After Monotony?
Explaining the Persistence of the Grand Strategy of Primacy

A Review Essay

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Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has pursued a global forward-engaged grand strategy. This grand strategy has sought to shape the evolution of international relations so as to prevent the reemergence of great power competition and to guarantee the continued benefits of an open liberal world market. This strategy, which was consciously constructed by low ranking figures in the George H. W. Bush administration, has gone through periods of aggressive unilateralism and multilateral institutionalized cooperation.1 The basic goals have been broadly accepted, however, at least by policy makers and the media, and formerly by wide swathes of academia.

According to Barry Posen and Andrew L. Ross, the post-Cold War debate featured four alternative strategies.2 Prior to the 2016 candidacy of Donald Trump, however, no post-Cold War major party presidential candidate seriously questioned the need for a global hegemonic strategy. While this stance has so far been contradicted by a variety of traditional and surprisingly hawkish moves, President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership is the first crack in the long-standing global deep engagement consensus.3 Trump

2 Posen, Barry R., and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” International Security, Winter 1996/97, Vol. 21, No. 3, p5. “They may be termed neo-isolationism; selective engagement; cooperative security; and primacy (see Table 1 for a summary presentation of the four alternative visions).”
followed this move with successful demands that the NATO allies increase their defense spending.\(^4\) In addition, Trump’s demands for more equitable burden sharing were accompanied by what may have been wrongly interpreted as a questioning of the U.S. commitment to defend NATO allies.\(^5\)

In spite of the long-standing consensus in favor of a global hegemonic strategy, a credible alternative position advocating a less active strategy has emerged. Indeed, the chief proponents of America’s strategy of Deep Engagement now admit that an academic consensus has formed in opposition to this strategy. The opposition school comprises a variety of positions alternately referred to as “Restraint,” “Disengagement,” “Retrenchment,” or “Offshore Balancing.” This inconsistent nomenclature has elicited criticism but indicates that there is serious disagreement as well as overlap among opponents of Primacy as to an appropriate alternative strategy. The variety of arguments offered in favor of a new grand strategy has resulted in a somewhat fragmented debate in which participants do not even agree on the fundamental characteristics of America’s current grand strategy, let alone the most important aspects of an alternative. Nonetheless, these critics of Primacy share much in common, especially in their desire to curtail the garrisoning of U.S. forces overseas.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) See Brooks and Wohlforth, America Abroad, p.4, n. ii. The argument that “Restraint” is a misleading term is not altogether weak, but I will continue to use this term for the most part since it is the term used by the majority of scholars. The terms “retrenchment” and “disengagement” would also seem to be imperfect since arguably they are phases of action that will lead a new grand strategy rather than being a grand strategy themselves. Also, as will be briefly discussed below, the term “Deep Engagement” is itself not altogether satisfactory since it ignores aspects of U.S. grand strategy that do not conform to Brooks’ and Wohlforth’s preference. I use the terms both “Deep
As will be discussed below, the possibility for a middle ground between proponents of Primacy and of Restraint appears to have evaporated, largely because of the failure to coherently articulate a middle way. This failure is probably not to be lamented, however, since it has allowed for sharpening of debate and the formation of clearer theoretical and practical distinctions. These distinctions, however, are distributed throughout the literature and as a result are not always immediately evident. Adding more complication is the fact that proponents of alternative grand strategies have laid out their visions with varying degrees of specificity and have identified various issues as the central point of divergence. One point of disagreement among critics centers on the temporal origins of America’s grand strategy. While most advocates of Primacy view it as a continuation of America’s post-World War II stance, critics do not agree on the level of consistency between Cold War and post-Cold War strategy. Thus it is unclear to what extent Primacy is engrained in America’s political and strategic culture.

In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, the 2008 financial crisis, the war in Libya, the ongoing Syrian debacle, and the failure of the Obama administration to create a coherent alternative to Engagement” and “Primacy,” though I acknowledge that the terms are not altogether interchangeable. While Brooks and Wohlforth assert that Primacy is a state of America’s relative power position, it could also be seen as a strategy that actively seeks to maintain this position.

Primacy, an increasing number of realist scholars began to advocate Restraint. Despite initial optimism these scholars came to the conclusion that Obama’s grand strategy was not a fundamental departure from previous interventionist policies.\(^8\) The desire for more dramatic change could be seen as the confluence of two factors: the apparent excesses caused by Primacy and the threat of fiscal insolvency. While many realists hoped that the end of the Bush era would create a manageable strategic approach it turned out that the bipartisan consensus that had led to the Iraq War would not allow for a shift in strategy. In other words, while there was some willingness to question the most extreme assumptions of the Bush era the fundamental myth of an unsecure America protected only by its hegemonic strategy ran deep and had broad strategic and policy consequences.\(^9\) Since the Bush administration decision to invade Iraq was not truly a departure from previous grand strategy -- but only a bolder version of it -- a repudiation of the Bush doctrine could not and did not erase the temptation for the excessive use of force.\(^10\) Finally, the strategic ethos of management present even in the most restrained versions of Deep Engagement meant that grand strategy was still a problem-solving enterprise and the primary solution was still American military power and the leverage such power enables.

John Mearsheimer has emphasized that America’s global strategy is eroding its liberal values, especially Fourth Amendment rights. The policies of mass surveillance, indefinite detention, and


assassinations using drones not only weaken America’s liberal system but illustrate the hypocrisy of those who run the U.S. government. These actions, which are targeted at relatively small threats, are sacrificing U.S. core values essentially for no reasonable purpose.\footnote{John Mearsheimer, "America Unhinged," The National Interest, 129 (2014), 9-30.} We cannot forget that while America’s dominance may be less than it used to be, still the international constraints on American power are so loose that no single reversal could shock the system away from Primacy.\footnote{Kenneth Waltz,"Structural Realism After the Cold War," International Security Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000): 29.} Therefore, the combination of growing debt and the realization that the current consensus had prevented the shift that Obama’s election seemed to herald meant that a more fundamental rethinking of U.S. grand strategy was now practically unavoidable.

powers such as the United States, which is why Mearsheimer emphasizes other aspects of the case against Primacy.\textsuperscript{16}

II. Most Prominent Arguments for Primacy and Deep Engagement

Among the first to openly advocate a policy of Primacy after the end of the Cold War were so-called neoconservative public intellectuals. Robert Kagan and William Kristol argue that a clear moral stance combined with the willingness to push regime change was the key to success in the Cold War as well as to the continued security of the U.S. These advocates placed strong emphasis on liberal democratic political values, believing that political freedom rather than mere economic liberalism is the heart of the Western tradition and ineluctably leads authoritarian states to challenge the West. Neoconservatives share with liberal institutionalists a belief that the spread of democracy favors U.S. interests, but they reject the role of international institutions, believing these to be bureaucratic nuisances that undermine the legitimate exercise of power by the United States. Like later analysts they identified the original motivation for U.S. grand strategy not in opposition to any particular threat but in the advancement of a liberal order. Unlike liberal institutionalists, however, they claim that America’s power by itself built, maintained and could advance this order. Hostility to the United States springs from the nature of certain regimes, therefore, regime change, even in countries like China, is critical to maintaining America’s security.\textsuperscript{17}

