon "chase you into the kitchen." The only solution, as the president and his advisors saw it, required the United States to bolt the door and punish trespassers, despite the obvious difficulties. Talk about compromise and cooperation could only follow security enforcement.²⁰

The election of Richard Nixon in 1968 marked a partial turning point in policy. The new president and his closest foreign policy advisor, Henry Kissinger, recognized (as Johnson did too in his last presidential year) that diplomatic negotiations with North Vietnam, and perhaps the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam, would be a necessary component of any cessation to the war in Southeast Asia. Kissinger, in particular, pursued negotiations with a vigor and determination not seen in any previous Cold War administration. His efforts, however, continued to hinge upon the use and frequent escalation of American force in the region. As scholars of the period have shown, massive U.S. bombings in the region were more than just a stick to prod Kissinger's interlocutors in negotiations. They were also a fundamental part of a Nixon-Kissinger strategy designed to convince American and foreign observers that the United States would not back down from communist containment. The massive destruction represented a continuing American commitment to show strength before diplomatic compromise.²¹

Kissinger's calls for more sophisticated American diplomacy in the 1970s, and later decades, echo many of the insights from Benjamin Franklin's experience in late eighteenth-century France. The idealistic urge for reform in the international system must be tempered by a willingness to negotiate and compromise, even with evil enemies. Effective foreign policy is always about choosing lesser evils, not perfect solutions. As Kissinger has argued repeatedly, containment strategy in the Cold War overvalued unilateral military responses to communism, and it undervalued diplomacy. Containment made diplomacy a second response, after the guns and bombs.²²

Unlike Franklin, however, Kissinger refused to accept that diplomatic negotiations could not always occur on American terms. He engaged diverse interlocutors, but he never showed a willingness to revise the fundamental assumptions about American moral righteousness and material dominance that underpinned his policies. Even when the United States killed thousands of innocent civilians in the name of communist containment, Kissinger refused to acknowledge that the nation had departed from its moral purpose. Even when the nation supported forces that impoverished local communities, he refused to

acknowledge the failures of American development strategies. Real diplomacy begins with talk, but it also requires compromise on fundamental assumptions as societies work together for mutual gain. Franklin's diplomacy in eighteenth-century France redefined the American Revolution in these terms; Kissinger's diplomacy, like that of other American Cold War policymakers, reaffirmed reasonable but often misguided U.S. definitions of power.²³

The Cold War locked the United States into assumptions about forcing enemies to change. These assumptions reduced the effectiveness of diplomacy abroad, and its persuasive potential at home. As the United States grew more powerful and more vulnerable after 1945, it also became more unwilling to embrace real diplomatic compromise on difficult issues. This was the greatest failure of containment doctrine, predicted by its earliest and most consistent critics, especially Walter Lippmann. It is a failure that recent practitioners of U.S. foreign policy, in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, have re-created. Since the Second World War Americans have commonly thought that they can and should get their way in international disputes. They expect opponents to make all the concessions. This assumption of victory for Americans and sacrifices for others is the single greatest impediment to effective diplomatic practice. At home and abroad, Americans must re-educate themselves to accept compromise rather than containment.

Alliance Mismanagement

The post-1945 American aversion to diplomatic compromise did not only affect conflicts with communist adversaries. It created a peculiar view of alliances. In addition to the balancing and partnering functions traditionally associated with alliances, Americans came to see their agreements with friendly states as mechanisms for furthering U.S. military and economic purposes *without* serious political bargaining. Americans spent heavily on their foreign alliances, and they made extensive security guarantees, but they rarely gave deep consideration to compromises or negotiations with foreign figures. American alliances were economically rich and diplomatically impoverished.

The United States treated the political concerns of its allies as a second thought, at best. Alliance diplomacy was, in fact, quite limited and one-sided. Allies who questioned U.S. political aims confronted forceful opposition and frequent American efforts at leadership replacement. Washington's alliances after the Second World War were intolerant of political diversity. The more the United States invested abroad, the more it demanded support in containing communist aggression, as defined by Washington, despite contrary local nationalist inclinations.²⁴

Comparing the American-led NATO alliance in Western Europe with the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact in Eastern Europe, John Gaddis appropriately emphasizes the far greater role for consent within the U.S. sphere of influence.²⁵ As Geir Lundestad has argued, many American allies “invited” U.S. protection, influence, and especially financial assistance after 1945.²⁶ They recognized major benefits from American alliance. The same could not be said for the Soviet satellites. The differences in the nature of the alliances had a considerable influence on the last decades of the Cold War, when the Warsaw Pact proved incapable of adapting to meet the financial and political demands of citizens in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and even the Soviet Union itself. The events of 1989 displayed the real gap between alliances—East and West.²⁷

Europe, however, provides an extreme example of the differences between an imposed Soviet empire and invited American influence. Scholars of other regions—particularly Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa—have not found the same degree of consent for U.S. policies. In these areas the United States consistently rejected relationships with legitimate nationalist figures who expressed serious interest in working with Washington, but with some American compromise on standard anticommunist, anticollectivist, and anti-protectionist policies. Figures such as Mohammed Mossadeq, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, Patrice Lumumba, Cheddi Jagan, Sukarno, and perhaps even Salvador Allende were open to U.S. partnerships, but they required political compromises for domestic nationalist needs.²⁸

As almost every scholar of these countries has agreed, Washington never pursued serious diplomacy with popular nationalist leaders. Economic sanctions, political isolation, and covert operations became an easy American alternative to discussion of mutually beneficial compromise. Even in Egypt, where the Eisenhower administration recognized a need to negotiate with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the foremost scholar of the subject shows that the White House never escaped an overwhelming commitment to anticommunism that, in the end, hindered the administration’s sincere efforts to accommodate Arab nationalism. As Salim Yaqub explains, the United States overinvested in military containment and underinvested in diplomacy in the Middle East.²⁹

Throughout the Cold War the evidence was clear that American anti-diplomacy undermined alliances and left the United States dependent on unpopular, unreliable, and undemocratic strongmen. The United States rejected viable national leaders and found itself stuck with surrogates who simultaneously depended on U.S. support and undermined American long-term capabilities with foreign populations. Despite this sad record, even the most clairvoyant American policymakers failed to embrace a fuller and more sophisticated

approach to alliance diplomacy outside Europe. The U.S. record on alliance management is remarkably consistent, and often counterproductive, in the Cold War.

Henry Kissinger is again the best example. During the 1960s he repeatedly criticized his predecessors for neglecting the political needs of allies, particularly in Europe. The United States could not keep the West Germans, the French, and the British at the front lines of the Cold War, he argued, while Washington stubbornly denied them more of a say in their own military defenses, their own foreign economic policies, and their own relations with Eastern Europe. As soon as Kissinger became national security adviser, however, he further subverted European efforts to assert more equality and autonomy in the Western alliance. Kissinger's activities in office presumed that the United States could act unilaterally and secretly in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and the Middle East, consulting the Europeans (and other allies) only after the fact. He spent far more time cultivating relations with adversaries than with allies. Even someone acutely sensitive to the complexities of alliance diplomacy could not escape the American penchant for self-centeredness. Kissinger, like his predecessors and successors, was far too limited in his efforts to author diplomatic compromises with allies that would encourage greater long-term cooperation and stability.³⁰

Why has the United States proven so poor at managing alliances? Franklin's experiences in late eighteenth-century France show that alliance diplomacy was once central to American foreign activities, even at a time when the Revolutionaries sought to separate themselves from the aristocratic Old World of Europe. Franklin left a model of alliance building for idealistic purposes that should inspire his successors.

The problem is not American ideals, but the scope and definition of American power. Between the early nineteenth century and the decade surrounding the Second World War, Americans defined their power in terms that were self-consciously opposed to the imperial and balance-of-power diplomacy of the European powers. This meant explicit and consistent opposition to traditional alliances—from the Monroe Doctrine to the Open Door to America's "associate power" status in the First World War. American leaders were more than comfortable asserting U.S. dominance throughout the Western Hemisphere, but they believed they could best assure American interests by steering clear of commitments in other regions. The Open Door Notes of 1899 to 1900, as William Appleman Williams famously argued, were an expression of American expansionist desires without accompanying political obligations. Williams called this indirect empire. We might more accurately describe it as influence and profit on the cheap.³¹

The American occupation of the Philippines after 1898 was particularly controversial within the United States—not among foreign powers—because it exposed the complications and costs of Washington’s efforts to expand abroad without political or diplomatic preparation. With very little thought, Americans quickly found themselves unilaterally fighting a nationalist insurgency and rebuilding a distant society. Rejecting imperial diplomacy, the United States might have reaped the costs of empire without many of the benefits.³²

During and after the Second World War Americans continued to see their power in opposition to traditional imperial and balance-of-power diplomacy. Instead of trade-offs and compromises, Washington would rely on its preponderant power to assure better results. This meant commitments from the United States to fight communism through an overwhelming variety of means—economic, military, cultural, and covert. It also meant greater promises from the United States to “democratize” and “modernize” regions of the world on an accelerated timetable. Global power reinforced an inherited urge to escape the opportunity costs of the Old World and assert leadership abroad unilaterally. Global power made diplomacy appear as a sellout of America’s anti-imperial potential. Idealist modernizers from the United States would replace diplomats of empire from the past.³³

At the root of this expansion without diplomacy is the assumption of American exceptionalism. Democrat and Republican, Americans see themselves above history. They recognize that all other global powers have relied upon elaborate diplomatic processes for managing alliances. They understand that the United States, especially since 1945, has created a similar process for its own foreign relations. Americans, nonetheless, see this as illegitimate at worst, or a temporary evil at best. God’s chosen country can and should lead by simply being itself. Diplomacy implies imperfection, and Americans are convinced that they are perfect, or nearly so. Our popular rhetoric reinforces this supposition, our history of remarkable peace and prosperity gives evidence to God’s hand, and our global power provides a tempting tool for messianic purposes. Self-confident, hubristic, and empowered, Americans have trouble identifying a need for diplomacy, especially among friends who apparently recognize our goodness. The only real way to improve U.S. diplomacy is to convince Americans that they are not as exceptional as they think.

Militarized Democracy

The clearest evidence of a departure from American exceptionalism, in practice, is the recent redefinition of democracy within the United States. Despite the popular reverence for the “founding moment,” the U.S. Constitution is no longer an accurate guide to the functioning of American government. The founders

were profoundly skeptical of any prominent and permanent role for the military in American society. They worried that it would imperil free government, free economy, and free intercourse with other countries. They also believed that the military would entangle the nation in unnecessary wars. The founders were not antimilitaristic in any sense, but they believed that the military functions of government should be subordinate to the work of politicians, administrators, and diplomats. Conspicuously, the secretaries of treasury and state had the highest standing in the president's constitutional cabinet. War functions were divided between two relatively weak secretaries of war and navy.³⁴

The Cold War transformed this constitutional structure of government because of decisions made by *civilian* leaders. The National Security Act of 1947 created a unified Department of Defense, a permanent Joint Chiefs of Staff, a Central Intelligence Agency, and a National Security Council—all of which allowed a more rapid integration of American military capabilities for foreign policy purposes. Through these institutions the executive branch of government focused on controlling and deploying military force in times of near-perpetual Cold War crisis. American military power became less immediately accountable to congressional and public approval.³⁵

Perhaps the creation of what some have called the “national security state” was necessary in the Cold War.³⁶ Perhaps it even serves certain purposes after the Cold War and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Most troublesome, however, is the asymmetry these changes have created in domestic priorities and visions of foreign policy. The military is not only one of the most respected institutions in the United States; it is also one of the best-organized and politically potent parts of our society. Defined broadly, the institutions that most conspicuously define national power by armed capability are positioned to mobilize more attention than those institutions, especially the State Department, that define power in diplomatic terms. The precise opposite was the case before the Second World War, when political power in the United States was centered in a relatively small group of legal and corporate figures who had few military connections, and even fewer good things to say about the Army or Navy. If there was an antimilitaristic bias in American politics during the 1930s, the equation reversed a decade later, and it has never (with the partial exception of the last years of the Vietnam War) reversed again. The only part of the U.S. government to retain a high degree of public trust since the 1960s is, in fact, the military.³⁷

This is not a conspiracy but a reflection, in classic institutionalist terms, of how the post-1945 reforms of U.S. government structures transformed political behavior. Simply stated, the military won the institutional battles and the State Department lost. The pressures of international conflict at the dawn of the

nuclear age probably made this probably unavoidable. The failure to compensate in any significant way since 1947 for the growth of military institutional presence, relative to the nation's diplomatic organs, has meant that diplomacy necessarily gets short shrift. For all its internal divisions, the military is a recognized and ubiquitous voice in Washington. The State Department is not.

The consequences of this institutional asymmetry are obvious. As the United States has developed and maintained for sixty years the most powerful military in the world, with significant “overkill” capabilities, it has underfunded the Foreign Service. As the United States has developed major institutions and related mechanisms for educating some of the best military officers in the world, it has refused to invest similarly in diplomatic training and related research. Most startling, as American political discussion has given significant attention to the needs and purposes of the military over the last decade, it has neglected any serious discussion about the needs and purposes of the nation's diplomatic organs. The importance of the military is evident to most Americans, even if they disagree about its appropriate size and scope. The importance of the Foreign Service is a mystery to even some of the best-informed citizens. They can learn about the military every day in their standard news sources. These sources offer little of value on our nation's diplomatic corps.³⁸

Violence has a deep historical root in American history. The valorization of the cowboy, the warrior, or the general is nothing new. The problem is that the democratic allure of force is not tempered any longer by an equally democratic case for the peacemaker. The framers of the Constitution and their successors anticipated this problem, and they went to great lengths to limit the influence of the military and boost the clout of civilians. The United States did not create a professional Foreign Service until after the Civil War, but the nation's politics were dominated in its first century by men who traded in words and ideas—Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, and Abraham Lincoln—not guns and soldiers. To be a good American democrat before 1945 was to be a leader who avoided major foreign wars.

In the shadow of the Second World War the U.S. military outgrew its constitutional restrictions. Although it has become more professionalized and committed to civilian control than ever before, it is also a billion-pound gorilla that distorts public debates about foreign policy toward questions of armed capability, and away from inquiries about diplomacy. More sophisticated diplomatic practice in the United States will require a rebalancing of the post-1947 institutions to give the State Department more relative weight. Constitutional change undermined diplomacy after the Second World War; only a new effort at constitutional reform can redress this problem.

Conclusions

At the dawn of the twenty-first century the United States is far removed from its revolutionary origins. Americans continue to use the idealistic rhetoric inherited from the eighteenth century, but words like *independence* and *liberty* mean different things when the country is governed by such a powerful, wealthy, and expansive set of institutions. Americans continue to espouse their strong anti-imperial sentiments, but words like *self-determination* and *national sovereignty* have much more complicated connotations in a world where the United States exerts such direct global influence. Barack Obama's America is indeed distant from Benjamin Franklin's America.

Franklin remains relevant because he points, like all significant historical personalities, to alternative paths for American policy. At the nation's founding, Franklin embodied a fruitful mix of eloquent high-minded idealism and skillful high-society diplomacy. He spoke for the deepest urges of the American people and he worked closely with the mightiest elites of his day. He was steadfast in his determination to build a new nation, and he was sophisticated in his recognition that the revolution could only succeed if it made compromises with those on the side of reaction. For Franklin, and the early Republic, politics was diplomacy.

Over the course of the last two centuries, and particularly since 1945, the American people and their governing institutions have abandoned Franklin in favor of simpler images of Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. These modern men of marble represent false dichotomies between idealism and realism, engagement and force. The impoverishment of the historical imagination in the United States has meant the impoverishment of foreign policy. The intoxication of wealth and power, and the seeming ease with which they can be used, has only reinforced the popular search for easy answers to contradictory, contingent, and complex international problems.

The United States has orphaned Benjamin Franklin and other diplomats who would follow his legacy. After the searing experience of the Second World War, and the failure of appeasement policies in the 1930s, the nation made *diplomacy* a synonym for weakness, even treason. This self-defeating phenomenon grew out of a long history, but three factors emphasized here reinforced pre-existing trends. First, the adoption of containment doctrine as a touchstone for policy degraded diplomacy as a primary instrument of power. Second, the effort to build expansive alliances on American-defined terms discredited compromise, especially with friends. Third, and most striking, the emergence of more powerful military institutions in the United States shifted political influence away from the traditional institutions of peacemaking. Again, this was not a conspiracy of militarists. It was the result of a false consensus *among civilians*

on Cold War national security, American exceptionalism, and preponderant power. Americans orphaned diplomats because they were unpopular and unpersuasive to a mass electorate.

If this argument is correct, or even partially correct, reviving the quality and scope of American diplomacy will require serious work. The United States will not embrace the sophistication of Benjamin Franklin overnight. Nor will the nation easily overcome its inherited international habits. Political and intellectual leaders can help the country think beyond containment in addressing global problems. Citizens can invest in building the sustained personal relationships—through language study, area expertise, and efforts at mutually beneficial cooperation—that provide the basis for effective alliance management. Perhaps most immediate, American opinion leaders can open a serious public discussion about the importance of diplomacy, and the constitutional revisions necessary to give diplomacy a chance.

Benjamin Franklin was only the first of many American statesmen to extol the nation's capacity for renewal. The end of the Cold War, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and the frustrations of subsequent years call for another moment of policy renewal. Among other things, this endeavor will require extensive global diplomacy with diverse actors, many of whom we abhor. New ideas and new institutions will provide the foundation for a return to the best of the old diplomacy.

Notes

- 1 On the early American rejection of traditional diplomacy, see Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); and Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Knopf, 2001).
- 2 See Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 242–97; and Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 325–435.
- 3 See Jonathan Dull, “Benjamin Franklin and the Nature of American Diplomacy,” *International History Review* 5 (August 1983): 346–63; and Dull, “Franklin the Diplomat: The French Mission,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 72 (1982): 1–76. See also the classic works on the subject: Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); and Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
- 4 Dull, “Benjamin Franklin and the Nature of American Diplomacy,” 351.
- 5 See Jonathan Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

- 6 On this point, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
- 7 See Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), especially the preface; and Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin, 2003 ed.).
- 8 See George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 9 See Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, chapter 3.
- 10 See H. W. Brands, “The Age of Vulnerability: Eisenhower and the National Insecurity State,” *American Historical Review* 94 (October 1989): 96–89; Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), chapter 1.
- 11 On this point, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).
- 12 Fredrik Logevall, “A Critique of Containment,” *Diplomatic History* 28 (September 2004): 473–99.
- 13 See Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*.
- 14 See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87–124.
- 15 See Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, esp. 151–71 (see note 8); and Wilson D. Miscamble, “Dean G. Acheson’s Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department,” *Reviews in American History* 22 (September 1994): 544–60.
- 16 See the classic work on this subject: Coral Bell, *Negotiation from Strength: A Study in the Politics of Power* (New York: Knopf, 1963).
- 17 The literature on the United States and the Vietnam War is gargantuan. For three representative scholarly works, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001).

- 18 See note 17.
- 19 See Suri, *Power and Protest*, chapter 4 (see note 10).
- 20 See President Johnson's Telephone Conversation with McGeorge Bundy, 27 May 1964, 11:24AM, citation 3522, Tape WH6405.10, Recordings of Telephone Conversations, White House Series, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas; Logevall, *Choosing War*; and Suri, *Power and Protest*, chapter 4.
- 21 See Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 2001).
- 22 For an analysis of Kissinger's thinking and writing about diplomacy, see Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, chapter 4.
- 23 For a critique of Kissinger's diplomacy in these terms, see Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, chapter 5 (see note 8).
- 24 On this point, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 25 John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26–53.
- 26 Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23 (September 1986): 263–77; and Lundestad, *"Empire" by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945–1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 27 See William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The History of the Continent Since 1945* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003).
- 28 See Westad, *The Global Cold War*; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); and Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.–Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- 29 Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- 30 See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, chapters 4–5 (see note 8).
- 31 William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Norton, 2009 ed.).
- 32 See the important collection of essays on this topic: Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

- 33 See David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); and Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
- 34 See Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address*; Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
- 35 See Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law that Transformed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Amy Zegart, *Flawed By Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*.
- 36 See note 35.
- 37 See Joseph Nye, Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, eds., *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 38 Although I differ with many of his specific claims, Andrew Bacevich and I are in general agreement on the larger point about the overmilitarization of American politics and society since 1945. See Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

II. Between Power and Partnership: The Prudent Uses of Multilateralism

Carolyne V. Davidson

Doctoral candidate in History, Yale University

An idea is always grasped in relative association, never in absolute isolation, and no idea, in history, keeps a changeless self-identity.

—Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, 1965

The British don't know how to make a good cup of coffee. You don't know how to make a good cup of tea. It's an even swap.

—Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain, 1942

For the last 500 years, world politics has been dominated by states located on the shores of the North Atlantic. As these states competed with one another for treasure and power, they in effect established the North Atlantic region's world-wide imperial supremacy.

—Zbigniew Brzezinski, “An Agenda for NATO,” 2009¹

Multilateralism has become one of the most loaded terms in international politics. In the United States the word has become both a target of derision and a source of aspiration. The desire to behave “democratically” (engaging, debating, listening, persuading) by building partnerships in the world has long competed with the need to put the U.S. national interest first and the desire to assert a measure of control in the international domain. Too often the idea of multilateralism is couched as a simple choice between the unfettered use of American power and the constraints of partnership. In reality, the U.S. has adopted a multilateralist stance in the past to enhance its power and influence: NATO’s development during the Cold War offers the most successful example of American-managed multilateralism.

In addition to transatlantic alliances, this paper uses occasional examples from the history of empires to explore how a superpower can avoid coercion and facilitate international cooperation. This is not to say that empires offer an

ideal model for multilateralism, or that the U.S. should be encouraged to build an empire, but rather to demonstrate that from the history of empires we may draw lessons for the successful management of relations between states with unequal levels of power. The historian Henry Kamen interpreted the networks of empire that existed around Spain as akin to “transnational organisations that aimed to mobilize the resources available not only within their areas, but outside them as well.” Once those resources had been mobilized, the networks established as a consequence brought increased unity to Spain’s empire.² Multilateralism, at its core, concerns connections or networks and how best to use them.

A quick (electronic) search of the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volumes reveals that the term *multilateralism*—including its first appearance in 1938—has most commonly been used in connection with trade relations.³ While military or defense alliances have always been controversial in the United States, multilateral trade relations have tended to be somewhat less contentious. The reasons for this could form the basis of another research project, but, to generalize, it seems that American history has provoked profound scepticism regarding the benefits of military alliances, whereas the benefits of a multilateralist approach to trade have been easier to sell to a suspicious public.⁴ This is all the more peculiar given that both military alliances and economic and trade cooperation have been used to build security. The Cold War period amply demonstrates this; NATO supported an American and European initiative for closer integration of trade as part of the Atlantic community project. Far earlier than 1949, however, European empires sought to build security through trade and mutual reliance: using Britannia’s naval supremacy to facilitate trade was always, for example, a key aim of the British Empire; conquest and coercion were not.

Spain’s empire began with an alliance between Castile and Aragon through the most common means of political alliance in the fifteenth century—marriage. Nonetheless, despite their union, Ferdinand and Isabella’s lands did not yield a state rich in money or manpower. Henry Kamen argues that Spain was consequently so heavily reliant on the people and resources of other nations that the Spanish Empire does not deserve the label *Spanish* at all.⁵ Only a minority of those who fought for the Spanish Empire were in fact Spanish, and Kamen shows further that the empire’s cultural capital was international too: Spain’s printers were German, its scholars Italian and Sicilian, its financiers Genoese—as, of course, was the most famous explorer of the Spanish Empire, Christopher Columbus. The Spanish Empire was based on collaboration more than on cooperation or even coercion; Spain succeeded in inducing non-Spaniards to labor intensively to meet shared goals. While cooperation and collaboration may seem synonymous, this essay emphasises degrees of difference in the level

of engagement among coercion, cooperation, and collaboration. At one end of the spectrum, coercion implies action under duress. Cooperation, in the middle of the spectrum, implies the acquiescence of one state to work alongside another state. At the other end of the spectrum from coercion is collaboration. Collaboration, in this essay, is taken to illustrate a situation in which states do not simply operate alongside one another but work together with a mutual sense of the importance of a successful outcome. Where cooperation implies a certain degree of passivity, collaboration implies a shared stake in the energetic pursuit of actions to meet mutual goals. Collaboration, most commonly, is also brokered by vigorous debate rather than uncomplicated submission. The Spanish were, through collaboration, able to forge their international power by drawing strength from many other nations—the ideal behind any multilateral venture.

To be effective, multilateral engagement must be conceived strategically, as a shared process among states each with a stake in meeting shared goals. The United States' greatest successes with multilateral ventures have acknowledged this model and the early American attitude toward multilateralism contributed to a distinct way of thinking about international commitments.

American Ambivalence Toward Multilateralism: Commitment Without Committing

In 1778 the American alliance with France helped secure independence, and yet for the next century and a half the United States retained a deep suspicion of alliances and avoided openly cooperating with other powers. That distrust stemmed from the heavy emphasis at America's founding on being "different" from Europe, avoiding anything resembling the Concert of Europe and inhibiting any instinct to cooperate with European powers. As Timothy Garton Ash has described, "in the beginning, the United States was the new Europe. It defined itself against what Alexander Hamilton called 'the pernicious labyrinths of European politics.'"⁶ Herman Melville summed up the American determination to look for *new* ideas on governance when he wrote that "the Past is the Textbook of Tyrants" and "the Future the Bible of the Free."⁷ The U.S. sought to avoid balance-of-power politics and "entangling" alliances with undesirable obligations. The founding fathers literally struck out on their own, and their independence imbued them with a distrust of relying on anyone else. The American desire to be self-sufficient, a leader rather than a follower, exceptional, and unfettered by obligations to other powers, endures today.

In reality, however, even as early as the nineteenth century the U.S. found strength in cooperating with other nations. Although President Monroe would never officially acknowledge it, the Monroe Doctrine was enforced in large part

by the British navy. The U.S. and Britain cooperated closely to keep other European powers out of the Western hemisphere. The absence of any official acknowledgment of Britain's role did not prevent the U.S. government, determined not to allow any other European power to take over Spain's ailing colonies, from working successfully within the Pax Britannica. In fact, while historians have tended to focus on America's unilateralism up until Franklin D. Roosevelt's push for "four policeman" to secure the world, the U.S. often advocated unilateralism more in theory than in practice.

In 1917 Woodrow Wilson, acknowledging Americans' desire to remain above the European fray of World War I, insisted that even if the U.S. shared a common enemy with the powers united by the Triple Entente (Great Britain, the Russian Empire, and France), the country would not "ally" with them against Germany, but would only be an "associated" power. In retrospect, however, it is hard to understand just what the difference was in practice. Wilson eventually justified the commitment of more than four million American troops to the fight in terms that emphasized Americans' moral obligation to participate in this "war against all nations." The president declared to a joint session of Congress, "American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination.... The challenge is to all mankind."⁸ The New York *Daily News* reflected on the degree to which Wilson's decision marked a change in American thinking: "President Wilson has abandoned, as no previous President has ever done, the exclusively national outlook that has been for 130 years the most sacred canon of American political thought."⁹

Although the United States' "associated" status made it possible for the president to refrain from declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in conjunction with the Triple Entente powers, there was very little else that distinguished the U.S. from being an ally in the truest sense of the word. In the same speech to Congress quoted above, Wilson detailed the contributions the U.S. would be making. Multilateral cooperation, the president declared, was "the utmost practicable cooperation in counsel and action with the governments now at war with Germany." The United States may have arrived late to the conflict, but the American contribution would be total and vital.

The entry of U.S. forces into the European theater during World War I also planted the seeds of the idea of a multilateral Atlantic community. Henry Adams wrote to a friend, "Here we are, for the first time in our lives fighting side by side and to my bewilderment I find the great object of my life thus accomplished in the building up of the great Community of Atlantic Powers

which I hope will at least make a precedent that can never be forgotten.”¹⁰ The first course in Western Civilization at Columbia University was “designed to teach soldiers what it was they would be fighting for in Flanders Fields.”¹¹ Common cause may have inspired the United States to act multilaterally to achieve American security objectives, but American leaders took great care in enunciating why it was in America’s interest to engage in an alliance.

Woodrow Wilson hoped to extend the multilateral example during wartime into peacetime when he set sail in December 1918 to help draw up a peace treaty for Europe. No other American president had ever gone to Europe while in office; Wilson ended up staying in Paris for six months in an attempt to make multilateral negotiations work in America’s favour.

Wilson drew on the American experience with multilateralism to inform his ideas on how to build multilateralism in Europe. The president saw the Monroe Doctrine as a framework within which all the nations of the Americas worked peacefully together, and therefore as a model for the European continent. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, however, thought the Monroe model entirely inappropriate: he argued, “the [Monroe] doctrine is exclusively a *national* policy of the United States and relates to its national safety and vital interests.”¹² Lansing missed the point that national policy objectives could translate into shared international goals and obligations. Moreover, multilateralism would be a much easier sell in each nation if it did relate to “national safety and vital interests.” The U.S. Senate, however, did not believe that the covenant of the League of Nations (comprising the first twenty-six articles of the Versailles Treaty) was congruent with American interests, and, ultimately, declined to ratify it.

Multilateralism in the United States remained closely associated with the idea of entanglement. While Wilson was feted by rapturous crowds and leaders in Europe, critics back home questioned whether he should even have made a trip that symbolized America’s assumption of responsibility for sorting out the mess that Europe had made for itself and the world. In August 1919 the Republican chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Henry Cabot Lodge, echoing George Washington’s Farewell Address, argued:

The United States is the world’s best hope, but if you fetter her in the interests and quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come as in the years that have gone.

It was the American role, Lodge and many other key figures believed, to remain above the fray, for if America became sullied by European politics,

who would be left as the “world’s best hope”? Lodge added, however, that Washington “did not say that we should keep clear from ‘entangling alliances’ in the Farewell Address. He said that we should keep clear of *permanent alliances*, and that temporary alliances would be sufficient to meet an emergency—as they were in the war just closed.”¹³ Multilateralism could be suffered as a short-term fix, but it was not to be used to promote U.S. interests over the longer term.

The U.S. may have gained a place at the Versailles negotiating table by acting multilaterally during wartime, but with Europe at peace once more multilateralism came to be seen by many Americans as dangerously idealistic and an inappropriate means for the prudent exercise of American power. Lodge did not suggest that the U.S. resort to isolationism, but he was determined that the country should not fall into the perceived traps of multilateralism: the abrogation of U.S. sovereignty through binding covenants and institutions, and the overextension of American power and responsibility. America’s strength should prompt her to reject the fetters of treaties and lead by doing. This of course presumed that other nations would be prepared simply to follow, cooperating rather than collaborating.

At the first meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva, Georges Clemenceau directed that an empty chair be left for an American representative. But the impact of the absence of the United States was felt in more than merely symbolic ways. Britain, France, Italy, and Japan (the remaining members of the steering committee that had led the negotiations at Versailles) found it easier to resort to their national prerogatives in Wilson’s absence. Each member was also granted a veto, in accordance with the requirement that council decisions be unanimous. Americans may have thought they were better protecting their sovereignty by leaving their representative’s chair empty, but the U.S. lost the ability to influence the course of the discussions and the chance to ensure that their vote mattered—even, if worse came to worst, by resorting to use of the veto.

By 1921 Warren Harding was, however, already resorting to multilateralism in an effort to reassert American influence when he convened the International Conference on Naval Limitation in Washington. Eight other countries, four of which were major naval powers, participated. The purpose was to regulate sea power, especially battleships, and to defuse tension in the Pacific and East Asia. No treaty was produced—in line with the American rejection of anything “permanent”—but the gentlemen’s agreement that resulted from the conference limited the tonnage of capital ships, restricted the use of submarines in war, and banned poison gas.

Calvin Coolidge *did* commit the United States to a treaty that he signed, the Treaty for the Renunciation of War (the Kellogg-Briand Pact), in 1928. Fifteen major powers signed the agreement and the U.S. Senate ratified the

treaty, but there was a catch: the Senate insisted on alerting all the signatories that the U.S. would not accept that the treaty curtailed the right to self-defense, nor was it prepared to take action automatically against any nation that violated the treaty. These caveats effectively killed any seed of a theory of collective defense that might have developed from the pact, and the effectiveness of the treaty, as became abundantly apparent when it was invoked in 1929 after the Soviet Union and China came to blows in Manchuria, was null.

Three months after Coolidge signed the treaty, the 1929 stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression forced the U.S. to consider multilateral engagement once again. The United States was the largest creditor nation in the world, but the U.S. Federal Reserve decided that rather than engaging in multilateral negotiations to come to an agreement to make it easier for debtor countries (principally Britain, France, and Germany) to service their loans, the U.S. would revert to a protectionist and isolationist stance, halting foreign lending and raising tariffs on imports. Economies around the world went into free fall; the resulting depression inflamed nationalist feeling throughout Europe. By rejecting multilateralism as a strategic approach to solving an international problem, the U.S. limited its options to influence the consequences of the Great Depression worldwide.

Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to increase his options in the 1940s by engaging in multilateralism under conditions that enhanced the American ability to lead partners in the United States' preferred direction. Zara Steiner concludes that the League of Nations failed because "it was an experiment in internationalism at a time when the currents of nationalism were running powerfully in the opposite direction."¹⁴ Could the United States have redirected that flow if it had remained more committed to fostering multilateralism? The U.S. was presented with a second chance to answer that hypothetical question. "The League is dead," declared the British diplomat Lord Robert Cecil in April 1946, "Long live the United Nations." This time the United States would take its seat at the head of the table and have a second chance to explore what might have been if it had pushed Europe more resolutely toward collaboration for peace.

In his January 1941 State of the Union address, Roosevelt's proclamation of the Four Freedoms was explicitly intended as a guide for American foreign policy based on universal principles as "a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation." The president insisted that "the world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society." Roosevelt wanted the UN to have an American blueprint and he was determined that the U.S. should play a leading role within the organization. FDR acknowledged that national interests were not going to disappear, but he argued that this should not preclude the

emergence of collective interests; a prudently multilateralist approach would ensure that national interests and partnership could be compatible and mutually reinforcing.

The Grand Alliance that had emerged in World War II, however, arose from necessity rather than from any sense of community: Stalin was not interested in a world safe for democracy or capitalism; even Churchill had very different views from FDR on what the postwar world should look like. Nonetheless, Roosevelt recognized that the war (and the close cooperation it had required) could provide a catalyst for the construction of a new world order shaped by American ideas and interests. One fundamental premise for such a strategy was the rejection of the traditional idea of American exceptionalism. Rather than assuming that the United States was unique and therefore had no chance of reforming the world, FDR focused on spreading capitalism and democracy through the prudent, but open, use of American power.

FDR developed the concept of the Four Policemen (the U.S., Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China) as a multilateral means of embedding national interests within a multilateral framework: entanglement, he believed, could work in America's interest. The Atlantic Charter, though negotiated bilaterally between Churchill and Roosevelt, formed the basis for the multilateral General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the UN Treaty. FDR happily encouraged the Bretton Woods system (negotiated by forty-four nations) as a means to prevent a postwar economic collapse that would again undermine international cooperation, as it had in the 1930s. FDR believed that the American interest could be better served by binding nations together to negotiate multilaterally on trade, economics, and war and peace—not least because he knew that American influence was so great that the United States could retain a great deal of control.

While the language used by Roosevelt in the 1940s was heavy with idealism, the reality that underpinned that idealism was the use of multilateralist strategies to further the U.S. national interest. China was included as one of the Four Policemen because FDR understood that China's inclusion could amount to a surrogate American vote; veto power in the UN Security Council demonstrated that the U.S. could have multilateral influence and the ability to prevent the Council's acting against American interests too; Bretton Woods was calculated to be an insurance policy for the American economic hegemony that emerged at the end of World War II.

Building international cooperation in the pursuit of shared goals made sense for the United States. Using American power to spread the burden of promoting international stability seemed prudent. The U.S. wanted to be able to influence the behavior of other states without resorting to costly coercion

wherever possible. Demonstrating some degree of concern for local or regional entities affected by the behavior of a greater power helped the U.S. to win friends and build partnerships rather than provoking antipathy or antagonism. Most importantly, FDR's focus on the details of not just why but *how* to build partnerships made multilateralism easier to justify by making it appear less risky.

How to Win Friends and Influence People?

If you want to win friends, make it a point to remember them. If you remember my name, you pay me a subtle compliment; you indicate that I have made an impression on you. Remember my name and you add to my feeling of importance.

—Dale Carnegie

The United States, through the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, engaged in more multilateral behavior than it is typically given credit for. Roosevelt, did, however, engage in considerably more *overt* efforts at American leadership through multilateral means. It is in this context that it is useful to consider what the history of empires can illustrate about techniques for managing cooperative relations among states of unequal power.

The Romans were, for example, forced to think creatively about how to foster stakeholders in their imperial enterprise in order to make Rome's expansion manageable. The early roots of what would be termed "indirect rule" in Britain were already apparent in the Roman Empire by the end of the Latin War in 338 B.C.E. Unilateral leadership over Rome's vast territory would have been too time consuming and resource draining to be sustainable. The Romans discovered that one of the easiest ways to win cooperative partners in their imperial enterprise was material reward and some degree of membership in the Roman "club." *Coloniae civium* were self-administering civic units in which colonists enjoyed full Roman citizenship and received a plot of land; their stake in the Roman Empire thus became both material and ideological.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States provided a material stake for Europeans through the Marshall Plan, which, arguably, permitted sufficient economic recovery to inhibit the growth of communism but also established the U.S. as a beneficent power prepared to give monetary backing to its rhetorical promises. The Marshall Plan made Western Europe's recovery a genuinely transnational effort, one that even included the western parts of occupied Germany. Truman argued he was committed to Marshall Plan aid "because it is necessary to be done if we are going to survive ourselves."¹⁵ Perhaps even more important than the aid itself, however, was that the way in which the plan was negotiated and the aid distributed promoted a role for the U.S. in Europe that accorded with U.S. postwar aims.

There was, of course, a measure of suspicion and concern among Europeans that Marshall aid would bring undesirable American influence. An editorial in *Le Monde*, for example, called for a militarily self-sufficient and neutral France that would be able to stand up to both Uncle Sam and Uncle Joe. In 1952, the same Parisians who had welcomed American forces as liberators in 1944 returned to the streets to protest the arrival of General Matthew Ridgway as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. The U.S. had to strike a balance between partnership and control; between acting multilaterally and alienating both international and domestic publics. France would long remain America's most difficult ally, but the multilateral ties the U.S. built with other European countries helped to manage the challenges the country encountered in its relationship with France.

At home in the U.S., successive administrations had to show Congress and the voters that granting aid was in the U.S. interest, forcing policymakers in a healthy way to ensure that American priorities meshed with the multilateral means they were pursuing in Europe. Ultimately, the U.S. did win friends and influence American public opinion to support unprecedented American intervention in European affairs, but it took great diplomatic skill and planning to do so. Moreover, Stalin made it easier for the U.S. to promote multilateralism, and for Western Europe to accept it, by making it clear that his plan was to impose a unilaterally controlled sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe. By 1945, rather than holding out the United States passively as the "best hope" for the rest of the world, American policymakers had the strongest incentive to show how they wanted the world to work in contrast to the Soviet model.

Both Rome and the United States accepted that the increased autonomy made possible by material generosity facilitated a sense of ownership and mutual reliance: healthy precursors for effective multilateral relations. The Roman *municipium* was a self-governing community of people that had originally been outside Rome's territorial orbit. *Municipii* lost their sovereignty when they were integrated into the Roman Empire, but they gained dual citizenship in their own city-state and in Rome. During the Cold War, Western Europeans were promised a type of "citizenship" in an Atlantic community with the hope that European nationalism could be softened if not subsumed in a new spirit of internationalism. American policymakers, notably Dean Acheson, deliberately advocated for something broader than NATO and collective defense to encourage the sense of community across the Atlantic. Dwight Eisenhower emphasized that

NATO should not for all time be primarily a collective defense organisation.... We have common traditions which have been passed on from

generation to generation. We should continue to work together as a growing community.¹⁶

Acheson focussed on the North Atlantic Treaty as “the product of at least three hundred and fifty years of history,” and, emphasizing the values that brought an “Atlantic community” together, he made it clear he believed the Atlantic Alliance should continue even if the Soviet threat diminished, encouraging Europeans to believe that the United States was committed to a peaceful and prosperous Europe even beyond the Cold War context.

Having built up the impression of a shared enterprise among powers of unequal strength, the challenge becomes to *sustain* the impression that “friends” matter. This was a problem that imperial powers faced with their colonies and the United States wrestled with in NATO. In the nineteenth century Britain’s method of imperial management in India morphed into an authoritarian, centralized, bureaucratic approach far different from the hands-off approach the East India Company had earlier adopted. Britain ultimately found that its efforts to create an educated middle class in India backfired when that elite reached the limits of its potential influence.

British governance of India became closer in constitutional terms to European enlightened despotism than to Anglo-Saxon concepts of liberty and representative government. Indirect rule through native princes allowed the collaborators greater autonomy and status while signifying that Britain’s main allies were a territory’s traditional ruling elite rather than the new semiwesternized middle classes that had grown up under imperial rule. Britain discovered firsthand through its failure to manage the “jewel” in its imperial “crown” that rulers alone cannot control the effective conduct of multilateral relations; they have to win friends in the military, in the rank and file of business and industry, and at the nonelite, grassroots level. Britain also discovered the continuing need to sell the concept of empire to an increasingly sceptical audience at home.

Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles understood that the Atlantic Alliance was an alternative to isolationism and a means to sway the American public away from enduringly negative feelings about foreign entanglements. The rhetoric justifying American commitments to Europe therefore had to be couched in the same strident terms used to justify isolationism and neutrality in the past. In a speech on the Mutual Security Program, Eisenhower emphasized that collective security was the “least costly form of peace insurance” and that “mutuality and security” met the objective of U.S. foreign policy to keep the nation “militarily, politically and economically strong.”¹⁷ The concept also had bilateral appeal, with conservatives supporting the apparent extension of Anglo-American partnership to Western Europe and liberals supporting the Atlantic

community as a project in the mold of Wilsonian internationalism. In a draft of a December 1957 presidential speech to the North Atlantic Council, the Policy Planning Staff urged Eisenhower to use a line from his second inaugural address, applying it specifically to his vision of NATO as an alliance of equals: “We recognize and accept our own deep involvement in the destiny of men everywhere,” the president had said, acknowledging that “Each of us has a share in the work to be done. For we are all, each one of us, free men, citizens in a free society. It makes no difference whether you are a citizen of a small nation or a citizen of a large nation; a citizen of an ancient state (as many of you here today claim with true pride to be), or a citizen of a younger state (like mine) in the family of nations.”¹⁸ In this way Eisenhower was able to endorse multilateralism by coupling respect for other nations with an unmistakable exhortation to share the burden of defending Europe against communism.

Dean Acheson used the carrot of anti-isolationism to sway key international allies toward supporting the Truman administration’s efforts. German rearmament was the first major concession France and Britain made to American priorities, and Acheson couched his diplomacy in sweeping terms, arguing that it marked “the complete revolution in American foreign policy.” This “revolution” was however “based on the expectation that others would do their part.”¹⁹ Multilateralism was thus used effectively as both a carrot and a stick.

For the United States, planning beyond the conquest of World War II required multilateralism. Europe wasn’t conquered by American troops, but American policymakers did want to ensure that the “empire by invitation” Geir Lundestad has described would end when the U.S. chose, not when the Europeans withdrew the invitation. The U.S. committed to stationing American troops in Europe, but made this commitment more palatable at home and abroad by doing so in the context of NATO, ensuring that those troops (and the bases and weaponry accompanying them) were viewed as part of a multilateral defense effort with European nations. Of course when one country, France, objected to American troops being stationed on French soil, the United States elected to accept withdrawal without (much) complaint; Lyndon Johnson recognized that fighting Charles de Gaulle’s decision would undermine the spirit of the democratic alliance NATO was intended to be.

The parallels between British efforts at indirect rule and American engagement in postwar Europe are in some ways striking, particularly the attempt to gain influence without devoting unsustainable numbers of troops and expenditures of treasure.²⁰ But such an approach did not eliminate the challenge the U.S. faced in trying to remain a partner in an alliance in which all states were ostensibly equal and had chosen to be members, while simultaneously ensuring

that the U.S. national interest was protected and that America retained influence and control when it mattered.

American policymakers during the Cold War not only made a conscious effort to encourage exchange programs facilitating transatlantic understanding but inculcated an informal elite on either side of the Atlantic with a belief in the importance of European integration. This concept would have gained less traction had it been limited to the realm of bilateral negotiations between governments. However, with the emergence of this international constituency—including influential (if sometimes controversial) figures such as Jean Monnet in France, Paul-Henri Spaak in Belgium, Konrad Adenauer in Germany, and Americans Dean Acheson, George Ball, and Walter Lippmann—the U.S. could count on multilateral efforts to develop ideas for improving transatlantic relations that could then be encouraged within national bureaucracies. These men on both sides of the Atlantic frequently met socially, sharing dinners and rounds of golf and regularly staying in one another's homes. The Americans among them took their friends' ideas seriously and transmitted them to the U.S. policy planning staff, and even the president, regularly. Formal multilateralism worked considerably better than it otherwise might have because of such informal multilateral connections.²¹

What happened when multilateralism was no longer considered to further the American interest? Having promoted the sense of a shared stake in a transatlantic community of democratic states in the 1950s, the U.S. faced the challenge of a growing expectation through the 1960s that its allies should have access to nuclear weapons and the results of nuclear research, and a say in nuclear strategy. Multilateralism was enormously useful to the U.S. in planning for a *conventional* response to the Soviet threat, particularly because it permitted the rearmament of West Germany, but when it came to nuclear weapons the U.S. continued to act bilaterally or unilaterally. The rhetoric surrounding the Atlantic community was one of unity, but the McMahon Act (even in its amended form, permitting limited sharing of nuclear technology with the U.K.) reflected the American determination to retain control over both nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy.

The Multilateral Force (MLF), as it developed through the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations, never solved the problem of how to work with Europeans on nuclear sharing in a credible way. In a speech to the Canadian Parliament in 1961, Kennedy took the earlier idea developed by Robert Bowie and expanded it into an American commitment of five Polaris submarines to the NATO command, with a view to establishing a force “truly multilateral in ownership and control...once *NATO's non-nuclear goals have been achieved.*”²² This last caveat met the State Department recommendation that

the U.S. should ensure “the appearance of progress,” without actually conceding control.²³ The real goal behind the MLF was to halt nuclear proliferation: as George Ball described, he was won over to the concept because “as the French increasingly flaunted their force de frappe as a badge of great power status” he “began to fear that the Germans might...develop a sense of grievance.”²⁴

Robert McNamara was even more open about the problem. In a widely reported speech early in 1962, the secretary of defense condemned the British and French nuclear forces as “dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence, and lacking credibility as a deterrent.”²⁵ France and Britain were furious, but McNamara subsequently developed a set of guidelines on nuclear weapons that was successfully adopted by NATO. Apart from France, European countries came largely to accept that control of nuclear weapons would ultimately remain with the United States.²⁶ On 4 July 1962, Kennedy made his famous “declaration of interdependence,” emphasizing “a mutually beneficial partnership” in NATO based on “full equality.”²⁷ Yet in a meeting between the ambassador to France and Walt Rostow, the head of the policy planning staff, acknowledged the reality of U.S. multilateralism regarding nuclear weapons: “whether its allies want it or not, [the U.S.] must play its role as leader and impose its will when the superior interest of the West required it.”²⁸

How much, however, did that nuclear roadblock undermine the multilateral spirit—and practice—of NATO? Charles de Gaulle, while maintaining that he understood why the U.S. preferred to act as it did over nuclear weapons, used the issue to highlight his own belief that the American defense guarantee to Europe was unreliable. Nonetheless, while several other countries were disappointed at the American reluctance to give Western Europe a greater say in when and how nuclear weapons could be used on the continent, the North Atlantic Council continued to discuss the problem multilaterally, the Nuclear Planning Group emerged in the late 1960s, and de Gaulle’s arguments had little practical impact other than encouraging U.S. policymakers to consider how to present American concerns about nuclear weapons more sensitively to U.S. allies.

The development of the French force de frappe was not what the U.S. had wanted, but it was not as catastrophic to American aims as West Germany’s developing a nuclear bomb might have been. Failure to gain French support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was also a blow, but with the bulk of U.S. allies signing on to the treaty, the French abstention had little serious impact on American goals. In fact, de Gaulle’s recalcitrance pushed other European allies into a more unified position under American leadership.²⁹ Moreover, Germany never developed nuclear weapons, and in that regard a key U.S. goal was achieved multilaterally.

The U.S. was, in short, able to adopt a largely multilateralist stance during the Cold War while retaining flexibility. Even Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty allowed the U.S. more flexibility than is commonly assumed. The wording of Article 5 affirms that each ally will react to an attack on any member state “by taking forthwith . . . such action it deems necessary, including the use of armed force.” Washington retained the right to determine *how* it would react if Soviet forces were to invade Western European territory, and—as demonstrated in 2001—the U.S. president retained the right to reject the offer of multilateral action (though not without damaging consequences in the diplomatic domain).

Legitimacy and the United Nations

Everyone wants to have it, but there is little agreement on where it comes from, what it looks like, or how more of it can be acquired.

—Edward C. Luck³⁰

Justinian began his key text, *Institutes*, with the declaration that “[t]he imperial majesty should be armed with laws as well as glorified with arms.”³¹ While its wealth was admired and envied, the Roman Empire also spread its intellectual culture: Roman law (including the Roman laws of warfare) became the law of the whole of Europe and has remained the basis of civil and public international law throughout most of the world.³² Similarly, the United States sought to build legitimacy for American actions through multilateralism. Repudiation of the use of force through the United Nations was coupled with collective defense in NATO and both were backed by binding multilateral treaty obligations. Again, however, bilateralism subsumed multilateralism when controversial issues arose that went to the heart of the American national interest, but which were viewed differently by other states. Thus, for example, both SALT I and SALT II were largely negotiated bilaterally between the U.S. and the Soviet Union despite having multilateral consequences for both nations’ allies.

Cicero argued that men should resolve their differences through language (which he considered a tool of reason), resorting to war only when language fails.³³ In the twenty-first century, the aspiration to resolve conflicts through negotiation endures. However, the legitimacy of any nation’s resort to the use of force inevitably remains contested. As Edward Luck has concluded, “legitimacy is the product of innumerable interactions between national and global politics on a spectrum of policy issues” and it “is not an all or nothing condition.”³⁴ Member nations of the United Nations, required to ratify the legitimacy of one member state’s use of force against another nation by a vote for or against, seldom achieve unanimity; national differences and interests endure. Roosevelt’s idea of the UN Security Council as a global police force quickly

fell victim to the Cold War reality of national interests trumping international opposition to conflict.

Nonetheless, particularly in the early Cold War period, the U.S. attempted to exploit the intrinsic multilateralism of the UN to its own advantage. Dwight Eisenhower condemned the British-French-Israeli attempt to depose Nasser in Egypt in 1956 by arguing that their actions “could scarcely be reconciled with the principles and purposes of the United Nations.” Working with Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN Secretary General, Eisenhower called an emergency session of the General Assembly. Writing in *The New Yorker*, E. B. White adopted a more realistic attitude when he wrote of “president Eisenhower’s determination to make U.S. foreign policy jibe with the UN Charter” that he “would feel easier” if the president “would just make it jibe with the Classified Telephone Directory, which is clear and pithy.”³⁵

Nonetheless, the USSR and sixty-three other nations voted (against five other nations) during the Suez Crisis to establish the first ever UN peacekeeping operation to provide a buffer between Israel and Egypt. Six thousand troops from Scandinavia, India, Indonesia, Colombia, Canada, and Yugoslavia participated, helping to restore traffic through the Suez Canal. The leadership of the United States made the peacekeeping operation possible, but opposition at home to using the UN quickly emerged. Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. (the grandson of Wilson’s key opponent) was quick to emphasize that the U.S. had only worked with the UN because Eisenhower’s judgment of where American interests lay coincided with Hammarskjöld’s interpretation of UN principles. It was one thing for the UN Charter to trump the actions of Britain, France, and Israel; it would be quite another for the UN to suggest that the United States was subject to its authority. Even more damningly, the UN failed to do anything in Hungary where, almost simultaneously with the Suez crisis, a revolt against the Soviet-dominated communist government was brutally repressed by Soviet forces.

During the Congo crisis of 1960 to 1964, the UN deployed its largest force of peacekeepers up to that time. Hammarskjöld was determined to prevent the Congo’s disintegration because of the example it would set for the rest of the African continent. Again working with the U.S. president, the secretary general persuaded the Security Council to permit the use of force. Foreshadowing the tribulations of future UN peacekeeping missions, however, blue helmets with insufficient arms arrived in Africa to find themselves unacceptably vulnerable.

Hammarskjöld chose to use force in order to make peace. This choice, however, only worked in defeating the mercenary-led Katangese army because the U.S. helped to airlift the necessary arms to the UN forces: the multilateral initiative still had to be equipped with available materiel from a single powerful country. The cooperation between the U.S. and the UN was necessary, but it

also had political repercussions. Khrushchev demanded Hammarskjöld's resignation on the grounds that he was making the UN an extension of American power—precisely the consequence the U.S. had hoped to avoid by securing the legitimacy of acting through the UN.³⁶

Another unforeseen development also occurred; because the UN provided the Soviets with a public arena in which to criticize the U.S., elements of the American public turned against the UN. Growing unease among the American public about the UN was expressed by the 1987 ABC television miniseries *Amerika*. Playing on imagery that had its roots in the 1960s, the series presented American viewers with a dystopian scenario in which the United States suffers under Soviet occupation enforced by UN peacemakers. Increasingly, to many Americans, the United Nations became inextricably associated with ineffective multilateralism that hindered the pursuit of the U.S. national interest. The battle to convince Americans of the value of the UN in augmenting the prudent use of American power took several severe blows during the 1960s and the right capitalized on the bruised image of the UN to challenge the usefulness of the concept of multilateralism. Toward the end of the Cold War the impact of this assault had reached beyond rhetoric. Since 1985, the U.S. Senate has refused to appropriate the full amount of the standard United States contribution to the UN, arguing that the UN often acts in a way that is contrary to American interests.

Avoiding Overstretch and Justifying Multilateralism at Home

Many Americans not only began to worry during the Cold War that the U.S. would import other peoples' problems by engaging in multilateralism; they also feared that the U.S. would squander its prosperity by spreading its power too thin. Again, Rome provides a precedent for this concern. Despite being careful to consolidate its regional power before setting about imperial expansion farther afield, Rome had failed to set limits on its empire's power and ambitions. Livy, the Roman historian, declared that Terminus, the god of boundaries, had refused to be present at Rome's birth. By 75 B.C.E., coins had been struck with emblems of a scepter, globe, wreath, and rudder; all these metaphorical images made clear that Rome aspired to world government and never intended its empire to be restrained behind a wall, as China's Qing Empire would later be.³⁷ Seneca suggested that Rome should "measure the boundaries of [its] nation by the sun." Future empires would aspire to nothing less, and overstretch was, most often, the consequence.³⁸

For the United States in the twentieth century, avoiding overstretch was one of the reasons for building multilateral institutions during the Cold War, in the hope that burden sharing would lessen American obligations. Yet multilateral

institutions were also criticized for obliging the United States to commit to more than it wanted. With the escalation of the Vietnam War there was a renewed insistence that the U.S. should focus on American interests and move away from multilateral concerns, particularly given the lack of support offered by America's allies during the war. How could the U.S. continue to justify a multilateral approach to world problems in an era of détente, when the Cold War increasingly began to be perceived as a rivalry between the U.S. and the USSR alone?

Empires most frequently justify governing dependent peoples with claims to a higher mission, usually with divine sanction, but reputation and credibility have also always played a role. To work well, multilateral engagement requires great powers to think strategically about how to ensure that engagement continues to meet, rather than detract, from the national interest. Moreover, the historiography of empire increasingly reveals that influences tend to flow in both directions between the metropole and the periphery. Productive and effective multilateral relations should realize the value of a multilateral check on power by preventing any one nation's risking the overall objectives of the multilateral enterprise by indulging its ambition for dominance. A clear view of the balance of ends and means in a nation's foreign policy strategy should ensure that multilateralism works both to support key national goals and to inhibit the imprudent use of power—a balance that John Ikenberry has termed “strategic restraint.”

Lyndon Johnson's “More Flags” campaign marked an attempt to encourage European allies to help defend South Vietnam, but the campaign was a spectacular failure. As Fredrik Logevall points out, European opposition stemmed from deep scepticism about the possibility of any lasting victory against the Vietcong and uncertainty over how much Vietnam really mattered to Western security.³⁹ Kennedy opted against military intervention in Laos in part because of the opposition of Harold Macmillan and Charles de Gaulle and his concern that unilateral action would alienate the international community and increase domestic opposition. LBJ, however, confidently ignored the opinions of his overseas allies.

Imperial headquarters tended to worry (more than is often acknowledged by historians) that their own political and economic systems, even the morality of their people, would suffer under the burden of imperial enterprise. The more others could be persuaded to cooperate with the imperial enterprise therefore, the lower the costs and risks and the less this burden was felt at home. The Roman, British, and Spanish publics, for example, took pride in their imperial role, but also demanded that their leaders prioritize national survival over that of their empire.

Empire has often been seen as a corrupting force. Josiah Tucker, attempting to dissuade the British from continuing the American War, wrote in 1776 that the “heroic spirit [and] thirst for glory merely increase exponentially the range of imperialists’ desires and artificial wants, draining the spirit of industry.”⁴⁰ Empire was also seen to breed a false sense of security: the Spanish Royal Secretary, Fernandez Navarette, argued in 1621 (a time when the Spanish Empire appeared highly successful) that people are inclined naively to believe that wealth and reputation gained by conquest are sufficient for national preservation. Navarette also revealed a degree of paranoia regarding the dangers Spain faced by continually expanding; “were it not that reputation obliges her to preserve them,” he wrote, “Spain should give up some of her territories and certainly cease to expand.” The Vietnam War invoked a similar lesson: the attempt to maintain credibility should not lead to cognitive rigidity; the desire to prove to allies that the U.S. would come to their defense if necessary should not have influenced strategy in Southeast Asia.

Many Americans, of course, took away a different lesson from Vietnam: the necessity of a return to self-reliance. Navarette, adviser to Spain’s Philip V, saw “proof of the little valor and spirit of the Chinese” in the Qing Empire’s construction of a restraining wall around their empire.⁴¹ François Quesnay, however, maintained that the true greatness of a state is defined by its ability to *limit* the ambitions of its subjects. Other students of the history of the Qing Empire have admired Chinese restraint. Quesnay emphasized that the object of empire was not honor or wealth but *shared* prosperity. Quesnay, like many other European commentators, was impressed by the ritual known as K’eng-chi, in which the Emperor ploughed the first furrow and planted the first seed of the season. This ancient rite was taken to symbolize the importance of China’s being self-sufficient and free of reliance on external trade, unlike the countries of Europe. The United States, to some degree, took the same lesson away from the Vietnam War. The belief that American power should be used to promote self-sufficiency and security rather than international change and broader multilateral engagement during the Cold War led to an insistence on maintaining the status quo in Europe. The West German policy of Ostpolitik was discouraged by U.S. policymakers anxious to retain American control over European relations with the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, however, Nixon and Kissinger sought to improve bilateral Sino-American relations without consulting European allies in advance because of the restraining influence of multilateralism on the potential for dramatic change in international relations.⁴²

Throughout its history, the U.S. has shifted periodically from an emphasis on cooperation (working alongside other nations, using various means to attain a common goal) to an emphasis on collaboration (engaging more closely with

other nations, sharing both means and ends, with each holding a greater stake in the outcome). The American brand of multilateralism (whether in trade relations or in security alliances) has required a balance of autonomy and engagement. *Managing* that balance has been a tough challenge but also a necessary one.

The Past as Prologue?

John Lewis Gaddis is right to conclude that “the history of American grand strategy during the Cold War is remarkable for the *infrequency* with which the United States acted unilaterally.” John Ikenberry, too, has emphasized that the U.S. “acted as though it had less power than it did, sacrificing short-term flexibility and advantages by embedding itself in multilateral institutions to secure a long-term preeminence.” It is essential, however, to understand that multilateralism during the Cold War was adopted because it meshed with American needs and wants; whether considering the GATT or NATO, multilateralism entailed the calculated use of American power. Successive U.S. governments understood that power and partnership *could* be compatible. When multilateralism was thought through in a strategic way, power could even facilitate partnership. By the end of the Cold War, using multilateral means, the U.S. had established a preponderance of American power—not a balance of power—just as Wilson wanted. However, the question of how to manage that power after the Soviet Union was vanquished posed new challenges.

A great deal of rhetoric regarding multilateralism emerged in the 1990s and, most impressively, that decade brought the expansion of NATO to include former Warsaw Pact states and a reunified Germany. But it is notable that the more that decade is considered by historians and policy experts, the more a picture emerges of multilateral U.S. action pursued as an end in itself, without necessarily any concomitant understanding of why a multilateralist approach represented a prudent use of American power and what the consequences might be.⁴³ As Zbigniew Brzezinski has eloquently described, NATO’s expansion eastward, for example, “was less the product of strategic design than the result of history’s spontaneity.”⁴⁴ Multilateralism, in effect, was becoming too unwieldy to serve American purposes.

The prudent use of American power was more important than ever after the collapse of the Soviet empire, and there were key policymakers arguing that the most prudent way to use American power would be to apply it through institutions that the United States had fostered at the beginning of the Cold War and could now expand and strengthen with the end of that struggle.⁴⁵ There were also those that argued that if the U.S. fell back on being an “unchallenged” power and took friends and allies for granted, they would start to find ways to thwart U.S. power and influence.

With the end of the Cold War, however, successive governments began to reconsider how much of America's immense power it was ready to concede to partnership. Little serious consideration, however, was given in either the Bush or the Clinton administrations to the need to overcome the fear and resentment of other countries as American power dominated the international scene. At the same time, the wars in Yugoslavia, the horrors of Mogadishu, and the failures of the international community to act effectively in Rwanda did the reputation of multilateralism and U.S. military power no favors. Desirable ends and appropriate means became increasingly confused, and with that confusion multilateralism suffered. In 1993, Henry Kissinger accused the White House of "trying to submerge the national interest in multilateral ventures."⁴⁶ In 2000 the newly elected president, George W. Bush, pulled the U.S. out of multilateral negotiations on a small-arms treaty, announced he would not seek ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and said that he would withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The treaty establishing the International Criminal Court was left "unsigned." These were all very public gestures of America's intent to stop signing multilateral agreements that were not perceived to advance the U.S. national interest. The overall message was, arguably, more important than the individual turns away from the carefully constructed multilateralism of the previous fifty years.

Dean Rusk had said to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1965, "We are every day, in one sense, accepting limitations upon our complete freedom of action.... We have more than 4,300 treaties and international agreements, two-thirds of which have been entered into in the past 25 years.... Each one of which at least limits our freedom of action." George Bush would have heartily nodded his head at this statement, but he ignored what Rusk argued next: that international agreements and treaties *can* create stability and an environment where it is easier for the U.S. to pursue its national interests, in conjunction with more willing partners.

Rome, Great Britain, and Spain all offer examples of empires that became much more imperialistic, at least in the ways in which they defined and justified their existence, as their power was challenged. The Roman Empire abandoned its idealism and the search for stakeholders and resorted to brutality as an (untenable) means of ensuring its survival; Britain lost support for its empire at home and abroad the more it had to resort to intervention rather than indirect rule; Philip of Spain moved away from his predecessors' allied imperial project toward an empire stamped more authoritatively as Spanish, even though it continued to rely on international financing and military resources. All three empires collapsed for a variety of reasons, but it is noteworthy that all came

over time to rely more on costly coercion rather than on the collaborative approach to imperial rule that characterized them in their earlier periods.

The United States needs to recognize how to use multilateralism as a flexible strategy to manage power and control, acting as a leader without provoking fear of domination. Truman, Acheson, and Eisenhower led the United States into a managerial role. The difference between managing and dominating is similar to Eisenhower's distinction between commanding and leading:

Put a piece of cooked spaghetti on a platter. Take hold of one end and try to push it in a straight line across the plate. You get only a snarled up and knotty thing that resembles nothing on earth. Take hold of the other end and gently *lead* the piece of spaghetti across the plate. Simple!¹⁴⁷

The more the U.S. acts unilaterally or through ill-conceived, half-hearted efforts to act multilaterally, the more difficult it will be for the country to use its power prudently and strengthen the power of multilateralism, as the history of the Roman, British, and Spanish empires shows. American policymakers need to reconsider the balance between power and partnership and recognize that the national interest can be served prudently through multilateral engagement, provided that multilateralism is considered in a strategic, long-term way. Multilateralism also takes practice. As journalist Gideon Rachman pointed out in his observations of the September 2009 G20 summit, Europeans have become practiced in the art of multilateralism, making it easier to extend the practice into different contexts:

[T]he Europeans seemed much more tuned into what was going on than some of the other delegations. Puzzling over the new powers given to the IMF to monitor national economic policies in the Pittsburgh conclusions, I was interrupted by an old friend from the European Commission, who recognized the language immediately. "Ah yes," she said, "the open method of co-ordination."¹⁴⁸

Multilateralism takes time and energy, and the U.S. has to show that it is prepared to expend those treasured resources. To justify doing so, American policymakers must think through how to use multilateralism to their own advantage and sell it to a sceptical international and domestic public. Managing multilateralism is not, of course, simple, nor should it be. To be effective, a multilateral approach must incorporate flexibility, creativity, collaboration, long-term thinking, tough but constructive initiatives, and the ability to engage in diplomacy that works by persuasion, all while outlining clear goals. A genuinely

multilateral mentality has no place for the “you’re either with us, or you’re against us” attitude. Historically, the U.S. has done well to embed its leadership in multilateral engagement; it *should* be able to bring that history to bear on the future. There are lessons to be learned from the history of empire: think strategically about how to mesh national interests with international concerns, and power can be used prudently; lose that clarity of thinking and overstretch, and loss of public support and the growth of international fear and suspicion may well lead even the most super of superpowers to undermine its own strength.

Notes

- 1 Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xxviii; *Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain* (Washington, DC: War Department, 1942), n.p.; Zbigniew Brzezinski, “An Agenda for NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5 (September/October 2009): 3. This volume of *Foreign Affairs* also proclaimed NATO “the world’s most important alliance,” or as Brzezinski explained: “NATO today is without doubt the most powerful military and political alliance in the world. Its 28 members come from the globe’s two most productive, technologically advanced, socially modern, economically prosperous, and politically democratic regions. Its member states’ 900 million people account for only 13 percent of the world’s population but 45 percent of global GDP” (*ibid.*, 9–10).
- 2 Henry Kamen, *Spain’s Road to Empire: The Making of a World Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 491.
- 3 United States Ambassador to Turkey (MacMurray to Secretary of State), October 12, 1938, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1938, vol. 2, *The British Commonwealth, Europe, Near East, Africa*.
- 4 The Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organisation was one of the few instances in which President George W. Bush supported multilateral negotiations.
- 5 Henry Kamen, *Spain’s Road to Empire*; see, in particular, chapter 4. (*See note 2*).
- 6 Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World: Why a Crisis of the West Reveals the Opportunity of our Time* (London: Penguin, 2005), quoting Alexander Hamilton, in James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*, no. 7 (London: Penguin, 1987), 113.
- 7 Herman Melville, *White Jacket* (Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2006 [1st ed. 1850]), 160.
- 8 President Woodrow Wilson’s speech to a joint session of Congress, 2 April 1917.
- 9 *Daily News*, 5 March 1917, quoted in “London Press Sympathetic: Appreciate Wilson’s Difficulties, Which Are Compared to Lincoln’s,” *The New York Times*, 6 March, 1917, 2.

- 10 Letter to Charles Milne Gaskell, quoted in Alex Zwerdling, *Improvised Europeans: American Literary Expatriates in London* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 73.
- 11 William H. McNeill, "What We Mean by the West," in *Orbis* 4, no. 47 (Fall 1997): 513–24, at 520.
- 12 Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), vol. 2, 461.
- 13 The first quotation is from Henry Cabot Lodge's speech in Washington, D.C., against the League of Nations, on 12 August 1919, the second from a speech he gave in the Senate on 19 September 1919.
- 14 Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 349.
- 15 Quoted in David McCullough, *Truman* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 583.
- 16 *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1957* (Council on Foreign Relations, 1958): 100.
- 17 "Mutuality and Security," 18 November 1957, Presidential Speech on Mutual Security Program, September 1957, John Foster Dulles Papers, Draft Presidential Correspondence and speeches, box 3, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (DDEL).
- 18 Policy Planning Staff Memorandum for John Foster Dulles, from Gerard C. Smith, 7 December 1957, John Foster Dulles Papers, Draft Presidential Correspondence and Speeches, box 3, DDEL.
- 19 Telegram, Acheson to Truman, 15 September 1950, Student Research File (B file), no. 34A, NATO, box 1, folder 9, Harry S. Truman Library (HSTL).
- 20 For an introduction to the concept of indirect rule, see John W. Cell, "Colonial Rule," and Toyin Falola and A. D. Roberts, "West Africa," in Judith Brown and W. M. Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4, *The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 21 The Bilderberg Group met for the first time in 1954 to allow off-the-record discussions among policymakers, leaders in business and finance, and former statesmen in an effort to enhance mutual understanding. No votes were taken, communiqués issued, or policy statements made; even the names of those attending a Bilderberg meeting were until recently only ever disclosed by the invitees themselves. Sadly, because of the off-the-record nature of the discussions it is hard to track how influential informal meetings have been on the development of policy, but the evidence historians do have seems to suggest that these forums, as much as formal summitry, were used effectively in the past to permit more candid multilateral discussions among key transatlantic players on global challenges. See Thomas Gijswijt, "Uniting the West: The Bilderberg Group, the Cold War and European Integration, 1952–1966" (PhD thesis, Universität Heidelberg, 2007). My own archival research on France and NATO has included examining a plethora of letters among transatlantic policymakers that frequently refer to candid discussions on the golf course and around the dinner

- table; such discussions frequently led to carefully written reports that policymakers and planners dutifully considered.
- 22 “Early History of the MLF,” undated, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (LBJL), NSF, box 23 (emphasis added).
 - 23 “A New Approach to France,” 21 April 1961, JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, box 9.
 - 24 George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1983), 261.
 - 25 Full text (unclassified version of McNamara’s Athens comments given at a speech at the University of Michigan) printed in *The New York Times*, 7 June 1962.
 - 26 NATO Defense Ministers Meeting, Paris, 31 May 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File, Department of Defense, box 11.
 - 27 Audio and text versions of Kennedy’s speech, 4 July 1962, available at <http://www.jfklibrar.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003PoF03IndependenceHall7041962.htm> (accessed December 2007).
 - 28 Telegram, Alphand to Couve de Murville, 9 May 1962, French Foreign Ministry Archives (FFMA), Amérique 1952–1963, États-Unis.
 - 29 See Carolyne Davidson, “Dealing with De Gaulle: The United States and France,” in Locher, Nuenlist, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies*, Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).
 - 30 Edward C. Luck, “The United States, International Organizations and the Quest for Legitimacy,” in Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 47.
 - 31 John Baron Moyle (ed.), *The Institutes of Justinian*, Prooemium 1.
 - 32 Together with a theory of just and unjust wars the later Roman Empire also developed a new morality of empire. Roman jurists began to look upon war as a means of last resort, even if the emperors they worked for tended to be more belligerent. War for these thinkers could not be justified by the need to acquire territory, nor by objectives of cultural transformation or religious conversion. The only justification for war, they argued, could be an attempt to achieve peace and justice.
 - 33 Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.34–35. “There are two types of conflict: the one proceeds by debate, the other by force. Since the former is the proper concern of man, but the latter of beasts, one should only resort to the latter if one may not employ the former.”
 - 34 Edward C. Luck, “The United States, International Organizations and the Quest for Legitimacy,” 69 (see note 30).
 - 35 E. B. White, “Letter from the East,” *The New Yorker*, 15 December 1956: 43.

- 36 Sadly, not only did the Congo succumb to the dictatorship of Mobutu a year after UN forces withdrew (with the future of the Congo looking fairly stable) but Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash while traveling to a mediation meeting.
- 37 Jonathan Spence, “Comparing Empires,” seminar notes, Yale University, January 2005.
- 38 Seneca, *De Otio* 4.1.
- 39 Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 396–97.
- 40 Quoted in Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 108.
- 41 Domingo Fernandez Navarette, 1676, cited in Pagden, 31 (*see* note 40).
- 42 It is notable, however, that Charles de Gaulle had long encouraged Nixon to make this move.
- 43 *See* for example, John Lewis Gaddis’ description of a NATO briefing team that gave a lecture at Yale in September 1998 on the eastward expansion of NATO. Gaddis quotes Bruce Russett questioning what would happen “if NATO expansion caused difficulties with the Russians, perhaps undermining President Yeltsin’s efforts to democratize the country, perhaps creating an awkward situation for the new or prospective members of the alliance as Russian power revived, perhaps even driving Russia into some new form of cooperation with the Chinese, thereby reversing one of the greatest victories for the West in the Cold War, which was the Sino-Soviet split.” Gaddis recounts the reaction of the NATO team being one of “shocked silence.” Gaddis, “What Is Grand Strategy?,” *American Grand Strategy After War*, The Triangle Institute for Security Studies and the Duke University Program in American Grand Strategy, February 26, 2009; available at <http://www.duke.edu/web/agsp/grandstrategypaper.pdf>.
- 44 Zbigniew Brzezinski, “An Agenda for NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5, (September/October 2009): 8.
- 45 *See* Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 280–281, for Talbott’s account of his attempt to convince Bill Clinton of this idea while he was running for office in 1992.
- 46 Henry Kissinger, “Foreign Policy Is About the National Interest,” *International Herald Tribune*, 25 October 1993, 5.
- 47 Letter, Eisenhower to Anthony Eden, 16 March 1953, Dwight D Eisenhower, Papers as President, International Series, box 20, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
- 48 Gideon Rachman, “Europe’s Plot to Take Over the World,” *Financial Times*, 5 October 2009, 11.

III. Is a Grand Strategy of Restraint Politically Feasible Today?

Major Roadblocks to a Prudent Foreign Policy

Jane Kellett Cramer

Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Oregon

I thought the best example of a way to handle a situation was East Timor, when we provided logistical support to the Australians, support that only we can provide. I thought that was a good model. But we can't be all things to all people in the world, Jim. And I think that's where maybe the vice president and I begin to have some differences. I'm worried about overcommitting our military around the world. I want to be judicious in its use. You mentioned Haiti. I wouldn't have sent troops to Haiti. I didn't think it was a mission worthwhile. It was a nation-building mission. And it was not very successful. It cost us a couple billions of dollars and I'm not sure democracy is any better off in Haiti than it was before.¹

—Governor George W. Bush, to moderator Jim Lehrer, in a presidential debate with Vice President Al Gore, October 12, 2000

Governor George W. Bush was elected in 2000 to be president of the United States on a platform that declared he would pursue a more “humble” foreign policy than his predecessor, Bill Clinton. As a presidential candidate, Bush repeatedly averred that he wanted to shun nation building; he wanted to avoid the mission of promoting democracy with U.S. military forces. President Bush’s foreign policy approach radically changed after 9/11; perhaps Bush’s approach changed in response to 9/11, or, more likely, 9/11 gave Bush a “window of opportunity” to aggressively pursue a primacist strategy he largely preferred before the terrorist attacks.² In either case, it is revealing to notice that Bush’s declared foreign policy platform in 2000 emphasized that he would work with allies and be more judicious than his predecessor. Bush’s “humble” foreign policy platform was carefully crafted to appeal to the center of American public opinion in order to win a majority of votes in a tight presidential election.

Barack Obama, as a candidate, likewise advocated he would pursue a foreign policy much, much more prudent and restrained than his predecessor. Upon taking office, Obama reiterated and delineated his more restrained approach to foreign policy in his inaugural address:

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with the [*sic*] sturdy alliances and enduring convictions.... They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.... We are the keepers of this legacy, guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We'll begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan.³

President Obama's historic inaugural address underscored his understanding that a majority of Americans who had elected him wanted him to pursue a more restrained foreign policy than his predecessor. The election platforms of both candidates, Bush and Obama, appealed to the long-standing general preferences of the American public—especially since the end of the Cold War—to pursue a multilateral foreign policy that is internationalist but not extravagant, a foreign policy that is judicious, humble, restrained, prudent and neither forcefully unilateralist nor isolationist.⁴

The American public desires a more prudent foreign policy, yet neither Democratic Party nor Republican Party leaders deliver. Why? Instead of restraint, leaders of both parties have steadily maintained and even increased the number of military commitments that have accumulated since the beginning of the Cold War. There have been a few brief or modest attempts at imposing marginal restraint and limiting defense obligations and spending, but none of these attempts has proved lasting or politically advantageous for the president who attempted the strategy.

President Barack Obama appeared to enter office at a most propitious moment for steering a new, much more restrained, course in U.S. foreign policy. He took office in the midst of a severe financial crisis, while at the same time inheriting two expensive, unpopular, and intractable wars. While President Obama has made some potentially significant strategic adjustments (most notably in U.S. nuclear policy), most Obama supporters have been deeply disappointed that he has not delivered any dramatic changes in the direction of restraint. Many pundits have even argued that Obama is primarily continuing the failed

militaristic policies of the Bush administration. Why can't President Obama steer a new course? What are the major obstructions to a much more restrained grand strategy?

This essay explains the major roadblocks to real foreign policy change. The first section outlines a brief description of what a grand strategy of restraint would be, and why it appears vitally important to seek such a strategy at this time to many scholars and analysts. The second section reviews the conventional wisdom on why dramatically changing course on foreign policy toward restraint is difficult if not impossible politically, and why this conventional wisdom is backward. Third, this article reviews a brief history of the four attempts at modest restraint since World War II and the political lessons learned from these attempts. Fourth, based on this history, this article outlines the key elements of "uninsinister militarism," arguing that the insights from this analysis explain why U.S. foreign policy is not restrained and is very difficult to change despite radically changed international threats and obviously more pressing national priorities than military threats. Finally, three key strategies based on this analysis are suggested as the keys to unblocking the path toward prudence and restraint.