A more formal and somewhat less alarmist version of the same argument has been advanced by Charles Krauthammer. He saw Unipolarity as allowing and, to some extent, demanding a strategy based on America’s willingness to use its power to advance its material and other


interests. Krauthammer held that the only real danger to the United States would come not from overstretch but from the increased ability of small and often hostile states to acquire weapons of mass destruction. He shared the belief of realists that power and its relative distribution was crucial in international politics. However, he concluded that power did not motivate state behavior to the extent neorealism contends. Thus while Krauthammer derided liberal means he shared many of the same goals as liberal theorists.\(^{18}\) At the same time, however, Krauthammer, Kagan and Kristol were willing to embrace a certain amount of nationalism that saw the unilateral pursuit of U.S. national interests as prudent if still, on the whole, benevolent. Most fundamentally these arguments differed from realism by holding that states did not necessarily pursue their self-interest but would be motivated to harm the United States by various misguided ideologies such as socialism, Communism, Islamic fundamentalism, and various forms of authoritarianism such as the Ba'athism of Iraq and Syria. Since they privileged ideology over the effects of anarchy these neoconservatives did not accept that ideologically friendly states would balance against the U.S. In essence they held that liberal political values had overcome the centrality of the “conflict group” but that these groupings still applied between liberal and non-liberal entities regardless of economic factors.\(^{19}\) Liberal theorist, G. John Ikenberry, agrees with earlier Primacists that America’s orientation toward the non-communist world predated the emergence of the Soviet threat, but he views institution-building as a more fundamental aspect of the U.S. order. According to Ikenberry, the skewed distribution of power that follows major wars allows a predominant state to shape the nature of the post-war order in a way that can markedly shift international relations. The open and penetrated nature of the U.S. political system allowed


America to construct an order that could simultaneously reassure allies that they would be neither abandoned nor dominated by the U.S. Ikenberry holds that the line between domestic and international order is not as clear-cut as previous theories have claimed and therefore international orders can also be constitutional in nature. Such orders can incorporate binding institutions that lock in the advantage of the dominant state while preventing exploitation of weaker states by “limiting the returns to power.” States thus are able to “solve” the relative gains problem in that dominant states will worry less about short term gains because in the long term their position will be secure.20

In the wake of the Iraq War Ikenberry revised his argument somewhat, claiming that although the U.S. could unbind itself from the liberal order it had suffered significant costs for doing so and would seek to reintegrate itself. Decline gave the United States an incentive to maintain the liberal order such that future preponderant powers could be integrated into a system that would continue to benefit American interests. This, in turn, would foster further acceptance of the liberal international order.21 Ikenberry’s modification, however, undermined the clarity of his argument and left ambiguous the relative role of choice and constraint in America’s grand strategy.

Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth present the most coherent and theoretically compelling arguments for Deep Engagement. They have argued that balancing and other countervailing tendencies should not be expected under Unipolarity and that there is no compelling theoretical or practical reason to predict America’s decline. In their view the unipolar distribution of power

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is fundamentally different from previous distributions of power. Today, systemic constraints do not limit America’s freedom of action.\textsuperscript{22}

According to Brooks and Wohlforth the U.S. grand strategy of “Deep Engagement” has continued as a logical response to the unique incentives of Unipolarity. America’s hegemonic position has allowed it to provide security to the key regions of Eurasia while at the same time fostering a global economic system and an institutional order that favor American interests. Brooks and Wohlforth point to America’s technological edge and economic preeminence as factors that guarantee that no state will be able to challenge the U.S. for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, America’s forward presence is key to maintaining both deterrence and assurance. The authors assert that, contrary to popular belief, both offensive and defensive realism support this argument. They acknowledge that Deep Engagement can allow policymakers to pursue counterproductive policies such as the forceful militarized promotion of democracy and human rights. At the same time, however, they assert that the force structures favored by advocates of Restraint would only reduce but not eliminate the ability to pursue what they label “Deep Engagement Plus.” Brooks and Wohlforth say that the critics of U.S. grand strategy grossly underestimate its benefits by ignoring its economic components and focusing almost exclusively on its military aspects.\textsuperscript{23}

Nuno Monteiro agrees with Brooks and Wohlforth that Unipolarity is key to understanding American grand strategy, but disagrees with the basis of this conclusion. According to Monteiro Unipolarity should be analyzed on two separate counts: its durability and its peacefulness. These two dimensions lead, in turn, to an understanding of which grand strategy the unipole should

\textsuperscript{23} Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}. 
pursue. Unipolarity’s durability is a factor of the cost of a war to challenge the unipole’s dominance and whether the unipole accommodates the economic rise of other powers.\textsuperscript{24}

Unipolarity, on the other hand, is not peaceful because there exist two incentives for conflict. In the first place the unipole will not be deterred from pursuing aggressive policies against recalcitrant powers. Second, due to the lack of great power alliances minor power conflicts will not be aggregated into the overall balance of power and thus will not be prevented. Monteiro also emphasizes that should a unipole disengage, it will be unable to prevent the rise of a peer competitor. As a result of these factors Monteiro recommends what he calls a strategy of “defensive dominance” in which the U.S. does not seek to slow the economic rise of other powers and does not pursue preventive war to maintain its position. This strategy does have drawbacks:

\begin{quote}
Militarily, defensive dominance requires the unipole's regular involvement in conflicts aimed at maintaining the status quo. At the same time, however, it lowers incentives for regional arms races that would lift the power of all competitors relative to that of the United States, undermining the durability of its position. Defensive dominance is therefore conducive to a durable unipolar world.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

While defensive dominance cannot guarantee Unipolarity in perpetuity it reduces incentives for major powers to challenge the unipole and it allows for the unipole to continue to enjoy the economic benefits of its status. Monteiro provides a strong case for believing that Primacy as a grand strategy leads to otherwise avoidable conflict. Monteiro’s conception of Unipolarity and the grand strategy of the U.S. is more realist than that of Brooks and Wohlforth. He explicitly denies the independent role of institutions, arguing that power and structure alone determine the

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 6.
nature of Unipolarity. Furthermore, Monteiro disagrees with Brooks and Wohlforth in that he claims that Unipolarity can be durable but not simultaneously peaceful.26

Brooks and Wohlforth argue that Monteiro sets the bar for durability too low by requiring any new pole to obtain global power projection capabilities.27 This is an interesting point and, indeed, Monteiro does not adequately incorporate the possibility that the U.S. could be prevented from projecting power across the globe by a combination of regional dynamics. These dynamics could include a Chinese capability to exclude hostile powers from the Western Pacific, a neutralization of some Eastern European NATO members, and / or simply the rise of a regional power which dominates weaker states in its region but cannot challenge the U.S. outside of its region. Even in Monteiro’s own formulation it might be possible that the U.S. could cease to be the unipole without another state becoming a true peer competitor. This possibility, while seemingly far-fetched, may actually become a reality that upends the whole framework of a “global” balance of power. Offensive realism already incorporates this possibility by emphasizing regional power balances over global power balances. All in all, Monteiro’s work, while supporting a policy of Primacy, provides a coherent theoretical basis for questioning the cost-benefit analysis of Deep Engagement.