A Grand Strategy of Restraint

A grand strategy of restraint for the U.S. would be dramatically different from the position of preponderant power that the country has maintained and come to regard as "normal" since the beginning of the Cold War.⁵ It is by now a cliché that the U.S. expends more on its military defense than the rest of the world combined—a case of extreme preponderance. President Obama has so far continued this position of maintaining absolutely preponderant power with his first two defense budgets. Obama did include cuts of some weapons systems in some areas, but overall, he continued to increase the defense budget in his first year, going from \$654 billion in FY 2009 to \$680 billion in FY 2010—setting the record for the highest defense bill in history.⁶ Obama's FY 2011 continues in the same vein, even if it is minutely smaller, with some additional marginal reductions planned in the future—by 2015. More importantly, Obama boldly escalated U.S. military activism in Afghanistan, with only the remotest hope that he can somehow quickly "fix" the situation militarily and then leave.

A strategy of restraint would be completely different. True restraint would include profoundly reducing annual U.S. military expenditures by roughly two-thirds, resulting in the U.S. spending under \$250 billion annually on defense in less than ten years. This \$250 billion defense budget would still roughly be more than twice that of China, the second highest military spender at approximately \$122 billion annually, and more than three times Russia's, at \$70 billion

annually. A U.S. defense budget of \$250 billion would be much more in line with the expenditures of all U.S. allies in Europe combined (\$289 billion).⁷

The goal of a grand strategy of restraint would be to quit the U.S.'s habitual practice of maintaining global preponderance and pursuing primacy. A strategy of restraint would recognize that current U.S. spending levels are not sustainable; moreover, they are not desirable, since primary threats to U.S. interests are not military. Instead, very scarce U.S. resources should be redirected and used to address other pressing priorities, such as creating jobs at home, clean energy research and development, and energy independence. Pursuing clean, renewable energy and conservation would positively transform U.S. security interests at the same time as providing domestic jobs; the benefits are so obvious that the lack of political will to move toward real restraint internationally in order to free up significant resources for more pressing priorities is nothing short of stunning.

A grand strategy of restraint acknowledges that military force most often fails to succeed at controlling international politics and is very often counterproductive because it alienates many potential allies and provokes adversaries. A strategy of restraint is not synonymous with isolationism; it simply recognizes that there are other more productive and cost-effective tools for pursuing an internationalist strategy than military threats and coercion.

The core principles of a grand strategy of restraint include giving up overseas military bases and pulling back U.S. military forces to an "over the horizon" position. The United States would decide to be merely a great power militarily, but no longer be a superpower intent on defending and controlling world affairs with force. This would mean the U.S. would reduce and eventually almost wholly eliminate U.S. security guarantees and security assistance as they are now conceived; the U.S. would no longer act as a superpower capable of and willing to provide security for all of its allies. Instead, the U.S. would maintain alliances on a more equal basis, with allies providing for their own security. Further, the U.S. would openly adopt and acknowledge full reliance on nuclear deterrence by reducing its nuclear stockpile and "de-alerting" its remaining weapons. Ultimately, in order to keep the world's nuclear arsenals safe from terrorist threat while at the same time assuring nuclear stability among states, the U.S. should dismantle *all* its nuclear weapons and rely on virtual nuclear deterrence (such virtual deterrence would be established by declaring that nuclear retaliation is immutably assured if others initiate a nuclear attack, because the U.S. would always remain able to rebuild nuclear weapons if necessary); or nuclear deterrence could be maintained internationally (with a well-secured and highly survivable actual nuclear arsenal, if deemed necessary). Complementing this safe nuclear deterrence policy, the U.S. would vigorously pursue

diplomatic nonproliferation policies to the greatest extent possible, while absolutely forswearing preventive attack to stop proliferation and ceasing the pursuit of missile defenses.

Over time, the U.S. would aim to maintain alliances and institutions that create and solidify norms of cooperation without being the heavy-handed superpower that uses military tools in too many situations. Just as the U.S. has become accustomed to being the sole superpower unilaterally dictating policy, it should change course and become accustomed to working with others through building and supporting international institutions in order to facilitate cooperation. This internationalist strategy of restraint would be based on two central observations: (1) the current preponderant strategy is not sustainable and is depleting U.S. power while not providing optimal security; and (2), it is not wise to be militarily overbearing, as other countries and nonstate actors around the globe resent U.S. dominance, and many will always seek to counter it, and therefore such activism does not produce the desired results.

The Conventional Wisdom on Why the U.S. Needs to Be Militarily Activist

Supporters of Obama were either stunned or sanguine when Obama, after studying the problems in Afghanistan for months after taking office, decided he needed to “surge” the troops in order to be sure not to lose the war in Afghanistan. The stunned supporters had hoped, despite Obama’s clear telegraphing that he would be a “strong” leader, that Obama would manage to disengage more quickly from both Iraq and Afghanistan—it seemed clear that that was what he had really promised to his base. Obama’s more sanguine supporters largely reasoned that he needed to not lose in Afghanistan (even if he could not win) because if there were another 9/11-type terrorist attack while Obama was “disengaging,” then he would be politically doomed. In other words, it was essential to appear to be a strong leader even if the surge in Afghanistan was ineffectual and probably not at all substantially related to preventing another 9/11-type attack. This conventional wisdom holds that Obama chose to be “strong” on defense and to intervene more forcefully in Afghanistan for U.S. national security reasons—to satisfy a public desire for safety, or at least to satisfy a public need for the illusion that the president is doing all he can to assure safety.

According to another, similar tenet of conventional wisdom, Obama needs to pursue a militarily activist foreign policy, “despite the hunger of many [U.S.] citizens and of its foreign policy intellectuals for a quiet life,” because the U.S. is naturally drawn into engagements around the world over and over, the consequences of disengagement seem unacceptable, and the convictions of many

Americans lead them to be engaged in a tumultuous world.⁸ This reasoning again argues that the U.S. intervenes overseas because it has various strong interests around the world that drive it to intervene.

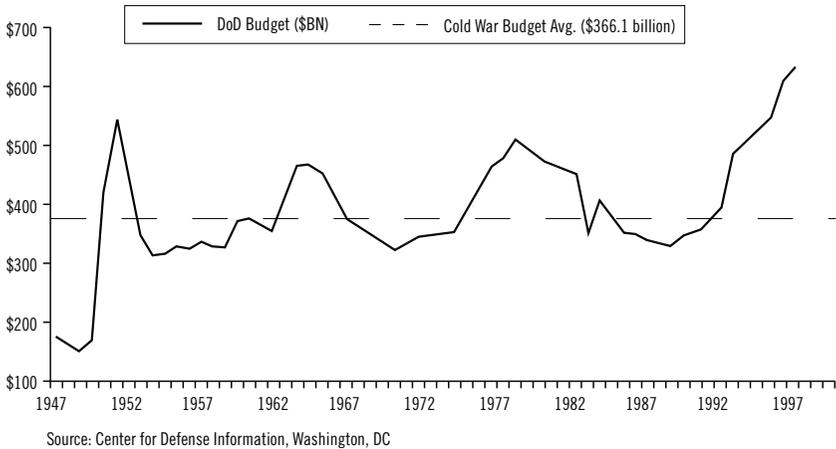
There is no doubt that some significant public preference for a feeling of security, and some American interests overseas, press Obama to some extent into an activist foreign policy. However, I argue that what really is going on is what I would call a “duct tape” problem. Before the invention of duct tape—or before a person has discovered duct tape—he or she will simply walk by a ripped window screen, or throw out a pair of favorite shoes that is coming apart. But with duct tape around, every problem that could conceivably be fixed with duct tape appears to cry out for it. In essence, this perspective turns the argument in favor of the desire or need for U.S. military activism on its head. While real problems may exist and potential sites of U.S. military intervention are certainly limitless, the public’s preference for intervention is in fact no stronger or more profound than the countervailing desires for prudence, restraint, and the wise allocation of scarce resources to vital domestic priorities. If only we could figure out how to disengage—or to not intervene in the first place! The strongest evidence that Americans today would likely prefer much more restraint in U.S. foreign policy is the arguments for greater restraint, which were the dominant winning arguments in the presidential campaign. Yet Obama now owns a lot of duct tape, so to speak, and thus it appears that he is somehow stuck in pursuing a militarily activist strategy even though it is unsustainable and will not produce increased U.S. security at acceptable cost. Obama chooses military preponderance and military solutions to foreign policy problems precisely because the tools he has readily at hand are military tools.⁹ Exploring this notion of why Obama is so stuck helps to uncover how he could possibly get unstuck.

Historical Attempts at Implementing Restraint and Political Lessons Learned

Since the beginning of the Cold War there have been periodic dramatic public fears of external threats leading to sharp increases in U.S. defense spending, followed by modest attempts at restraining U.S. defense spending. The cumulative effect has been to continuously ratchet up the U.S. military budget to historically unprecedented levels by any metric. Both parties have taken the lead in exaggerating external threats at different times, especially when it was to their political advantage to do so. All executive branch leaders and congressional leaders have found it relatively easy to increase defense obligations and spending but nearly impossible to ever significantly decrease defense obligations and spending. Restraint has instead, at best, been achieved not by significant, rational,

real defense cuts but by halting increases in defense spending and then holding defense spending constant against inflation. These limited attempts at restraint demonstrate how nearly impossible it seems to be to steer a new course in a more restrained direction even when the president appears to prefer more restraint.

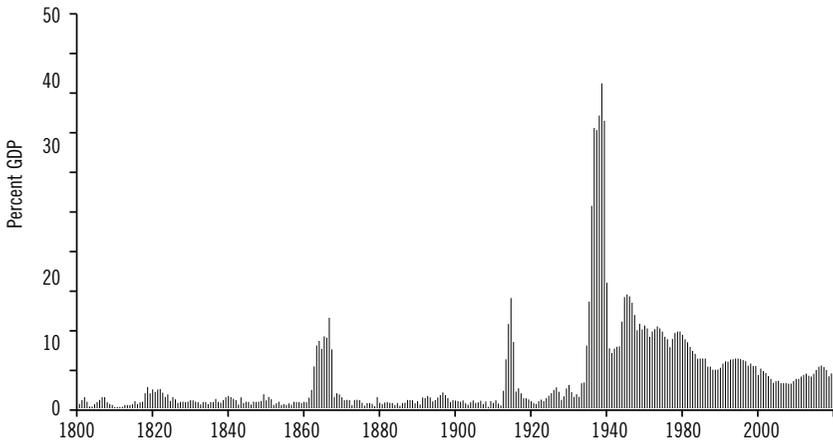
Chart 1. Department of Defense Spending over Time (Constant 2007 Dollars)



Historically, it is important to remember that the U.S. was not always so willing to sustain an extravagantly preponderant military defense. Conventional wisdom holds that the U.S. was resistant to standing military forces and military spending prior to Pearl Harbor because the U.S. was an isolationist country, uninterested in great-power rivalries, resistant to internationalism, and ideologically opposed to imperialism.¹⁰ This mythologized understanding of U.S. history has been thoroughly refuted and reconceived by numerous scholars in almost all respects. Since the founding of the country, American leaders and publics of every era have not shunned internationalism.¹¹ Even in 1936, at the brief height of popular American isolationism, FDR proclaimed on the campaign trail, “We are not isolationists except insofar as we seek to isolate ourselves completely from war.”¹² FDR was emphasizing that the U.S. was noninterventionist rather than anti-internationalist. The U.S. public, even in this most isolationist period, viewed itself as internationalist, and it preferred to stay engaged internationally in many respects, but it also believed that the main danger to American security lay in going “far beyond our borders, into distant seas...[and] frittering away our great strength in foreign theaters,” as Hanson Baldwin wrote in 1939.¹³

Instead of being isolationist as the mythology would have it, the American public and U.S. leaders across time have viewed themselves as internationalist and have been continuously engaged in internationalist debates and policies, frequently choosing to pursue imperialism as they sought rapid expansion. In light of the deep roots of America's internationalist, hegemonic, and even imperialist leanings, what is most important here is to notice why the conventional wisdom of an isolationist/anti-imperialistic America came to be accepted. A quick glance at the relative percentage of U.S. GDP dedicated to military spending since 1792 makes clear why some have argued that prior to World War II the U.S. must have been anti-internationalist and even isolationist (*see* chart 2, U.S. Military Spending as Percent of GDP since 1792, below). For nearly 150 years, relatively and in absolute values, the U.S. dedicated far less of its wealth to military spending than it did after World War II.

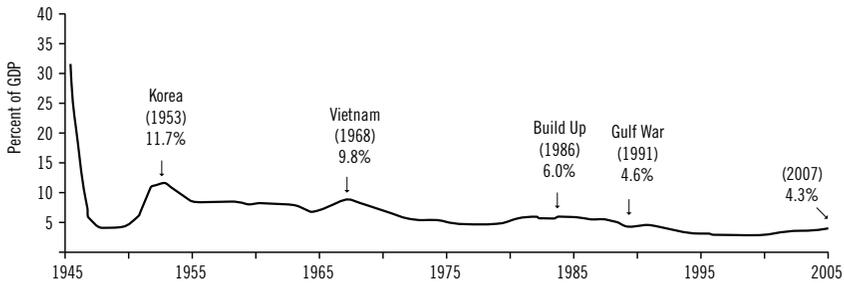
Chart 2. U.S. Military Spending as a Percent of GDP since 1792



Data from U.S. Budget Statistical Abstracts
 Compiled by Christopher Chantrell
<http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/charts.html>

In other words, the norm for military spending from 1792 until World War II was less than 2 percent of GDP. After World War II, a new norm was established, with spending suddenly rising drastically to about 10 percent of GDP for well over twenty years. As the U.S. GDP rapidly grew, high levels of spending continued, but fell back as a percentage of GDP, until a norm of roughly just over 4 percent of GDP was established.

Chart 3. Defense Budget as a Percentage of GDP



*Estimated

Data from U.S. Department of Defense, at:

http://www.heritage.org/research/Budget/images/bg2012_chart1.jpg

Since 1940, there have been several periods of relative contraction after rapid expansion in spending, but each time defense spending never reverted back to its former level. Thus, there has been an overall effect of ratcheting up real defense spending across time as the U.S. grew wealthier. This relative growth continued even during the period known as *détente* in the 1970s when many believed the Cold War was over. Even more surprising is that defense spending continued at levels above average Cold War spending levels even after the Cold War ended (*see* chart 1, Department of Defense Spending over Time).

The new norm of spending above 4 percent of GDP on defense since World War II has become such an accepted norm that leading politicians and influential pundits have recently argued for legislating 4 percent of GDP to be unconditionally allocated to defense spending without making the difficult judgments about the size and nature of the threats faced and whether or not it is prudent or judicious to use such a significant amount of finite resources for these purposes. In November 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates said that 4 percent of GDP should be a “benchmark as a rough floor of how much we should spend on defense.”¹⁴ During this period of over sixty-five years, no leading politician has ever successfully challenged the prudence of this post-World War II spending norm.

The massive shift in U.S. foreign policy priorities after World War II, reflected in the budget shift from 2 to 4 percent of GDP dedicated to military expenditures, was not commensurate with a change in stance from isolationism to internationalism but a change in status from internationalist, regional hegemony to global superpower. Recognizing the real nature of this shift opens up

room for discussion of how broad the actual possibilities are for different forms of internationalism. For example, the U.S. could revert back to spending less than 2 percent of GDP on the military and still continue the more than two-hundred-year American tradition of being a wholly internationalist power. Currently the U.S. maintains absolutely preponderant military power; devoting less than 2 percent of GDP to military expenditures would leave the U.S. significantly ahead of all other powers in absolute spending, while allowing the country to free up resources for other essential domestic priorities.

It is widely recognized that the most difficult task for politicians is to try to impose restraint relative to the strategy of their immediate predecessors. While politicians often contend they will be more prudent and restrained than the opponent they have just defeated, belt tightening is always painful and unpopular. It is much easier to expend resources freely, just as it is more fun to live on credit cards than it is to live within a sustainable, tighter budget. It is much easier politically and organizationally to increase spending than to decrease spending or even just to hold the line. In fact, the history of the presidents who have attempted to impose restraint demonstrates how politically disadvantageous such a move is. Some leaders have shifted toward restraint incrementally, but the political rewards have been small and the political punishment has often-times been great.

Public opinion may generally prefer prudence and restraint, but when past presidents such as Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon (abetted by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger), and Carter attempted to limit defense spending and turn the country toward a more prudent policy, competing politicians teamed up with interest groups who would benefit from confrontational foreign policies and higher military expenditures to form strong, highly motivated coalitions that successfully overturned the more prudent president's preferred foreign policy.

In the spring of 1950, President Truman was lobbying and stumping extensively to keep defense spending at approximately \$13 billion. Republican opponents were attacking the administration for being "soft" on communism, especially for allowing communists to infiltrate the State Department. In an effort to immunize the administration from unfounded political attacks, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Director of Policy Planning Paul Nitze, and military leaders joined together behind Truman's back to craft NSC-68, a highly aggressive strategy that would greatly expand military spending and unquestionably prove the administration was not "soft" on communism. This monumental strategy document was written not as a thoughtful strategy memorandum weighing possible options, but as a rallying cry. It wholly abandoned any pretense of prudence or restraint, and concentrated on making its points "clearer than truth."

This expansionist strategy was easy to sell. The central lesson here was the public had seemed to want to prudently limit defense spending, but was easily swayed by leaders to do the opposite. When Truman's own advisers first presented the strategy document to him, Truman resisted it because of its fiscal imprudence; Truman at first felt politically cornered and undermined by his own advisers. Overall this policy, which quadrupled defense spending in under two years, served Truman well and was much easier to sell than his policy of restraint. The NSC-68 policy was at its root a product of domestic coalition building and it allowed domestic political interests to trump prudent foreign policy.¹⁵

President Eisenhower also tried to marginally limit defense spending in his second term. Former Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington, Senator John F. Kennedy, some members of the air force, and other special interests joined together to rally the public behind fears of a mythical "missile gap." A possibly dangerous missile gap was first perceived after *Sputnik* in 1957, but by 1960 a dangerous gap was no longer plausible. Yet by then, the public fear of a gap was so powerful and widespread that Kennedy continued to use this fear for his political advantage, even though the gap had been closed and U.S. intelligence no longer supported estimates of a possible dangerous gap. Missile-gap imagery served Kennedy as a ready metaphor in 1960 to support his argument that Eisenhower was not doing enough on defense. Arguing against restraint and for increased defense budgets overall proved a winning strategy, and the missile gap was a useful tool that helped propel Kennedy into the White House.¹⁶

In the early 1970s, in the wake of the devastating costs of Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger also tried to adopt a more prudent foreign policy in the form of détente, including arms limitations. President Carter inherited this more restrained policy at a time of economic recession and high inflation, and he attempted to build upon it prudently. However, a powerful political coalition cohered around the highly exaggerated top-secret threat assessment put forward by the Team B report, which was leaked to the press just after President Carter took office. (The Team B report was the result of an experimental "competitive threat assessment exercise" authorized by CIA Director George H. W. Bush in which an outside "blue ribbon panel" of alleged experts gained access to raw CIA intelligence and got to create their own threat assessment; the report was highly flawed in its methods of analysis, completely contradicted the much more accurate CIA estimates of Soviet capabilities and intentions at the time, and ultimately undermined the CIA and led to highly inflated estimates of Soviet capabilities for over a decade and to the U.S. not recognizing the coming end of the Cold War.) The political movement that gathered behind the Team B report was largely funded by defense contractors and others who had lost out

under policies of restraint. This movement mobilized under the auspices of the Committee on the Present Danger, a political coalition that had come together to oppose President Carter's every move. Carter ultimately reversed course and attempted to placate this powerful coalition with large increases in defense spending and a sharp turn toward hard-line policies, but to no avail. The coalition that opposed the prudence and restraint of *détente* only gained in strength.¹⁷ President Reagan swept into office in 1980 promising to increase defense spending largely to address the wholly mythical threat of a looming "window of vulnerability." Reagan instituted the highest U.S. peacetime military spending until that time, and was remembered for being a highly successful president, as opposed to Carter, whose prudent belt-tightening policies made him unpopular and who was ultimately remembered as an ineffectual and unsuccessful president.

These cases illustrate how the public, while preferring prudence generally, is easily convinced to fear foreign threats.¹⁸ These cases also demonstrate that grand strategies of even marginal restraint seem to provoke major political backlashes from groups affected by such restraint. The institutional heft of the Department of Defense and its allies, combined with the charismatic power of politicians campaigning for office, ensure that the pursuit of even marginal restraint can be politically disastrous.¹⁹

Fully aware of the lessons of Carter's disastrous experience, President Bill Clinton opted to impose only very modest restraint even though the Cold War was over and both the public and the military expected a possible "peace dividend" of up to 50 percent of the military budget to be redirected to other pressing needs. Clinton worked to avoid Carter's one-term fate and total humiliation. Clinton did not attempt to significantly cut the defense budget; instead he held it level for about six years, with no increases to compensate for inflation. This had the effect of reducing the defense budget over time without provoking a strong political coalition in opposition. President Obama so far appears to be borrowing some pages from Clinton's playbook, with apparent plans to hold the defense budget flat in future years.²⁰

Restraint Thwarted by "Unsinister Militarism"

In February 2010, President Obama sent to Congress a proposed defense budget of \$708 billion for FY 2011. This budget included \$549 billion in discretionary budget authority to fund base defense programs, and \$159 billion to support overseas contingency operations primarily in Afghanistan and Iraq. This defense request was larger than all other U.S. discretionary spending combined. The sheer magnitude of the U.S. defense budget, especially given that there exists no significant domestic opposition to these enormous military spending priorities, has led many to conclude the U.S. polity is infected with militarism, and that it

is this militarism that stands in the way of a more rational grand strategy of restraint. However, this perceived militarism is not the virulent, aggressively expansionist militarism of, for example, pre-World War II imperial Japan, but simply—as the dictionary has it—a common “belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests.”²¹ Such militarism is not the result of a sinister plot of either civilian or military leaders. Instead it is the artifact of four largely unintentional conditions: organizational interests, collective-action problems, pork barrel politics, and prevailing norms of militarized patriotism.

Organizational interests. All organizations (businesses, government bureaucracies, not-for-profit organizations) strive to protect and promote their organizational interests (protect the jobs and prestige of its members and promote the mission of the organization). One main way organizations promote their interests is to work to increase the size and wealth of the organization. Large organizations have more capacity to promote their interests than small ones, hence as an organization grows it expands its ability to promote its interests roughly in proportion to its size. Therefore, as the U.S. military organization grew it became more and more capable of promoting its own interests. Success often breeds more success simply because the larger the organization grows, the more capable it becomes of promoting its own interests. By virtue of its increasing size and capability, the U.S. military is more and more likely to prevail in protecting its interests by preserving its large budget, and more likely to be able to thwart efforts to impose restraint.

Collective action problems. The public interest may wish to impose restraint on excessive military obligations and budgets, but it is well known that large groups face relatively high costs when attempting to organize for collective action, while small groups face relatively low costs. Thus the general public—which is, in a sense, the largest group of all—will be the most difficult to organize. Furthermore, individuals within large groups will gain less per capita from successful collective action, while individuals in small groups will gain more per capita through successful collective action. Hence, in the absence of collective incentives, successful group action diminishes as group size grows. Moreover, not only will collective action by large groups be difficult to achieve, but also large groups (including the public as a whole) can be dominated by minority groups that share concentrated interests, especially in situations in which the minority can control information, and the large group does not have access to reliable and full information.²²

Pork barrel politics. It is well known that U.S. congressional budgetary practices are plagued by “pork barrel politics,” a term that refers to the appropriation

of government spending for localized projects secured solely or primarily to bring money home to a representative's or senator's district. This problem is so ubiquitous in U.S. defense budgeting that the president finds it nearly impossible to cut any military programs; proposed cuts end up being restored by Congress. Congress almost universally authorizes significantly more money for defense than the president requests. This, in effect, means that a substantial proportion of defense spending subsidizes local "jobs programs" rather than being devoted to programs based on a rational, prudent assessment of defense requirements. Pork barrel politics directly blocks the imposition of restraint.

The norm of militarized patriotism. Most likely as a result of the powerful organizational interests of the institutionally preponderant Department of Defense, U.S. citizens and politicians have come to share the view that being patriotic means "supporting the troops," which translates into deference for expert military opinions, patriotic acquiescence to military budget requests that are "necessary" for security, and unquestioning support for most military endeavors, at least initially. To dissent from this type of reflexive unconditional support for the military is to be unpatriotic. Politicians who express contrary opinions, such as making strong arguments for cuts in defense, are quickly labeled as unpatriotic, if not treasonous, and punished politically. This norm, the reflex of upholding a "strong" defense posture, especially on the part of politicians of national stature, is one of the largest roadblocks to implementing a grand strategy of restraint.

These four factors—the preponderant organizational interests of the U.S. military, combined with the inherent weakness of collective action on behalf of the public interest, amplified by the robust tradition of pork barrel politics that maintains high levels of defense spending, and reinforced by a conventional American form of patriotism that emphatically "supports the troops," right or wrong—all come together to create a culture of unambiguous militarism in the U.S. It is an *un*sinister militarism—indeed, a largely unintentional militarism—that is primarily a byproduct of maintaining a large military organization, but it is nonetheless a deep and wide cultural current that directly thwarts attempts at implementing a grand strategy of restraint.

Four Essential Strategies for Overcoming the Roadblocks to Restraint

The American public generally supports an internationalist foreign policy, showing very little interest across time in isolationism. Yet the public, while not isolationist, is far less internationalist than elite opinion, with 54 to 72 percent of the public supporting the idea that the U.S. should take "an active part in world affairs" in repeated surveys between 1974 and 2002, while elite opinion registered a minimum of 96 percent support in response to the same question.²³

The public also generally prefers a more prudent and restrained foreign policy than do elite opinion leaders on almost all issues across time.²⁴ Both the public and the elite also prefer a multilateral over a unilateral foreign policy, and this broad and robust opinion likewise generally favors a policy of restraint.²⁵

Beyond these general attitudes toward foreign policy, which reveal the public to be internationalist but inclined toward greater restraint than elite leaders favor, recent polls also show that the U.S. public overwhelmingly feels the Iraq War was a mistake (57 percent in July 2009).²⁶ Further, by one careful measure, it appears that the public feels the defense budget should be reduced by more than 30 percent.²⁷ Moreover, Americans believe that the federal government wastes, on average, fifty cents of every dollar it gathers in taxes.²⁸ Further, in poll after poll, Americans cite the economy as the most important issue facing the nation (47 percent in November 2009), with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan only a distant third (12 percent).²⁹ With all of this historic and current support for a more restrained foreign policy, it would seem that President Obama could easily assume he has a mandate to turn away aggressively from the policy of his predecessor.

Yet the obstacles to a grand strategy of restraint described above prevail over the general public preference for more restraint. Powerful organizational interests clearly come together in overwhelming coalitions to overturn presidential initiatives for restraint. Collective action problems plague the public interest in restraint. Pork barrel politics regularly reverses already politically difficult spending cuts proposed by the executive branch. And the general norm of militarized patriotism silences politicians who might dare to object to “strong” military-oriented foreign policies.

All of these considerations lead us back to the duct-tape problem. If you own *too much* duct tape, you will feel inclined to fix everything with it—it’s just too handy. Four key observations follow from this analysis. First, the way for the president to implement a grand strategy of restraint is through changing the defense budget. He should not spend time overanalyzing priorities, determining which interests are vital, and which programs should be downgraded. He must recognize that so long as the U.S. has a large military organization on hand, he will be inclined to use it; the duct tape will jump into his hand and all interests will appear vital. To move in the direction of restraint, cutting the defense budget must become *an end in itself*. Close all overseas bases; shrink the organization.

Second, we must recognize that the barriers to accomplishing collective action on military issues do not simply constitute a typical collective-action problem. Instead, the public interest is almost completely impotent when civilians try to organize to address military questions because of the culture of secrecy. Civilian security experts know that secrecy is never so tight that civilians could

not know enough to assess threats and weigh in knowledgeably on budget priorities, but most citizens do not understand this. They have no way of demystifying military budget planning enough to feel comfortable arguing that thirty-five jobs for public school teachers in Oregon are far more important to the national interest than paying \$3 million to send three eighteen-year-old soldiers to Afghanistan for two years. The public cannot weigh the opportunity costs and the economic consequences of overseas wars without much more access to detailed analysis of military budgets.

Third, pork barrel politics is not likely to change, but jobs must be created in such areas as clean energy, public healthcare, and environmental auditing that will rival and successfully compete with the demands for military jobs. Again, official secrecy often shields military jobs from public audits for efficiency and necessity. Reducing secrecy and increasing public auditing will greatly enhance the ability of the U.S. to move toward restraint.

Finally, confronting the norm of militarized patriotism is absolutely essential for freeing up political debate about national security. Both political parties back foreign policies of preponderance over restraint largely because of the power of the military lobby, the silence and impotence of critical public opinion, and the economic rewards that accrue to such practices as pork barrel politics. Militarized patriotism reinforces these problematic dynamics by silencing critics. In a democracy, open debate is essential to rational policy making. Any norms that silence debate are antidemocratic because they hamper the functioning of democracy.

These suggestions are only a beginning. Moving toward a grand strategy of restraint in U.S. foreign policy is a politically risky gambit because it requires taking on the most powerful organization in the history of the world.

Notes

- 1 Transcript of major excerpts of the debate at *Online NewsHour*, "Presidential Debate," October 12, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec00/for-policy_10-12.html.
- 2 On the contention that Bush had radical goals before 9/11, see Bill Keller, "The Radical Presidency of George W. Bush: Reagan's Son," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 26, 2003; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/26/magazine/the-radical-presidency-of-george-w-bush-reagan-s-son.html?scp=1428&sq=woodward&st=nyt&pagewanted=7>.
- 3 "Transcript: Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?_r=1.

- 4 For evidence that the American public has been generally internationalist and multi-lateral since polling began before World War II, see Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 174–77, 201–02; and Ole R. Holsti, *Making American Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 237–67.
- 5 For more on this strategy, with some differences in details and emphasis, see Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 5–48; Barry R. Posen, “The Case for Restraint,” *The American Interest* 3, no. 2 (November/December 2007): 13–17; and Barry R. Posen, “Restraining Order,” *The American Interest* 3, no. 3 (January/February 2008): 94–97.
- 6 Christopher Drew, “Victory for Obama over Military Lobby,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 2009, A1.
- 7 The source this data is *U.S. Military Spending vs. the World*, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, February 22, 2008, available at <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#InContextUSMilitarySpendingVersusRestoftheWorld>.
- 8 Walter Russell Mead makes these arguments in response to Posen’s “The Case for Restraint” (see note 5) in *The American Interest* 3, no. 2 (November/December 2007): 19.
- 9 Military action is in fact being abandoned in Afghanistan even though the original Obama plan emphasized the importance of a military offensive. U.S.-led military intervention has not been effective and is bitterly opposed by the local population and Afghan officials. See Rod Nordland, “Afghanistan Strategy Shifts to Focus on Civilian Effort,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 2010, A1.
- 10 For a description of the conventional wisdom, see Benjamin O. Fordham, “Economic Interests and Public Support for American Global Activism,” *International Organization* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 164.
- 11 David C. Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789–1941* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009).
- 12 *Ibid.*, 353.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 357.
- 14 Quoted in Travis Sharp, “Tying US Defense Spending to GDP: Bad Logic, Bad Policy,” *Parameters* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 6.
- 15 See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).
- 16 See Christopher Preble, *John F. Kennedy and the Missile Gap* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004). Preble spells out the domestic economic interests that joined the Kennedy coalition.

- 17 See Anne Hessing Cahn, *Killing Detente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1998). Cahn usefully delineates the domestic political groups that came together at the time to kill détente.
- 18 For other theories and more debate about the sources of public fear and threat inflation, see A. Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, eds., *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 19 Cindy Williams, *Planning and Resource Allocation for Statecraft and Security*, Tobin Paper 2008.
- 20 “Declining Defense: Obama’s Budget Does Cut One Federal Department,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2009, A14.
- 21 *New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 22 I derive these insights are from Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1971[1965]).
- 23 Fordham, “Economic Interests and Public Support for Global Activism,” 164 (see note 10).
- 24 Holsti, *Making American Foreign Policy*, 251 (see note 4).
- 25 This is found much of the time, with the public much more interested in strengthening the UN than U.S. leaders (57 versus 28 percent in 2002), but leaders do express marginally more interest in strengthening international law and institutions (49 over 43 percent). Data from the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Surveys, in Holsti, 295 (see note 4).
- 26 Gallup Poll, July 10–12, 2009.
- 27 This high number comes from an in-depth poll that asks people to consider tradeoffs: PIPA, “The Federal Budget: The Public’s Priorities,” March 7, 2005. Many other polls support this somewhat by showing that the public does not rank national security issues nearly as high as other priorities. However, when asked about defense spending in February 2009, 24 percent said the U.S. was spending too little, 41 percent said the level was about right, and only 31 percent said it was “too much.” Gallup Poll, February 9–12, 2009.
- 28 Gallup Poll, September 15, 2009.
- 29 CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll, October 30–November 1, 2009.

PART II:
**NONKINETIC POWER AND
CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL
SECURITY CHALLENGES**

IV. Using U.S. Leverage to Abate Conflicts That Harm U.S. Security

Stephen Van Evera

Ford International Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Al-Qaeda exploits wars that involve Muslims to sustain its power. It features these wars in its propaganda, and uses them as occasions to recruit and train new fighters, raise money, and network with other extremist groups. For these reasons wars that involve Muslims are a tonic for al-Qaeda and a threat to U.S. efforts to defeat al-Qaeda.¹ Conflicts that do not involve Muslims can also help al-Qaeda by causing states to quarrel among themselves instead of cooperating to defeat al-Qaeda, or cooperating to limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that al-Qaeda seeks to acquire.

Hence the U.S. has a major interest in preventing, abating, or ending many international and civil conflicts. Peacemaking should therefore be a key U.S. weapon in the war on al-Qaeda. Accordingly, the U.S. government should consider ways to develop more capacity for peacemaking. Specifically, the U.S. should seek ways to translate its vast military and economic power into peaceful conduct by others. America's military and economic strength gives it large power to shape others' conduct. U.S. policy thinking should focus on finding ways to apply this leverage to prevent or dampen conflicts that involve Muslims or that otherwise harm U.S. security.

I. War Begets Terror

Al-Qaeda arose as a byproduct of five wars in the Middle East and South Asia, and is now sustained by four current conflicts. Without these wars al-Qaeda would likely not exist—a fact that highlights the U.S. interest in ending current conflicts and preventing new ones.

The Soviet-Afghan war of 1979 to 1989 was the petri dish in which the Egyptian Muslim brothers led by Ayman al-Zawahiri and Saudi Islamist radicals led by Osama bin Laden combined to form al-Qaeda, and the place where they first gained combat experience. The India-Pakistan conflict (1947–) led Pakistan in 1994 to create and aid the Afghan Taliban, which Pakistan viewed as a tool

to forestall the possible growth of Indian influence in Afghanistan. The ruinous Afghan civil wars of 1989 to 1996 persuaded many Afghans to accept barbaric Taliban rule in 1996 as the only alternative to the chaos of war. And the war between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan Northern Alliance from 1996 to 2001 led the Afghan Taliban to grant safe haven to al-Qaeda, in exchange for al-Qaeda's help against the Northern Alliance.

These four wars led to the founding of al-Qaeda, motivated others to create and support its Afghan Taliban allies, and motivated the Afghan Taliban to ally with al-Qaeda. The Persian Gulf conflict of 1990 to 1991 also fueled al-Qaeda's growth by drawing U.S. troops into the Arabian peninsula—a deployment that al-Qaeda propagandists decried as a sacrilege—and by providing al-Qaeda a grievance against the Saudi regime.

The U.S. unwisely did little to abate or prevent these conflicts. Since 1947 the U.S. has sometimes moved to dampen crises between India and Pakistan but never pushed hard for an India-Pakistan peace settlement. It helped sustain the civil war in Afghanistan for three years after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in February 1989 by continuing to support rebels seeking to overthrow the Najibullah regime. Then, when the Najibullah regime was ousted in 1992, the U.S. abruptly disengaged from Afghanistan without trying to reconcile the Afghan factions that overthrew Najibullah. Instead the U.S. callously left them to war viciously among themselves. In retrospect the U.S. would have been better served by working to limit or end these conflicts.

Four current conflicts continue to complicate U.S. efforts to defeat al-Qaeda and stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction today. Together these conflicts pose a prime obstacle to U.S. efforts against the threat of WMD terrorism:

1. Pakistan's conflict with India causes Pakistan to fear the possible growth of Indian influence in Afghanistan. This leads Pakistan to continue aiding the Taliban insurgency against Afghanistan's Karzai government.² The Taliban insurgency now threatens the survival of the Karzai government, raising the risk that Taliban leaders who were once allied to al-Qaeda, and who remain ideologically friendly to al-Qaeda, could return to power in Afghanistan.
2. Russia has fractious relations with states on its near periphery, especially Ukraine and Georgia. (Russian relations with Ukraine have lately improved but remain unsettled and could deteriorate again.) These conflicts are irritants in the U.S.-Russian relationship, as the U.S. has allowed itself to be drawn into the quarrel on the side of the near periphery states. Important U.S.-Russian cooperation on other key issues has suffered as a result. This includes U.S.-Russian cooperation to stem nuclear programs

in Iran and North Korea, to lock down loose nuclear weapons and nuclear materials worldwide, to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, and to stem global warming. All these problems are made harder to solve by U.S.-Russian friction over Russia's relations with its near neighbors.

3. The Israel-Palestine conflict supplies al-Qaeda with a compelling propaganda opportunity—a bloody shirt that al-Qaeda waves with great success to mobilize support.³
4. The Iraq civil war (2003–) has abated but still smolders, and it threatens to escalate again. It ties down thousands of U.S. troops, supplies al-Qaeda with fodder for effective anti-American propaganda, and sustains the risk that al-Qaeda could regain a refuge in Iraq by cutting a deal with one side in the conflict (like al-Qaeda's deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s). There is also the danger that other states could be drawn into the conflict—a development that would benefit extremists in the region, including al-Qaeda.

Peace is therefore a key weapon against al-Qaeda and the WMD terrorism threat. More peace will bring less terrorism and reduce the spread of WMD.

II. Translating U.S. Leverage into Peace

Despite its current economic woes the U.S. remains the world's sole superpower. U.S. military and economic strength is unmatched in the world, far surpassing the power of all parties involved in the four conflicts, mentioned above, which sustain al-Qaeda and impede progress against WMD terror. How can the U.S. use its power to persuade the belligerents in these conflicts to behave more peacefully?