The work of Anne Marie Slaughter, both individually and in conjunction with Ikenberry, presents a policy which, while theoretically distinct from Primacy, does not present much of a practical alternative. Slaughter urges a focus on the aggressive enforcement of liberal legal and humanitarian values through the use of pressure, including the use of US military force. This has led Slaughter to align with many aggressive actions of the U.S., including the wars in Iraq and

26 Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics*.
Libya. Slaughter and Ikenberry have argued for an international order that mirrors domestic order in that it employs hegemonic force to support the rule of law, which generally means liberal humanitarian and political norms. Although Slaughter’s preferences are somewhat less strategic and more normative than those of Primacy, the sheer amount of change she desires means that Primacy is most likely the closest practical strategy to her version of cooperative security.

Colin Dueck continues to argue for a more neoconservative style of Primacy. Dueck puts forward what he calls a “conservative” foreign policy, a less theoretically developed version of Krauthammer’s activist stance. Dueck criticizes the Obama Administration for preferring a policy of “Retrenchment,” which he links to Obama’s domestic policy tilt. Dueck views liberal internationalist versions of Primacy as naïve. He does favor containment over regime change, but advocates confrontation with a wider variety of adversaries and with far less room for accommodation than more liberal versions of Primacy.

While the case for Primacy has tended toward the positions of Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth, Robert Art has attempted through his advocacy of Selective Engagement to present a less interventionist option to achieve many of the ultimate ends of Primacy. Specifically Art advocates forward deployment in Europe, Northeast Asia and the Middle East in order to ensure stability and allow for continued economic openness. According to Art,

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selective engagement is careful in using military power but committed to use it; multilateral in practice, but not bound to everyone or committed to do everything; visibly present militarily in regions of concern, but in ways deliberately designed to elicit rather than thwart or dampen the cooperation of other key states; prime in military power, but not so unilateralist in use to create self-defeating counter-coalitions; and cooperative with those states that reciprocate in kind, but tough with those that do not.31

Of course it is not as if Primacy was designed deliberately to be self-defeating, either. While Art correctly identifies some of the excesses of Primacy, his preferred strategy does not produce any consistent criteria for avoiding these pitfalls in the future. In any case, forward deployment aimed at preventing conflict so as to further economic openness and to prevent the future rise of an unfavorable balance of power is the heart of Deep Engagement just as it is the key to Art’s strategy. It may be that Art desires a more prudent evaluation of costs and benefits, but this is not a compelling theoretical distinction.

Part II. The Restraint Challenge

Recently, the number of scholars advocating Restraint has grown dramatically. The 1990’s saw a few important contributions to this literature. Most of these scholars were traditional conservatives or libertarians who feared excessive militarization and doubted the need for a global engaged military posture. At the same time, however, these advocates differentiated themselves in important ways from old-style isolationists.

Doug Bandow argued that America’s limited government and Constitutional system are inconsistent with expansive foreign policy objectives. The government’s duty is to protect security for the sake of the lives and property of citizens as well as to maintain the security of the U.S. Constitutional system. More expansive goals are not only improper but unnecessary considering America’s geographic position and power, especially following the demise of the

Soviet Union. Due to its wealth and the way in which others view its ideas and institutions the United States can remain influential without the risk incurred by military involvement abroad. According to Bandow, the apparent moral ends of policy are often pretexts for strategic goals. In general, however, these goals are ill-conceived, unrealistic and often counter-productive. There is no need for a prosperous and secure America to tie itself to the unpredictable events in places that do not impact its vital interests. As a result the U.S. can pursue a disengaged strategy while not shutting itself off from global commerce.32

According to Ted Carpenter, the end of the Cold War allowed the United States to abandon its forward presence and adopt a strategy that essentially would amount to offshore balancing. The great economic wealth and favorable geographic position of the U.S. meant that it should encourage the emergence of a multipolar world, only intervening in the event that a potential hegemon emerged.33 Carpenter criticizes the expansion of U.S. security goals after the end of the Cold War. These policies were less a coherent strategy than an attempt to justify the continuation of old policies. He favors a more narrow definition of U.S. interest: “A vital interest ought to have a direct, immediate and substantial connection with America’s physical survival, political independence or domestic liberty.” This represents a clear rejection of the complex causal arguments that undergird a policy of Deep Engagement. For Carpenter this logic stretches interests beyond the point where they can be clearly defined and defended.

Eric Nordlinger presents a version of isolationism that narrowly defines U.S. interests as freedom of movement on the high seas, the flow of foreign trade into and out of the United States, and the physical security of North America. America’s isolated position provides it with “comprehensive

33 Ted Galen Carpenter, A Search for Enemies: America's Alliances After the Cold War, Cato Institute, 1992.
immunity,” meaning that so long as the U.S. secures its strategic perimeter, outside countries – no matter how powerful – will not be able to challenge America’s fundamental security. Nordlinger argues that involvement abroad led to a counterproductive obsession with credibility that would not exist if the United States simply pursued its own interests rather than unnecessarily tying itself to the security of others. He asserts that uncertainty of intentions should lead the United States to eschew foreign entanglements since such commitments require judgment about others’ future course.34

Eugene Gholz, Daryl Press and Harvey Sapolsky present a more nuanced case for Restraint. The end of the Cold War meant that no threat or combination of threats menaced the security or prosperity of the U.S. In their view three factors – the offense-defense balance, the propensity of states to balance, and the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons – allow the United States to pursue a policy of Restraint in the absence of a hegemonic threat in Eurasia. At least in part, however, their references to the offense-defense balance refer to what is now known as the stopping power of water.35 In addition to these factors the authors bring the most sophisticated and free-market oriented analysis to the case for Restraint. Taken as a whole their work is an important critique of hegemonic stability theory. This work also demonstrates the difference between market liberalism and the political and institutional “liberalism” favored by Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlfarth.

Gholz, Press and Sapolsky claim that world markets generally do not need the support of hegemonic leadership. In later work Gholz and Press argue that economic disruption caused by

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war would not damage the economic interests of neutral countries.\textsuperscript{36} Although war causes temporary disruptions in trading patterns, the opportunities for adjustment caused by the shift in trading partners has an economic effect on neutrals which is either null or slightly positive. Contrary to liberal theories they claim that globalization has actually decreased the economic cost of war by increasing the number of potential partners and allowing for faster and cheaper adjustments. They support this theory through two case studies, that of US trade with belligerents during the time of its World War I neutrality and that of the trade of neutral oil producing countries during the Iran-Iraq War.\textsuperscript{37}

Brooks and Wohlforth argue that the relevant conditions in the global economy that pertained during World War I no longer hold and therefore the Gholz and Press’ analysis is not applicable to the U.S. today.\textsuperscript{38} Gholz in turn argues that Brooks’ approach to this matter overestimates the importance of globalization and underestimates the role of systems integration in providing firms flexibility in their production process.\textsuperscript{39} This debate is probably the most important in the entire literature as both sides acknowledge that Gholz and Press’ argument seeks to undermine a central element – if not the central element – of Deep Engagement. If the U.S. economy has little to fear from most overseas conflicts then peace among the Great Powers of Eurasia is itself not a significant material interest of the United States. Of course, other arguments such as fear of the use of nuclear weapons in a Great Power war still obtain, but these are not really derivative of the core logic of Deep Engagement and are probably on shakier ground.\textsuperscript{40} This debate also fits


\textsuperscript{37} Gholz and Press, “Neutral Countries.”


\textsuperscript{40} Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}, 107-110.
within a wider theoretical difference over the importance of planning and order as against flexibility and market-based cooperation.¹¹

Joseph Parent and Paul K. MacDonald argue that Retrenchment has been a successful strategy for Great Powers facing relative decline. The authors assert that Retrenchment is a feasible strategy in spite of the claims of pessimists that such a strategy will be impeded by domestic constraints or will be internationally counterproductive. Measured in terms of GDP the degree of relative decline explains the degree to which Great Powers retrench. Finally the rate of relative decline shapes the strategies that will be used to implement Retrenchment. The authors find that in a study of 18 cases their theory was supported by at least eleven but possibly as many as fifteen of the cases. McDonald and Parent admit that Retrenchment has risks, but they claim that in general Retrenchment is less risky than alternative strategies such as preventive war.⁴²

It is becoming quite common to claim that America’s debt and relative economic decline make the current U.S. grand strategy ultimately unsustainable.⁴³ Advocates of Primacy, on the other hand, maintain that these arguments have no basis in economics and ignore a multitude of factors that continue to allow the United States to maintain the dollar as the reserve currency of the world and finance U.S. debts. In defense of Primacy, Carla Norrlof and William Wohlforth have examined the sources of U.S. sovereign debt from 1973 through 2015. They argue, in the first place, that “the idea of US insolvency cannot be reconciled with standard economic theory.” Additionally, they assert that “there is no support for the argument that military spending brings

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on economic decline via the sovereign debt channel.” Finally they point out that it is theoretically possible for military spending to bring about economic decline through other mechanisms but these mechanisms have not been systematically theorized.\textsuperscript{44}

Daniel Drezner argues that even if America can maintain its military edge, its relative economic decline will negate many of the benefits of Unipolarity. In other words, for Primacy to produce the benefits posited by theorists American dominance must be “full spectrum” and not merely confined to the military realm.\textsuperscript{45} While this argument is persuasive, in addition Retrenchment advocates may wish to return to the classic argument of Gholz and Press, that is, that defense spending has more negative effect than the amount of spending alone would suggest. Government spending is acknowledged generally to be less beneficial than an equivalent amount of private spending. In other words, even if the Defense budget is fiscally sustainable its negative impact is probably far more than that of the debt burden alone.\textsuperscript{46}

The works advocating Restraint after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq agree that U.S. grand strategy has been overly aggressive and counterproductive but do not completely agree on the best alternative. Today’s Restraint positions encompass advocacy of different strategies ranging from offshore balancing to neo-isolationism. Although Restraint is now generally presented as the main alternative to Primacy, it is actually a collection of positions each of which favors a


\textsuperscript{46} Gholz and Press, “Neutral Countries,” 54-56; Also see Posen, \textit{Restraint} 27. Note, however, that Posen’s argument refers merely to other ways in which the government could spend this money. Posen’s argument, however, is more subjective, since one form of government spending is not necessarily more productive than another and each, with the exception of debt reduction, produces an equal amount of debt.
different level of Retrenchment and future commitment to Eurasia. The first version opposes merely the stationing of U.S. forces onshore and criticizes some excesses of Primacy but wishes to pursue a similar level of alliance commitments from an offshore position. Others advocate withdrawing forces from some or most overseas areas while reducing, but not eliminating, the number of alliances and limiting the circumstances under which the U.S. would reengage in Eurasia. A final version is closer to traditional isolationism but is willing to reengage in very rare circumstances, generally the emergence of a potential Eurasian hegemon or an imminent threat to consolidate control over Persian Gulf oil.

Offshore balancing itself is not entirely one strategy but ranges from the more liberal positions of Stephen Walt to positions that are difficult to distinguish from neo-isolationism. Walt claims that America’s desire to micromanage events and to pursue aggressive, interventionist strategies has delegitimized U.S. Primacy and inhibited the cooperation necessary to make U.S. grand strategy successful. Walt instead favors removing forces from in-theater positions and pursuing a more narrow definition of U.S. interests that will elicit cooperation from others without requiring the frequent use of coercive tactics. His desire to maintain commitments such as NATO means that Walt’s preferred strategy is a mix of various strategies and, thus, not the best example of Restraint as an alternative grand strategy.

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47 The following discussion draws on Brooks and Wohlforth, America Abroad, p. 125, n. i.
49 Posen and Mearsheimer.
Of these positions, the most prominent in recent years has been Barry Posen’s version of Restraint.52 Posen’s *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* presents both a critique of current U.S. grand strategy and a formulation of Posen’s preferred alternative strategy. According to Posen, “a grand strategy is a nation-state’s theory of how to produce security for itself.” Posen says that a grand strategy does this by identifying threats, ranking them in importance, and identifying the political and military responses to these threats.53 The current grand strategy of the United States emerged out of the Post-Cold War debate. This debate featured four options: Cooperative Security, Primacy, Selective Engagement and Isolationism. Posen claims that the current U.S. grand strategy, which he labels “Liberal Hegemony,” is a melding of Primacy and Cooperative Security. On the other hand, Restraint is portrayed as a combination of Isolationism and Selective Engagement.54

Posen emphasizes that Restraint is a realist strategy premised on four causal factors in international politics: “the anarchical condition of international politics; the propensity of modern people to identify with groups larger than themselves…; the enormous and obvious destructive power of nuclear weapons; and the propensity of war, once underway, to create a

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52 Barry Posen's important contribution, for example, defines grand strategy "as a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself," thus excluding any US interest in fostering economic globalization and cooperating within institutions on nonmilitary issues. Most Retrenchment proponents do not explain why they exclude the nonsecurity benefits of Deep Engagement.