Lesser states and nonstate actors often bend when great powers apply carrots and sticks. Israel, Britain, and France stopped their war on Egypt and withdrew from the Sinai in 1956 in response to arm twisting by the Eisenhower administration. West Germany agreed to abandon its nuclear ambitions in the early 1960s in response to U.S. assurances and threats—assurances that the U.S. would continue to protect Germany if it cooperated, and threats to end U.S. protection if it did not.⁴ Taiwan and South Korea likewise ended their nuclear programs in the 1970s and 1980s in response to U.S. promises to protect them if they complied and to punish them otherwise. The governments of emerging states in Eastern Europe agreed to respect the rights of their ethnic minorities after 1989, under threat by the European Union that it would otherwise withhold economic relations. The Nicaraguan Sandinistas agreed to elections in 1990 and to leave power when they lost those elections under U.S. military pressure. The Serbs halted their war on Bosnia in 1995 under threat of continued U.S. aid to

the Bosniaks and Croats, and U.S. air attack. Other examples abound. Threats and inducements deftly applied can often turn ships of state in new directions.

Three types of leverage bear mention. They are: (1) Using threats or inducements to broker neutralization agreements—that is, agreements ensuring that a state will behave with benign neutrality toward its neighbors. Such agreements can calm the fears of neighbors who may otherwise attack the state to forestall its possible attack on them. (2) Using threats or inducements to persuade adversaries to refrain from using force or committing other belligerent acts against one another. This cannot end conflicts but can limit or abate them. And (3) using threats or inducements to persuade adversaries to settle their conflict by peace agreement.

The U.S. should apply these tactics to help to abate four current conflicts: Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, Russia-Ukraine-Georgia, Israel-Palestine, and Iraq.

III. Dampening Conflicts in South Asia

Public discussion of U.S. options in Afghanistan focuses on debating the size and duration of U.S. troop deployments to Afghanistan, the rules of engagement for those forces, and possible means to raise the legitimacy of the Karzai government. These are important questions, but the problem of Pakistani support for the Taliban must also be addressed. Even a more legitimate Afghan government supported indefinitely by U.S. troops probably cannot defeat the Taliban as long as Pakistan sustains the Taliban with safe haven and material support.

In principal the U.S. could address the problem of Pakistani support for the Taliban with either threats or inducements aimed at Pakistan. However, the threat option has large downsides. Its clearest downside lies in the danger that Pakistan may not comply, leaving the U.S. in a confrontation with a Pakistani government whose cooperation it needs in the wider effort against al-Qaeda.

A more promising approach would seek to remove Pakistan's motive for supporting the Afghan Taliban. As noted above, Pakistan backs the Afghan Taliban because it fears that otherwise Afghanistan will fall under Indian influence or control. Pakistan would then face the hazard of a two-front conflict involving danger of a direct Indian attack from the east, and a stab in the back by a pro-India Afghanistan from the north and west. Pakistani strategists see the Afghan Taliban as friendly agents who avert this two-front threat by steering Afghanistan away from alignment with India. (Pakistan's fear of an Afghan-Indian alliance is overblown, but this is how the Pakistanis see things.)

The U.S. could dispel Pakistan's two-front fear by guaranteeing the strict neutrality of Afghanistan in all present and future conflicts between Pakistan and India. Specifically, Afghanistan would agree to have no formal or informal alliances with India; no military cooperation or coordination with India; no

military assistance from India; no outsized Indian consulates or military advisory groups on Afghan soil; and no Afghan military deployments against Pakistan in times of India-Pakistan tension or crisis beyond what Afghanistan might normally deploy on its Pakistani border. In exchange Pakistan would halt support for the Afghan Taliban insurgency and steer them toward peace. Pakistan would likely accept this bargain, as its motive for backing the Taliban would then be erased by the assurance of Afghan neutrality.

The U.S. would act as guarantor of the agreement. The U.S. could also seek agreement from Afghanistan's neighbors, and from India, not to undermine Afghan neutrality.

Neutrality agreements have been successfully used in the past to calm conflicts by removing states from the international chessboard. Examples include the 1831 Five Power Treaty to guarantee Belgian neutrality; treaties to ensure Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Italian and German neutrality under various scenarios in the 1880s; and agreements to guarantee Austrian and Finnish neutrality in the Cold War. Specifically:

- After Belgium seceded from the Netherlands in 1830 some European powers feared that another power (France) might move to control the new Belgian state and use its assets against them. Such thinking raised the risk of a conflict among the powers for control of Belgium. To avert this danger the European powers agreed in 1831 to guarantee that Belgium would be forever neutral. This agreement, the Five Power Treaty, lasted until Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914.⁵ For eighty-three years a struggle among the powers to control Belgium was averted by its agreed neutrality.
- German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck brokered three overlapping alliances in the 1880s that featured neutrality agreements as a key element. In the 1881 *Dreikaiserbund* agreement Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia promised benevolent neutrality to one another should any of the three be at war with a fourth great power. In the 1882 Triple Alliance, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy made the same promise of neutrality to one other. And in the 1887 Reinsurance Treaty, Russia and Germany promised benevolent neutrality should the other be involved in war with another great power, except for wars stemming from German aggression against France or Russian aggression against Austria-Hungary.⁶ These treaties helped keep Europe at peace by defusing states' fears of being attacked, which dampened their impulse to forestall others' attacks by launching preventive or preemptive war against them.
- The neutrality of Austria in the Cold War was agreed by a 1955 Soviet-Austrian accord in which Austria agreed not to join NATO, and the

Soviet Union agreed to recognize Austrian independence and withdraw all Soviet troops from Austria. This arrangement ended Soviet-American competition for control of Austria, pacifying that front in the Cold War.⁷

- A less formal Soviet-Finnish Cold War understanding saw Finland accept Soviet demands that it agree not to join NATO, in return for Soviet acceptance of Finnish autonomy in its domestic affairs.

Thus we see that neutralization agreements have been effective means for calming international conflict in the past. The Afghan maelstrom seems an ideal case for the same cure. Afghanistan's Karzai government will quickly accept neutralization, as (contrary to Pakistan's exaggerated fears) there is no strong constituency in Afghanistan for joining the India-Pakistan conflict. Afghanistan's neighbors are also likely to cooperate with Afghan neutralization. Most important, India should agree to its own nonalignment with Afghanistan because it gives up little by agreeing (as Afghanistan is unlikely to align with India in any case) and India would gain by helping its U.S. ally address the problem of Islamic extremism in South Asia.

In short, the U.S. could help solve its Afghanistan riddle by arranging the agreed neutrality of Afghanistan. Such a move could well persuade Pakistan to pull the plug on its Taliban allies. And without Pakistani support the Afghan Taliban would be far weaker than it is now.

The U.S. could also diminish Pakistan's motive to support the Afghan Taliban if it could find ways to abate or end the India-Pakistan conflict, since Pakistan's fear of India is what drives its desire to control Afghanistan. Two steps might be considered. First, the U.S. could make clear to both India and Pakistan that it will help the attacked party while ending any help to the attacker if either attacks the other. If the U.S. managed to make this threat credibly, both sides would be better deterred from attacking the other from fear of losing U.S. support and provoking U.S. opposition. They also could breathe easier knowing that their opponent would face U.S. opposition if it attacked, and is therefore unlikely to attack; so each would see less need to forestall the other's potential attack by striking the other first.

A precedent for this approach lies in President George H. W. Bush's successful efforts to dampen the 1990 Kashmir Crisis between India and Pakistan. In that crisis Bush dispatched then-Deputy National Security Advisor (and current Secretary of Defense) Robert Gates to South Asia to warn both Pakistan and India that the U.S. would withdraw support from the more aggressive side if war broke out. To the Pakistanis Gates explained that the U.S. would "have to stop providing military support or any kind of support to whichever side initiates things." To the Indians Gates then explained that he had told the

Pakistanis “not to expect any help from the Americans if they started a war,” and he firmly conveyed a similar message to India.⁸

The U.S. could also try to encourage India and Pakistan to agree to a final settlement of their long conflict. Specifically, it could frame an Obama Plan that defines a just and reasonable final-status settlement to the India-Pakistan conflict, and use threats and inducements to persuade both sides to accept it. The outlines of that plan are fairly clear.⁹ India and Pakistan have at times seemed ready to make peace themselves in recent years. Tensions between India and Pakistan arising from the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack preclude peace in the short term, but such an approach should be considered when conditions are ripe.

Such an India-Pakistan peace would lessen four U.S. security problems. First, it would ease Pakistan’s fears of a war with India, which would calm Pakistan’s fear that Afghanistan might take India’s side in such a war, which would reduce Pakistan’s motive to aid the Afghan Taliban. Second, it would remove Pakistan’s motive for supporting Punjabi terrorist groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, that are friendly with al-Qaeda. Pakistan sustains these groups to attack India, especially in Kashmir, but these groups also give al-Qaeda ideological and material support. At long last an India-Pakistan peace might bring Pakistan to dismantle these al-Qaeda allies.

Third, an India-Pakistan peace would allow Pakistan to remove military units from its eastern frontier with India (where Pakistan’s forces are now concentrated) and redirect them against al-Qaeda and Pakistani Taliban forces in Pakistan’s northwest. And fourth, India-Pakistan peace would allow Pakistan to reconfigure its army, now structured for armored war with India, toward a counterinsurgency posture appropriate for combating al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban, and Afghan Taliban elements in Pakistan, should Pakistan opt to take them on (perhaps in line with the Afghan neutralization scheme outlined above, should it be accepted). As a result Pakistan could bring far more force to bear against al-Qaeda, its Pakistan Taliban allies, and perhaps even its Afghan Taliban allies. Given these benefits, India-Pakistan peace is worth pursuing despite the odds against it.

IV. Harmonizing Russia with its Near Neighbors

During the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations NATO was extended to include former Warsaw Pact states in Eastern Europe plus the Baltic states. The Bush administration later proposed to further extend NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia. Russian leaders responded by declaring that they view NATO’s approach to their borders as a threat to their national security, and have threatened to disrupt this NATO approach, perhaps by stirring up

civil war in Ukraine. Important Russian-American cooperation on other issues has been limited by this dispute.

A solution lies in the agreed neutralization of states on Russia's periphery. Russia would agree to respect the domestic independence of these states; while these states would agree not to join NATO or another alliance that did not include Russia. NATO would join the agreement as a concurring party. Such a settlement would give all parties what they say they most desire. Russia would secure its frontiers, while its neighbors would ensure their own control of their domestic order. The U.S. and Russia could then get on with the important business of defeating al-Qaeda, halting the spread of WMD, and addressing climate change.

V. Dampening the Israel-Palestine Conflict

To prepare the ground for Israeli-Palestinian peace the Obama administration should propose a final status peace plan similar to President Bill Clinton's December 2000 Mideast peace plan (known as the Clinton Parameters or Clinton Plan), and direct threats and inducements (mostly the latter) to both sides to persuade them to agree. This would strengthen forces on both sides that favor peace on reasonable terms, while pushing opponents of peace onto the defensive. It could thereby break the logjam and finally move the parties toward peace.

Polls have long shown that most Israelis and about half of all Palestinians favor peace on the terms like those framed in the Clinton plan.¹⁰ What has been missing is U.S. leadership to pull them over the line.

Clear U.S. willingness to apply pressure for peace would help moderate Israeli and Palestinian leaders make concessions, by making clear that the U.S. would give their opponents an incentive to reciprocate their concessions. In recent times moderates on both sides have held back from offering concessions from fear of being hung out to dry—exposed as willing to concede, with no results to show for their concessions. U.S. pressure would counter this fear.¹¹

U.S. suasion for peace would also compel extremists on both sides to moderate their goals or risk losing support from their communities. Today extremists on both sides— Hamas on the Palestinian side, and the Israeli settler movement and its Likud allies on the Israeli side—pay no political price for depriving their communities of peace, because they can claim that their radical actions are not preventing peace, as there would be no peace even if they behaved better. Hamas used this argument with success in its victorious 2005-to-2006 election campaign. The U.S. can prevent this game by making clear that it will lead the region to peace unless the radicals disrupt it. It will then be clear to Palestinians

that Hamas really is preventing peace. Hamas will then be forced to moderate or lose support.

An Obama/Clinton Mideast peace plan would also help educate publics on both sides about the concessions that peace will require. Elites on both sides (especially the Palestinian side) have misled their publics to underestimate the concessions that peace will require. U.S. endorsement of terms like those that both sides accepted (albeit with reservations) in 2000 to 2001 will trigger discussions that will help restore realism in both communities on the need to make painful concessions.

Peace is impossible between Israel and the Palestinians in the short term. The split between Fatah and Hamas must first be healed, and Prime Minister Netanyahu's Israeli government must first be reshuffled to expel its pro-settler elements and incorporate more moderate elements. But these are not insuperable obstacles. Moreover, an Obama/Clinton plan will help overcome them. The promulgation of an Obama/Clinton plan will put pressure on Hamas extremists to explain to the Palestinian community why they refuse a union with Fatah that could bring a positive peace, and will likewise force Netanyahu to explain to Israelis why he persists with a government that includes extremists and so cannot make peace when a just peace is finally available. Extremists on both sides will be put on the defensive. Their ability to veto peace will be weakened, perhaps sufficiently to allow peacemaking to proceed.

VI. Peace for Iraq

Regarding Iraq, the U.S. should frame a grand bargain that defines how to resolve the major outstanding issues that continue to divide the main Iraqi factions. These issues are: how to distribute power between the Iraqi federal government and provincial governments; whether and how to share power in the Iraqi central government among Iraqi political factions; where to locate provincial borders; how to share control of the Iraqi national army and other national security services among Iraqi factions; how to share ownership of oil and oil revenues among Iraqi regions and factions; whether to allow provincial governments to organize local militias and police; and how to define Iraqi national identity (how strongly Arab should it be?).

The U.S. has been in Iraq long enough to know what formulas on these issues are most acceptable to the various Iraqi factions. It should frame these formulas and use positive and negative inducements to persuade the Iraqi factions to accept them.

The George W. Bush administration unwisely confined itself to mediating and cajoling the factions in Iraq. The Obama administration has so far pursued

the same impotent policy. Instead the Obama team should move more forcefully to persuade Iraqis to settle their differences. The U.S. has vast leverage on the parties, including strong economic tools, powerful military forces in the region, and the capacity to arm and train the military forces of Iraqi factions that cooperate with U.S. policies. The U.S. could shape the outcome of an Iraqi civil war by arming and aiding one or another Iraqi faction. Hence no faction can dominate Iraq against U.S. wishes. The U.S. should harness this leverage to persuade the Iraqi factions to make the concessions that peace requires.

The U.S.-endorsed peace terms should reflect the principle that power and assets in Iraq shall be shared equally based on population. The U.S. government should then make clear that it will favor with assistance those who endorse these parameters and help foster a peace that embodies them, and that it will punish those who refuse to endorse these parameters, or obstruct progress toward a peace settlement that embodies them, by aiding their opponents.

Such a policy would leave all Iraqi factions better deterred from reaching for total dominion in Iraq. It would also leave them more secure in knowing that other factions could not achieve dominion (as the U.S. would not allow it), and that other factions therefore might no longer try to gain dominion. Hence all factions would be more willing to take the risks that agreeing to peace involves.¹² All would be both deterred and reassured, hence more inclined toward peaceful conduct.

This approach to peace in Iraq finds precedent in Syria's successful effort to coerce Lebanon's factions to end their civil war in 1989 by compelling the factions to cooperate with a power-sharing arrangement framed by Syria. It also finds precedent in successful U.S. efforts to coerce the combatants in Bosnia, especially the Serbs, to end the Bosnian war in 1995. To do this the U.S. made clear that it would not permit Serb dominion in Bosnia. Eventually the U.S. armed the Croats and bombed the Serbs to compel them to accept an outcome premised on sharing power, and the Serbs complied.

VII. Using Leverage for Peace: Feasibility

To recap, I have suggested three ways the U.S. might use its leverage to limit or end conflict between or within other states: (1) to use threats or inducements to foster neutrality agreements that calm conflicts; (2) to use threats or inducements to dissuade adversaries from using force or taking other belligerent steps against each other; and (3) to use threats or inducements to persuade adversaries to agree to a peace settlement.

Are these remedies practical? We know from experience that the first remedy, neutralization, is quite feasible. Neutrality agreements have often been used

to dampen conflicts in the past, with marked success. More questions arise about the feasibility of the second and third remedies. Possible problems include these:

- Both remedies require a flexible U.S. policy that directs U.S. support to whichever belligerent behaves better, and shifts support from one belligerent to another when their behavior changes. But the U.S. government is often too rigid for this. Instead, it sorts the world into good guys and bad guys, and then treats them as permanent friends and permanent enemies. It is not clear that Washington is capable of learning the more complicated habits of mind that these remedies require.
- Both remedies presuppose that the U.S. can be a fair broker. They fail if the U.S. pursues an unjust peace. But past U.S. policies have sometimes been tainted by prejudice or ideology, or captured by foreign lobbies (like the China lobby of the 1950s, or today's Israel/Likud lobby, Cuba lobby, Taiwan lobby, Georgia lobby, and others) that seek their own parochial goals without regard to justice.¹³ Remedies two and three—using threats or inducements to elicit peaceful conduct or agreement to a peace settlement—requires that these influences on U.S. policy be kept at bay.
- Persuading adversaries to agree to peace terms requires that Washington officials agree on a U.S. peace proposal. But achieving this agreement in Washington would often be challenging, partly because the belligerents will mobilize opposing lobbies in Washington to promote their case, creating policy gridlock.
- Persuading adversaries to agree to peace presupposes that the U.S. government has deep knowledge of the goals and perceptions of the belligerents. But this condition is often unmet. The U.S. State Department has been starved of resources for many years, leaving it short of expertise. American popular culture is insular; as a result most Americans know little of the wider world, so expertise is often lacking outside government as well. Hence Americans may be the wrong people to attempt difficult social engineering in faraway lands. Using threats or inducements to persuade others to agree to peace terms may be feasible in principle, but Americans may be the wrong people to try it.¹⁴

These objections warn that efforts at muscular peacemaking may not succeed. But the U.S. should try it nevertheless. The United States has a large national security interest in peace, and should run risks to pursue it, including the risk that muscular peacemaking might fail. The cost of pushing for peace without success is small, while the benefit of success is large. Hence the U.S. should apply its leverage for peace despite the fact that success is hardly assured.

Notes

- 1 This argument is derived from the work of Stephanie Kaplan, who argues in a forthcoming MIT political science Ph.D. dissertation that war is a tonic for terrorist propaganda making, recruitment network building, and training, and thus serves as a general breeding ground for terrorists. She concludes that war prevention and war termination should be a centerpiece of U.S. counterterror policy.
- 2 The Pakistani Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's largest intelligence service, created the Taliban in the 1990s and covertly gives it important help today. This covert help includes training, funding, munitions, other supplies, and sanctuary in Pakistan. The ISI also exerts important control over Taliban political and military policy. See Matt Waldman, *The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents* (LSE Destin Development Studies Institute, Discussion Paper 18, June 2010).
- 3 I summarize relevant evidence in Stephen Van Evera, "Vital Interest: Winning the War on Terror Requires a Mideast Peace Settlement," *The American Conservative* 4, no. 5 (March 14, 2005): 7–10.
- 4 Marc Trachtenberg, "The Structure of Great Power Politics, 1963–1975," (unpublished manuscript, May 18, 2010, 2–3; available at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/cv.html>).
- 5 See René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 33–36; and A. J. Grant and Harold Temperley, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century (1789–1914)* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1927), 194–97. The Five Power Treaty was the famous "scrap of paper" dismissed by German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg in August 1914.
- 6 See Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History of Europe*, 179–86, 201–02 (see note 5).
- 7 A summary is John W. Young, *Longman Companion to Cold War and Detente 1941–91* (London: Longman, 1993), 181–82.
- 8 Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 170–73. The Lyndon Johnson administration used similar tactics to prevent war between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus in 1964 and 1967; *ibid.*, 101–02.
- 9 The most plausible outline for a settlement would have Pakistan agree to accept the line of control as the international border; in exchange, India would agree to stop stealing elections in Indian Kashmir and grant it greater autonomy.
- 10 See polls of Israelis and Palestinians taken during 2004–2007, available at the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) at <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2007/p26joint.html>. In these polls Israeli support for peace terms closely resembling those of the Clinton plan ranged from 52 percent (in December 2006) to 64 percent (in December 2004 and December 2005). Palestinian support ranged from 46 percent (in December 2005) to 54 percent (in December 2004).

- 11 As he left office in fall 2008, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert revealed his belief that Israel should make peace on terms like those of the Clinton Plan. Specifically he argued that Israel should withdraw from “almost all” of the West Bank, and should share Jerusalem with the Palestinians. *See* Uri Avnery’s column “Summing Up,” October 4, 2008, available at <http://middleeast.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/55507>. But Olmert feared to state these positions while serving as prime minister. U.S. pressure for peace might have allowed him to lead Israel toward these goals while in office, as he could have had greater confidence that his steps toward compromise would bring reciprocal results from the Palestinians, knowing that the U.S. would apply leverage to persuade the Palestinians to reciprocate.
- 12 Arguing that outside powers can dampen civil conflicts by extending security assurances to belligerents who agree to peace is Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 335–364. This argument is explored further in Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- 13 On the role of foreign lobbies in shaping U.S. foreign policy *see* John Newhouse, “Diplomacy, Inc.: The Influence of Lobbies on U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 3 (May/June 2009): 73–92.
- 14 Some also argue that a peace imposed by outsiders will not endure because the belligerents have not freely agreed to it, will therefore not embrace it, and will return to war once they are free to do so. I am not persuaded by this hypothesis but agree that it needs research.

v. Without Conditions: The Case for Negotiating with the Enemy

Deepak Malhotra

Associate Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

Diplomacy appears ready to make a comeback. The United States, after years of reluctance, is reconsidering the role of negotiation in confronting extremism and managing international conflict. India has resisted an aggressive response to the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai and is open to diplomatic engagement with Pakistan over Kashmir. Participants in the six-party talks have been scrambling to decide whether, when, and how to engage North Korea since its nuclear test of May 2009. The generals in Afghanistan are busier today than they have been in recent years, but so are the diplomats. Certainly, not everyone has rushed to the bargaining table—witness, for example, the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. But governments around the world are asking themselves the same important question: When should they negotiate with their enemies?

Determining the precise conditions for such talks is never easy. In the shadow of terrorism, the calculus is all the more complex. Not only can acts of belligerence or extremist violence strain or derail ongoing negotiations, but the persistence of violence is often the primary reason governments refuse to negotiate in the first place. This has long been the case in Israel, for example, where successive governments, especially those led by the conservative Likud Party, have refused to negotiate with Palestinian leaders until they bring the violence to a halt. The same dynamics influenced the peace process in Northern Ireland in the years leading up to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. North Korea's recent provocations have elicited a similar response from hard-liners in Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

The ability of extremists to derail negotiations through violence and belligerence presents policymakers with a high-stakes dilemma: Should the muzzling of extremism be set as a precondition to negotiations, or should negotiations be initiated in order to reduce support for extremism? Similar considerations have plagued peace efforts around the world, from Colombia, where the government has struggled for decades to determine when it should demand a ceasefire from

FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), to Kashmir, where using violence to derail prospective talks has become a predictable tactic. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, surges in extremist violence are threatening to further destabilize already weak governments.

The cessation of violence is perhaps the most common precondition that governments evaluate when considering diplomatic engagement. But it is far from the only one. The Israeli government suggested earlier this year that it would only negotiate with the Palestinian Authority (PA) if it formally recognized Israel as a Jewish state. U.S. diplomats are debating whether Washington should demand that Iran freeze its uranium-enrichment program as a precondition to negotiations. Participants in the six-party talks are considering the extent to which North Korea should be forced to adhere to prior agreements before the next round of negotiations can begin. And governments everywhere have long been imposing preconditions on themselves, hesitating to negotiate with those seen as having blood on their hands. Israel and the United States, for example, have been reluctant to negotiate with Hamas, even after its resounding success in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. How such issues are decided is tremendously important. On the one hand, failing to set preconditions when they are useful can undermine the effectiveness of a negotiating strategy. On the other hand, preconditions that are ill conceived may eliminate the prospect of diplomatic engagement.

The Conditions for Preconditions

Peacemakers in Northern Ireland decided that the Irish Republican Army would have to cease its violence as a precondition for the involvement of Sinn Féin (the IRA's political wing) in the peace process, and the peace process was a resounding success. Yet when Israeli officials have demanded that Hamas and other terrorist groups stop their attacks before they will negotiate with the PA, substantive negotiations have typically failed to materialize. What accounts for the difference?

To determine whether and when to impose preconditions, governments should make two assessments. First, is the other side capable of meeting the demand? Far too often, preconditions are set without regard to the constraints that the opponent faces or the limits of the negotiation partner's influence. Second, will agreeing to the precondition significantly reduce the other side's bargaining power? When one side demands that the other make a highly valued, irrevocable concession before negotiations even begin, such a precondition will almost surely be rejected. Preconditions are appropriate only when they satisfy both criteria: the opponent is capable of meeting them, and doing so will not weaken its future leverage. Otherwise, they will serve no purpose except to create

the impression that the other side has thwarted diplomatic efforts. Demands that ignore these criteria suggest either a flawed strategy or an attempt at political gamesmanship—or perhaps both.

Applying these criteria is especially important—and difficult—during a protracted violent conflict. Contrast, for example, the Sri Lankan civil war and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers not only had a seat at the bargaining table, but they also controlled all the antigovernment violence. When the Sri Lankan government demanded the temporary cessation of violence as a precondition to negotiations, both criteria were met: the Tamil Tigers not only had the ability to stop the violence; they also had the power to resume it if the negotiations failed and thus would not be giving up any leverage by agreeing to lay down their arms and talk. The decades-long conflict ended with a military victory for the government, but the Tamil Tigers cannot blame their reluctance to negotiate on the government's precondition.

In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, the PA has been the one at the bargaining table, but Hamas and other extremist groups have been responsible for much of the anti-Israel violence. When former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that there would be no negotiations with the Palestinians until the violence stopped, the only thing that stopped was the peace process. The PA simply could not meet this precondition, as Hamas was not under its control. The problem with postures like Sharon's is that they give extremist organizations like Hamas too much influence—a veto, effectively—over if and when negotiations take place. Throughout the end of the last century, and the early years of this century, Yasir Arafat, as head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and later the PA, did not have the power to fully rein in violent extremists, and his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, may exert even less control over Hamas. In other words, governments should demand the cessation of violence or belligerence as a precondition to negotiations only, first, when the other side is capable of meeting the demand and, second, when the other side can do so without having to relinquish all its leverage. When either condition does not hold, they would do better to follow the advice of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: "Fight terrorism as if there is no peace process; pursue peace as if there is no terrorism."

The same analysis holds for the question of whether the PA's recognition of Israel as a Jewish state should be a precondition for final-status peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. In April 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made statements that were interpreted as asking for just that. This precondition would impose a far greater hurdle than Israel's demand for simple diplomatic recognition, which the PLO largely conceded during the 1993 Oslo negotiations. After a spate of criticism, Netanyahu's office backtracked.

This was a welcome revision. If the PA were to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, it would sacrifice its future leverage, because this is a concession that would be difficult to retract if the negotiations failed. And most Palestinians believe that it would compromise their ability to advance their long-standing demand that Palestinian refugees displaced in 1948 and 1967 be granted “the right of return.”

Another example of a diplomatic initiative potentially hinging on the wrong precondition is a proposal, currently under consideration, that North Korea be made to adhere to the agreements it has already signed before another round of negotiations is launched—this is what former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has called “the minimum precondition.” On the one hand, it seems reasonable to demand this, lest the North Koreans feel free to disregard future agreements with equal abandon. On the other hand, why make this a precondition when it can just as easily be negotiated at the table? More important, if North Korea’s recent saber rattling was meant less to pressure the United States than to signal the regime’s strength at home as a leadership succession looms, then the North Korean leadership might not be able to meet the precondition at all: neither Kim Jong Il nor his successor could agree to respect prior agreements without signaling weakness to North Koreans at large or to those competing for the top job. As this example suggests, one should never set preconditions without a clear understanding of the other side’s perspective and the constraints the other side is under. When it comes to North Korea, it might be more useful to insist that if negotiations happen at all, they must happen very soon. Delays will only increase North Korea’s relative bargaining strength as Pyongyang continues to expand its nuclear capability.

Engaging with Extremists

Governments not only impose preconditions on others; they also impose preconditions on themselves. A government may want to wait until there is sufficient support among constituents for a peace process or insist on holding multilateral, as opposed to bilateral, talks. More commonly, even governments that are generally willing to negotiate often first set limits on their own behavior by refusing to talk to groups with ties to terrorists. The U.S. State Department, for example, publicly states that it will “make no concessions to terrorists and strike no deals.”

This position has the virtue of ideological purity but the vice of impracticality. When everyone at the table has clean hands, governments are unlikely to make progress on what is often the most important issue: the cessation of violence. By making it difficult for governments to extract concessions on a critical issue, this precondition reduces the governments’ own bargaining power. The experience

of Northern Ireland demonstrates the value of bringing extremists—or their proxies—to talks. In 1997 and 1998, even though the Unionists were unwilling to negotiate directly with the IRA, the presence of Sinn Féin at the bargaining table allowed the parties to negotiate the issue of violence. Although Sinn Féin and the IRA by no means formed a monolithic entity, sufficient ties between the organizations made it possible to neutralize any potential spoiler tactics of the IRA by dealing with Sinn Féin. The implication is that governments should encourage ties between those responsible for violence and those willing to negotiate. For this reason, recent attempts to reconcile Hamas and the PA should be supported by Israel and the United States.

Unfortunately, diplomatic efforts are often based on carefully selecting only those negotiating partners who are unlinked to extremist violence. This was true of the United States' de-Baathification effort in Iraq and is true of Israel's support for the anti-Hamas leader of the PA, Abbas. Likewise, India's willingness to negotiate with Pakistan is predicated on the ability of Pakistan's leaders to distance themselves from extremists operating in Kashmir. In fact, the existence of some ties between Pakistan's leaders and those extremists would be useful in negotiating with the Pakistani leadership. Certainly, not all extremists are willing to negotiate, but efforts to exclude those groups that are willing to come to the bargaining table or send their proxies are ultimately self-defeating.

Erring on the Side of Negotiation

Their potential to cause strategic blunders notwithstanding, ill-conceived preconditions to negotiations are popular. Politicians who are personally opposed to negotiations make them because when unmet, they provide an easy excuse to scuttle diplomatic efforts. And politicians who support negotiations but are wary of public opposition favor preconditions because if met, they provide an early win with which to hedge against the risk of backing a peace effort that may ultimately fail. The public, in turn, tends to support such demands as just claims against an enemy that has behaved immorally or illegally.

Unfortunately, the appetite for preconditions is not matched by an adequate supply of reasoned analysis and nuanced debate about them. This creates a bias toward setting preconditions, ones that are often based on political expediency or simplistic assessments. This approach has been so detrimental that even the elimination of all preconditions to negotiations would yield better diplomacy than what has prevailed in recent years, particularly when it comes to the diplomatic efforts of the United States and Israel.

Change may be on the way. Barack Obama's call early in the U.S. presidential primaries—before he was leading in the polls—to negotiate with enemies without preconditions was, if not a fine-tuned policy revision, an important step forward.

That Obama's stance was so strongly criticized as being naive and dangerous, when it was neither, illustrates the enduring appeal of preconditions. That these attacks were not altogether successful and that he subsequently reasserted his position—most notably, in his June 2009 Cairo speech—suggest that enough Americans have done some analysis of their own: If a country refuses to negotiate when it is clearly in a position of strength, when will it ever negotiate?

A wise foreign policy errs on the side of negotiation and removes as many impediments to diplomacy as possible. Carelessly conceived preconditions remain among the greatest barriers to achieving negotiated peace. Curtailing their use, if not discarding them altogether, would herald a new era in foreign policy—one both more ambitious and, ultimately, more successful.

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VI. Economic Sanctions and the Prudent Use of Power

Kimberly Ann Elliott

Senior Fellow, Center For Global Development

Visiting Fellow, Peterson Institute For International Economics

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, documented cases of economic sanctions typically accompanied the use of armed force and were used to reinforce military power. The League of Nations was created after World War I to harness collective action, including economic sanctions, as an alternative to war, but that experiment is widely considered a failure.¹ Since World War II, sanctions have been used for a wide variety of purposes and with widely varying degrees of effectiveness, particularly by the U.S. After the Cold War, there was another flurry of hope for collective action and the utility of sanctions, but the experience with comprehensive United Nations sanctions against Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Haiti triggered a backlash against comprehensive global sanctions because of the impact on civilians. Since the mid-1990s, the UN has focused on trying to make “targeted” economic sanctions more effective, but with limited success.

This essay reviews what we know about the utility of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool, mainly through the lens of the data compiled by Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, and Oegg (2007; henceforth referred to as HSEO). I begin with a basic framework for analyzing economic sanctions and then present the results from the HSEO database. I then turn to evidence on the conditions under which sanctions are most likely to contribute to positive foreign policy outcomes, including the interaction with military tools. I then examine the Iraq and Libyan cases to see what lessons they might offer for dealing with Iran and North Korea.

A Framework for Analysis

Stripped to the bare bones, the formula for a successful sanctions effort is simple:

costs of defiance imposed on the target > *perceived costs of compliance for the target*

That is, the political and economic costs to the target country from sanctions must be greater than the political and security costs of complying with the sanctioner’s demands. The difficulty lies in accurately predicting both the magnitude of those costs *and* how they will be perceived and weighed by the target.

Sanctions are also rarely the only tool used, so attributing a positive result to sanctions can be tricky.

The starting point for gauging the probability of success in a sanctions episode is the potential leverage that the sanctioner has over the target. If trade and financial flows between the two parties are minimal, then the odds of a successful sanction are low, unless the goal is an extremely modest one. But potential leverage, while necessary, is not sufficient. If the sanctioner is not strongly interested in achieving the target's compliance, or if the sanctioning government is satisfied with merely mollifying domestic political demands to "do something," then whatever potential leverage exists may not be fully deployed or used effectively.

Table 1 summarizes what the sanctioner might expect from sanctions, depending on various combinations of relative motivation and the sanctioner's size and leverage compared to the target. If the target is larger and has more leverage than the sanctioner in terms of trade and financial flows, then a successful sanction is unlikely unless the sanctioner cares far more intensely about what is at stake than does the target. By contrast, the odds for a successful outcome are higher if the sanctioner is larger and has extensive leverage over the target, but are still not guaranteed if the perceived costs of compliance for the target are high. In this situation, the outcome will depend on how highly the target values what the sanctioner is asking it to give up.

Table 1. Expected Outcomes, Depending on Relative Motivation and Sanctioner Leverage

Relative intensity of interest	Relative size and sanctioner leverage		
	T > S	T = S	T < S
T > S	Failure	Failure	Success possible but not likely
T = S	Failure	Indeterminate	Success possible, but depends on goal, with modest goals being more achievable than ambitious goals
T < S	Success possible but not likely	Success possible	Success

T = target; S = sanctioner

The costs of defiance that the target faces in a given case begin with the estimated direct costs of the sanctions, in terms of lost trade or finance. These costs can be increased if the sanctioner is able to attract international cooperation in

its sanctioning efforts and the political costs may be amplified if the sanctions are endorsed by an international organization that is viewed as legitimate. The impact of the sanctions may be intensified if economic conditions in the target are weak, or they can be mitigated if the target government is able to evade them or to elicit offsetting assistance from a rival of the sanctioner. The costs of defiance can also be raised by threatening to use or by actually using military force. Finally, whether the pain of sanctions produces the desired change also depends on whether that pain produces a rally-round-the-flag effect that strengthens the government, or leads to political dissatisfaction that weakens the target's ability to resist.

The costs of compliance for the target are determined primarily by the nature of the sanctioner's goals and the nature of the target regime. Foreign policy objectives that threaten national security or internal regime stability are obviously ambitious; in many cases, it is simply impossible to make sanctions costly enough to gain the target's acquiescence in those cases. For example, autocrats, such as Saddam Hussein, have little incentive to comply when the demand is for democratization or other regime change that would mean sacrificing the leadership's primary source of wealth and, possibly, its physical safety. In such cases, economic sanctions can only contribute to a successful outcome if they change incentives or capabilities within the country so that more acceptable leaders can win power.

Thus, the probability that a sanction can be effective, and the conditions that will contribute to it, depend crucially on the difficulty of the goal sought. HSEO classified the case histories into five broad categories, according to the central foreign policy objective sought by the sanctioning country (or coalition):

- To change the target country's policies in a relatively modest and limited way—according to the scale of the target country's national values, for example—to improve the human rights situation or to stop religious persecution (in limited ways; not broadly, for example through democratization).
- To change the target country's regime, including, as an associated goal, to change the target country's policies; for the period of the Cold War, this category includes many cases in which the U.S. used sanctions in efforts to destabilize governments viewed as tilting toward the Soviet Union; more recent cases often involve demands to democratize.
- To disrupt relatively modest militarized disputes among third parties.
- To impair the military potential of the target country, often in the context of major hostilities, such as the two world wars; since the 1970s, countries seeking to acquire the capability to produce nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction have become frequent targets of sanctions in this category.

- To change the target country's policies in another major way, often involving the surrender of territory, such as forcing Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait in 1990.

While exceptions occur, the target country's relative intensity of interest in the issues at stake usually exceeds those of the sanctioner in the second and third categories. Both sanctioner and target should be intensely interested in the outcome of the military impairment cases, but one would expect these goals to be difficult to achieve with economic measures alone, since they involve national security concerns. When cases are classified as involving either modest goals or other major goals, sanctioners and targets often share similar perceptions about the relative seriousness of the issues at stake.²

How Effective in Achieving Foreign Policy Goals Were Economic Sanctions in the Twentieth Century?

Overall, in the judgment of the HSEO team, economic sanctions contributed to positive policy outcomes in about one-third of the more than two hundred episodes studied. A successful outcome in this approach does not mean that the outcome was a rout, or that sanctions were the decisive factor. But at a minimum, sanctions must make a "substantial contribution" to partial achievement of nontrivial goals. The case studies begin with World War I and go through those initiated in 2000, with ongoing cases updated through 2006.

For the post-World War II period, the overall success rate has been remarkably stable, at roughly the one-in-three average observed overall, but this apparent consistency conceals substantial variability, particularly in the U.S. experience. Table 2 highlights several important aspects of the twentieth-century experience with economic sanctions:

- The U.S. has played a prominent role in nearly 70 percent of all cases, acting with little or no cooperation from other countries in a third of those cases.
- The use of sanctions increased sharply in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, but there was a return to earlier patterns by the mid-1990s, after disillusion set in.
- The effectiveness of U.S. unilateral sanctions drastically diminished over the course of the century: more than 60 percent achieved some degree of success in the early post-World War II period, but fewer than 20 percent have succeeded since 1990.
- However, the *overall* effectiveness of U.S. sanctions has considerably increased in the 1990s as more and more have been undertaken in conjunction with other countries or international organizations; the success rate for *nonunilateral* U.S. sanctions is just below 40 percent for both the two decades prior to and the decade after the end of the Cold War.