54 Ibid, p. 6-7. Brooks and Wohlforth argue that this characterization is not a description of U.S. grand strategy but of optional elements that are sometimes exercised and sometimes ignored. They label these elements “Deep Engagement Plus.” At issue here is whether the liberal goals that Posen associates with U.S. grand strategy actually motivate the strategy itself. It is somewhat unfortunate that Posen does not completely differentiate between liberal economic goals such as global trade and other goals such as democracy promotion and human rights. Posen argues that U.S. grand strategy seeks to promote liberalism in general without regard to costs and benefits. A crucial issue, however, is whether the grand strategy itself is pursued for the same reasons that the most destructive policies, such as the war in Iraq, were pursued. Brooks and Wohlforth claim, in essence, that the opportunity for U.S. intervention is related to two elements of U.S. grand strategy, force posture and force structure. While the elimination of a forward posture does reduce somewhat the chance of U.S. interventions characteristic of Deep Engagement Plus, it could not by itself preclude them. Only a large scale reduction in force structure that makes interventions infeasible could completely eliminate the temptations that Posen associates with Liberal Hegemony. (*America Abroad*).
system of action resistant to human control.” He points to four negative results of America’s present global strategy. He argues that it stimulates opposition to the United States. It encourages allies to pay less than their share (“cheap riding”) or take risks they otherwise would not take (“reckless driving”). U.S. strategy generates opposition to the U.S. by ignoring identity politics which in this context means nationalist or similarly based political action. Finally, Liberal Hegemony is “inherently expansionist,” that is, it leads inexorably to military action aimed at the expansion of the liberal order.

Posen identifies the main goals of Restraint as preventing the rise of a Eurasian hegemon, countering nuclear proliferation, and combating international terrorists. Against that threat Posen suggests utilizing primarily policing and intelligence assets of other countries, though he leaves room for small scale military operations such as Special Forces raids and drone strikes. As for a Eurasian hegemon, Posen advocates the maintenance of command of the commons to ensure the ability of the U.S. to intervene in Eurasia when necessary. He notes that maintaining command of the commons is a demanding task. Therefore, Posen recommends a force structure tilted toward naval power. Posen reviews all of the plausible justifications for the US commitment to the Persian Gulf, concluding that none of them justifies the maintenance of forces on shore in the region. He argues that a regional hegemon would be a threat to US interests, but that a bid for regional hegemony can be thwarted by an offshore US presence.

We can see from these works that while all advocates of Restraint repudiate the need for Deep Engagement-style in-theater presence, the levels of force structure they prefer vary, as do their

56 Ibid., pp. 65-68.
57 Ibid., pp. 45; 69-70.
58 Ibid., p. 85-86.
59 Ibid., pp. 135-163.
60 Ibid., pp. 144-163.
willingness to use force in the future. This complicates the debate somewhat because in practice
the United States must choose not only between Primacy and Restraint but among differing
levels of future flexibility. Fundamentally these choices will revolve around two issues: the
monetary cost of U.S. grand strategy and the trade-off between flexibility and temptation. The
differences between Restraint and Primacy or Deep Engagement revolve around both political
and economic questions. However, recent attempts to recast the debate have not overcome the
crucial question of the link among stability, forward presence and a beneficial economic order.
While the costs of Primacy remain important, each issue in U.S. grand strategy must continue to
be considered in light of these three fundamental factors. In the following sections I will address
the key components of America’s grand strategy and how the case for Restraint frames each of
these issues.

Part III. Core Issues for U.S. Grand Strategy

Core Issue 1: Public Opinion

The primary focus here overall is the academic debate surrounding U.S. grand strategy and the
Restraint position in particular. In this section I briefly discuss some of the work of important
non-profit groups seeking to influence public opinion on these topics. Due in part to the previous
preference among academics for a forward-engaged grand strategy the CATO Institute produced
among the most prominent early work advocating Restraint. This work can be divided into very
traditional libertarian positions on U.S. grand strategy and the work of realist academics who
have produced occasional papers for CATO.

Some of this work has sought to question the extent to which the United States should be willing
to take risks for even somewhat desirable outcomes such as the continued *de facto* independence
of Taiwan. Other work has examined hawkish critiques of the Obama administration, noting that in fact there is significant overlap between the grand strategies of the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations. More realist-centered critiques have emphasized that countries like Japan have not shifted the focus of their policies much over time but instead have pursued a buck-passing strategy to the extent that it was compatible with their security. Finally, some collections have included both works from Cato scholars and from academic advocates of Restraint.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs has engaged in efforts to clarify public and “elite” opinion on foreign affairs and the U.S. global role. Findings focus on a variety of current affairs and foreign policy goals. According to CCGA a majority of Americans prefer that the U.S. remains engaged as a leader in world affairs. Isolationism is not supported. In addition they found that opposition to elements of the liberal order such as free trade and immigration is common among Trump supporters but not among the majority of Americans. The majority of Americans, including Trump supporters, also maintain positive views about some other

significant pillars of the liberal order such as the NATO alliance. The authors believe that the public’s preference for engagement will continue over the long term.\footnote{America in the Age of Uncertainty October 6, 2016 By: Dina Smeltz, Senior Fellow, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy; Ivo H. Daalder, President, Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Karl Friedhoff, Fellow, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy; Craig Kafura, Research Associate.}

The newly-founded Defense Priorities Foundation has begun work to advance a restraint-oriented policy agenda. This group’s goals include auditing the Pentagon, pushing for a new round of base readjustments and closure, encouraging more appropriate burden sharing by U.S. allies, and an effort to assure that Congress carries out its responsibilities regarding authorization of force as per Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution. Importantly, the work of Defense Priorities emphasizes that decision-making regarding U.S. grand strategy should be open and take place within the normal processes of America’s representative political system.\footnote{Defense Priorities, “Defense Priorities: Leading Issues.” Online at http://www.defensepriorities.org/issues.}

The election of Donald Trump has unclear implications for U.S. grand strategy. On the one hand, Trump has voiced support for restraint positions on a variety of issues, including alliances. On the other hand, Trump is notoriously inconsistent and his actual commitment to any particular issue can never be taken for granted. At the very least, however, Trump has shown a greater willingness to question U.S. grand strategy than did Hillary Clinton or even former President Barack Obama. Thus, as with the rest of Trump’s policies, it is unclear which positions will be implemented. The long term implications of Trump’s election for U.S. grand strategy are impossible to predict, but a shift toward implementation of certain aspects of restraint is not out of the question.

Core Issue 2: Terrorism
Given the role of terrorism in America’s grand strategy since 2001 it is unsurprising that this issue represents an important point of divergence for proponents and opponents of America’s current strategy. Deep Engagement advocates believe that terrorism is a strategic problem best dealt with through the international cooperation enabled by a forward-engaged grand strategy. The relationships on which U.S. counter-terrorism depends cannot be isolated from the overall cooperation that encourages issue-specific cooperation.\textsuperscript{68} Furthermore, advocates of Deep Engagement have claimed that the U.S. reaction to 9/11 was reasonable given the information available at the time. It was also reasonable that other courses of action were foreclosed by legitimate concerns about future attacks.\textsuperscript{69} Neoconservative Primacy advocates believe that terrorism is caused by Islamic fundamentalism and a lack of freedom in Muslim societies. They argue that fundamentally transforming the political structure of these societies will lead Muslim people to abandon radical points of view.\textsuperscript{70}

In contrast, many of the advocates of Restraint have adopted a view of terrorism similar to that of Robert Pape’s work on suicide terrorism.\textsuperscript{71} According to Pape the phenomenon of suicide terrorism has arisen as a response to foreign occupations. This argument criticizes other literature for focusing too heavily on individual terrorists and not on the political and social logic that leads to suicide terrorism. While the motives of individuals play a role, focusing on this aspect leads to the confusion of political motives with deviant behavior or “radicalization.” Nationalism rather

\textsuperscript{68} Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}.