Table 2. Success by Period

Policy goal	1914–1944		1945–1969		1970–1989		1990–2000	
	Success cases	Failure cases						
Modest policy changes	2	0	5	4	7	10	8	7
Regime change and democratization	0	4	7	6	9	22	9	23
Disruption of military adventures	2	4	2	2	0	6	0	3
Military impairment ^a	3	0	0	6	4	10	2	4
Other major policy changes	0	1	2	13	3	4	5	5
All cases	7	9	16	31	23	52	24	42
All U.S. cases	3	5	14	14	13	41	17	33
Unilateral U.S. cases^b	0	3	10	6	8	33	2	9

a. Military impairment failures for 1990–2000 include the 2002–2006 phase of the North Korea proliferation case.

b. Cases in which the U.S. is the only sanctioner and international cooperation are nonexistent or minor.

The United Nations was an important source of increased activity in the 1990s, with mandatory UN Security Council sanctions resolutions rising from just two in the 1960-to-1989 period to eleven in the subsequent decade. During the Cold War, the UN role was constrained by U.S.-Soviet rivalry and on the few occasions when economic sanctions were invoked, they were usually hortatory and relatively weak. With the end of the Cold War, UN sanctions initially became more frequent, more likely to be mandated by the Security Council, and more likely to be broad and painful. But after a flurry of comprehensive sanctions—against Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Haiti—concerns were raised about the impact on vulnerable populations within target countries, as well as on neighboring countries and other trading partners.

As a result of such humanitarian concerns, as well as increasing discomfort with and differences over the use of sanctions on the part of Russia and China, no broad sanctions have been imposed by the United Nations since those against Haiti in 1994. The concern about avoiding harm to the general populace inside target countries led to a focus on narrower sanctions that targeted either specific goods that contributed directly to the problem at hand (such as the importation or smuggling of arms in a conflict situation), or targeted individuals in the regime who were deemed responsible for unacceptable behavior. The interest in sanctions targeted at individuals ratcheted up again as the focus of the international community turned to combating terrorism, whose perpetrators were often non-state actors rather than governments. In addition, selective resource sanctions intended to choke off revenues for regimes or guerrilla movements engaged in violent conflict were also used several times, particularly in Africa.

The shifts over time in UN use of different types of sanctions are illustrated in table 3. The categories of sanctions are arrayed down the left side of the table from relatively narrower and less costly to broader and more costly; this arrangement reveals that the trends in UN sanctions are clearly not linear. There is a movement not only toward more frequent sanctions after the Cold War but also toward sanctions that are more likely to be mandated by the Security Council. But the abrupt reversal in the increased use of comprehensive sanctions is clear at the bottom of the table. Arms embargoes remain a constant feature in all periods as a response to conflict, but it is only over the last decade that targeted travel and financial sanctions have become prominent as stand-alone measures. These sanctions are intended to raise the costs for corrupt or authoritarian leaders involved in violent conflict, repression of human rights, or support for terrorism, and to pressure them to change their behavior. Travel sanctions typically involve restrictions on the issuance of visas for travel by targeted individuals, while targeted financial sanctions aim to limit the access of these individuals to any bank accounts or other property they may hold abroad by freezing or seizing their assets.

Table 3 indicates with underlines which of these sanctions episodes achieved some degree of success toward stated foreign policy goals.³ None of the cases in the top half of the table—involving hortatory sanctions, arms embargoes, or the most narrowly targeted sanctions (travel or asset blocking only)—have been effective in pressuring changes in behavior. Whether these sanctions have been more effective in punishing pariahs or denying resources misapplied for nefarious purposes is more difficult to assess. Any assessment of the degree of success in achieving such goals requires knowing something about the size and *relative* importance of the assets seized, but such data has proved difficult to obtain because of the multiple mechanisms available for hiding the ownership of

Table 3. Distribution of UN Sanctions Targets by Period and Sanctions Type

	Cold War Period	1990–94	1995–
Sanctions recommended	Palestine <i>et al.</i> (1948) South Africa (Namibia) South Africa (Lesotho)	Cambodia	Burundi Iraq III
Arms embargoes <i>Hortatory</i>	North Korea (1950) Congo (restraint)	Armenia-Azerbaijan Yemen Afghanistan (Taliban)	Yugoslavia (Kosovo) Ethiopia-Eritrea Sudan (Darfur)
<i>Mandatory</i>	Portugal (restraint) South Africa (apartheid)	Yugoslavia (1991) Somalia Rwanda	
Targeted <i>Travel</i>			Sudan (terrorism) Sudan (Darfur) Taliban
<i>Financial</i>			Taliban Osama bin Laden and supporters Iran (proliferation)
All of the above		<u>Libya</u> <u>Liberia: timber, diamonds</u> <u>Angola: diamonds (UNITA)</u>	Sierra Leone: diamonds DR Congo Côte d'Ivoire Lebanon North Korea: luxury goods
Comprehensive	Rhodesia	Iraq (Gulf War) <u>Iraq II (postwar)</u> <u>Serbia-Bosnia</u> Haiti	

Sanctions episodes against underlined targets achieved some degree of success toward stated foreign policy goals.

financial assets. Unless there is a discernible change in behavior, assessing the signaling or punitive effects of travel bans is even more difficult, since the effect is primarily psychological.

Broader sanctions regimes, which either involve a combination of targeted sanctions (often including selective restrictions on trade in natural resources) or comprehensive sanctions, have been more likely to achieve coercive goals, often in conjunction with sanctions by individual member states (for example, the

U.S. comprehensive sanctions against Libya, or U.S. and EU financial and trade sanctions against Serbia over Kosovo). The bottom line on targeted sanctions seems to be that the costs of defiance are often too small to induce behavioral change.

Is Sanctions Effectiveness Underrated Because Threats are Underrepresented?

It is sometimes asserted that the observed success rate for economic sanctions in foreign policy cases is likely understated because it ignores sanctions threats. The problem is that it is difficult to systematically observe such threats and, therefore, determine how they turn out. It is true that in the eleven HSEO cases in which threats were documented but sanctions were never imposed the probability of a successful outcome was far higher than for the rest of the sample—82 percent versus 32 percent. But that relatively small number of successful threats must be weighed against the much larger number of cases in which more or less explicit threats failed and sanctions were imposed. Nor is there any a priori reason to assume that unobserved threats were all as likely to be successful as those documented in HSEO. It is also plausible that unobserved threats were met by resistance and dropped to prevent the public perception of failure.

There are two trade policy mechanisms whose history sheds additional light on this question by making it possible to identify a clearly defined set of cases that includes both threats and imposed sanctions. Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, though largely abandoned after the adoption of a legally binding dispute settlement mechanism by the World Trade Organization, was invoked more than eighty times by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) from 1975 to 1994. Section 301 created a process whereby a private party could file a petition that, if accepted by USTR, would lead to an investigation into alleged unfair practices by a trade partner, usually involving discrimination against U.S. exports. If the complaint were confirmed, the Trade Representative could threaten to restrict the partner's access to the U.S. market in retaliation and eventually do so if no other resolution was reached. The U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which provides preferential access to the U.S. market for exports from developing countries, also includes a process whereby petitioners can challenge a beneficiary country's access if they are not "taking steps" to respect certain workers' rights.

Bayard and Elliott (1994) analyzed the results in seventy-two section 301 cases; the success rates in cases involving implicit and explicit threats, as well as the imposition of sanctions, are reported in table 4. Elliott (2000) examines thirty-two of the GSP workers' rights cases from 1985, when the workers' rights

Table 4. Comparing Sanctions Threats and Actions

	Number of successes/failures	Success rate
Foreign policy sanctions		
Sanctions threatened (observed)	9/11	82%
Sanctions imposed (failed threats?)	61/193	32%
Commercial disputes (Section 301) (rarely embedded in broader foreign policy disputes)		
Sanctions threatened		
• Implicitly (petition filed)	15/34	44%
• Explicit threat of retaliation	20/38	53%
Sanctions imposed (failed threats?)	2/12	17%
Workers' rights provision in trade preference programs (often embedded in broader foreign policy cases involving human rights or democracy)		
Sanctions threatened	10/20	50%
Sanctions imposed (failed threats?)	5/12	42%

provision was added to the program, through 1994. Those results are also reported in the table.

There is not space for a thorough analysis of the differences among these sets of cases, but a few factors do stand out in the context of assessing the utility of sanctions threats. First, the overall success rate, as well as the success rate for threats, is roughly 50 percent in the commercial disputes and GSP cases—essentially the same as the success rate in the set of “modest goal” foreign policy cases examined in HSEO. Second, while the success rate for section 301 threats is far higher than that for cases in which retaliation was imposed, the difference in the GSP cases is far narrower. A key difference in the two sets of cases is that eight of the twelve sanctions cases under section 301 involved larger, richer countries (the European Union, Canada, and Japan), while the GSP cases all targeted developing countries. One implication is that sanctions are typically imposed in the harder cases, in which success is less likely from the beginning. Overall, this brief analysis suggests that many of the same factors that determine success and failure when sanctions are imposed—the nature of the objective and of the target being prominent among them—also determine whether threats will be successful.

When Are Sanctions Most Likely to Be Effective?

In order to identify the conditions under which economic sanctions are most likely to be effective in contributing to foreign policy goals, HSEO examine a number of political and economic variables. But many factors affecting outcomes are missing or cannot be measured, and statistical analysis reveals that the variables selected for examination explain only around 15 to 20 percent of the variation in outcomes. Nevertheless, both quantitative and qualitative analysis support three broad conclusions that are consistent with the basic framework comparing costs of compliance and defiance—though probably not very satisfying for policymakers:

- modest goals are more likely to be achieved than others;
- sanctions have more influence over regimes that are relatively more democratic and have relations with the sanctioner that are friendly rather than hostile; and
- the economic costs imposed by sanctions on the target must be proportionate to the goal sought.

Episodes involving modest and limited goals, such as the release of a political prisoner, succeeded half the time. Cases involving attempts to change regimes (for example, by destabilizing a particular leader or by encouraging an autocrat to democratize), to impair a foreign adversary's military potential or prevent nuclear proliferation, or to otherwise change policies in a major way, succeeded in about 30 percent of those cases. Efforts to disrupt relatively minor military adventures succeeded in only a fifth of cases in which that was the goal.

The evidence also suggests that economic sanctions are more effective against allies and close trading partners. Nearly half of cases in which HSEO judged relations between sanctioner and target to be cordial were successful, versus 19 percent of those in which relations were hostile. While frustrating for policymakers looking for tools to use against adversaries, this result should not be particularly surprising. Friendly countries have more to lose, diplomatically as well as economically, than countries with which the sender has limited or adversarial relations. These target countries may be less likely to face the threat that a dispute will be escalated or that force will be used, but they are more likely to receive foreign aid or to have extensive trade and financial relations with the sender country. In addition, allies will not be as concerned as adversaries that concessions will undermine the government's reputation and leave it weaker in future conflicts.⁴ Thus, the higher compliance with sanctions by allies and trading partners reflects their willingness to bend on specific issues in deference to the overall relationship with the sender country. With respect to regime type, nearly half of sanctions against democratic governments (as measured in

the Polity IV database) achieved some degree of success, versus 28 percent of sanctions against autocrats.⁵

Finally, the costs of sanctions imposed on the target should be proportionate to the goal sought. Overall, the average cost of sanctions as a share of the target's GNP was twice as high in successes (3.3 percent) as in failures (1.6 percent). The average cost in successful cases involving modest goals was 2.6 percent, while in the "other major policy change" category, it was 5.5 percent.

The importance of other variables that might be expected to affect the size of the economic and political costs imposed by sanctions varies across goal categories. Thus, international cooperation, offsetting assistance by a political rival, or the use of companion policies, such as military force, are used less frequently in episodes involving relatively modest goals and make little discernible difference to the outcome in those cases. Military force is an important variable in the military impairment cases, however, and international cooperation with the sanctioner is present in far more successes than failures when the goal is a major one, such as the surrender of territory.

One of the more surprising results is that, on average across all cases, international cooperation with the lead sanctioner had no impact on the probability of a successful outcome. But the idea that international cooperation is a necessary component in all sanctions cases is misplaced. A sanctioning country looks to its allies for help when its goals are ambitious; in cases involving truly modest goals, cooperation is often not even sought. In cases involving ambitious policy goals, however, international cooperation was markedly higher in successes than failures. Even in these cases, significant cooperation may be necessary but not sufficient, as with the comprehensive global embargo against Iraq prior to Gulf War I. On the other hand, active noncooperation by other countries can sabotage the effort by providing offsetting assistance to the targeted regime. Adversaries of the sanctioning country may be prompted by a sanctions episode to assist the target, as happened frequently in episodes that either provoked or derived from U.S.-Soviet rivalry.

What HSEO call "companion policies" moreover do not have a clear relationship with successful sanctions and for many of the same reasons—in cases of modest goals, covert or military activities are usually not needed, and when they are needed, because the goal is ambitious, either they may not be enough, or military force will dominate the outcome. The complementary policies examined by HSEO are covert activities by intelligence agencies, usually the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency; quasi-military actions, usually a show of force involving deployment of forces to a problem area or physical blockades to enforce sanctions; and "regular" military force, ranging from air strikes to troops in combat.

Table 5 shows the distribution of sanctions and complementary policies according to the goal categories introduced earlier. Each cell shows three numbers: the number of cases in which sanctions were judged to have contributed to a successful outcome; the number of cases with positive foreign policy results, including those in which sanctions made a minimal contribution; and the total number of cases in that category. Overall, complementary policies occur in only about a third of the sanctions cases examined and, not surprisingly, are rare in cases in which the goal is relatively modest, but complementary policies are present in roughly half of the high-policy cases. Covert activities are most likely to be used in conjunction with sanctions when the goal is regime change and the combination appears to be relatively effective. Quasi-military actions do not appear to add much to sanctions and the combination is not particularly successful. In the case of regular military force, sanctions are usually in the supporting role and, not surprisingly, sanctions are dominated by military options in many of these cases.

Table 5. Interaction of Sanctions and Other Tools, Including Military Force

Goal category	Type of companion policy						
	None	Covert	Covert & Quasi	Quasi only	Quasi & regular, or all three	Regular	All policies
Modest	20/22/36	0	0	1/1/5	0	1/1/2	22/24/43
Regime change	16/29/55	5/6/7	2/3/4	2/3/4	0/1/3	0/5/7	25/47/80
Military disruption	4/11/14	0/0/1	0/1/1	0/0/2	0	0/1/1	4/13/19
Military impairment	2/4/15	0/0/1	1/1/1	1/1/4	1/1/2	4/4/6	9/11/29
Other major	6/8/16	0	0	0/0/5	0/0/1	4/8/11	10/16/33
All cases	48/74/136	5/6/9	3/5/6	4/5/20	1/2/6	9/19/27	70/111/204

Covert = covert activities by intelligence agencies

Quasi = quasi-military, ranging from actions short of the application of force, such as a show of naval force off a coast or massing troops on a border, to limited airstrikes

Regular = application of military force, generally involving ground forces

Note: The first number in each cell is the number of sanctions successes; the second is the number of policy successes; and the last the total number of cases in that category.

Lessons for Iran and North Korea from Libya and Iraq

Economic sanctions have been important tools in recent major U.S. foreign policy episodes targeting Libya and Iraq, where the sanctions have ended, and Iran and North Korea, where they are ongoing. Based on the analysis above, it appears that none of these cases at the outset had high prospects for successful outcomes. All four target regimes were autocratic; relations with the U.S., the lead sanctioner, were neutral at best, but usually hostile; and the goals—involving regime change, dismantlement of WMD programs, and surrender of territory—were ambitious. Nor were the estimated economic costs of sanctions high, with the exception of the comprehensive UN sanctions against Iraq beginning in 1990.

Yet of the nine separate episodes involving these four targets over the past two decades or so, just over half (five) achieved some degree of success, with sanctions contributing modestly. All three of the episodes involving Libya were judged to have been successful, while one of three targeting Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was judged successful, and one of two targeting North Korea because of its nuclear program was scored as a partial success. So far, economic sanctions to punish Iran for its support of terrorist groups in the Middle East and its attempts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability have not been successful. The common elements in the relatively more successful cases are that the sanctions, or threats, were endorsed by the international community and were accompanied by varying degrees of military force, or threats to use force.

The nine episodes are:

1. U.S. sanctions to achieve regime change in Libya, with an end to terrorist groups as a subsidiary goal, achieved by changing the regime's behavior, not its leadership
2. U.S. sanctions to coerce an end to Libyan WMD programs
3. UN sanctions against Libya to coerce the government to surrender the suspects in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland
4. The U.S. attempt to end Iranian support for terrorism in the Middle East; and the U.S. goal, with limited support from the UN and others, to prevent Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability
5. UN sanctions to coerce Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, achieved through military force
6. U.S. attempt to remove Saddam Hussein from power, achieved through military force
7. UN/U.S. attempt to prevent the rebuilding of Iraq's WMD capability
8. UN/U.S. threat of sanctions to prevent the development of nuclear weapons capability in North Korea, which contributed to the negotiation of a framework agreement in 1994

9. UN/U.S. sanctions designed to pressure North Korea to dismantle its nuclear programs after the earlier framework agreement broke down in the early 2000s

HSEO judged that sanctions contributed modestly to the achievement of foreign policy goals in the first three episodes, as well as numbers 7 and 8. What are the lessons of this experience for the current disputes with Iran and North Korea?

With respect to Libya, U.S. and UN goals were mostly achieved. Libya did reduce its support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups; it surrendered the Pan Am bombing suspects; and it eventually gave up on plans to acquire WMD. These changes in behavior were apparently sufficient for American policymakers to give up on the goal of destabilizing the regime of Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi. But these goals were achieved only after more than twenty years of sanctions, and sanctions were not the only tool used. The air strikes and naval clashes in the 1980s appear to have contributed to the decision to reduce support for terrorists, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 may have contributed to the dismantlement of the WMD programs, though negotiations toward that end began well before the Iraq invasion. An important factor in this case appears to be changing Libyan perceptions of the relative costs of compliance and defiance; the costs of sanctions against investments in the Libyan oil sector increased over time, and the Gaddafi regime must have reassessed the value of WMD to be willing to surrender them. U.S. willingness to negotiate and to put the lifting of sanctions on the table also affected the perceived Libyan costs of complying with U.S. demands.

The Iraq case shows the limitations of economic sanctions. They did not, and probably could not, destabilize the Saddam Hussein regime. But sanctions, along with military threats and occasional air strikes, supported the task of the UN inspectors in finding, destroying, and preventing the rebuilding of Iraq's WMD programs. The real success of the inspections and sanctions programs was not understood, however, until after the 2003 invasion, when no evidence of any new WMD programs was found. Iraq's continued challenges to the UN inspectors, despite its abandonment of all its WMD programs may have been due, in part, to Saddam Hussein's recognition that the U.S. would never agree to lift sanctions as long as he remained in power. Thus, he had no incentive to cooperate on the other UN goals related to disarmament and the settlement of border issues with Kuwait. The sanctions were also costly in humanitarian terms and this would have made them difficult to maintain indefinitely; indeed, pressure to ease them was building within the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in the early 2000s. The humanitarian costs also undermined support for UN sanctions in other cases, including Sudan.

Table 6. Applying the Framework for Analysis to the Iran Case

Costs of defiance	Costs of compliance
<p><i>Direct cost of sanctions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. sanctions are comprehensive, limited scope to increase • Increased EU cooperation on targeted sanctions possible • Relative cost varies inversely with oil price, which is unlikely to be sanctioned outside U.S. • Russia, China reluctant allies; participation varies between acquiescence to passive noncooperation to actively offsetting effects (e.g., through investments) <p><i>Escalation threat</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is military action against Iran credible? • Would airstrikes be effective in destroying WMD capability? For how long? <p><i>Relations with sender or third parties</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing to lose with U.S. since relations already hostile; improvement in relations is a potential inducement • Potential for deterioration in relations with EU • Does it matter if Russia and China remain friendly? <p><i>Internal political response in target</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thus far, sanctions have limited economic effects, especially relative to oil price and poor domestic policies • Would gasoline sanctions, if effectively implemented, have a significant impact on the public? • Would citizens blame regime or U.S.—would it increase divisions in Iran and undermine regime, or cause a rally-round-the-flag effect? 	<p><i>External security</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the regime view a nuclear option as essential to national security? • Does the regime view nuclear weapons as essential? • Is the regime unified in this view? <p><i>Internal security and stability</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the regime believe that concessions on nuclear program would undermine public support? • Can the U.S./sanctioning coalition reduce these costs by directly addressing national security concerns?

In North Korea in the mid-1990s, a credible threat that China and Russia might support some UN sanctions, plus implicit threats that military force might be necessary if no other resolution was possible, and a U.S. willingness to negotiate the loosening of long-standing sanctions and to cooperate in providing other assistance to North Korea all contributed to agreement on a framework to reverse North Korea's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. The agreement proved short-lived, however.

Now, in both Iran and North Korea, we face a situation in which U.S. unilateral sanctions have been in place for decades with little effect, leaving the U.S. with little remaining unilateral leverage over these targets. Significant UN sanctions are unlikely because of Russian and Chinese opposition in both cases. Somewhat less sweeping multilateral sanctions are possible. But other necessary

allies, including the European Union with respect to Iran, and South Korea with respect to the North, differ with the U.S. over the priority they give to some goals and have varied over time in their commitment to sanctions to achieve shared goals. Table 6 summarizes these and other factors for the case of Iran, using the relative-costs-of-compliance-and-defiance framework.

Ultimately, if either regime views a nuclear weapons capability as essential to state or regime survival, then sanctions are unlikely to be powerful enough to change minds. And, if regime change is perceived to be a goal in either case, then it could complicate achievement of the immediate goals of nonproliferation. If military options also appear to be too risky or unlikely to achieve disarmament goals in these cases, then a strategy that combines carrots with strengthened sticks may be the only remaining option. With ad hoc cooperation from Europe and Russia, sanctions could deny key components and technologies for the Iranian nuclear program, thus raising the costs of defiance and at least slowing the country's acquisition of a weapons capability. A willingness to negotiate and to address security concerns in Iran and North Korea could also contribute to their governments' changing perceptions about the costs of complying with demands to abandon nuclear weapons and tilt the balance between the relative costs of defiance and compliance in a positive direction.

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Notes

- 1 The perception of failure is overstated, since the League used the threat of sanctions to successfully settle two border disputes in the Balkans prior to its better-known failures in Latin America (the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay) and with Italy over Abyssinia.
- 2 While I recognize that domestic political considerations are often important in explaining the decision to impose sanctions, I do not assess their utility for that purpose; for an analysis of the decision to impose sanctions, *see* Drury (1998).
- 3 Assessments of the more recent cases should be treated with a greater degree of caution than those that were included in HSEO, in some cases because they are ongoing, and in others because they have not been the subject of the same in-depth research.
- 4 *See* Drezner (1999, especially 4–6) for detailed analysis of this argument, and Mastanduno (2000, 298–99) for an alternative analysis.
- 5 The Polity IV database codes the regime characteristics and transitions of states from 1800 to 2008; *see* <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

VII. Cold War Two?: The (Il)logic of a Struggle with China for Resources in the Developing World

Eugene Gholz

Associate Professor of Public Affairs, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs,
University of Texas, Austin

and

Daryl G. Press

Associate Professor of Government, Dartmouth College

Two great powers seem to be acting as if resources are the new locus for international competition: China and Russia. China is scooping up energy and mineral resources in the developing world with solicitous diplomatic initiatives and aggressive contract negotiations. Meanwhile, Russia recently has used resources for coercion—reducing its natural gas exports to Ukraine and indirectly cutting them to Europe, too—in what was seen in some quarters as a case of energy coercion. Do China’s efforts to secure resources in the developing world threaten the United States? Does the Russia-Ukraine incident foretell a future in which energy supplies and other resources are used coercively? Should the U.S. scramble for political influence in the developing world as it did during the Cold War?

The conventional wisdom in the policy community seems to have settled on answers to these questions. However, it has apparently settled on two answers that are inconsistent with each other. In 2005 and 2006, when China’s “going out” policy to encourage Chinese companies to acquire equity stakes in overseas oil and other resource plays first broke into policy discussions, pundits bombarded leaders with statements about threats to energy security. But over time, the shrillness has subsided, perhaps because the post-financial crisis plunge in prices has made energy security as a whole seem less important. The conventional wisdom now is that China is late to the prospecting game and is constrained by limits on its firms’ technical capabilities, meaning that most Chinese firms are buying low-quality energy plays. These investments surely should not worry the West.¹

Nevertheless, newspaper reporters have little trouble finding an alarmist comment to greet each announcement of Chinese overseas energy investment. For example, when PetroChina announced a \$1.9-billion investment in Canadian oil sands in the fall of 2009, Carolyn Bartholomew, chairwoman of the Congressionally appointed U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, said, “I think that an acquisition [of Canadian oil sands] should raise national security questions both for the government of Canada and for the government of the United States.”²

This statement is more consistent with the conventional wisdom on Russia’s apparent ability to disrupt European energy supplies. Many stories have settled on a refrain that expects Russia to exploit its leverage each winter, when demand for Russian energy supplies in former Soviet states and in Europe is most acute. These stories present stark warnings of a contentious energy security future.³ Even if energy coercion is economically expensive for Russia, Russian leaders seem to value the possibility of political leverage—and countries make strategic decisions based on many logics other than the simple attempt to maximize revenues for their domestic firms.

We argue that both these pieces of conventional wisdom are on the right track, despite their seeming inconsistency. China’s development of political and economic ties with major exporters of raw materials in the developing world poses no significant threat to the U.S.—not because of flaws in China’s investment strategy but because of the characteristics of global energy markets. Russia, on the other hand, actually gains some (perhaps dwindling) coercive leverage from its energy exports—but only from its natural gas exports, which rely on a rigid transportation infrastructure.⁴ Unfortunately, news stories about energy coercion often haphazardly mix coverage of oil and natural gas.⁵ But only natural gas disruptions are not amenable to rapid market adaptation. Carelessly blending coverage of the two different types of energy leads analysts to exaggerate threats to energy security.

In normal times, most resources, notably including oil, are distributed on the basis of price, so the Western economies will not be starved of vital resources if they can put them to efficient use. Whether Chinese, Dutch, or American oil companies get the contracts to pump oil from African countries, the Caspian Sea, or anywhere else in the world may have significant implications for individual energy firms’ profits, but it has little effect on U.S. economic prospects or national security. On the demand side, China’s prepurchase agreements merely change the patterns of global oil trade (that is, of which specific barrels of oil China consumes), not the overall level of consumption. The long-term agreements, therefore, do not significantly affect oil prices. On the supply side, China’s leap into oil exploration and extraction are economically neutral for the

U.S.; if Chinese investments increase aggregate global supplies, China's efforts might even *reduce* global oil prices. The U.S. has little to fear from Beijing's energy policy, and U.S. policymakers should not expect or initiate the type of competition that analysts envision when they describe the "geopolitics of oil."

Even in times of conflict, resource denial strategies—for example, coercion and blockade—are only feasible in very narrow circumstances. The Russia-Ukraine example is one of the few cases in which energy coercion is possible, largely because natural gas supply mechanisms are nearly unique given their rigid transportation and limited storage infrastructure. In contemporary energy security policy discussions, European leaders should think hard about the danger of dependence on Russia for natural gas supplies. The proposed Nordstream and South Stream pipelines will do less to alleviate European vulnerability than other investments might, because these pipelines, if completed, will still leave Western Europe dependent on gas imports from the same source, Russia. But the relationship between Russia and Europe in natural gas should not stoke American fears of energy insecurity, especially vis-à-vis political competition with China to ensure supply diversity.

Ironically, U.S. strategic analysts who worry about China's investments in overseas resources appear to have the strategic equation exactly reversed. The special conditions that might allow energy coercion to work in the Russia-Ukraine situation suggest that *China* is vulnerable to energy coercion, but the U.S. is not.

The U.S. need not compete for access to raw materials in the developing world. U.S. policymakers should make sure that unwarranted fears that energy competition will breed a Sino-American conflict do not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In reality, no American interest in oil requires hostile relations with China.

China's Foreign Energy Investments

Some analysts see a grave threat from Beijing's energy policy: China is negotiating preferential long-term purchase agreements that could deny Americans even the opportunity to bid for some oil.⁶ General news coverage of oil investments now casually uses the phrase *lock up* in reference to oil drilling and production contracts, a loaded phrase that started life among energy security alarmists.⁷ The alarmists implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) recommend that the U.S. shift its foreign policy to work against the Chinese strategy—in essence, creating our own preferential agreements to guarantee U.S. access to oil.

The traditional "geopolitics of oil" line of argument goes like this: Chinese companies, supported by government policy, are signing long-term contracts to buy large quantities of oil from producers around the world such as Nigeria,

Venezuela, Russia, and Brazil. Chinese companies have also bought access to overseas fields by investing in established foreign oil companies, concessions to develop oil fields, and rights to explore for new fields in many countries, including Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Angola, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere. With its large foreign currency reserves, China has taken advantage of the global financial crisis to expand its overseas acquisitions, which give the Chinese decision-making control over future oil supplies. Meanwhile, Chinese diplomats cultivate relationships with the governments of countries with government-owned oil companies, hoping to influence their future oil sales. All of these moves allegedly reflect a coherent Chinese national energy policy—one that might “lock up” sources of oil supply, leaving less oil on the world market for relatively laissez-faire countries like the U.S.⁸

Although these deals have been signed, they may not end up being “preferential” for China in any meaningful sense. Is China getting oil at below-market prices? Are Chinese deals assuring Beijing secure access to future supplies that could not be acquired by simply bidding for oil on the open market? The economic arguments against these fears are compelling.⁹

Whether or not China prearranges its oil purchases years in advance, China will consume the same amount of oil. If China buys concessions from foreign governments to pump oil from their wells or to prospect for new fields on their territory and then chooses to ship the crude to Chinese customers rather than to sell it on the open market, the Chinese actions will simply free up oil pumped by other companies so that they can then sell to non-Chinese consumers. In other words, the Chinese arrangements may lock up some supply, but they also free up an equivalent amount that is no longer needed to sate China’s consumption.

Defenders of the “geopolitics of oil” argument attack this rebuttal by questioning a key assumption of the economic view. They ask, what if the Chinese government were willing to sacrifice profits to keep oil for the Chinese market—that is, what if they imported all of the oil from their foreign concessions, holding down oil prices on the Chinese domestic market, and refused to resell their oil, even if world market prices soared above the Chinese domestic price?¹⁰ That would reduce the supply of oil available to non-Chinese consumers, dramatically driving up oil prices outside China. After all, Chinese price controls on petroleum products have demonstrated the Chinese government’s willingness to sacrifice economic efficiency for noneconomic goals, such as the political stability that Beijing thinks cheap oil enhances.

What these pessimistic analyses overlook, however, is that a Chinese decision not to resell the oil they pump (whether from foreign concessions or domestic production), despite the opportunity to make big profits, would have the same

effect as China's deciding to pay more for oil than other consumers. In other words, China's hypothetical decision not to sell oil to Americans even if world prices rose dramatically (for example, during a supply disruption) would cost the Chinese the same amount of money that they could use to outbid Americans in a "free" oil market in which China had not made long-term deals with suppliers. The point is that China's current activities, whether or not they are characterized as "mercantilist" efforts to lock up oil supplies, make no difference for Americans' long-term ability to buy oil in the market. What might hurt American consumers is China's growing *demand* for oil, because that demand would drive up prices if supply remained on the same trajectory. Chinese *ownership* of oil does not matter much.

Some Chinese oil policy initiatives are even good for U.S. consumers. In recent years, Chinese firms have spent billions of dollars to purchase concessions. Compared to Western oil firms, the Chinese seem willing to overpay for oil fields; the Chinese "win" competitive auctions by spending more than Western oil companies think a property is worth. Some areas that the Western firms do not consider likely to have a high enough return on investment still attract Chinese drilling. If those prospects pay off, more oil will enter the world market, driving down prices for all consumers; if the prospects fail, Chinese rather than American shareholders will cover the losses.

In sum, China's oil policy will not hurt the U.S., and it may even benefit the U.S. economy. China's prepurchase agreements mainly move oil around—altering trade patterns and dictating which specific barrels of oil arrive at China's ports; they do not affect the total amount of oil consumed or the market price determined by supply and demand. China may end up being disappointed by its investments in foreign oil fields: Western firms may be unwilling to pay as much as Chinese oil companies to explore and develop these concessions for good reasons. On the other hand, if it turns out that Chinese investors were shrewd or if they simply get lucky, their prospecting will expand world oil supply, and the price of oil will drop for Americans too.

Overall, the U.S. should not worry that China is locking up oil supplies with prepurchase agreements or that China is investing to develop overseas oil reserves. The real energy "problem" that China poses for the U.S. is that rapid Chinese economic growth increases demand for oil, and that drives up global prices. But that potentially serious problem has nothing to do with any country's efforts to lock up resources.

The U.S. cannot do very much to change this situation. In the lead-up to the Copenhagen climate change negotiations, the Chinese government announced a goal of substantially reducing by 2020 its economy's energy intensity (the amount of energy consumed per unit of GDP created). The U.S. might encourage that

policy by offering technology transfers or paying to install energy-efficiency technology in China. But such expensive efforts are likely only to reduce the rate of increase in Chinese energy consumption, and the Chinese government has suggested that it does not want foreign interference with its domestic energy policy.¹¹

The only way for the U.S. to truly stem China's increasing energy consumption would be to significantly slow China's economic growth. Formal American efforts to hurt the Chinese economy would surely trigger enormous bilateral tension. Given the importance that the Chinese government attaches to steady economic growth, it would be hard to imagine a more hostile and provocative U.S. policy toward China.

One other concern may fan U.S. fears about China's energy policy, though it is rarely articulated publicly.¹² U.S. military planners may worry that Beijing's efforts to improve relations with foreign oil producers and purchase foreign oil concessions may partially protect China from a U.S. blockade during a future military conflict (not necessarily caused by tensions over access to oil). In a war over Taiwan, for example, the U.S. would likely use its naval power to try to sever China's energy supply lines. Perhaps China's foreign energy investments are partially intended to protect China from U.S. military coercion.

But few of China's overseas investments would help China in such a scenario. If the United States Navy successfully prevented oil tankers from reaching Chinese ports, China would be unable to access the oil it owned in (for example) Sudan or Venezuela. China could probably sell the oil into the global market, even during a conflict, but earning money from the sales would not help China circumvent the blockade: even without the oil market earnings, China would presumably be looking for ways to spend its already substantial foreign currency reserves. In the face of a blockade, China would need secure transportation routes more than extra paper (or electronic) funds.

If Energy Coercion Doesn't Work, Then Why is it Cold in Kiev?

The arguments in the previous section about flexibility in the oil market are mostly based on reasoning rather than empirical evidence. However, our sanguine conclusions appear inconsistent with recent experience in Europe: Russia has used its position as the dominant foreign supplier of natural gas in the region for coercive leverage against its near neighbors (for example, Ukraine). Western Europe has apparently decided that the unreliability of Ukraine as a transportation route for Russian gas exports is the primary threat to its secure energy supply, and rather than diversifying away from reliance on Russia, European investments in new natural gas pipelines emphasize diversifying transportation routes to connect consumers to gas from that single source. Russia, as

a major energy producer, seems to have tremendous—and growing—coercive leverage against both its near-abroad and Western European consumers of its natural gas.¹³

Fortunately for our analysis of the effect of Chinese investments on American energy security, the situations in the global oil market and the European regional natural gas market are not analogous. A careful understanding of what happened in the European natural gas case should reinforce rather than undermine confidence in our interpretation of China's allegedly mercantilist energy policy.

For nearly two decades, Russia and Ukraine have engaged in a series of disputes during which Russia repeatedly reduced or ceased gas exports to Ukraine and Western Europe.¹⁴ If control over resources provides little coercive leverage, as we claim in the previous section, what explains Russia's ability to interfere with energy supplies in Ukraine and Western Europe?

The disputes between Russia and Ukraine are not a clear-cut case of energy coercion. The dominant explanation for Russian behavior among U.S. diplomats is that Russia has been using its control over natural gas supplies to punish the Kiev government for moving away from Moscow's orbit. According to this view, Russia is particularly unhappy about the steps Ukraine has taken toward NATO membership, as well as its support for Georgia during the recent conflict.¹⁵ However an alternative explanation for Russian natural gas policy exists: the dispute between Moscow and Kiev is merely a mundane business quarrel. Ukraine keeps failing to pay its gas bills, so Russia periodically turns off the supplies to force Kiev to settle some of its debts.¹⁶

Regardless of Russia's motivations, Moscow has been able to repeatedly interfere with Ukraine's energy supplies, shaping both price and access to energy. Whether leaders in the Kremlin are employing that coercive leverage to pressure Ukraine to retain political distance from the West, or simply to pay its bills, is immaterial. If Russia can deny Ukraine the gas supplies it needs, then Russia has a meaningful coercive tool. And if Russian control of natural gas supplies gives Moscow coercive leverage over Ukraine, shouldn't we worry that other countries' control over critical materials will give them coercive leverage as well? Perhaps the U.S. should not be as sanguine about China's activities in the developing world after all.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the Russia-Ukraine dispute that ownership of energy supplies (or other natural resources) typically gives states significant coercive leverage over consumers. The key to understanding the Russia-Ukraine case lies in the rigid transportation infrastructure associated with natural gas. Whereas most oil is carried by tankers, which can deliver their cargo to any deep port with an oil-offload terminal, most natural gas is carried

by pipelines, which create far less flexible supplier–consumer relationships.¹⁷ For example, if Russia refused to sell *oil* to Western European countries, they could simply buy additional Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Nigerian crude to replace the “missing” Russian barrels. (Presumably the customers who once bought the Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Nigerian supplies would bid on Russia’s available oil.) But this type of easy adaptation will not work with natural gas: there are relatively few liquefied natural gas tankers in the world; most gas is carried by pipeline. If Russia cut off European natural gas, European consumers would have no practical way to replace the gas supplies in the short term.

To express this differently, we have argued in the previous section that in most industries embargoes merely shuffle the supplier–consumer relationships. Customers who can no longer purchase commodities from their pre-embargo supplier simply buy their supplies from someone else. But refusing to sell natural gas to a major customer leaves that customer in the cold—no gas to heat the house, and no other sellers who could quickly replace the lost supplies.

The natural gas industry may become less rigid in the near future as the number of liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers and ports grows. As of November 2009, there were ninety functioning LNG ports in the world, another twenty-seven are under construction, and sixty-seven are at various planning stages.¹⁸ In fact, just three years ago many analysts predicted that by 2015 roughly 40 percent of all EU gas imports would be carried on LNG tankers,¹⁹ reducing the EU’s reliance on pipelines. However, fluctuation in gas prices has reduced interest in some LNG projects, and long-planned new pipelines connecting Russia directly to the EU seem to be moving forward. Consequently, growth in LNG transport will likely only have a mild effect on the EU’s dependence on Russian gas pipelines.²⁰

More importantly, the growth of seaborne LNG traffic would only somewhat mitigate the rigidities in the gas industry, even if LNG transports increased modestly as a share of total global trade in gas. If a natural gas producer embargoes a customer who buys natural gas carried by LNG tankers, then the spurned customer could in fact seek other seaborne supplies to replace the lost source (just as in the oil example). However, if a producer cuts off a customer who buys natural gas via pipeline, then the existence of a robust LNG fleet won’t create much flexibility: the spurned customer could try to replace the pipeline-carried natural gas with tanker-carried LNG (if the customer had a LNG port), but the consumer who lost that tanker-carried LNG could not turn around and buy the pipeline-carried gas that was being denied in the first place.²¹

Even in the gas industry, in which rigid transportation infrastructure makes coercion plausible, embargo threats have limited effectiveness: too frequent use encourages consumers to invest to diversify their sources of supply. As a result,

Russia made great efforts to argue that its gas restrictions were *not* coercive acts. Spinning the cutoffs as a normal response to a deadbeat customer helped Russia portray the transit countries as the threat to Europe's energy security. Whereas a perception that Russia used its gas exports as a weapon would reduce interest in Europe in developing new pipelines, a perception that disruptions were someone else's fault might even spur interest in the pipeline projects. But, most importantly, whatever short-term leverage natural gas pipelines create, they do not suggest that there is an analogous risk of coercion from oil or other commodities.