\textsuperscript{71} Stephen M. Walt, “In the National Interest: A Grand New Strategy for American Foreign Policy,” \textit{Boston Review}, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2005), 1-14; John Mearsheimer, "America Unhinged," \textit{The National Interest} 129 (2014), pp 9-30. Mearsheimer explains an important argument regarding the role of terrorism in the strategy of Restraint: “…America’s interventionist policies are the main cause of its terrorism problem. Nevertheless, terrorism is a minor threat, which is why Washington is free to continue pursuing the policies that helped cause the problem in the first place.” Thus, the main issue is not that U.S. grand strategy increases anti-U.S. terrorism but that -- as far as terrorism goes -- U.S. grand strategy does not contribute to American security.
than Islamic fundamentalism is the key ideological motivator of suicide terrorism. In more recent years this thesis was seemingly challenged by the rise of transnational terrorism committed by individuals not directly affiliated with occupied nations. It has been argued, however, that these individuals are motivated by similar logic. They come to identify with occupied groups and commit politically inspired acts on behalf of these communities.

The solution to this phenomenon lies not in attempting to change cultural, political, or social institutions in Muslim countries, but in a combination of more targeted policing measures and less intrusion into the affairs of other states. Specifically, the U.S. should switch to an offshore force posture or -- when such a posture is temporarily infeasible -- switch to a less intrusive form of in-theater presence that supports rather than polices local communities. Finally, abandoning policies of regime change and interference in domestic political processes is key to averting further suicide terrorists attacks.

Although the United States has made the targeting of terrorist leaders for assassination a key component of its anti-terrorism strategy, a study of this subject concluded that such targeting is not effective for larger established groups such as Al Qaeda. This points to a larger problem with the anti-terrorism approach of U.S. grand strategy, that is, the tendency to ignore the core components of these groups’ appeal and instead to view them as the product of aberrant mentalities to be eliminated or corrected through social engineering or propaganda. This is not to

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73 James K. Feldman and Robert Pape, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
74 Pape, *Dying to Win*.
say that the argument of groups like Al Qaeda or ISIS should be taken at face value. However, the U.S. would do better to acknowledge the basis of their appeal.76

A central premise, even of the Obama Administration’s approach to terrorism, has been that Al Qaeda and associated groups pose a threat to the United States that is significant enough to merit the frequent, if small-scale, use of military force.77 John Mueller and Mark Stewart assert, however, that U.S. counterterrorism is primarily an exercise in self-delusion in which participants frighten themselves into grossly exaggerating the capacity of what are at worst incompetent hotheads. U.S. officials have cultivated what these authors refer to as “the myth of the mastermind.” According to this myth, terror leaders like Khalid Sheik Mohamed and Mohamed Atta are evil geniuses always on the verge of carrying out another unpredictable and spectacular attack. Further, U.S. counterterrorism does not employ any accepted form of risk analysis or threat assessment but largely “confirms” assumptions without evidence. An examination of every post 9/11 terrorist plot against the U.S. outside of war zones reveals that almost all plotters were incapable of carrying out their plans or were enabled primarily by government informants. U.S. public opinion has created an uncontrollable fear among public officials that if they do not exercise the highest level of vigilance they will be held responsible for future attacks. The fear of such attacks, however, is not justified by careful analysis of these terrorists’ activities.78

The most chilling scenario offered to justify America’s aggressive counter-terrorism measures is the detonation of an improvised nuclear device.79 Generally these scenarios are not particularly detailed and/or they grossly underestimate the difficulty involved in such operations. John

76 Pape, Dying to Win.
78 Mueller and Stewart, Chasing Ghosts.
Mueller has argued that a successful attack of this nature would require the execution of a full twenty complex steps almost none of which would plausibly succeed on its own, let alone in combination with the other 19.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed the whole notion that there is any chance that a state could carry out a nuclear attack by terrorist proxy without successful attribution by the U.S. is preposterous and has no basis either in the history of terrorism or the history of these weapons.\textsuperscript{81}

The level of threat posed by terrorism has been seen by some to merit a combination of policing, intelligence and occasional small-scale military operations against Al Qaeda and its affiliates.\textsuperscript{82}

While the rise of ISIS created problems for U.S. grand strategy in the Middle East, it hardly should be seen as a justification of the in-theater presence approach. The decision of the Obama administration in the summer of 2011 to seek the removal of Bashar al Assad in Syria made stability a low priority for U.S. strategy.\textsuperscript{83}

Certainly the removal of U.S. forces from Iraq and the decision of the central government to rule on essentially a sectarian basis weakened the position of the Sunni tribes and made the maintenance of more moderate factions in the Sunni community more difficult. Given the importance of the Anbar Awakening in creating calm in Iraq after 2008, the criticism of the Obama administration for discontinuing its payments to the Sunni tribes is not unjustified.\textsuperscript{84} It is hard to imagine, however, that even had the rise of ISIS been prevented the central problems of instability in Syria and Sunni opposition to the Shia-led central government would have allowed for long-term stability. In any case, the rise of ISIS certainly demonstrates the perils of

\textsuperscript{80} John Mueller, \textit{Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarism from Hiroshima to al-Qaeda} (Oxford University Press, 2009), Figure 13.1, p 186.


\textsuperscript{82} Posen, \textit{Restraint}.


overestimating American influence in places like Syria and underestimating the value of stable central governments. For Restraint advocates this is the primary lesson of these conflicts. Certainly these conflicts have also shown that U.S. air power in coordination with skilled local allies can produce results, but the events have also highlighted the lack of ability to achieve long-term change in the region. An offshore posture does not eliminate America’s ability to support local allies in combat operations against groups such as The Islamic State.85

In sum, Restraint advocates have two overarching themes with regard to terrorism. The first is that in-theater presence in areas where the U.S. is likely to be viewed negatively should be minimized if not eliminated. The second is that while terrorism should be taken seriously it should not be treated as a paramount issue requiring the use of large scale military force. To treat terrorism as primarily an issue for policing and intelligence is not to assert that it is irrelevant but to acknowledge that not all opponents are equally capable. While the question of motivation for anti-U.S. terrorism is important, the limited capabilities of these groups should not be forgotten.

Core Issue 3: Oil

The U.S. approach to securing a steady supply of petroleum took shape in the 1970’s. While the OPEC embargo focused popular attention on the issue of the maintenance of a stable oil supply the formation of the Carter Doctrine and the Rapid Deployment Force solidified a militarized approach to this issue. The U.S. role in the Persian Gulf became more visible during Operation Desert Shield and the subsequent First Gulf War. Following the decisive defeat of Iraq the U.S.

continued to station troops in the region largely out of fear that Iraq, or possibly Iran, would threaten producers such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the future.