In sum, the Europeans may have been shortsighted in developing an energy infrastructure that made them vulnerable to Russian energy coercion. They seem to be reinforcing that vulnerability by developing new natural gas pipelines from Russia rather than shifting away from pipelines in favor of seaborne LNG supplies. But nothing in the Russia-Ukraine experience should cause U.S. security planners to worry about China. The long-term contracts China is signing to develop oil and mineral deposits in the developing world do not put Beijing in a position to coerce the U.S. At most Chinese investments might allow them to shuffle the supplier-consumer relationships in those commodities—but they do not create serious opportunities for coercion.

Implications

America's concerns about Chinese economic activity in the developing world are unwarranted. Chinese investments and long-term purchase agreements will not have a substantial effect on peacetime access to raw materials for the U.S. or the global economy. To the extent that China's investments affect the prices of raw materials, they are likely to reduce them—if China's investments increase global supplies.

Nor is it likely that China's activities will guarantee them access—or deny access to the U.S.—in time of conflict. For the foreseeable future, the United States Navy controls the seas; therefore, if there were a serious political/military dispute between Washington and Beijing, China's ownership of raw materials stockpiles overseas would do little to assure its access to those stocks.

Two other conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, Western Europe may be unwise to depend as much as it does on natural gas piped from Russia. While individual suppliers of most raw materials have little coercive power—because withheld supplies could be rapidly acquired from other sources—the rigid nature of natural gas infrastructure means that suppliers can coerce their customers. Even the growth of the worldwide LNG tanker fleet will not significantly mitigate these risks; if the fleet were used near capacity (as expected), interruptions of pipeline-carried gas could not be easily replaced by seaborne supplies. It is

surprising, therefore, that Europe is developing new natural gas pipelines from Russia—pipelines that will bypass Ukraine (allowing Russia to cut off Ukraine without harming Western Europe). These new pipeline developments suggest that Western Europe sees virtually no risk of future hostility from Russia (and cares little about Ukraine’s vulnerability to coercion), or that Western European governments have internalized the lessons of market flexibility from oil markets but mistakenly applied them to gas markets as well. In either case, the increased reliance on piped natural gas from Russia is a decision they might be wise to reconsider.

Second, this analysis suggests that recent efforts to convince Beijing to significantly expand China’s use of natural gas as a means of reducing their greenhouse emissions are unlikely to succeed. Burning natural gas releases less carbon into the atmosphere per BTU than oil or coal, and some analysts and policymakers have suggested that China would be a logical customer for Australia’s substantial supplies. Given the small size of the global LNG tanker fleet, however, Chinese leaders will likely (and rightly) conclude that reliance on Australian LNG would create unacceptable national security risks for China. If Australia were to cut off China’s supply of LNG, China would not be able to readily shift to another source of imported natural gas, at least for the foreseeable future.

The final overarching point is this: in a world in which most raw materials are transported on ships, the most important factor determining access to supplies in time of conflict is control of the seas. China is therefore right to worry about its energy security—and its access to raw materials—if it found itself in a conflict with the U.S. But if China’s activities in the developing world are intended to mitigate those risks, Chinese leaders are making a mistake.²² Owning oil fields in Venezuela will do little to guarantee access to oil if the U.S. is intent on preventing that oil from reaching Chinese ports. U.S. concerns about China’s efforts to lock up resources in the developing world have it exactly backwards: China is vulnerable; the U.S. is not.

Notes

- 1 Trevor Houser, “The Roots of Chinese Oil Investment Abroad,” *Asia Policy Research Note* no. 5 (January 2008): 141–66; available at <http://nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=336>.
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- 3 See Jeffrey Mankoff, "Long Pipelines Make Bad Neighbors," *Foreign Policy*, January 12, 2010, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/12/long_pipelines_make_bad_neighbors; and Bruce Crumley, "Russia's Gazprom Diplomacy: Turning Off Europe's Heat," *Time*, January 7, 2009, available at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1870111,00.html>.
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- 17 Tonjes and de Jong, "Perspectives on Security of Supply": 12. For up-to-date information on European gas pipeline routes, offload ports, and capacities at ports and border crossings, see "The European Natural Gas Network: Capacities at Cross-border Points on the Primary Market," Gas Infrastructure Europe; available at http://www.gie.eu.com/maps_data/capacity.html.
- 18 Data on LNG tanker ports includes both LNG production terminals (in supplier countries) and LNG regasification terminals, which are offload sites. Data are from Global LNG Limited.
- 19 See Tonjes and de Jong, "Perspectives on Security of Supply": 8 (see note 16).
- 20 As of summer 2009, the LNG tanker ports only comprised 25 percent of the EU's total capacity for importing gas, meaning that pipelines still provided 75 percent of total import capacity. For up-to-date data on the capacity of individual EU LNG terminals and pipelines, see "The European Natural Gas Network," available at http://www.gie.eu.com/maps_data/capacity.html.
- 21 To some extent, this vulnerability is symmetrical: exporters who export primarily through pipelines are potentially vulnerable to coercive actions by importers, because pipelines cannot be rerouted in another direction. Tonjes and de Long (at 11; see

note 16) make oblique reference to this point when they write, “Diversification of demand makes as much sense for Russia as diversification of supply makes for Europe...”

22 If China is seeking to reduce its vulnerability to raw material disruptions by securing overseas supplies, its strategy is strangely similar to Germany’s efforts before World War I to reduce its reliance on British-controlled materials by developing an overseas empire—a strategy that made little sense, given Great Britain’s control of the seas.

PART III:
**LIQUIDATING MILITARY
COMMITMENTS**

VIII. Cutting Losses in Wars of Choice: Obstacles and Strategies

Stephen Walt

Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Relations
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Introduction

Throughout history, great powers have fought “wars of choice,” often in areas far from their home territory. Britain and France waged colonial wars against each other and against local opponents during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and both the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a number of conflicts in the developing world during the Cold War. Sometimes these great powers triumphed quickly and relatively easily, as the United States did when it invaded tiny Grenada in 1983. In other cases, however—the American war in Vietnam and the Soviet war in Afghanistan—they eventually chose to “cut their losses” and disengage.

In general, getting out of a war of choice is harder than great powers expect when they begin them. In a number of prominent cases—the Boer War, Vietnam (for both the United States and France), Algeria, Afghanistan (for Britain, the Soviet Union, and now the United States)—the conflict lasted longer than initially anticipated and the intervening great power continued to fight even after many leaders recognized that victory might be elusive.¹ In many of these cases, it seems clear in hindsight that these states could have achieved similar results at far less cost had they managed to extricate themselves earlier.

As Fred Ikle notes, “cutting one’s losses, although a common notion in everyday life, appears to be a particularly difficult decision for a government to reach in seeking to end a prolonged and unsuccessful war.”² Or as Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey acknowledged in a February 1965 memorandum urging President Lyndon B. Johnson to de-escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam, “it is always hard to cut losses.”³ Johnson rejected Humphrey’s advice and sent combat troops instead, thereby confirming the validity of Humphrey’s observation.

The difficulty of cutting one’s losses is not confined to wars of choice, of course; it is in fact a problem common to many human endeavors. When should an investor dump a declining stock? At what point should a business firm pull the

plug on a new product that isn't selling well? When should an unhappy spouse stop trying to fix a troubled marriage, and head for the divorce court instead? Should a scholar or research team respond to negative results by abandoning an existing line of inquiry and attacking a research puzzle in a new way? Each of these decisions involves reaching the conclusion that investing additional resources in an existing commitment is not likely to pay off and that a different course of action is advisable.

This essay examines two different aspects of this ubiquitous problem, within the narrow context of military interventions. First, why is it hard for strong states to cut their losses in wars of choice? What are the individual, organizational, and political forces that lead states to fight these wars for longer than they should, and to pay a bigger price in defeat? Second, when great powers do disengage from wars of choice, how can they minimize costs of disengagement and thus preserve or improve their strategic position?

I begin by defining wars of choice, as distinct from "wars of necessity" or "wars of national survival." The next section considers the various obstacles that make it hard for national leaders to determine whether they should cut their losses or "stay the course," and tend to prolong such conflicts longer than is optimal. I then consider some of the strategies that states can employ when attempting to disengage, so that a failed intervention does not cost more than is absolutely necessary.

Wars of Choice

The distinction between a war of choice and a war of necessity can be somewhat blurred in practice, and both contemporaries and subsequent historians will often debate how a given war ought to be viewed. Nonetheless, a true war of choice will normally exhibit the following features.

First, the stakes in a war of choice are not immediately vital to national survival.⁴ Wars of choice are not fought to defend the nation's territory from invasion, for example, or to defend a key ally whose defeat would tilt the balance of power decisively in favor of one's enemies. Although policymakers often try to rally support for minor wars by predicting dire consequences from defeat or withdrawal, in a war of choice there is little or no chance that defeat or withdrawal would lead to the immediate subjugation of the defeated power. A war of choice is not like the Battle of the Low Countries in 1940 or the October War in 1973 (the Fourth Arab-Israeli War), in which one country is attacked by a powerful rival and has no choice but to fight or surrender.

Second, it follows that wars of choice will often be asymmetric conflicts, pitting a great power against a weak state (or in some cases, an insurgency) that it nonetheless believes is a threat to its interests. Other great powers may be

involved, of course, and such conflicts sometimes take the form of a “proxy war” motivated by larger balance-of-power considerations.⁵ Nonetheless, direct great-power-versus-great-power wars are largely excluded from this definition, because these conflicts almost always threaten vital national interests, such as control over one’s home territory.

Third, the decision to cut losses and terminate a war of choice does not occur because of military incapacity. A great power that decides to end a war of choice does so even though it still has the wherewithal to continue the fight, and may even have the capacity to escalate. Thus, to accept defeat in a war of choice is not like Egypt’s loss in the Six Day War in 1967, Germany’s collapse in September 1918, or even the Japanese decision to surrender in 1945. Rather, ending a war of choice is essentially a decision to cut one’s losses, at a time when it is clearly possible to continue the effort in the hope of securing a more favorable outcome.

Furthermore, leaders who decide to cut their losses in a war of choice do so even though continuing the war would not necessarily bring down their government (at least, not in the short term). Domestic pressure to end the war may be a factor in their calculations, but the decision to end a war of choice occurs even though the state’s leaders could continue it if they wished without provoking a military mutiny, a mass uprising, or some other immediate challenge to their positions.

In short, a great power that decides to end a war of choice does so not because it is facing imminent military defeat, a complete collapse of public support, the prospect of violent overthrow, or an immediate and overriding strategic challenge elsewhere.⁶ Rather, it is choosing to cut its losses even though it has the option of fighting on, based on the belief that further expenditure of lives and materiel will leave it in a weaker strategic position and that it is better off getting out.

Examples of wars of choice conducted by great powers might include: Russia and Great Britain in Afghanistan, the Boer War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1980 to 1988), the Korean War (for both the United States and People’s Republic of China), the Indochina War (France, the United States), and the Russo-Finnish War (1940). Wars of choice fought by non-great powers include Egypt in Yemen (1962 to 1967), Israel in Lebanon (1982 to 2000), South Africa in Namibia, and the Cuban intervention in Angola and Ethiopia (1975/76 to 1988).

Why do Wars of Choice Last So Long?

Rationalist approaches to war and war termination generally frame the issue of ending a war as a bargaining problem, in which states constantly update their demands based on new information about the costs of fighting, each side’s level

of resolve, or the prospects of victory.⁷ Applied to wars of choice, the perspective implies that states will seek to disengage if the expected utility of continuing the war is lower than the expected utility of getting out, either unilaterally or via some sort of negotiated settlement.

The problem, however, is that it is impossible to forecast the impact of these different choices with one-hundred-percent confidence, because of the unpredictability of warfare itself (the “fog of war”), asymmetric information, each side’s incentives to misrepresent its capabilities and/or resolve, and the likely responses of third parties. In the real world, a decision to continue or withdraw from a war of choice ultimately depends on subjective probability estimates that cannot be known with certainty. Just as a stock may soar as soon as you sell it, a war that was going badly might have been won if one had added more troops, adopted a different strategy, or just got lucky.⁸ By the same logic, a war of choice that is going well may go south unexpectedly, so that the state misses the opportunity to get out on more favorable terms. It is equally impossible to be certain about the negative consequences of withdrawal and easy to imagine various worst-case possibilities. Even if states’ leaders were perfectly rational, in short, it would be difficult for them to identify when it is time to cut their losses and end a war.

To make matters worse, states fighting a war of choice will face a host of impediments to the rational assessment of different options, and these biases tend to prolong wars longer than necessary rather than ending them too soon. In particular, states in a war of choice are likely to overstate the prospects of securing a better outcome, understate the costs of achieving it, and exaggerate the dangers of getting out. Accordingly, wars of choice are likely to last longer than they should.

Psychological Barriers to Cutting Losses

One obvious barrier to “rational” war termination lies in how human beings process information and weigh the costs and benefits of different courses of action. An extensive literature in social and cognitive psychology has shown that human beings tend to interpret new information in light of their pre-existing beliefs, and therefore tend to update or revise their beliefs more slowly than a purely “rational” decision maker would.⁹ Humans also tend to exaggerate their own strengths, fail to conduct an impartial search for relevant evidence when making key judgments, actively overvalue evidence consistent with pre-existing beliefs, and discount evidence that conflicts with these same convictions. It follows that leaders committed to a particular course of action—such as fighting a war of choice—will be slower to revise their beliefs about the necessity of war in response to evidence suggesting that it is not going well or that the original

decision to fight was erroneous. They will therefore tend to prolong involvement longer than would be optimal.¹⁰

For example, Lyndon Johnson's willingness to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam and to continue the war despite growing difficulties may have stemmed in part from his underlying conviction that the world's most powerful military could not be defeated by a country of Asians "in black pajamas," as well as his belief that American credibility and domestic tranquility were on the line.¹¹ He knew that continuing the war in Vietnam threatened the domestic programs to which he was deeply committed, but it appears to have been hard for LBJ to accept that continued U.S. involvement would not produce a markedly better outcome.

Prospect theory identifies a second mechanism that could reinforce this tendency.¹² It suggests that humans place too much weight on low probability events; that is, we tend to see rare occurrences as more likely to occur than is in fact the case. Decision makers waging a difficult war of choice may therefore be prone to exaggerate the probability of two radically different but unlikely events: (1) a catastrophic collapse of their strategic position in the event of a withdrawal, or (2) total victory if the war continues. The more likely possibilities—a modest setback in the event of withdrawal and a continued stalemate if the war continues—will receive less attention in the decision makers' calculations and the case for disengagement will seem weaker to those responsible for the decision.

Prospect theory also suggests that humans tend to be "loss averse": negative outcomes affect our sense of well-being more than a positive outcome of equivalent magnitude would. As a result, "when things are going badly in a conflict, the aversion to cutting one's losses, often compounded by wishful thinking, is likely to dominate the calculus of the losing side.... To withdraw now is to accept a sure loss and that option is deeply unattractive. The option of hanging on will therefore be relatively attractive, even if the chances of success are small and the cost of delaying failure is high." Note that in this case the problem is an irrational bias that interferes with the rational calculation of utility. As discussed below, this same tendency to prolong a losing war in the hope of gaining a miraculous resurrection may also be a rational course of action when defeat threatens a leader's political or personal survival.

A third "bad reason for sticking to plans" is the familiar "sunk cost effect."¹⁴ After investing substantial amounts of blood and treasure in a war of choice, decision makers may erroneously believe that cutting losses now would be "wasteful" and that it is therefore necessary to keep going. Awareness of this problem led George W. Ball to warn against escalation in Vietnam, because "once we suffer large casualties, we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot—without national

humiliation—stop short of achieving our complete objectives.”¹⁵ Ball’s analysis was essentially correct, but this common tendency nonetheless reflects fallacious reasoning. If continuing a war of choice is unlikely to produce a better outcome, then the fact that losses have already been suffered is irrelevant (from a strategic perspective) and it makes no sense to throw good money after bad, or to throw away more lives needlessly. Yet this sort of reasoning can be a powerful psychological and political tendency, which reinforces concerns about credibility and other ancillary effects.

Finally, the well-known mechanism of “groupthink” is also likely to inhibit attempts to reverse course and cut losses.¹⁶ Participants in a decision-making process may be reluctant to raise doubts about current policy so as not to disturb the group consensus, because they are actively discouraged from doing so by senior members of the group, or because they gain false confidence from the positions held by their colleagues. Alternative views may not get a fair hearing even if someone does raise them, and the fact that a few objections were voiced may even bolster the original decision by allowing group members to tell themselves that “all the options” were considered.¹⁷

In general, these various tendencies are likely to bolster hawkish arguments in favor of continuing a war. As Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Renshon conclude in a recent distillation of this literature, “all the biases in our list favor hawks...these biases have the effect of making wars more likely to begin and more difficult to end.”¹⁸

Organizational Impediments and “Non-Self-Evaluation”

A decision to end a war of choice depends on key decision makers having access to accurate information suggesting that prospects of victory are low. Unfortunately, the normal workings of government bureaucracies make it harder for key decision makers to acquire the information that would encourage them to withdraw. There are three distinct dimensions to this problem.

First, as Stephen Van Evera and others have argued, government organizations display a marked tendency for “non-self-evaluation.”¹⁹ Government bureaucracies are generally hierarchical, and subordinates who challenge the current policy direction run the risk of being marginalized or otherwise penalized by their superiors. Subordinates may therefore tell superiors “what they want to hear”—even when they are explicitly asked to provide honest assessments—leading those who are responsible for the ultimate decision to receive overly optimistic evaluations of progress. Whistle blowers and other dissenters from the current policy are likely to be ostracized within their own agencies, further inhibiting a careful evaluation of the war effort.²⁰ Client regimes have similar incentives to overstate success and exaggerate prospects for victory in order to prevent foreign patrons from deciding to cut losses and withdraw support.²¹

These tendencies may not be a significant problem when a war is going well and there is mostly good news to report, but it will make it harder for top decision makers to realize when a war is going badly and delay recognition that it is time to either revise the existing strategy or to cut one's losses and get out entirely.²²

Second, the main architects of the war have obvious incentives to keep it going until victory is achieved, lest their own reputations and political influence suffer. Advisors who convinced a dictator, a president, or a prime minister that war was a good idea cannot easily counsel withdrawal without admitting that their earlier counsel was faulty. To put it bluntly, the people who get you into a war are not the ones who can get you out. Thus, prominent studies of war termination emphasize that some sort of regime change (or at least a major change in the "governing coalition") is usually necessary to end a war.²³ But because rearranging the governing coalition is politically costly and usually time consuming, wars of choice that are not going well are likely to continue longer than they should.

Third, the organizational incentives of the uniformed military are likely to conflict with this process as well. Even if the military leadership opposed the initial decision to launch a war of choice (as seems to have been the case both in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979 and the U.S. decision to attack Iraq in 2002 to 2003), its job is to achieve victory on behalf of the nation and its leaders will undoubtedly worry about the political and budgetary consequences of admitting defeat. No military organization welcomes losing, and once committed to the field, its leaders—and especially the commanders in the field—are likely to be among the most consistent voices opposing any attempt to cut losses.²⁴

This tendency is likely to be especially prevalent in an asymmetric war of choice, because in this case an objectively stronger army will be in effect admitting that it cannot vanquish a foe that looks much weaker on paper. It should not surprise us that the U.S. Army kept requesting more troops as the situation in Vietnam deteriorated, or that former commanding general Stanley McChrystal repeatedly sought an increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan.²⁵ Powerful elements in the French military wanted to stay the course in Algeria but were eventually outmaneuvered by President Charles de Gaulle (in part because de Gaulle possessed enormous military prestige).²⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev had serious doubts about the Soviet Afghan campaign when he became general secretary, but felt he had to give the Soviet military a year to show results before moving to disengage. Only after increased effort failed to bear fruit did Gorbachev begin assembling a domestic coalition to overrule pro-war forces within the Soviet "military-industrial complex" and arrange a withdrawal.²⁷ In short, political leaders who decide to cut their losses are almost certainly going to face military resistance that magnifies the domestic political costs of disengagement.

Political Obstacles and Politicians' Incentives

In addition to the psychological and bureaucratic barriers to cutting losses, there are also powerful political dynamics that tend to prolong most wars of choice as well. In order to convince the public to support the war—particularly if it does not produce a rapid victory—politicians are likely to portray the enemy as especially evil and/or dangerous, and to warn of grave dangers that might arise if victory is not achieved. For example, in order to persuade the public to support a war in a country of marginal strategic importance, leaders commonly argue that the country's credibility is at stake, thereby coupling the outcome of a minor conflict to the broader defense of more important interests. If efforts to rally public support succeed, however, these same leaders will pay a larger political price if they subsequently try to reverse course, because they will appear to be inviting the very calamities about which they previously warned. Having convinced the public that the enemy is the embodiment of evil, that the nation's credibility is on the line, and that dreadful consequences will occur if they cut and run, politicians may be trapped by their own rhetoric and unable to cut losses even when they believe this is the right decision.

During the Vietnam War, for example, Lyndon Johnson reportedly worried that a withdrawal would produce a domestic political backlash akin to the McCarthy period. As he told biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin:

I knew that if we let Communist aggression succeed in taking over South Vietnam, there would follow in this country an endless national debate—a mean and destructive debate—that would shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy. I knew that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness from the day that the Communists took over in China. I believed that the loss of China had played a large role in the rise of Joe McCarthy. And I knew that all these problems, taken together, were chickenshit compared with what might happen if we lost Vietnam.²⁸

The danger here is greater than simply being trapped by rhetoric used instrumentally to rally public support. In addition, government officials may come to believe the arguments they originally invoked to mobilize the citizenry, and thus genuinely regard a change in course as potentially disastrous. Once political arguments used to build support for the war are internalized in the minds of key decision makers, then the various psychological obstacles to disengagement already discussed come into play and tend to delay disengagement even more.

At the same time, mobilizing the nation for war will discourage critics from raising their voices and make it less likely that any such voices are heard, at least initially. Those who favor ending a war of choice are likely to be accused of being insufficiently patriotic or even treasonous, and their advice is likely to be discounted by a fully aroused populace. Even in democracies with a free press, it may be more difficult for dissidents to make their views known, especially if media content is shaped (or “indexed”) by the nature of elite discussion.²⁹ It will take a significant number of setbacks to disrupt the elite consensus and legitimize dissenting voices, thereby delaying public recognition that the war is going poorly and reducing pressure on decision makers.

Paradoxically, domestic opposition to an unsuccessful war can trigger another war-prolonging dynamic: the temptation to “gamble for resurrection.”³⁰ Leaders presiding over a losing war will fear that defeat will lead to their removal from office, especially if they have convinced the public that victory is all-important. In nondemocratic societies, in fact, accepting defeat may even threaten their personal survival. A leader in this position may be tempted to fight on even when he or she knows the prospects of success are remote, because victory is the only outcome that can save them. Notice that this decision can be entirely rational from the narrow perspective of the individual leader or ruling elite (that is, it need not depend on any of the psychological biases discussed above). In other words, gambling for resurrection may be rational for an individual leader and his/her immediate associates, even if it is not in the best interest of the nation as a whole.³¹

Reputation, Credibility, and the Coupling of Commitments

By definition, wars of choice are usually fought for seemingly small material stakes, but leaders often believe that the outcome of some relatively minor conflict may have far more serious repercussions down the road. First, they may believe that cutting losses today will undermine the nation’s reputation for military prowess and affect perceptions of the overall balance of power, and thus weaken its ability to deter attacks on more vital interests. Second, they may fear that withdrawal will be taken a sign of declining resolve, thereby emboldening adversaries or leading allies to doubt their credibility. Even if the stakes in a particular war do not warrant investing additional blood and treasure, the fear that more important interests may be jeopardized by withdrawal can persuade leaders to expend additional resources for otherwise minor prizes.

Although concerns about the reputational effects of cutting one’s losses appear to be widespread, the anticipated effects are probably much less worrisome than leaders seem to think. Scholarly studies of reputation in international

politics generally find that foreign policy setbacks have only modest and temporary effects on a state's overall reputation, and do not really affect how third parties judge the reliability of other deterrent commitments. In other words, most states do not appear to draw strong inferences about an adversary's conduct in one area or issue from its behavior in other contexts.³² Furthermore, a state that liquidates a costly military commitment may actually put itself in a better position to meet the next challenge (because its resources aren't being dissipated) and it may even be more inclined to respond so as to repair the reputational damage of its earlier retreat. At a minimum, the fear that a decision to cut losses invariably undermines a state's credibility and emboldens adversaries seems simplistic.³³

Of course, a war fought in a seemingly minor arena could be vital to a state's long-run security if the outcome really did have a powerful effect on its strategic position. If defeat jeopardized access to vital resources or a key strategic location, or enabled a rival to acquire these assets, then decision makers should be reluctant to cut their losses. Yet in this instance we are not really talking about a war of choice. If the outcome of a war would have major effects on the balance of power, then it is more of a war of necessity than a war of choice and one would expect rational leaders to devote more resources to trying to win it.

Uncertainty and Staying Power

Warfare is an uncertain business, and battlefield outcomes can be frustratingly ambiguous and difficult to interpret. It didn't take the Ford Motor Company very long to figure out the Edsel was a dud, or for Coca-Cola to undo the replacement of its original formula with "New Coke"; all these companies had to do was look at sales figures and monitor consumer reaction. By contrast, national leaders fighting a war of choice will usually be bombarded with some mixture of good, bad, and ambiguous information. Is a drop in enemy activity a sign that one is winning, or does it mean that the enemy is preparing for a major new offensive? If enemy "body counts" are high, is that a sign of progress or evidence that the enemy army is growing larger and bolder? Even an unmistakable defeat or a clear victory may be misleading, if it leads one's opponent or key third parties to alter their behavior in ways that affect the overall strategic situation. In a war of choice, definitive information that it is time to quit is usually lacking, and there will usually be a plausible alternative to getting out.

Unfortunately, uncertainty and the ambiguity of information will reinforce most of the obstacles to rational assessment identified above. When information is ambiguous, leaders are even less likely to revise pre-existing beliefs and subordinates seeking to tell superiors what they want to hear will be able to spin

a favorable story without actually deceiving anyone. In warfare, unfortunately, only outright victory (or defeat) sends an unmistakable message.

The Danger of Infinite Innovation

Finally, wartime opponents are engaged in a constant process of strategic innovation and response, and great powers in a war of choice usually have ample reserves to continue the fight. Dan Reiter argues that “a belligerent will ignore bad news from the front and fight on only if it has some hope of turning the tide in the future,” but in wars of choice leaders can almost always come up with some new initiative that might turn failure into success.³⁴ Commanding generals can be replaced, more troops can be sent, the field of battle can be expanded, new weapons can be utilized, or a new strategy can be adopted, all in the hope that it will reverse the tide and lead to a better outcome.

As Britain’s brutal and ultimately successful campaign against the Boers demonstrates, sometimes a new strategy enables a great power to end a war of choice on more or less favorable terms.³⁵ In other cases, however, the key to victory remains elusive no matter what the great power does. In Vietnam, for example, U.S. leaders sent more troops, replaced General William Westmoreland with Creighton Abrams, conducted massive aerial bombings of North Vietnam and the “Ho Chi Minh trail,” invaded Cambodia to attack enemy sanctuaries there, implemented counterinsurgency strategies such as the “strategic hamlets” program and Operation Phoenix, and tried to build up their client’s forces through “Vietnamization.” Yet none of these initiatives enabled the United States to achieve the goal of an independent, noncommunist South Vietnam. In much the same way, the Soviet Union, Israel, and France all tried a variety of different commanders and various strategies in Afghanistan, southern Lebanon, and Algeria respectively. Yet even when a new strategy worked (as in Algeria), it could not overcome the larger strategic problems that each state faced.³⁶

The problem, in short, is that any time a decision maker is tempted to cut losses and disengage, there is likely to be some new option for continuing the war that might lead to a better outcome. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, a strong state that is losing a war of choice will eventually do the right thing and get out, but only after trying all the alternatives.³⁷

To sum up: there are a host of independent but mutually reinforcing reasons why it is easier to get into a war of choice than it is to get out of one (unless victory is achieved relatively quickly, of course). By the time national leaders are seriously considering cutting their losses, the available options will be unattractive and the temptation to stay the course will be hard to resist. As a result, strong states waging a war of choice will not cut their losses until they

have expended a lot of effort and tried a number of different strategies, but to no avail.

How to Get Out

Despite the obstacles just identified, strong states do eventually decide to cut their losses and end costly wars that they have not yet won. But how do they do this? Can strong states reverse course without damaging their strategic position and reputation? If so, how?

What Is at Stake

A state contemplating disengagement has two main concerns. The first concern is the direct effect of disengagement on its overall strategic position: will ending the war affect the balance of power in some significant way or create other worrisome vulnerabilities? For example, withdrawal might lead to the loss of valuable bases, and might even allow them to be taken over by an adversary (as when the Soviet Union began using the former U.S. naval base at Cam Ranh Bay). Accordingly, states seeking to end a war of choice will try to do so in a way that does not make them significantly more vulnerable in the future. As discussed above, however, the direct strategic stakes in a true war of choice are not likely to be that large, and great powers usually have several ways of compensating for any negative effects on their strategic position.

The second concern is that defeat and/or disengagement will have damaging effects on the state's reputation. In particular, leaders contemplating a disengagement often worry that acknowledgement of defeat will cause their allies to lose confidence and bandwagon with the adversary, as suggested by the Vietnam-era "domino theory." They may also believe that adversaries will become more confident and aggressive, because they view disengagement as a sign of weakness or as a lack of resolve. If these reputational effects are significant, then disengaging from a conflict that is of little direct material consequence could still have strategically significant consequences. Accordingly, a state that is trying to cut its losses will want to minimize the potential damage to its overall reputation.

To address these two concerns, great powers seeking to end a war of choice have at least three broad options.

Passing the Buck

The optimal strategy when liquidating a war of choice is to pass the buck to someone else.³⁸ In effect, the buck passer stops using its own resources to maintain its interests and hands primary responsibility over to another country.

Assuming that this is done successfully, the disengaging state's strategic interests are still protected but it no longer has to pay the costs. And the reputational consequences may be minimal, precisely because the decision can be defended as a more rational allocation of existing resources.

Classic examples of successful buck passing include Britain's decision to turn responsibility for the security of Greece and Turkey over to the United States after World War II and to give up its League of Nations mandate to govern Palestine and turn the problem back over to the newly formed United Nations. Britain's decision to withdraw its forces from east of Suez in 1968—another buck successfully passed to the United States—fits this same pattern as well. France tried but failed to pass the buck in Indochina to the United States in 1954, but the United States had in effect “caught the buck” by the end of the decade.³⁹ The EU passed the buck in Bosnia to the United States in 1995, only to have Washington pass the (greatly reduced) burden back when it withdrew nine years later.

Despite its obvious attractions, buck passing has two obvious limitations. First, there may be no “buck catcher” available to take over. Britain could pass the buck to the United States at the onset of the Cold War, but the United States had no comparable buck-catching options when it withdrew from Vietnam in 1975. Second, buck passing may fail if the buck catcher tries to shoulder the responsibility but proves unable to do so. If important strategic stakes are involved and the buck catcher falters, the disengaging state's interests will not be protected and it will pay a larger price for withdrawal.

A variation on this approach to disengagement is to rely upon a local balance of power to contain any subsequent threat. When the United States finally withdrew from Vietnam, for example, balance-of-power dynamics soon reemerged and prevented the falling dominoes that U.S. leaders had long feared. Not only did several local states develop regional balancing mechanisms, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), but bitter rivalries soon arose between the communist regimes in Vietnam, Kampuchea, and China. Those who now call for bringing regional powers to help devise a postwar settlement in Afghanistan or Iraq are in effect looking for a way to pass the buck to local states whose interests are more directly affected and thus shift most (if not all) of the burden to them.

Compensating Countermeasures

If buck passing is not an option and disengagement may affect important strategic interests, then a state seeking to cut its losses can take direct steps to mitigate these concerns. If disengagement means the loss of an important base, for example, it can try to negotiate new base rights and redeploy its existing assets.

Losing the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay did not affect the U.S. ability to project power in the Pacific, because it had many other facilities available and Cam Ranh Bay was most useful for supplying a war effort that had ended. Disengaging states can allay concerns about the balance of power by conducting a visible arms buildup, which may in any case be necessary to redress losses produced by the war itself. States concerned about a serious degrading of their strategic position can also pursue new alliance arrangements or fight “credibility wars” to demonstrate to others that their overall capabilities have not been significantly impaired.

In most cases, reestablishing a sound strategic position should not be especially difficult for the simple reason that most wars of choice do not in fact involve large and direct material stakes. Winning such a war may be desirable but is unlikely to alter the overall balance of power very much, but by the same logic, losing such a war (or deciding to cut one’s losses and withdraw), probably won’t do enormous damage. This was the position that George Ball argued (unsuccessfully) during Vietnam; as he wrote in a prescient memorandum in June 1965, “we have tended to exaggerate the losses involved in a compromise settlement in South Vietnam...[it] should not have a major impact on the credibility of our commitments around the world.”⁴⁰

In fact, leaders who cut their losses in a timely fashion may actually place their country in a more favorable position over the longer term, precisely because they will no longer be squandering resources on a peripheral contest and can concentrate on arenas that matter. In this respect, it is sobering to realize that the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan now costs at least five times more each year than Afghanistan’s entire GDP and is consuming more and more top-level attention.

Protecting One’s Reputation

As discussed above, prior research on reputation suggests that disengagement and/or defeat usually has less significant effects on reputation than national leaders often fear.⁴¹ In the real world, dominoes do not fall very far and states rarely jump on a bandwagon, provided that the losing side still retains significant capabilities. Nonetheless, the possibility that defeat or disengagement might have ripple effects elsewhere cannot be entirely excluded. Fortunately, there are a number of strategies that states can employ to minimize adverse reputational consequences.

1. Redefining “Victory”

One obvious strategy is to redefine one’s objectives so that a seeming defeat can be portrayed as a success. Of course, if costs are mounting and outright victory

seems less likely, rational leaders should revise their expectations downward, abandoning loftier or nonessential objectives and trying to achieve only essential strategic goals.

During the Korean War, for example, the United States abandoned its original goal of reunifying all of Korea and eventually made a further concession by agreeing to re-establish the more difficult-to-defend thirty-eighth parallel as the border separating North and South. China made its own concessions in the armistice talks as well, most notably over issue of voluntary versus forcible repatriation of prisoners of war. The Bush administration abandoned its initial hopes of “regional transformation” once the occupation of Iraq went south, and eventually agreed to a timetable for withdrawal and Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that conformed more to Iraqi preferences than to its own.⁴² One sees similar behavior in the Obama administration’s suggestion that its primary goal in Afghanistan is to deny al-Qaeda a “safe haven,” and that it is not trying to create “some sort of Central Asian Valhalla.”⁴³

Lowering one’s sights in this way thus reflects a more realistic appraisal of what is in fact achievable. At the same time, efforts to repackage failure as success may also be intended largely to save face. Such efforts may be directed primarily at one’s own citizens, to lessen the political fallout of a decision to withdraw. But it may also be intended to convey to foreign audiences that the disengaging state has not really been defeated. Such efforts typically involve trying to negotiate specific terms for disengagement, so that what might appear to be a defeat on the battlefield can be represented as a genuine bargain achieved through skill and determination.

As David Edelstein has emphasized, however, efforts to save face in this fashion rarely succeed.⁴⁴ Most observers will be well aware when a great power has scaled back its objectives or accepted peace terms that it had previously rejected, and its ability to guarantee the terms of its withdrawal tends to diminish as disengagement proceeds. Thus, even if it manages to reach a negotiated settlement that seems to protect some of its interests, its capacity to enforce the agreement may be small once it is gone. Few observers were fooled by Nixon’s claim that he had achieved “peace with honor” in Vietnam, and Washington’s ability to enforce the terms of the 1973 peace accords vanished as soon as U.S. forces were withdrawn. Although Lester Grau credits the Soviet Union with a plan for withdrawal from Afghanistan that was “masterfully executed,” and says that it “provides an excellent model for disengagement,” he recognizes that the Soviet Union could not permanently protect the government of President Mohammed Najibullah after disengaging. Once the USSR itself collapsed and its subsidies to Najibullah ended, a coalition of warlords and mujahedin quickly toppled the demoralized government in Kabul.⁴⁵

2. Reframing the Problem

A closely related strategy is for leaders to redefine the nature of the main challenge facing the nation so that disengagement from a losing war looks like an intelligent strategic adjustment rather than a military defeat. Thus, the Ehud Barak government in Israel justified withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 by arguing that the original purpose of the invasion—to expel the PLO—had long since been achieved, and that a continued presence was in fact making a new threat (Hezbollah) more popular and thus more dangerous. An even clearer example is President Obama’s efforts to shift the focus of the U.S. “war on terror” from Iraq to Afghanistan. The Bush administration had repeatedly called Iraq “the central front” of the war on terror, but Obama ran for president arguing that Iraq was diverting attention from al-Qaeda, and that the United States should be focusing on Afghanistan or Pakistan. In short, this strategy seeks to make *continuing* a particular war look like the principal threat to the nation’s security, and to make getting out look like the obvious solution. Disengagement is not defeat; it is simply a prudent realignment of one’s forces to meet the real threat.

3. Decoupling Commitments

A third and more promising way to limit reputational damage and/or preserve deterrent credibility is to find convincing ways to “decouple” the war of choice from which a state is disengaging from the commitments it is determined to maintain.⁴⁶ In many cases, in fact, a state can differentiate the conflict from which it is withdrawing from other strategic commitments, in order to explain why the outcome in one arena conveys no information about the country’s likely behavior elsewhere. The greater the objective differences between two commitments (for example, geographic separation, regime type, material interests, etc.), the easier such efforts will be. In effect, anything that makes it harder to link two commitments (for credibility purposes) makes it easier to decouple them.

The credibility of the U.S. commitment to NATO was not affected by withdrawal from Vietnam, for example, because the two arenas were on opposite sides of the world and it was obvious that Vietnam was of little intrinsic strategic value, while Western Europe was a major center of industrial power that was important to keep out of Soviet hands.

This example suggests that states can limit reputational damage by taking concrete steps to reinforce credibility elsewhere, such as sending more troops to defend critical areas or engaging in a military buildup.⁴⁷ Getting out of Vietnam enabled the United States to rebuild its army and strengthen its defenses in Europe, which if anything made the U.S. commitment there more credible. Similarly, if the United States were worried about security in the

Persian Gulf following a withdrawal from Iraq and/or Afghanistan, it could rebuild the Rapid Deployment Force and establish deeper links with regional allies such as Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, in order to make clear that it was still committed to upholding a balance of power in the region.

This line of argument may also explain why disengaging may be harder for some states than for others. Because it lacks fully established borders and at various times has occupied a number of adjacent territories (Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and southern Lebanon), Israel may find it harder to withdraw from one area without encouraging its adversaries to believe that additional concessions may be achievable in the future. In particular, it may be more difficult for Israel to draw a clear distinction between its presence in southern Lebanon between 1982 and 2000 and its current military presence on the Golan Heights and the West Bank: if Israel can be driven out of the former, its adversaries may assume it can eventually be forced to give up the latter.⁴⁸ In general, the more a given war of choice resembles other military commitments, the greater the danger of reputational damage in the event of a withdrawal.

Reputational damage can be limited further by disengaging at the behest of one's allies. Such a request could come from the clients on whose behalf one is fighting, or from other allies in more important strategic contexts. If this sort of justification can be arranged, then the decision to withdraw can be portrayed as either a simple decision to honor a request from one's local partner, or as a "strategic adjustment" intended to keep more important allies happy. Among other things, allies elsewhere are even less likely to question one's future credibility when a disengaging power is essentially doing what its allies requested.

4. Finding a Scapegoat

Finally, states can also minimize the reputational consequences of withdrawal by finding a convincing scapegoat. New leaders can blame defeat on their predecessors, or argue that the war should never have been undertaken in the first place, because their own reputations are not bound up in the prior decision. (This is yet another reason why the termination of a war often requires the election of new leaders or the appointment of new advisors.) Alternatively, a great power seeking to disengage can try to pin the blame on its allies and partners. If the Obama administration wanted to disengage from Afghanistan, for example, it could announce that the Karzai government is simply too corrupt and incompetent to merit additional U.S. support, thereby pinning the blame for failure on indigenous forces rather on its own shortcomings.⁴⁹

Indeed, letting an incompetent client fail might even have positive reputational consequences. In particular, if other states hoping to elicit a great power's protection infer that they must prove themselves worthy of support, they will work harder at being capable partners.

Necessary Conditions: A Coalition for Change and a New “Theory of Victory”

As Elizabeth Stanley and others have noted, decisions to end a war usually require major shifts in the governing coalition in one or more of the warring parties. This may occur because key leaders die, resign, leave the cabinet, etc., thereby shifting the preferences of one or more of the belligerents so that each side’s “bargaining space” overlaps, thereby making a negotiated settlement possible. Shifts within governing coalitions may also alter the information environment available to leaders and/or publics, making the case for disengagement clearer.

It follows that leaders seeking to end a war of choice must assemble a governing coalition to support their effort. Politicians trying to extricate themselves from a costly commitment will have to search for support within military ranks, rearrange their cabinets and/or governing coalitions behind the decision, and convince key international allies to endorse the new policy as well. Even when a war is going badly and prospects for success are bleak, disengagement is an intensely political process requiring skill, persistence, and even good luck.⁵⁰

Finally, disengaging from an unsuccessful war of choice probably requires formulating an alternative “theory” of national security that makes disengagement seem like the smart strategic choice. Given the barriers to cutting losses discussed in the first half of this paper, advocates of disengagement cannot simply point to the costs of the war or the dim prospects for success and expect to carry the day in political debate. Instead, their efforts will be enhanced if they can develop a coherent account of the state’s interests that explains why disengagement will not jeopardize vital interests and is in fact necessary to preserve them. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon used this basic approach to justify the removal of Israeli settlements from Gaza, arguing that retaining them threatened Israel’s status as a Jewish-majority state. His successor, Ehud Olmert, justified the need to pursue a two-state solution on similar grounds, saying that failure threatened Israel’s very existence.⁵¹ In effect, each leader was positing a “theory” of national security that downplayed Israel’s traditional emphasis on territory and focused instead on the number of Palestinians under Israeli control.

Exploiting Opportunities

Last but not least, politicians seeking to disengage should remain alert for catalytic moments that may facilitate a policy shift. Incontrovertible evidence that it is time to quit may never be available, but especially vivid or dramatic events may have disproportionate effects on public attitudes and provide opportunities for new policy initiatives. The 1968 Tet offensive played a critical role in Johnson’s deliberations about the Vietnam War (and his decision not to run for re-election),

even if the actual military consequences were misinterpreted.⁵² Similarly, a helicopter crash in February 1997 that killed seventy-three Israeli soldiers riveted public attention on its continued presence in southern Lebanon and led Ehud Barak to make withdrawal a campaign issue in the upcoming election. Positive events—such as the death or capture of a key enemy leader—may also provide opportunities to disengage from a position of strength, if leaders choose to use it in this way. If the United States were to capture Osama bin Laden, for example, it would provide an ideal moment to declare victory and come home.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, ending wars of choice may be especially difficult, because it is almost always possible to continue them and because the case for disengagement may never be completely compelling. Psychological, bureaucratic, and organizational barriers will make it harder for leaders to realize that it is time to cut their losses and quit, and may make it politically costly to do so even when they suspect that disengagement is in fact the better choice.

The good news is that ending a war of choice is usually less costly than leaders commonly fear. The direct stakes are rarely large, the reputational consequences are likely to be minor, and great powers usually have many ways to compensate for any material setbacks and to minimize reputational damage. The hard part is deciding to end a war of choice and finding the political will to disengage; the easy part is living with the consequences.

Notes

- 1 U.S. leaders' recognition that Vietnam would be difficult to win is the central theme of Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1979).
- 2 See Fred C. Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 83.
- 3 Quoted in Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 234.
- 4 According to Richard Haass, "wars of choice tend to involve stakes or interests that are less clearly 'vital,' along with the existence of viable alternative policies, be they diplomacy, inaction, or something else but still other than the use of military force." See his discussion in *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 10.
- 5 Examples of recent proxy wars include the Soviet war against the Afghan mujahedin (who were backed by the United States and others), the Angolan Civil War (which involved outside interference by the United States, Cuba, and South Africa), or the Middle East Wars of 1956, 1967, and 1973.

- 6 Of course, a great power waging a war of choice might well decide to end (or at least to downgrade) some peripheral conflict if a major challenge arose elsewhere and it concluded that the new threat was more serious. As discussed later in the essay, this is one scenario where issues of credibility and reputation are less germane and cutting losses is likely to be easier.
- 7 Key works in this literature include: James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Theories of War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995); Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Paul Pillar, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, "A Bargaining Model of War and Peace: Anticipating the Onset, Duration and, Outcome of War," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 4 (October 2002); Robert Powell, "Bargaining Theory and International Conflict," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (June 2002); and Branislav L. Slantchev, "The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiations," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (November 2003).
- 8 In the Seven Years' War (1757 to 1763), Prussia's declining fortunes were rescued when Russian Empress Elizabeth died unexpectedly in February 1762. Her successor, Tsar Peter III, withdrew the Russian forces, allowing Prussia a reprieve that ultimately led to victory. In the latter stages of World War II, Joseph Goebbels reportedly sought to console Adolf Hitler by reading Carlyle's account of this incident aloud to him. See Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 734.
- 9 See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); and also Richards J. Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), chapter 9.
- 10 According to Jonathan Baron, "in any war in which one side clearly loses, the loss is apparent before it occurs, but both the government and people of the losing side continue to believe they can see victory just around the corner." See Jonathan Baron, *Thinking and Deciding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 1994), 282.
- 11 See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983), 320.
- 12 See Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," *Econometrica* 47 (1979). Applications to international politics include Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Renshon, "Why Hawks Win," *Foreign Policy* 154 (January 2007); and Barbara Farnham, ed., *Avoiding Losses/Taking Risks: Prospect Theory in International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- 13 Kahneman and Renshon, "Why Hawks Win," 38.
- 14 The phrase is Jonathan Baron's. See his *Thinking and Deciding*, 507 (see note 10).
- 15 George W. Ball, "Memorandum for the President: A Compromise Solution in South Vietnam," in *The Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel edition, vol. 4 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 617–19.

- 16 Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).
- 17 See Alexander L. George and Eric Stern, "Harnessing Conflict in Foreign Policy Making: From Devil's to Multiple Advocacy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (June 2006).
- 18 Kahneman and Renshon, "Why Hawks Win," 36 (see note 12).
- 19 Stephen Van Evera, "Why States Believe Foolish Ideas: Non-Self-Evaluation by States and Societies," (unpublished ms., 2002, available at http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/vanevera/why_states_believe_foolish_ideas.pdf); and Aaron Wildavsky, "The Self-Evaluating Organization," *Public Administration Review* 32, no. 5 (September/October 1972).
- 20 During the Iraq War, for example, a mid-level army officer (Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling) published a scathing but convincing critique of senior officer leadership, based on his own combat experience in the field. Although many of his criticisms helped produce important changes in the Army's counterinsurgency strategy, his candor did not enhance his own prospects for advancement. See Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling, "A Failure of Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2007.
- 21 As a South Vietnamese general told an American official, "Your Secretary of Defense loves statistics. We Vietnamese can give him all he wants. If you want them to go up, they will go up. If you want them to go down, they will go down." Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Strategy During the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 253.
- 22 Given this tendency, it should not surprise us that the main instigators of the so-called surge in Iraq in 2007 came from outside the regular chain of command and included both retired officers and a number of prominent civilians. See Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
- 23 See Ikle, *Every War Must End*, chap. 4 (see note 2); Elizabeth Stanley, *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Stanley, "Ending the Korean War: The Role of Domestic Coalition Shifts in Overcoming Obstacles to Peace," *International Security* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2009); and Robert Rothstein, "Domestic Politics and Peacemaking: Reconciling Incompatible Imperatives," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 392, no. 1 (November 1970).
- 24 See in particular Morton H. Halperin, "War Termination as a Problem in Civil-Military Relations," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 392 (November 1970), especially 88–89, 92–93.
- 25 It may have been easier General Matthew Ridgeway to recommend that the United States *not* intervene to rescue the French effort in Indochina in 1954 simply because U.S. military forces had not yet been committed and the prestige and bureaucratic clout of the army was not at stake.

- 26 On de Gaulle's intricate maneuvers to extricate France from Algeria, see Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chap. 7.
- 27 On Gorbachev's policy toward Afghanistan, see Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 2 (April–June 2007); Sarah E. Mendelson, "Internal Battles and External Wars: Politics, Learning and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *World Politics* 45, no. 3 (April 1993); and Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 28 See Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 252–53.
- 29 Recent research on media coverage in wartime suggests that media organizations "index" their handling of these topics in response to elite opinion. If elites are largely united, then there will be few authoritative voices challenging the war and media organizations will tend to ignore opposing views. Only when the elite divides do media organizations begin to disseminate information and opinion challenging the case for war. See Lance W. Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States," *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 2 (1990); and John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1999," in Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia, eds., *Decisionmaking in a Glass House: Mass Media, Public Opinion, and American and European Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
- 30 On this phenomenon, see Hein E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and George W. Downs and David Ročke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War," *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (May 1994).
- 31 The tendency to gamble for resurrection varies across regime types and according to the type of conflict, and it may be a less powerful factor in a war of choice than in a war of national survival, simply because the danger of an unsuccessful leader's being ousted and/or killed will be reduced when the stakes are small. One might hypothesize that democratic leaders are more likely to prolong wars of choice than secure dictators are, simply because the latter won't worry as much about the political consequences of defeat. On the general phenomenon, see Goemans, *War and Punishment*.
- 32 Studies suggesting that concerns about reputation and credibility are exaggerated include Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965–1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

- 33 Hakan Tunç suggests that a premature U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be a major boon to Islamic terrorists such as al-Qaeda, who would undoubtedly portray this as a triumph that confirmed their claims that United States was either a paper tiger or a “weak horse.” See his “Reputation and U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq,” *Orbis* 52, no. 4 (Fall 2008). Similar arguments are now being made regarding the war in Afghanistan as well, but it is not clear how seriously one should take them. Islamic radicals would no doubt proclaim a great victory and try to use it to rally support (just as Soviet ideologues saw Vietnam as a triumph for international communism), but removing the U.S. military presence would also eliminate one of the main justifications for jihad. The net effect on their recruitment efforts is thus far from obvious.
- 34 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 38 (see note 7).
- 35 On the Boer Case, see Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chap. 4.
- 36 On Algeria, see Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands* (see note 26).
- 37 There is an obvious selection effect here: if a strategic innovation leads to victory (or at least an acceptable political outcome), then the need to cut losses vanishes. Thus, the whole problem of cutting losses arises only in those cases in which victory is proving elusive.
- 38 General discussions of “buck passing” include Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Thomas Christensen and Jack L. Snyder, “Chained Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1990); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 157–63 and chap. 8.
- 39 Note that in this case France had given up its own claims in Indochina, and its only strategic interest was a diffuse concern that communism not spread further.
- 40 Ball, “Memorandum for the President” (see note 15).
- 41 See Mercer, *Reputation in International Politics* (see note 32); Press, *Calculating Credibility* (see note 32); and Hopf, *Peripheral Visions* (see note 32).
- 42 On this point, see Patrick Cockburn, “America Concedes,” *London Review of Books*, 30, no. 24 (December 18, 2008).
- 43 In a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in August 2009, President Obama said of Afghanistan, “This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans.” For a dissenting view, see Stephen M. Walt, “The Safe Haven Myth,” at http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/08/18/the_safe_haven_myth.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had previously sought to lower expectations of U.S. goals by saying, "If we set ourselves the objective of creating some sort of central Asian Valhalla over there, we will lose, because nobody in the world has that kind of time, patience and money." See Ann Tyson, "Gates Predicts Slog in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2009.

- 44 See David M. Edelstein, "Exit Strategies, When, How and Why Do States End Military Interventions," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, March 26, 2008; David M. Edelstein, "Trap Doors: Exiting Military Interventions and the Logic of Saving Face," unpublished ms., Georgetown University, 2009.
- 45 Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos."
- 46 On the general phenomenon of "decoupling," see Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), chaps. 6 and 7.
- 47 Jervis refers to such actions as "indices," which he defines as "statements or actions that carry some inherent evidence that the image projected is correct," as opposed to mere "signals" which are actions intended to convey a particular image but which "do not contain inherent credibility." A verbal statement of commitment is a signal, but sending troops to reinforce a commitment would be an index, especially if it involved high costs. "Indices" are virtually identical to the concept of a "costly signal." See Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 18–19.
- 48 Interestingly, Israel has tried to distinguish between these various commitments in a number of ways. When withdrawing from Lebanon, for example, the Barak government emphasized that it was retreating across a recognized international border, and went to some lengths to make sure the border was delineated properly. By contrast, there is no official border between Israel proper and the West Bank (the pre-1967 "Green Line" was only an armistice line). Similarly, Israel has officially extended Israeli law to the Golan Heights (an act of de facto annexation), thereby placing it in a slightly different category as well.
- 49 A more Machiavellian approach would be to set a firm deadline for a set of unrealistic internal reforms (in the expectation that they would not be met), and then use the local government's failure to meet these goals as a pretext for withdrawal.
- 50 This theme is especially evident in Lustick's account of de Gaulle's lengthy campaign to extricate France from Algeria. See *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*, chap. 7 (see note 26).
- 51 Sharon told a French audience in 2005 that "The future of the Jewish people depends on the nature of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.... In this spirit we initiated the disengagement plan...[t]hat would secure the Jewish majority in the land of Israel." See Aluf Benn, "Trading Spaces," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2005. In November 2007, Olmert told interviewers that "If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights...then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished." See Aluf Benn, David Landau, Barak Ravid, and Shmuel Rosner, "Olmert to *Ha'aretz*:"

Two-State Solution, or Israel is Done For,” *Ha’aretz* (online), November 29, 2007, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/olmert-to-haaretz-two-state-solution-or-israel-is-done-for-1.234201>.

- 52 The offensive was a major military setback for the North Vietnamese, but the scale of the attack contradicted official claims that the U.S. was winning and raised new doubts about the wisdom of the war itself. According to Dan Hallin, “Before Tet, editorial commentary by television journalists ran nearly four to one in favor of administration policy; after Tet, two to one against. Before Tet, of the battles journalists ventured to describe as victories or defeats, 62% were described as victories for the United States, 28% as defeats, and 2% as inconclusive or as stalemates. After Tet, the figures were 44% victories, 32% defeats, and 24% inconclusive.” See his *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 161–162.

IX. A U.S. Military Withdrawal from the Greater Middle East: Impact on Terrorism

Daniel Byman

Director, Center for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University
Senior Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution

Some pundits and analysts have argued that a withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the Middle East would decrease the threat of anti-U.S. terrorism from Islamic extremist groups such as al-Qaeda.¹ After all, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East is part of what drives al-Qaeda, especially the core of the organization that surrounds its leader, Osama bin Laden, to attack U.S. targets and the U.S. homeland. Elements of this argument are valid, but its simplistic application misses much of the picture—even when broader U.S. interests are excluded, and counterterrorism concerns alone are examined. Clearly, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East is a tremendous source of anger for the al-Qaeda core, and many other Muslims also oppose it. Yet even for the core of the organization, the U.S. military presence is only one motivating factor for anti-U.S. terrorism, and for the many al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations and sympathizers, the U.S. presence in the Middle East is even less important. Moreover, the definition of withdrawal for al-Qaeda is broad: combat troops are the most important component of the U.S. presence to al-Qaeda members, but as part of the desired withdrawal, they would add U.S. trainers and intelligence personnel, and in some cases even the entire U.S. diplomatic and cultural presence. In some cases, a U.S. withdrawal would carry dangers to U.S. allies, particularly those at risk of destabilization from terrorism. In the case of Pakistan, allowing a terrorist haven there to continue without hindrance risks not only greater strife in Pakistan and associated dangerous regional consequences but also the increased possibility that al-Qaeda would be able to orchestrate anti-U.S. attacks from its base there. In the end, the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the region would likely have mixed results on the threat of terrorism, some of which are difficult to predict with certainty and a few of which could prove exceptionally dangerous.

This essay first briefly reviews the argument that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Middle East would aid counterterrorism, including several key

distinctions to consider when evaluating this argument. It then discusses the limits to this argument, such as several risks that U.S. withdrawal would bring to U.S. allies. It concludes by noting some broader implications of this argument for U.S. policy.

The Case for Withdrawal and Key Distinctions

When discussing the impact of withdrawal on al-Qaeda, it is vital to recognize that the term *al-Qaeda* is used to refer to different things and even distinct groups, and the effects of a withdrawal would vary considerably by component. The components can be broken down as follows, though in reality these groups overlap:

- ***The small core around bin Laden.*** Probably numbering in the hundreds or low thousands, al-Qaeda has a group of dedicated and mostly skilled operatives who have sworn loyalty to bin Laden. They see themselves as a vanguard, an elite group that understands the Muslim community's true interests and would serve as the point of the spear for a revolution in the Muslim world.² This group often focuses on high-profile terrorist attacks and has carried out many attacks that were centralized in their direction and planning, such as the September 11, 2001, strikes in the U.S. and the bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.
- ***Active jihadists trained by al-Qaeda.*** Al-Qaeda has run training camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, and elsewhere since the late 1980s. Tens of thousands of men have attended these camps—a RAND study that examined a trove of documents discovered in Afghanistan and elsewhere estimated that twenty thousand fighters have gone through al-Qaeda camps;³ other reports place the number much higher. Some of the trainees fought or are fighting in wars in the countries where they trained, while others have gone back to their home countries to wage jihad. Still others have died, been arrested, dropped out, or otherwise are no longer active in al-Qaeda. The men who have trained at al-Qaeda camps are often known to al-Qaeda, both bureaucratically and individually, and many are sympathetic to at least some aspects of the movement.⁴
- ***Jihadist-linked insurgencies.*** Al-Qaeda supports a Salafi-jihadist credo, elements of which were or are shared by a range of full-blown or proto-insurgencies around the Muslim world. Examples have included Egyptian Islamic Jihad; the Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan in Yemen; the Islamic Army in Iraq; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia; Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan; and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. After negotiating terms with the al-Qaeda core leadership,

a number of these organizations have taken on the al-Qaeda brand name, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and al-Qaeda in Iraq. Other groups have some sympathy for al-Qaeda and links with some individual fighters, such as the Shebab in Somalia, the Islamic Group in Egypt, and various Chechen groups in Russia and Chechnya. Some members of these groups at times cooperate with al-Qaeda on terrorism. For example, Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan fighters reportedly cooperated with al-Qaeda in the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000 and the subsequent attack on the *Limburg*.⁵ The density of the links to al-Qaeda, the command relationship, and other important factors vary by group and historical period. Many of the ties are personal as well as organizational.

- **Local jihadists.** Some recruits embrace al-Qaeda's ideology and take up its call to act but have not gone to Afghanistan and Pakistan or perhaps even met a member of the al-Qaeda core. Although the impact of these home-grown jihadists is often exaggerated, nonetheless they are quite real and at times have proven deadly. In these instances, *al-Qaeda* is more an ideology than a distinct movement.⁶

Although these categories are analytically discrete, in practice they overlap considerably. A local jihadist may over time join a jihadist-linked insurgency, travel to Pakistan for training at the hands of al-Qaeda, or both. While in Pakistan, or perhaps even in his own country, he may meet a member of al-Qaeda and receive some instruction. Some operatives may go back and forth between local groups and al-Qaeda, cooperating because of past personal connections forged in training camps or ideological sympathy. Thus to different degrees, al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and sympathetic individuals have a presence in dozens of countries. One of bin Laden's successes by the late 1990s was to bring these different components of jihad into a greater degree of harmony and cooperation; this coherence, however, has varied since 9/11, as discussed below.

The al-Qaeda core considers the U.S. military presence in the Middle East an outrage, and most of the pro-withdrawal arguments focus on this grievance.⁷ Starting in 1996, the organization openly cited the U.S. presence as justification for attacks on U.S. military forces and, in 1998, this was part of its rationale for calling for attacks on U.S. civilians as well—a threat that was soon made good when al-Qaeda bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and, two years later, bombed the USS *Cole* while it was in port in Yemen. Al-Qaeda's opposition to U.S. troops has wide support from the citizens of every Arab country, as well as in such non-Arab countries as Pakistan, where the U.S. military presence is extremely unpopular. So even beyond motivating current group members, the U.S. presence inspires some new members to join up, helps

the group raise money, and makes governments more hesitant to crack down on terrorism.

A withdrawal of the U.S. military presence would reduce the number of potential targets. U.S. military bases, visiting naval craft, and personnel all would be less exposed if they were not in terrorist hotbeds such as Iraq and Pakistan, among others. Moreover, much of the U.S. presence in noncombat zones such as Qatar only supports the U.S. presence elsewhere and could be reduced if the U.S. withdrew from other parts of the region. This presence is often located in remote, well-guarded parts of the host countries. Nevertheless, in 1996, Iranian-backed terrorists successfully attacked the remote and well-guarded Khobar Towers complex, killing nineteen Americans.⁸ In 2000, the USS *Cole* was attacked by a suicide bomber on a boat. Americans in Kuwait, Jordan, and elsewhere have also been killed in jihadist-linked killings. As opportunity often guides terrorist targeting, reducing the numbers of targets would also reduce the likelihood of an attack (or, more accurately, would often lead terrorists to attack less well guarded targets).

Limits to the Withdrawal Logic

Clearly the U.S. military presence in the Middle East angers members of the al-Qaeda core, but the organization has a host of grievances against the U.S. that go beyond the absence or presence of troops in various countries. Reducing al-Qaeda's embrace of anti-U.S. terrorism to one factor is mistaken, and misses much of the organization's essence. (Other commentators often posit U.S. support for Israel in a similarly mistaken monocausal explanation for al-Qaeda's hostility.)

Al-Qaeda has several other grievances against the U.S. in addition to its emphasis on U.S. troops. Al-Qaeda is hostile to Israel, and it correctly sees the U.S. as Israel's most important patron—even though U.S. military forces play at most a minor role in this relationship, which is primarily economic and diplomatic. (The U.S., of course, is a major arms supplier to Israel as well as a provider of billions in aid each year.) Indeed, one of the bombers responsible for the July 7, 2005 attacks in London did so because of British "oppression" in Palestine and "British support of the Jews," a description that would surprise many Israelis. Another major grievance is U.S. support for various pro-Western regimes in the Middle East, such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Some of these regimes have hosted U.S. forces (for example, Saudi Arabia), others are home to important U.S. logistics bases (for example, Egypt), and still others are simply allies that have an important intelligence relationship with the U.S. Al-Qaeda's rhetoric paints all these countries as U.S. puppets, claiming that U.S. backing is what keeps them in power. Indeed, for much of the organization these regimes are the true problem, and there are many members

who want to focus on fighting guerrilla struggles against them—members who act, in Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon's words, as "quartermaster[s] for jihad."⁹

The limits to the impact of a U.S. military withdrawal are even clearer when we go beyond the al-Qaeda core and other jihadist groups. A number of countries have hosted large numbers of U.S. troops; some, such as West Germany, experienced limited terrorism that was only partially directed at U.S. forces, while others did not experience anti-U.S. terrorism at all. At the same time, al-Qaeda has a presence and has conducted terrorist attacks in countries such as Algeria against international targets, even though the U.S. diplomatic and economic role in Algeria is small and there is no significant military presence or relationship there.

Part of the explanation for analysts' overreliance on the U.S. military presence as a causal factor in explaining anti-U.S. terrorism is the story that al-Qaeda has told to justify its own actions—a story that is not backed up by our current understanding of the organization's true history. Observers commonly point to the U.S. deployment to Saudi Arabia after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as what led bin Laden to turn against the U.S. In this version, the causality is clear: the deployment of a massive number of U.S. troops to the region's religious heartland fundamentally changed bin Laden and like-minded fighters. Although the U.S. deployment did anger bin Laden, it did not have a decisive impact on his thinking; he had been somewhat hostile to the U.S. before, and he does not seem to have turned against the U.S. as his primary target until 1994 or perhaps even 1995—years after the initial U.S. deployment and decision to stay on after the war ended. Before that, his organization focused first on Afghanistan and then, as the anti-Soviet jihad turned into brutal internecine fighting, considered India, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Sudan as other priorities.¹⁰ Bin Laden even applied for a British visa in order to go into exile in the U.K., from which he would probably have waged a propaganda war against the Saudi kingdom. Much of al-Qaeda's energies went into supporting various local jihads in the Muslim world. Other men who came to play key roles in the organization had long been involved in anti-regime struggles in places such as Egypt.

For the jihadist movement in general, a particularly important distinction is between U.S. forces that are actively involved in campaigns against Muslims (for example, in Iraq today) and those that are playing a more defensive role (U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia in the past or in Qatar today). Jihadists like bin Laden have long argued that the U.S. is an aggressive Christian power that seeks to subjugate Muslims; in his eyes, any U.S. presence in the region is an affront as it collectively serves the purpose of subjugating Muslims. This argument, however, has had limited influence outside radical circles. For example, with regard to his criticism of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, many establishment

religious leaders criticized the U.S. role, but they did not believe that it delegitimated the regime or made the U.S. a proper target of a religious war.¹¹ The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, however, was a different category: like the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan that spawned the modern jihadist movement, the U.S. action was seen by many mainstream clerics as a transgression that required all Muslims to take up arms or otherwise support the fight. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan, where the U.S. is working with the national government and where Americans are seen by many as victims of an attack, has not led to the same broad opposition, though it is still widely criticized (it probably falls between the U.S. presence in Iraq and the current presence in Qatar).

Beyond this theological disagreement, the different U.S. efforts are not equally sensitive politically. Iraq, which lies in a storied region in Islamic history and was for many years the Arab world's strongest power, has captured the imagination of Muslims worldwide, at times as much as the Israel-Palestine conflict has. Afghanistan, in contrast, is still important but does not have the emotional resonance of Iraq. In the Arab world, the Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and other communities do not excite a sense of ethnic and national identity as does Iraq's Arab population. In addition, Afghanistan is more remote from Islam's heartland and in general has captured less media attention. The al-Qaeda core is nonetheless motivated by the presence of U.S. forces in these countries, but this feeling is not shared equally beyond the core.

The impact on the zeitgeist has considerable effects on fundraising and recruitment. Iraq was a boon for al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement in general, helping them raise money and attract new members to the fight. Chechnya, Kashmir, and other causes too have motivated young men to fight. These hot wars, however, are quite distinct from the simple presence of U.S. military forces. This presence often generates opposition and anger, but not the same outrage as the use of U.S. forces against Muslims in combat. This is particularly so when we move from considering the al-Qaeda core to sympathizers or others at the edge of the current organization.

Indeed, al-Qaeda's priorities and targeting logic can often better be understood by looking at organizational dynamics rather than rhetoric and supposedly strategic ambitions. Core parts of al-Qaeda's cadre before 9/11 came from Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), and after 9/11 groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula formed. All these groups, when they formally joined al-Qaeda, had anti-U.S. and broader anti-Western goals. However, EIJ did not embrace this global agenda until it had been effectively defeated in Egypt: it was EIJ's inability to go after the near enemy, rather than any particular change in U.S. policy, that led some of its members

to embrace al-Qaeda's global agenda with its focus on the far enemy, the U.S. Similarly, al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb came about after its predecessors, such as the Armed Islamic Group and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, had failed to defeat the Algerian regime and found themselves relegated to a minor role. In these circumstances, ties to the al-Qaeda core offered resources, prestige, and a new narrative that these groups could embrace—all of which helped the organizations endure after being defeated in their original mission.

The trajectory of bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is instructive with regard to these organizational dynamics. After he raised the banner of jihad, Zawahiri claimed, "Jerusalem will not be conquered unless Cairo is conquered and the battle in Egypt and Algeria is won."¹² When he first connected with bin Laden, he simply sought to use the Saudis' money to help his cause in Egypt. He even may have instructed a key follower, Ali Mohamed (a.k.a. Ali Abdul Saoud Mohamed), to offer his knowledge of al-Qaeda to U.S. intelligence in 1993 as a way of penetrating U.S. services in order to help EIJ. This attachment to bin Laden grew as EIJ suffered a series of devastating blows in Egypt, and several bases overseas, such as Pakistan, became less open as the regime cracked down in response to Egyptian pressure after the terrorist attacks there.¹³

To survive as an organization, particularly outside Egypt, EIJ found itself financially dependent on bin Laden.¹⁴ In particular, Zawahiri was under pressure to pay the salaries of his members and to take care of the families of "martyrs" (whether killed or in jail) in Egypt itself.¹⁵ In this period, Zawahiri still seemed primarily focused on Egypt and, in 1996, attempted to travel to Chechnya to establish a base there, as opposed to joining bin Laden in Afghanistan.

Zawahiri's failure to establish a base in Chechnya appears to be a turning point in his relationship with al-Qaeda. After being imprisoned for several months by Russia, he returned to Afghanistan in 1997. EIJ suffered further blows with the disruption of an EIJ cell in Azerbaijan in 1998.¹⁶ This setback in turn led the Egyptian security services to round up many militants whom they did not know about before. The reported 1998 rendition of several EIJ cell members in Albania, like the raid on the Azeri cell, also led the Egyptian regime to make further arrests in Egypt itself and to reduce the effectiveness of the overseas network.¹⁷

Bin Laden had long pushed for EIJ to embrace a more global agenda. Zawahiri and much of EIJ—broke, devastated in Egypt, and harassed by the U.S.—was finally open to this message. In 1997, EIJ's own bulletins began to call for attacks on the U.S.¹⁸ In 1998, Zawahiri signed on to the al-Qaeda-backed declaration of the "World Islamic Front for Combat against Jews and Crusaders," marking what the U.S. government argued was effectively a merger between the two.¹⁹ In June 2001 Zawahiri's group formally merged with al-Qaeda.

This shift was justified rhetorically and strategically by blaming the U.S. for Egypt's problems and emphasizing other U.S. iniquities—but in fact a host of organizational problems were the primary causes of the shift.

The Uncertain Meaning of Withdrawal

Of course, large numbers of U.S. troops, particularly when they are in a combat role as they are in Iraq and Afghanistan today, anger and energize al-Qaeda. However, because of the propaganda value that the presence of U.S. forces has for al-Qaeda, the organization often claims that troops are deployed in places where they are not truly present or exaggerates their numbers and the importance of their role.

Al-Qaeda is also critical of U.S. security assistance measures. Part of al-Qaeda's far-enemy logic is that the U.S. props up its local allies: without U.S. backing, these governments would fall. Security assistance, of course, is often at the heart of this support. In addition, many jihadists have had firsthand experience with the brutal security services of their own countries, with some (such as Zawahiri) becoming further radicalized in the process. Even U.S. intelligence liaison, which involves sharing information, training, and other forms of exchange, is thus a sensitive issue for them.²⁰

Part of what inhibits al-Qaeda's operations in the Pakistan haven are strikes from U.S. drones, such as the Predator and the Reaper. Whether relying upon them instead of on ground troops constitutes "withdrawal" depends upon the definition of the word. U.S. drone strikes have killed Abu Khabab al-Masri, who ran al-Qaeda's WMD programs, and one of the few serious studies of the strikes found that "since the summer of 2008 U.S. drones have killed dozens of lower-ranking militants and at least ten mid- and upper-level leaders within al-Qaeda or the Taliban."²¹ In addition to the short-term disruption caused by the loss of leadership cadre, then CIA chief Michael Hayden contends, "we force them to spend more time and resources on self-preservation, and that distracts them, at least partially and at least for a time, from laying the groundwork for the next attack."²² Clearly, the U.S. program is only a limited success; nevertheless, it inhibits al-Qaeda operations in Pakistan and beyond.

Also important is the U.S. political relationship with governments in the area. Zawahiri has regularly criticized the U.S.-Egypt relationship, for example, claiming that the Mubarak government is a slave to Washington and Jerusalem. Zawahiri's criticism is not based on the presence of U.S. military forces in Egypt, but rather on the diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

For some jihadists, particularly outside the al-Qaeda core, economic and cultural relationships with the West matter. Mohammad Bouyeri's 2004 attack on the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh or the violent demonstrations over

the cartoons ridiculing the prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper are, for many European Muslims, more salient issues than U.S. support for corrupt regimes in the Arab world. (The al-Qaeda core is trying to reach out to these would-be affiliates. Although bin Laden has historically focused on policy more than values, Zawahiri released a videotape in March 2006 that railed against Danish cartoons mocking the prophet Mohammed.) The Taliban in Afghanistan and Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia are concerned about the penetration of Western popular culture, as suggested by its attack on the Bali discotheque. Protests ensued immediately after *Playboy* went on sale in Indonesia, even though the Indonesian version lacked unclothed women. In Southeast Asia and Egypt, insurgents burn churches and attack Christian businesses. Sectarian issues stir more passions than bin Laden's global, U.S.-focused agenda.

To be clear, however, all these forms of support are less aggravating than the presence of U.S. military forces, particularly if they are in a combat role against Muslim populations. Al-Qaeda core members in particular will still criticize the U.S. for these roles and justify attacks because of them. However, their justifications will have less popular support if the U.S. presence is lower profile, limited to such tasks as training or the provision of intelligence. In addition, other possible priorities—other foreign countries, such as India or Russia, or other causes, such as sectarian fighting or the struggle against a local regime—are more likely to rise to the fore.

Risks to U.S. Interests and Allies

From a counterterrorism perspective alone, a U.S. withdrawal carries with it several risks to U.S. interests and perhaps also to the U.S. homeland.

One clear risk is that of diversion: that al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups might shift from a focus on the U.S. to other states in the region. On the surface, diversion appears to be entirely desirable from a U.S. point of view, as it means that citizens of other countries would be in the crosshairs rather than Americans. And to some degree this is true. However, the U.S. has at least some interest in the security of the citizens of U.S. allies, such as the U.K., Canada, Germany, and Israel—to name only a few.

Much depends on which country is at risk. For all Western countries, terrorism is a risk to the lives of citizens, but not to the basic survival of a form of government or to the continuation of a leadership that is basically pro-American in orientation.²³ On the other hand, key al-Qaeda targets include the governments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Others, such as India, Iraq, Indonesia, Algeria, and Jordan, are also of concern. Fortunately, so far all these regimes have shown that they can survive a high level of terrorism. Their security services are strong, and in general the population has not rushed to embrace the terrorist cause.

Pakistan today and Iraq in 2003 to 2004, however, show how terrorism can pose a deeper danger. The continuation of terrorism can, over time, erode confidence in the state to provide the basic function of security. This in turn can give rise to a host of other actors. At times these may be legitimate opposition parties, but often they are ethnic, sectarian, or religious groups. These groups can create chaos in a country through guerrilla war as well as terrorism. In addition, some have strong anti-U.S. agendas. Thus terrorism can snowball and produce truly destabilizing violence.

The U.S. presence in Iraq is also worth examining in the context of threats to U.S. allies. Many Muslims came to Iraq to expel the U.S. from Muslim lands; many Iraqis took up arms for the same reason. In the course of the conflict, however, their agendas grew broader. Exposed to hardened terrorists such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, their ambitions and grievances went beyond Iraq, expanding their agenda to embrace goals closer to the core of al-Qaeda ideology. The war also served a Darwinian function for jihadist fighters: those who survived ended up better trained, more committed, and otherwise more formidable than when they began. Unfortunately, the skills they picked up in Iraq—IED design, the routine use of suicide bombing, sniper tactics, experience in urban warfare, an improved ability to avoid enemy intelligence, and use of man-portable surface-to-air missiles—are readily transferable to other theaters as well as (to a lesser degree) to the U.S. homeland. Stephanie Kaplan finds that jihadists exploit wars in the Islamic world, such as the war in Iraq, both to gain valuable skills that help them conduct terrorist attacks and guerrilla war elsewhere when the war ends and to mobilize new recruits and resources for the cause.²⁴

The greatest immediate danger is to Iraq's neighbors, which include several close U.S. allies. Bergen and Cruickshank argue that Iraq's effect on terrorism is partially a function of geographic proximity, the level of exchange between Iraqi and domestic groups in the other country, and how much the local population identifies with Iraqi Arabs.²⁵ For all of Iraq's neighbors, particularly in the Arab states, these conditions hold, even though the current danger is less than it was in 2006. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) would be particularly likely to reach out to strike Saudi Arabia, given the long, lightly patrolled border between the two countries and bin Laden's well-documented interest in destabilizing the al-Saud family, which rules the heartland of Islam. Ties among Islamists on either side of the border are tight: resistance groups in Iraq have at times turned to Saudi religious scholars to validate their activities.²⁶ A great many of the Arabs fighting in Iraq are Saudis. As Reuven Paz notes, "The Iraqi experience of these mainly Saudi volunteers may create a massive group of 'Iraqi alumni' that will threaten the fragile internal situation of the desert kingdom."²⁷ The turmoil in

Iraq has also energized young Saudi Islamists, who see it as emblematic of broader problems facing the Muslim world. Many Saudi Salafi extremists decided to fight in Iraq, in part because doing so is a clearer defensive jihad than struggling with the al-Saud family. If the U.S. were to leave Iraq, the balance would shift from Saudis helping Iraqi fighters to Iraqi fighters helping Saudis. Such a development is not likely to lead to the collapse of the Saudi government, but even a few dozen terrorists operating from Iraq could foster civil strife, attack Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure, and otherwise cause unwelcome unrest in a critical ally with many existing internal problems. A particular risk is that the anti-Shi'a sentiment of AQI members could lead to concerted attempts to sow sectarian strife in the kingdom, preying on Saudi Arabia's own domestic tensions. European intelligence services are also intensely concerned about Iraq, since dozens, perhaps hundreds, of European Muslims have gone and continue to go to Iraq to fight. So far, these fighters have not returned to Western Europe, but European officials believe that it is only a matter of time before they do. Although the Iraq war has clearly been a net loss from a counterterrorism perspective,²⁸ it did serve one purpose later claimed by the Bush administration as desirable: diversion. In particular, the war diverted fighters from Saudi Arabia at a particularly dangerous time in 2003 to 2005, when the regime was facing a low-level proto-insurgency there. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of fighters preferred to go to Iraq, in part because it was seen as an easier operational environment and because the anti-U.S., anti-Shi'a cause there was widely applauded throughout Saudi Arabia, while the struggle against the al-Saud family was supported domestically only by a minority. Pakistan is probably the most dangerous field of jihad—and, at the same time, the one that today offers the most probable prospect for jihadist success. Pakistan combines a wide range of dangerous elements: a nuclear program of uncertain security; bitter sectarian violence between Sunni extremists and Shiites; widespread ethnic violence among a range of groups; staggering corruption; economic weakness; and chauvinistic democratic leaders. Ongoing border tension with India, particularly over Kashmir, and the increasing civil war in Iraq compound these problems. Although a jihadist takeover remains far off, greater instability in Pakistan could be disastrous. In addition, jihadist elements in the military are robust and, though reporting on their influence and numbers is scarce, perhaps getting stronger.