Deep Engagement advocates point out that the U.S. has pursued other interests in the area – for example, non-proliferation – but in any case the issue of petroleum sets the stage on which the U.S. pursues its other “interests” in the Persian Gulf and in the wider Middle East. These advocates acknowledge that direct threat to supply may not absolutely necessitate U.S. deployments to the region. They argue, however, that disruptions and subsequent price shocks could be so damaging that forward presence is justified. Emblematic of the economic logic of Deep engagement it is claimed that “…access to oil at stable prices is one of the core elements of the global order that the United States constructed after World War II.”

Advocates of Deep Engagement also fear that ending forward deployment to the region would weaken the willingness of states to cooperate should supply be threatened in the future.

A recent study of basing in the region, however, found that the Gulf Monarchies are acutely aware of both external and internal threats to their security and adjust their cooperation with the U.S. accordingly. When these states face external threats they allow the United States basing rights in order to enhance deterrence. On the other hand, when these threats abate and internal threats predominate they revoke basing rights and adopt less prominent forms of security cooperation. These findings, the aftermath of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and the self-interest of oil producing states present significant reason to doubt the claims of Deep Engagement

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86 Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p 139, in Brooks and Wohlforth, *American Abroad*, 187 n. 64. This claim is quite broad and shows a surprising faith in the ability of the U.S., or any state, for that matter, to influence the global economy. It is one thing for the U.S. to seek to avoid external price shocks precipitated by conflict and quite another to believe that America is somehow capable of guaranteeing “stable prices” in any sector of the economy.
87 Brooks and Wohlforth, *America Abroad*.
advocates that the U.S. might be unable to return to the Persian Gulf in the event of threats from a potential oil hegemon.

Some important disagreements over the role of oil in international security include the role of free markets, stability, and whether the U.S. interferes with or supports an efficient exchange of goods.\(^89\) According to advocates of Restraint, the conventional fears of disruption of petroleum supply are based on inadequate understanding of how markets adjust to shocks. While certain scenarios do present threats that could not be dealt with through market adjustment, these threats are either best countered through an offshore posture or are beyond the control of the United States.\(^90\) Furthermore, the Persian Gulf War demonstrated that U.S. air power is exceedingly capable of targeting and slowing ground offensives.\(^91\)

In addition to the ability of markets to adjust to shocks some more recent work has questioned whether oil is truly a cause of significant international conflict. In particular the costs associated with the conquest of petroleum reserves should lead states to conclude that conquering such reserves while necessary in certain extreme circumstances is not economically profitable. Pre-war deterrence is not the only factor that might prevent countries from seeking to use force to seize a significant portion of the global petroleum supply.\(^92\) If oil itself is not such a prominent

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\(^92\) Emily Meierding, “Dismantling the Oil Wars Myth,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 258-288. Meierding points to four factors -- invasion costs, occupation costs, international costs, and investment costs -- that make the conquest of oil-rich territory less beneficial than is widely believed.
cause of international conquest the question is raised whether policies designed to prevent such conquest might be not merely unnecessary but counter-productive.

Other recent work shows that states not only “respond” to oil markets, but also misperceive them, undertaking reckless policies that needlessly interfere with the flow of oil. According to Roger J. Stern, Western policy toward oil in general and the Middle East in particular has been shaped by “oil scarcity ideology,” that is, “[b]elief in peak oil and related scarcity imperatives for aggressive policy.” Such imperatives have been derived from repeatedly falsified, but nonetheless recurring, predictions that peak oil is imminent. One unfortunate result of oil scarcity ideology was the formation of the Carter Doctrine. This doctrine was based on the false belief held by Zbigniew Brzezinski and others that a Soviet Union lacking sufficient petroleum would soon initiate conquests of oil rich territory such as Iran. The decision to support Saddam Hussein against Iran and thus prevent his regime from collapsing was also the result of oil scarcity ideology, as was the decision in 2003 to invade Iraq.

A final position holds that while hegemonic power is important to the free flow of oil the main object of deterring aggression in the Gulf can be achieved with an in-theater presence that is adjusted to meet changing threat levels. As a result while a completely offshore presence is not sufficient the U.S. does not need to maintain large in-theater forces given the lack of a potential regional hegemon. This argument, however, assumes more than it proves and in particular, as

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Roger Stern points out, simply dismisses as “too complex” the possibility that economic forces determine how and when oil reaches the market.95

In sum, the role of petroleum in U.S. grand strategy demonstrates that Restraint is a theoretically coherent alternative forcefully rejects hegemonic stability theory.96 While recognizing that markets are not perfect, advocates of Restraint emphasize the ability of markets to compensate for disruptive shocks. In addition, the traditional view overestimates the value of oil conquest and misperceives the dangers and costs. Finally, by advancing an inaccurate view of Gulf States and their environment, the traditional view caricatures Middle Eastern states and thus contributes to a colonial mentality that justifies actions such as the invasion of Iraq.97 These factors, as well as the abundant capacities of U.S. air power stationed offshore, make an in-theater presence in the Persian Gulf both unnecessary and counter-productive.

Core Issue 4: Alliances and NATO

Disagreements over the origin and utility of the U.S. alliance system are central to the debate over U.S. grand strategy. For both advocates of Primacy and proponents of Deep Engagement these alliances were never simply a tool to counter adversaries but evolved as part of the U.S.-led liberal order following World War II. The primary purpose of this order was to prevent the narrow economic nationalism and rivalry that supposedly had been the root cause of the War.98

Following the end of the Cold War these alliances were to serve the purpose of structuring relations so as to prevent the reemergence of rivalry caused by the inability of weaker states to guarantee their own security. While allies could provide some useful benefits to the United

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95 Roger Stern, *Oil Scarcity Ideology in US Foreign Policy, 1908–97.*
98 Ikenberry, *After Victory.*
States, America’s primary interest was to prevent security dilemma-style dynamics leading to a disruption of the open economic order. Thus, the alliance system served both to constrain allies and to assure them that future cooperation would be stable and beneficial for all parties.\textsuperscript{99} In addition, tying the military industrialized powers of Eurasia to the U.S. alliance system would prevent the emergence of a rival power that could become a potential regional hegemon.\textsuperscript{100}