In addition to the risk to U.S. interests via allies, a second concern of withdrawal is direct risk to U.S. targets overseas and the U.S. homeland. Al-Qaeda was at its most dangerous when it had a functional haven in which to operate. When the Taliban governed Afghanistan, al-Qaeda had a haven in which to build a miniature army. From that haven, they could organize and recruit on a vast scale. In addition, they could orchestrate plots around the globe and build

an organization that had branches in dozens of countries. The haven for the leadership in Afghanistan was vital to all of this.

Al-Qaeda's haven in Afghanistan is gone, and for several years the organization was on the run. This situation has changed remarkably in the last several years. Al-Qaeda's biggest success since 9/11 has been in Pakistan. Most important, Pakistan is now a base for al-Qaeda, replacing the Taliban's Afghanistan in many ways. In addition, Pakistan itself is now a central theater of conflict in the jihadist world. Despite the offensive that it launched in 2009, the Pakistani army is shut out of parts of its own country, and areas such as Swat—once a peaceful tourist destination—are now hotbeds of insurgency. Pakistan has a large, powerful army, nuclear weapons, and an ongoing border dispute with India. Unrest there is perhaps more terrifying than in any other country in the world.²⁹

Today, Pakistan is the center of the global jihad. Active groups today include the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizb-ul-Mujahidin, and many other small groups (many groups also operate under various names). In addition, a variety of more mainstream Islamist organizations support these groups, both in terms of direct financial and logistical support and indirectly by promulgating teachings that are in accord with these violent groups' goals. Many of these organizations focus on Pakistan itself or on India, some have a sectarian focus, while others share some of al-Qaeda's global objectives. Even when the groups do not carry out al-Qaeda-style attacks, they often share fundraising, training, logistics, and safe houses with al-Qaeda. A number of al-Qaeda operatives have been caught at facilities linked to these groups.

From Pakistan, the al-Qaeda core enjoys the benefits of a haven and can support operations in the Muslim world and attacks in the West and in Asia. As former CIA official and terrorism expert Bruce Riedel writes about the core, "Like a large corporation, it has a central headquarters in South Asia with affiliates and franchises around the Islamic world from which it can stage raids into the Christian and Hindu worlds beyond."³⁰ In the West, al-Qaeda has a wide potential range of individuals to call on; several thousand Europeans have received training in al-Qaeda camps.³¹

Al-Qaeda appears to have organized, coordinated, or otherwise played a major role in the foiled 2004 attacks in the U.K. on a nightclub or a shopping mall; plans to bomb economic targets in several American cities; and the 2006 plan to simultaneously blow up several airplanes as they flew from the U.K. to the U.S.³² Hoffman, who was involved in expert testimony in the U.K., found that al-Qaeda was actively involved in virtually all major terrorist plots in the U.K. since 2003.³³ Press reporting indicates that operatives with links to Pakistan played a role in the spring 2009 Manchester plot that British security services disrupted.³⁴

Outside the U.K., German government officials claimed that they disrupted a plot to attack U.S. and German targets in Germany in 2007 involving three men, none of whom were of Pakistani origin, who trained at camps in Pakistan.³⁵ The Danish government also reported a disrupted plot linked to Pakistan in 2007. Hoffman and Riedel also note that there is growing evidence that al-Qaeda may have played some role in the devastating 3/11 attacks in Spain (the March 11, 2004, bombing of four commuter lines into Madrid, which killed 190 people and wounded 1,800).³⁶

However, in these cases, the level of command appears to vary at least somewhat from that of the 1998 embassy and 9/11 attacks, with local leaders enjoying more discretion. In Pakistan, individuals are trained and given direction and probably approval for an attack, but there seems to be less back-and-forth between operatives and the al-Qaeda core compared to pre-9/11 attacks, because of concerns about operational security. Yet al-Qaeda from its beginning has used multiple command operations, so this shift is not as difficult as it might be for other organizations.

Several official government statements and documents support this assessment. The unclassified key judgments of the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) “The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland” contend that “al-Qaeda is and will remain the most serious terrorist threat to the Homeland, as its central leadership continues to plan high-impact plots, while pushing others in extremist Sunni communicates to mimic its efforts and to supplement its capabilities.” The NIE further estimates that al-Qaeda has protected or regenerated key aspects of the organization in Pakistan.³⁷ In the 2009 iteration of the annual threat assessment that the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) gives to the U.S. Congress, DNI Dennis Blair declared that “al-Qaeda remains intent on attacking U.S. interests worldwide, including the U.S. Homeland” and that the organization’s core in tribal parts of Pakistan is its most dangerous component. Blair further contends that the primary threat from Europe-based extremists stems from those “who return from training in Pakistan to conduct attacks in Europe or the United States.”³⁸

Cuts to, or the termination of, U.S. security assistance programs would be a particular problem for governments fighting jihadist-linked insurgents. Much of this depends on the definition of “withdrawal” of U.S. military forces. But if large-scale training were cut, these governments would find it more difficult to fight on their own.

Other U.S. Interests

The discussion above, of course, addresses only a small part of a larger question about the role of U.S. military forces in the greater Middle East. To protect the

Arab world, there is little need for extensive U.S. forces to handle many of the crises that could occur in the region. The region's two top military powers, Israel and Turkey, are close U.S. allies. Other countries with considerable military forces, such as Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, are also U.S. allies. Indeed, in the Middle East the conventional military threat comes down to a finite number of U.S. adversaries, particularly Iran. Iran's conventional military forces, however, are weak and do not pose a major threat to its neighbors, with the possible exception of Iraq. Iran's nuclear program might soon produce an operational nuclear weapon, but the operative concept for countering this is a strategic umbrella or perhaps small numbers of U.S. forces used to signal commitment, rather than a large-scale presence. It is plausible that a nuclear weapon could lead Iran to be more aggressive with its conventional forces (as Pakistan was during the Kargil War of 1999, which followed its first nuclear tests in 1998). This would be a reason, however, for the U.S. to build up local forces and arrange for a rapid response to reinforce them: a large-scale U.S. presence is not necessary for this contingency.

Implications for U.S. Policy

An axiom of counterinsurgency holds that local forces are always key. At times foreign forces can augment local forces, and indeed at times a government might collapse without this assistance. Even in these extreme cases, however, the goal is usually to return to a situation in which local forces can sustain the counterinsurgency by themselves. In Iraq in the coming year, for example, this transition is occurring, though it is a long way off in Afghanistan.

The U.S. must often stay in the background when dealing with potential insurgencies. Since the best cause for insurgents to harness is usually nationalism, direct and open U.S. support can undercut the legitimacy of a government. The U.S. can, however, provide behind-the-scenes training and advisory programs, particularly if the programs are conducted outside the country. These programs should focus on improving indigenous capabilities rather than on substituting U.S. roles for them.

To minimize the need for U.S. forces, more effort should be put into building up local forces, particularly police, before insurgencies break out. Historically, American efforts to help other governments enhance their domestic policing and intelligence capabilities by improving their internal defense forces have met with only weak support from within the U.S. federal bureaucracy. Unlike Italy, with its Carabinieri, or Spain, with its Guardia Civil, the U.S. does not have a national police with a paramilitary component of its own, making it difficult to identify an obvious American bureaucratic counterpart for such an important training mission. The State Department is too small to provide a massive training program, so the foreign internal defense mission tends to fall

upon the Department of Defense, which historically has resisted it.³⁹ A U.S. bureaucratic home for police training is necessary, as is a robust program that has high-level support.

U.S. programs to improve the rule of law, reduce corruption, encourage local economic development, and other nonmilitary measures are often underfunded and understaffed. The weak-state problem is here to stay, and U.S. bureaucratic capabilities need to be augmented as a result.

Difficulty of Prediction

Many of the assumptions of the consequences of a U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East are based on a limited focus on a few of the many factors contributing to anti-U.S. terrorism. Reducing the U.S. presence would logically reduce some anti-U.S. terrorism, but it also raises the possibility of a host of other issues coming to the fore. Many potential disasters, such as spillover from civil wars or the possibility of a mass-casualty attack emanating from Pakistan may not occur—indeed, the odds may be against them—but the likelihood of these events increases depending on the nature of the U.S. withdrawal.

Much depends on which policies come after a U.S. withdrawal. Diplomatic and nation-building successes that limit the various fields of jihad would have a huge beneficial impact, for example. Similarly, removing the al-Qaeda core presence from Pakistan would be tremendously advantageous.

Notes

- 1 Robert Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Random House, 2005), 244.
- 2 The vanguard concept emerges in the first discussion of al-Qaeda in *Al Jibad* magazine. For the text, see Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 75.
- 3 See Kim Cragin, Bruce Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Early History of Al-Qa'ida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, forthcoming).
- 4 Cragin, Hoffman, *et al.*, “The Early History of Al-Qa’ida”; Bruce Hoffman, “Is Al-Qaeda on the Run or on the March?” *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2, (Summer 2007): 44–58; Bruce Hoffman, “Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command Posed by the Global Terrorist Threat: Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?”; written testimony submitted to the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capacities, 110th Cong., 1st sess., February 17, 2007; “Summary of Evidence for Combatant Status Review Tribunal—Husayn, Zayn al Abidin Muhammad [Abu Zubaydah], March 19, 2007; and “Al-Qaeda Camps ‘Trained 70,000’” *BBC News*, January 5, 2005, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4146969.stm>. See also Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 298.

- 5 Global Security, "Aden-Abyan Islamic Army," available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/aden-abyan.htm>.
- 6 Marc Sageman emphasizes the importance of homegrown "leaderless" jihad. See his *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For a critique I find convincing, see Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63408/bruce-hoffman/the-myth-of-grass-roots-terrorism>.
- 7 See "Text of Fatwa Urging Jihad Against America," February 23, 1998, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>; Harmony Project, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qa'ida from 1989–2006* (West Point, NY, 2007); see also the August 2001 al-Qaeda videotape that addresses what bin Laden and others describe as the evil influence of Jews, as described in Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*, 291.
- 8 Iran sponsored Saudi Hezbollah, which carried out the bombing, and also trained cell members. One suspect detained by the FBI and later deported to Saudi Arabia noted that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had recruited him and that an IRGC leader directed several operations in the kingdom. The suspects also worked with the Iranian Embassy in Damascus for logistical support. See "Attorney General Statement," June 21, 2001, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2001/06/khobar.html>. See also Elsa Walsh, "Louis Freeh's Last Case," *The New Yorker* (May 14, 2001).
- 9 Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 113.
- 10 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 154 (see note 4); Coll, Steve, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 221–222; Cragin, Hoffman, et al., *The Early History of Al-Qa'ida* (see note 3).
- 11 For a review, see the International Crisis Group, "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?" 21 September 2004.
- 12 Montasser al-Zayyatt, *Ayman Zawabiri as I Knew Him* (Cairo, 2002), 117.
- 13 Zawahiri, Ayman, "Knights Under the Prophet's Banner," in *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawabiri*, ed. and trans. and with analysis by Laura Mansfield (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG, 2006); Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 182–184 (see note 4).
- 14 Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, "Terrorist's Odyssey," *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2002, A1.
- 15 Gerges, Fawaz A., *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 121; Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 185 (see note 4).
- 16 Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 169. Gerges notes that Mabruk himself opposed the EIJ–Al-Qaeda alliance.

- 17 Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 336 (see note 4).
- 18 Cragin, Hoffman, et al., *The Early History of Al-Qa'ida* (see note 3).
- 19 United States of America v. Usama bin Laden, et al., S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, p. 6.
- 20 Pre-positioning is also a form of military assistance and suggests that the actual presence of U.S. forces is being planned for.
- 21 Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "The Drone War," *The New Republic*, May 18, 2009, available at <http://www.peterbergen.com/bergen/articles/details.aspx?id=384>.
- 22 Bergen and Tiedemann, "The Drone War."
- 23 The spectrum here is not, say, between two parties in Germany that favor U.S. policies to different degrees. Rather, it is between regimes like those in the developing world in which one set of leaders may openly cooperate with the U.S. on a range of issues while another is far more critical and at times actively opposes the U.S.
- 24 Stephanie Kaplan, "The Jihad Effect: How Wars Feeds the Global Jihadist Movement" (MIT: unpublished PhD dissertation, forthcoming).
- 25 Bergen, Peter, and Paul Cruickshank, "The Iraq Effect: War Has Increased Terrorism Sevenfold Worldwide," *Mother Jones* (March/April 2007), available at <http://motherjones.com/politics/2007/03/iraq-101-iraq-effect-war-iraq-and-its-impact-war-terrorism-pg-1>. Another factor these authors cite is whether the countries in question have troops in Iraq, which would not apply to neighboring states.
- 26 International Crisis Group 2006, 10 (see note 11).
- 27 Rueven Paz, "Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: An Analysis," *Project for the Research of Islamist Movements Occasional Papers* 3, no. 1 (March 2005): 6.
- 28 Daniel Byman, "Iraq and the Global War on Terrorism," Columbia International Affairs Online (Summer 2007), available at <http://www.ciaonet.org/casestudy/ciao10022/index.html>; and Daniel Byman, "Who Wins in Iraq: Al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy* (January 2007), 38–51, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/02/13/who_wins_in_iraq?page=0,2.
- 29 For work on militancy in Pakistan, see Yoginder Sikand, "The Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Lashkar-e-Taiba," in Aparna Rao, et al., eds., *The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence* (New York: Berghan Books, 2007), 215–38; and Bruce Riedel, "The New Epicenter of Terror," *The Daily Beast*, June 9, 2009, available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-06-09/the-new-epicenter-of-terror/>.
- 30 Riedel, Bruce, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 125.
- 31 Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command," 12 (see note 4).
- 32 Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command," 11, 13–14 (see note 4); Richard Greenberg, Paul Cruickshank, and Chris Hansen, "Inside the

Terror Plot that ‘Rivalled 9/11’” Dateline NBC, September 14, 2009; available at http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26726987/ns/dateline_nbc-the_hansen_files_with_chris_hansen/.

- 33 Hoffman, “Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command,” 11 (*see note 4*).
- 34 Sarah Lavelle, Richard Norton-Taylor, and Vikram Dodd, “Student Visa Link to Terror Raids as Gordon Brown Points Finger at Pakistan,” *The Guardian*, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/10/student-visa-terror-arrests-link>.
- 35 Craig Whitlock, “Germany Says It Foiled Bomb Plot,” *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2007; available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/05/AR2007090500209.html>.
- 36 Hoffman, “Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command,” 11 (*see note 4*). Riedel points out that one of the reported masterminds was later killed in Saudi Arabia in an al-Qaeda safe house. Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, 131–32.
- 37 National Intelligence Council, “National Intelligence Estimate: The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland,” unclassified key judgments (July 2007), 1.
- 38 Dennis C. Blair, “Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” February 12, 2009, 5–6.
- 39 William Rosenau, “The Kennedy Administration, U.S. Foreign Internal Security Assistance and the Challenge of ‘Subterranean War,’” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 65–99.

x. How Damaging are Worst-Case Scenarios in the Persian Gulf?

F. Gregory Gause III

Professor of Political Science, University of Vermont

The American military presence in the Persian Gulf, which dates back to the end of World War II but grew substantially in the period after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, has been premised on the idea that the free flow of oil could be endangered by domination of the region by any power other than the U.S. This paper takes two extreme scenarios—that the United States, wearied from its Iraq adventure, returns to a pre-1979 military posture (withdrawal “over the horizon”) for the region and that Iran develops in the very near future a substantial and publicly declared nuclear weapons capability—and examines the potential consequences for regional international politics and energy flows of those scenarios. In neither case am I saying that I think these scenarios are likely, but examining their potential consequences can help us to understand the dynamics of Gulf international politics. I critically assess the implicit assumptions of bandwagoning by Arab oil producers that underlie the fears generated by the Iranian nuclear program and by the drawdown of American military forces in Iraq. (“Bandwagoning” is the international relations term of art meaning alignment with the strongest or most threatening power, usually motivated by fear of the consequences of not doing so. The complementary term is “balancing,” or aligning with other states *against* the strongest or most threatening state.) I find that the negative consequences of either scenario are much exaggerated, though a combination of the two (Iranian nuclear breakout occurring simultaneously with American withdrawal over the horizon) would increase the likelihood of both bandwagoning dynamics among smaller Gulf States and proliferation incentives for major regional powers.

Scenario I: An American Military Withdrawal from Iraq, or from the Gulf as a Whole

Since the Iranian Revolution, the need for an American military presence in the Persian Gulf region has been an article of faith among U.S. administrations and across the partisan divide in the U.S. The Carter administration proclaimed the Gulf an area of vital national interest, established the Rapid Deployment Joint

Task Force (which later became CENTCOM) and negotiated an access agreement with Oman. The Reagan administration upgraded Omani facilities and, in 1987, sent the largest American naval force assembled since Vietnam into the Gulf. George H. W. Bush fought Gulf War I and presided over the sea change in America's military relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. In his administration the U.S. established military bases in Kuwait and Qatar, vastly expanded the headquarters of the U.S. naval force in the Gulf in Bahrain (what would become in the mid-1990s the Fifth Fleet), stationed a combat air wing in Saudi Arabia for the first time since the early 1960s, and expanded American access to port and air facilities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Clinton administration maintained and expanded this new American military infrastructure in the Gulf in order to carry out its "dual containment" policy aimed against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is no need to review the dramatic increase in the American military presence in the Gulf during the administration of George W. Bush. While the Obama administration seems determined to end the presence of American combat forces in Iraq, it appears willing to maintain a large American military force in the country for training, air support, and other duties.

What would be the consequences of a drastically reduced American military role in the Gulf region? There are two immediate and reasonable fears about the consequences of an American withdrawal over the horizon: (1) that Iraq would descend into a civil war that would present al-Qaeda with new opportunities there and eventually draw in other regional states, possibly threatening oil production and oil flows; and (2) that Iraq and the GCC states, faced with the threat of Iranian power, would bandwagon with Iran on strategic issues and possibly allow Iran to dictate their oil policy. While I would not reject these possibilities out of hand, the evidence of the past indicates that they are not likely to occur.

The presence of American forces in Iraq is no guarantee against civil conflict in that country. While the surge of 2007, combined with a new strategy for deploying American forces and with developments on the ground in Iraq, certainly helped to reduce the level of violence in the country, the frightening level of violence sustained during 2006 and the first half of 2007 occurred with more than a hundred thousand American troops in Iraq. The American military presence could not prevent Iran from extending its influence into Iraq, through bilateral relations with the Iraqi government, through patron-client ties with a number of Iraqi parties and groups, and through economic investment in the south and the Shi'a pilgrimage cities. The surge seems to have given Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki the confidence to confront his Sadrist rivals in Basra and Baghdad in 2008, and that might eventually come to be seen as the necessary

step in restoring a credible central government in Baghdad, but those moves do not seem to have significantly reduced Iranian influence in the country.

American military withdrawal from Iraq could very well be accompanied by increased domestic violence. However, the likelihood of a “spillover” of that violence into the region more generally, in a way that could threaten oil production levels (outside Iraq; domestic Iraqi violence will certainly affect Iraq’s production) seems small. Horrific levels of violence in Iraq in the mid-to-late 2000s raised sectarian tensions throughout the region, but the regional governments were able to contain that problem and none felt the need to intervene directly in Iraq. Iraqi violence basically stayed in Iraq. Undoubtedly the presence of American forces there must have been a deterrent to direct military intervention by other states, but there are no indications that any regional state was looking to intervene.

In the absence of American forces in Iraq, the disincentives to military intervention there would certainly decline, but would the incentives increase? Iran has no particular reason to send its military into Iraq. It has what it wants in the country—a Shi’a government friendly to Tehran and substantial influence with both that government and various Iraqi groups. Only the prospect of the collapse of the friendly Baghdad government to hostile (Sunni) forces could potentially bring Iran into Iraq militarily, and that prospect is very slight, given the success of Shi’a forces in the Battle for Baghdad of 2006 to 2007. Turkey could have an incentive to intervene militarily in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq if it thought that the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) were set to declare independence. However, if the U.S., the patron of the Kurds since 1991, were to withdraw from Iraq, it seems less likely that the KRG would be able to take that final step toward independence. Moreover, Ankara is developing very close economic and even political relations with the KRG as a means of increasing Turkish influence (which would be exercised against independence) in Iraqi Kurdistan. Other military interventions—by Syria, by Jordan, by Saudi Arabia—seem farfetched. The Syrian army is untested in battle since 1973 (and when confronted with minor tests in Lebanon, in 1982, it did not do very well); the Jordanian army is well trained but small and untested for decades; the Saudi army is neither large nor particularly formidable. In each case, it is hard to see what political goal would lead any of these countries to intervene militarily.

This is not to say that Iraq’s neighbors will not interfere in Iraq’s internal politics to advance their interests. They will, through client relations with Iraqi politicians and groups. Iraq is now, and will be for some time to come, a playing field in the Middle East balance-of-power game. But that has been the case even with a large-scale American military presence. American forces cannot prevent this dynamic, because it is played out through relations of patronage and ideological affinity, not through direct military intervention. American withdrawal

from Iraq will not change that dynamic for the better, but it is unlikely to make it substantially worse.

Increased levels of civil violence in Iraq thus are unlikely either to spread outside Iraq's borders or to suck Iraq's neighbors militarily into the vacuum. They might, however, increase the chances that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) could reconstitute itself as a significant player in Iraqi politics. That would certainly not be a good result for the U.S., but the prospects of AQI being able to re-establish itself to the extent that it did in 2004 to 2006, when it controlled cities in western Iraq, seems unlikely. The backlash against AQI in the Sunni Arab community, which generated the Awakening Movements (al-Sahwa), means that AQI would face more local opposition than it had in the earlier period. The expansion of Iraqi government forces means that Baghdad itself could be better able to deal with any AQI threat on its own.

Withdrawal from Iraq would undoubtedly be seen regionally as a victory for Iran and would, at least somewhat, increase Iranian influence in Iraq in the short to medium term (though that influence, as mentioned above, is already considerable despite the presence of American forces in Iraq). Would increased Iranian power lead the Arab Gulf states to bandwagon with Tehran, enabling Iran to influence their strategic decisions regarding relations with the U.S., their disposition toward Israel, and oil? That is very unlikely in the case of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has balanced against regional adversaries since the Hashemites ruled in Iraq. The Saudis sought to counter the Nasserist effort to dominate the Arab world, not to bandwagon with it. They opposed revolutionary Iran in the 1980s and Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990, despite the domestic political risks that inviting American troops onto their territory entailed. With regional players such as Egypt and Jordan, not to mention Israel, also acting against Iran in the background, the Saudis would hardly be left on their own. And, even if the U.S. did not have a major military presence in the Gulf region, it would still have interests in the area and would still be an ultimate guarantor of Saudi security against cross-border military threats.

The smaller Gulf States would be a different matter, if a withdrawal from Iraq were accompanied by the deconstruction of the American military base infrastructure built up since 1991 in these states—a full withdrawal “over the horizon.” Kuwait and Bahrain would probably seek refuge within a Saudi-Egyptian Arab alignment, as both have Shi'a populations (in Bahrain, the majority) whom their leaderships see as potential allies in Iranian efforts to destabilize them domestically. The UAE has an ongoing territorial dispute with Iran over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb, but that has not precluded businesslike relations with Iran in the past. The UAE, Qatar, and Oman would probably be more attentive to Iranian desires if the U.S. were to exit the Gulf altogether.

Advocates of an over the horizon American role in the Gulf point to the domestic costs for the hosts of American military forces. That is certainly the case in Saudi Arabia, where the American deployments of 1990 to 1991 helped mobilize domestic Salafi-Wahhabi opposition to the regime, resulted in bombing attacks on American facilities in 1995 and 1996, and served as Osama bin Laden's major rallying cry against the Al Saud. It would undoubtedly be so in Iraq as well, with any remaining American military presence subject to attacks by extremists of every stripe and serving as a stick with which its domestic and regional opponents could beat whatever government is ruling in Baghdad, on both nationalist and Islamist grounds. In the big regional countries, foreign military presences are lightening rods of opposition and create serious problems for host governments.

That is not the case, however, in the smaller states of the Gulf. There has not been a serious attack on any American military facility in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE or Oman, even during the unpopular attack on Iraq in 2003. During the low-level uprising against the Bahraini government by the Shi'a opposition in the mid-1990s, there were no attacks on or even demonstrations in front of the gates of the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet. (There was a large demonstration at the U.S. embassy in April 2002, protesting Israeli military actions in the West Bank.) No American servicemen or women, who are ubiquitous on the streets and in the malls of Manama, the capital of Bahrain, were attacked. The American military presence is popular in Kuwait, understandably so given Kuwait's experience of Iraqi occupation from August 1990 to February 1991. During the recent parliamentary election in May 2009, not one candidate campaigned on a platform of getting the U.S. out of Kuwait. In the other states, while the U.S. might not be as popular as in Kuwait, the American military presences have not been targets of terrorists or mobilizing issues for opposition groups. Perhaps it is because the small size and population of these countries make them easier to manage for security forces; perhaps it is because their populations are accustomed to foreign forces from their long histories as British protectorates. But the domestic political costs for regimes in the smaller Gulf States of hosting American military forces are slight, if they exist at all.

Withdrawal from Iraq would certainly entail risks to American interests (and to the implicit moral obligations the U.S. has taken on through its presence in Iraq), most notably in the prospects for even more Iranian influence in Iraq and in the prospects (though not the certainty) of a return to intense levels of civil violence in Iraq. Withdrawal even further, from the Gulf itself to an over the horizon position, could lead to a pro-Iranian realignment in the foreign policies of some of the smaller Gulf States. However, withdrawal from Iraq also offers potential benefits, besides the obvious ones of conserving American blood and treasure. Iran has been able to play second fiddle in the country, with the

U.S. bearing the costs of putting into power and protecting a pro-Iranian regime. With the U.S. gone, Tehran would have to pay greater costs for supporting the friendly government in Baghdad and would inevitably get caught up in the frustrations of managing the conflicting ambitions of its Iraqi clients. If the U.S., with its power and wealth, could not successfully manage Iraqi politics, it is unlikely that Iran, which is poorer and less powerful, could do so, even with its cultural and sectarian connections (which are not a completely positive factor in Iraq). The results of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary elections presage some of the difficulties Iran will face. Their Shi'a allies split into two competing lists, the State of Law list headed by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Iraqi National Alliance list, which combined the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and its longtime rival, the Sadrist movement. These two lists split the Shi'a vote, allowing former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's Iraqiyya list to win the largest number of seats.

Moreover, an American withdrawal from Iraq would put the onus on Saudi Arabia to take a more active role in Iraqi politics, finding local actors to support against the Iranians and, perhaps, inducing the Saudis to take a more realistic view of the Maliki (or a successor Shi'a) government. The Saudis have been able to stay on the sidelines in Iraq, confident that the U.S. would prevent complete Iranian dominance of the country. Saudi involvement could have costs if Riyadh were to support extremist Sunni groups and thus encourage a resurgence of AQI, but since the Saudis have been fighting al-Qaeda at home since 2003, that is a less likely result than it would have been in previous periods. Saudi Arabia's active support for Allawi's Iraqiyya list in the 2010 elections and its reception in Riyadh, in the postelection period, of a number of delegations from across the Iraqi political spectrum, are indications that the Saudis are already starting to increase their role in Iraqi politics.

Scenario II: Iran Goes Nuclear

If Iran were to develop a nuclear weapons capability, would American interests in the Persian Gulf region be harmed? For the sake of this thought experiment, I will set aside the high probability that either Israel or the U.S. would take preventive military action against Iranian nuclear assets, a course of action that would have questionable likelihood of successfully destroying the Iranian nuclear program and would certainly lead to Iranian reactions against American interests. There are three possible results of an Iranian nuclear breakout that could affect American interests in oil production and transit: (1) an emboldened Iran behaving in a more aggressive and disruptive way in the region as a whole, including toward Israel; (2) the Gulf States bandwagoning with Iran, which would give Iran influence in their oil production decisions; and (3) a proliferation

cascade in the Middle East that might increase the chances of nuclear war in the Gulf, with the attendant disruptions to oil production and shipping.

The logic of nuclear possession might lead Iran into a more aggressive foreign policy, but that logic could equally work in reverse. An Iran with nuclear weapons could become more risk averse, fearing that a confrontation with Israel or the U.S. could escalate to nuclear exchange. We have no way of knowing a priori which of these logics would dominate in Tehran. But what we do know is that Iran without nuclear weapons has, on occasion, acted in a most aggressive manner. In the 1980s Iran actively worked to overthrow the governments of some of its neighbor states, including Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. It perpetuated a conventional war with Iraq when it could have declared victory and accepted an end to the conflict after it had expelled Iraqi forces from its territory in the spring of 1982. Iran also created Hezbollah in Lebanon at the same time, encouraging if not ordering it to confront the U.S. and Israel in Lebanon. More recently, Iran did not restrain its allies Hezbollah and Hamas from engaging in rocket attacks on Israel in the summer of 2006 and from December 2008 to January 2009. It does not appear that Iran has been waiting for nuclear weapons to take the gloves off in its foreign policy. The record shows that Iran without nuclear weapons has acted very aggressively at times and at other times much more cautiously. Clearly there are dynamics other than possession of nuclear weapons that drive the ups and downs in Iranian foreign policy. This is not to say that possession of nuclear weapons would not affect overall Iranian foreign policy. When other factors encourage Iranian aggressiveness internationally, possession of nuclear weapons might make decision makers in Tehran even more likely to accept risks. But that is not an inevitable result.

I discussed the prospects of bandwagoning dynamics in the Gulf above. There is no reason to doubt that Saudi Arabia would seek to counter the threat posed by a nuclear Iran. The Saudis are already exploring the prospects of their own nuclear program, though they are at the very beginning of the effort. The Saudi program must, at least in part, be a response to Iran's. In all probability, an Iranian nuclear breakout would drive the Saudis, and the smaller Gulf monarchies, into an even closer relationship with the U.S. (if they were confident in the credibility of U.S. protection—an issue to which I will return below). But even a nonnuclear Saudi Arabia would be difficult for Iran to coerce through nuclear blackmail. Except in the most extreme situations, threats of a nuclear first strike are simply not credible. It is highly unlikely that Iran could credibly threaten to use nuclear weapons against the Saudis on oil issues (*Lower your production or we will nuke you*). It is difficult to see how an Iranian nuclear weapons program could make Iranian conventional threats more credible either (*Lower your production or we will launch a conventional strike against Ras Tanura*,

and you cannot respond because we have nuclear weapons). The Saudi air force, not to mention those American forces that are, at most, “over the horizon,” might be able to defend against Iranian air attacks on Saudi oil facilities (although not against missile attacks) and could certainly respond with similar conventional strikes on Iranian oil facilities, far below the threshold that would elicit an Iranian nuclear response. It is impossible to rule out any scenario, but it seems extremely unlikely that a nuclear Iran would be able to turn the nuclear threat into practical leverage in Saudi oil decisions.

A nuclear Iran might have better luck in inducing bandwagoning behavior from the smaller Gulf States. The two most important oil producers in that group, Kuwait and the UAE, are already vulnerable to Iranian pressure in various ways. The Kuwaiti government after Gulf War I (1990 to 1991) looked to Iran as a useful counterweight to Iraq and, since 2003, has seen Iran as a potential agent of restraint on a Shi’a-dominated Iraqi government, should such a government threaten Kuwait. While the Kuwaiti Shi’a community is well integrated into Kuwaiti society, there is a persistent worry among the Sunni leadership that it could act as a fifth column against the Kuwaiti regime, as occurred during the Iran-Iraq War. The UAE has its long-standing territorial dispute with Iran over the Gulf islands, and Iran has in the past been willing to throw its weight around in that area to get its way. The UAE Shi’a community is less politically mobilized than its Kuwaiti counterpart, but it does exist. In other words, Iran can easily create serious problems for both countries. Thus a nuclear Iran would be seen as a more challenging regional actor, and the impulse to buy Iranian goodwill through bandwagoning, even on oil issues, could increase. Much would depend on the Gulf States’ relations with the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, with Saudi Arabia. If the smaller states perceived that the American commitment to their security were reduced, they would be more susceptible to bandwagoning dynamics.

The third hypothesized result of an Iranian nuclear breakout is a proliferation cascade in the Middle East, such that other regional states would scramble to obtain their own nuclear forces. In such an atmosphere of mutual distrust, conflict, and insecure second-strike capabilities, some observers think that the risk of nuclear war, with its attendant consequences for the world oil market (not to mention the consequences for the local populations), would increase dramatically. Again, this is not the only conceivable logic of regional nuclear proliferation; it could instead produce a stable “balance of terror” in which each actor is deterred from aggression by the enormous anticipated costs of conflict. But clearly the preferable result of an Iranian nuclear breakout, given the huge costs of a nuclear war in the oil patch, would be no proliferation.

The three most likely regional proliferators in the wake of an Iranian nuclear breakout, given their size, their resources and their regional roles, are

Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have recently announced that they are interested in developing civilian nuclear programs under IAEA oversight. Fortunately, the U.S. has significant leverage with each of these states, if it plays its cards right.

Turkey: As a member of NATO, Turkey already has an explicit defense guarantee from the U.S. and its other NATO allies. While the momentum for Turkish accession to the EU has slowed, the remarkable Turkish economic turnaround is predicated on access to EU and, to a lesser extent, American markets. The combination of assurance provided by NATO membership, the incentive of economic and political cooperation with the Western powers and the threat of loss of access to their markets seems to be a potent set of tools with which to dissuade Ankara from a proliferation decision.

Egypt: The U.S. provides Egypt with between \$1.5 and \$2 billion in aid every year. The Egyptian military has completely restructured its weapons procurement protocol and is now dependent upon American aid and arms to maintain itself. Egypt did not go nuclear in the face of Israel's nuclear program, which raises the question of why the Egyptians would view a nuclear Iran, a thousand kilometers away, as a threat so much more serious than nuclear weapons are a necessary response. (However, it is true that Israel would have had a much better chance of destroying an Egyptian nuclear weapons program than Iran would.) Given that the decision to proliferate would mean a fundamental break with the U.S., the country with which the current Egyptian regime has staked its future, it seems unlikely that Egypt would take that step. A replacement regime would likely be more Islamist, and thus less likely to see Iran as a threat, though more likely to view Israel as one.

Saudi Arabia: The Saudis would be the regional power most directly challenged by a nuclear Iran, given their rivalry with Tehran in the Gulf, in the broader Middle East, and over the right to speak for Islam in international affairs. Of the three states discussed here, Saudi Arabia has the weakest indigenous technical capability to generate a domestic nuclear program, but the most ready cash to buy one off the shelf. Given the strong relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, including rumored Saudi financial support for the development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, the most likely scenario for Saudi proliferation would be to buy part of, or somehow share in, Pakistan's nuclear force. But the Saudis have always looked to the U.S. as their ultimate security guarantor. Even when they have adopted policies that ran counter to American interests (such as the 1973-to-1974 oil embargo) and when relations have looked particularly rocky (post-9/11), the Saudis have always quickly acted to repair and restore their ties with the U.S. If Riyadh were confident of American support in the face of a more powerful Iran, Washington's influence on its proliferation decision would be substantial.

Conclusion: Simultaneous Scenarios

What might happen if the two scenarios discussed above occurred simultaneously—if Iran had a nuclear breakout at the same time that the U.S. was drawing down its military presence in the Gulf?

I have tried to make the case that either one of these events—American withdrawal or Iranian nuclear breakout—would not have enormously negative consequences for American interests if managed correctly. However, if they happen at the same time, the likelihood of negative results for the U.S. in two areas increases. First, if the U.S. were to dismantle the military infrastructure it has built up over the past two decades in the smaller Gulf States (in other words, if it were to truly withdraw over the horizon) at the same time that Iran went nuclear, the chances that the smaller Gulf States would bandwagon with Iran increases substantially. The perceptions of increased Iranian power and declining American commitment and credibility would have a profound effect on the foreign policies of the smaller Gulf States, all of which have attached themselves to the U.S. since 1991. Second, the chances of Saudi proliferation would increase in this scenario as well, and for the same reasons. If Riyadh saw the U.S. leaving the Gulf just as Iran was going nuclear, the arguments for obtaining its own nuclear deterrent force would be much stronger.

This conclusion would argue for an American withdrawal from Iraq and for a relatively sanguine view of Gulf security prospects despite the perceived short-term increase in Iranian power that this would entail, but not a full-scale withdrawal from the Gulf as a whole. The costs of the American military presence in the smaller Gulf monarchies is not very great, and it could provide the reassurance for the GCC necessary to prevent bandwagoning with Iran (among the smaller states) and proliferation in the case of Saudi Arabia, if and when Iran does go nuclear.

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THE PRUDENT USE OF POWER

IN AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

CONTRIBUTORS

PART I: The American Experience with Diplomacy and Military Restraint

Jeremi Suri

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Carolyn V. Davidson

Yale University

Jane Kellest Cramer

University of Oregon

PART II: Nonkinetic Power and Contemporary National Security Challenges

Stephen Van Evera

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Deepak Malhotra

Harvard Business School

Kimberly Ann Elliott

Center for Global Development & Peterson Institute for International Economics

Eugene Gholz

Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin

Daryl G. Press

Dartmouth College

PART III: Liquidating Military Commitments

Stephen Walt

John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Daniel Byman

*Center for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University
& Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution*

F. Gregory Gause III

University of Vermont