Advocates of neo-conservative-style Primacy, however, disagree with advocates of Deep Engagement regarding the utility of institutionalized alliance cooperation. For advocates of Deep Engagement the continued success of the liberal order was challenged by the neoconservative preference for unilateralism. According to Deep Engagement advocates, U.S. alliances should not merely be judged on an individual basis but on the extent to which they create a milieu that lessens the incentive for conflict and increases the possibilities for economic and other benefits of cooperation. Thus, one form of cooperation opens up the possibility of cooperation in other issue areas.\textsuperscript{101} For advocates of Primacy, on the other hand, the differential between America’s power and that of other states means that it is both irresponsible and unnecessary to make cooperation such a high priority for U.S. strategy.\textsuperscript{102} Recently advocates of Deep Engagement have also claimed that alliances have almost never had the effect of dragging the U.S. into conflict. Furthermore, any tendency that alliances have to lead to entanglement is balanced by tendencies to restrain allies or the U.S. itself.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{99} Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}; Ikenberry, \textit{Liberal Leviathan}.
\textsuperscript{100} Brooks et al., “Don’t Come Home,” p. 11.
Jennifer Lind points out that this discussion dismisses entirely the possibility that the US becomes entangled by redefining its interests to include alliance commitments themselves.\textsuperscript{104} In a traditional alliance the purpose of the alliance is to deter an attack against or to prevent the defeat of an ally because this would benefit a common enemy. Traditional alliances have been targeted at particular states that present a potential threat to members of the alliance, either directly or indirectly.\textsuperscript{105} However, the purpose of alliances under Deep Engagement is to prevent or to limit conflict itself in order to maintain a favorable security environment. As a result it is not clear that expansion of a state’s definition of its own self-interest due to alliance commitments could be seen as negative according to the logic of Deep Engagement. The claim of Deep Engagement advocates that alliance commitments today are a continuation of Cold War commitments ignores the question of what made those commitments credible.\textsuperscript{106} It may be that the interest of the U.S. in stability inclines the country to control its allies and seek peaceful resolution of disputes. On the other hand, since the U.S. interest is more in a state of equilibrium than in intangible political results the gradual expansion of America’s role does not seem to contradict the core logic of Deep Engagement.

As Daryl Press has argued, credibility of a commitment or threat is determined by the interest at stake in a particular time and by the power to implement the threat or commitment.\textsuperscript{107} Thus a commitment that is predicated on the favorability of the security environment and not on any particular interest that could be threatened by a specific adversary is inherently less credible.

\textsuperscript{106} For an alternative to Ikenberry’s view of the evolution of the liberal order that pays more attention of the role of the Soviet threat see Marc Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963, Princeton University Press, 1999.
This is not to imply that all U.S. alliances lack credibility but to argue that they cannot be evaluated in the aggregate as Deep Engagement advocates prefer.

For proponents of Restraint U.S. alliances are faulty for several reasons. First, they discourage U.S. allies from defending themselves. This “cheap riding” is characterized by low defense expenditures, relative incapacity of forces, and relatively modest contributions to their own defense.\(^{108}\) Since states tend to engage in “buck-passing” the forward deployment of U.S. forces and the attendant alliance commitments discourage U.S. allies from maintaining modern proficient forces.\(^{109}\) This is the most politically salient argument against U.S. alliances, as can be seen by both the rhetoric and the actions of the Trump administration. The expansion of NATO both in membership and in mission since the end of the Cold War has elicited criticism. This enlargement threatened to antagonize Russia while creating an unsustainable burden of either defending most of Eastern and Central Europe or constructing an unrealistic cooperative security arrangement.\(^{110}\)

Finally, the wars in Libya and Kosovo bear importantly on whether alliance commitments cause the U.S. to undertake action for fear of losing credibility with allies. The war in Kosovo, while involving some political and humanitarian considerations, also was triggered by concern about the credibility of NATO and the U.S. role in the alliance. While U.S. allies were not eager to intervene in the conflict, the desire to maintain NATO’s relevance and the credibility of U.S.

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\(^{109}\) Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 159-162.

threats were important factors in the ultimate decision to intervene.\textsuperscript{111} Kosovo demonstrated how the conception of NATO’s role led to ever-more assertive implementation of an ever-more expansive mission.\textsuperscript{112} The war in Libya illustrates a case in which allied interests were arguably more significant than those of the U.S. Despite the claims that the NATO allies and the Arab League would take responsibility for Libya, this was beyond their capacities and, probably, also beyond their will.\textsuperscript{113} Since the Europeans lacked the capacity to intervene independently, the U.S., through NATO, had to become involved for European goals to be realized. The whole notion that the Europeans could provide security outside of the NATO area ignores the fact that such provision burdens the U.S. more, not less.

These conflicts were less expressions of common interest than of fears about U.S. credibility and the ability of U.S. allies to realize their goals within U.S. led alliance systems. Since the U.S. insists on maintaining a superior military force that can fight on behalf of its allies, it is not a coincidence that allies are often unable to achieve their own interests without these American forces. In theory, this may give the U.S. some control, but in practice the commitment to alliance cohesion may trump the desire to constrain allies. This is especially true when, as in Libya, risks seem low and thus alliance cohesion seems to be a more salient priority than avoiding unnecessary conflict. That results may be negative may not even dissuade such action in the future so long as the U.S. position in the alliance emerges strengthened. Thus the importance of


assurance in Deep Engagement means that the line between necessary support of allies and unnecessary involvement in armed conflict may not be clear and therefore often may not be drawn.

The Ukraine crisis has focused Restraint advocates’ case against the NATO alliance. By expanding the alliance and pursuing, simultaneously, nonproliferation, NATO managed to antagonize Russia while making it less likely that states like Ukraine could defend themselves. 114 The lack of political criteria for NATO’s continued mission has also resulted in the extension of commitments that the alliance is apparently unable to honor. 115 This is hardly surprising since the focus on stability and assurance does not provide any clear criteria for the boundaries of NATO’s commitments.

In sum, the Restraint criticism of America’s alliance system centers both on fears of entrapment and the allocation of burdens. While it may seem that burden sharing might be obtained without radical changes to U.S. grand strategy there are important theoretical reasons to doubt this. In addition, it is unclear whether the disproportionate allocation of burden is a bug or a feature of U.S. grand strategy. As a result, a shift in force posture may well be the only way to achieve the adjustment of burden sharing. Whether this should be undertaken depends on the overall efficacy of these alliances. There is significant reason, however, to doubt that U.S. alliances achieve an appropriate level of deterrence and thus are worth the risk that they entail. Advocates of Restraint also point to deterrence theory for support for their opposition to the breadth of U.S. alliances.

115 See, for example, David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics,” (Santa Monica: RAND Arroyo Center, 2016).
Specifically, the fact that extended deterrence is deemed to be inherently less credible both puts the U.S. at risk and calls into question the ultimate sustainability of its alliances.116

Core Issue 5: Russia

Over the past decade, relations with Russia have become an increasingly divisive issue in American politics. Periodically the prospect of improved relations with Russia has arisen only to be foreclosed both by reactions to Russia’s actions and by the perceived domestic political utility of opposition to Russian policies. Deep Engagement advocates have long viewed the U.S. alliance system and other pillars of the liberal order as a hedge against the possibility of Russian resurgence. At the same time they have held out the possibility of cooperation with Russia at least on a limited number of issues.117

Primacy advocates and, indeed, most major figures in the Republican Party until the emergence of Donald Trump, have treated Russia as an adversary or potential adversary both in Europe and, increasingly, in parts of the Middle East.118 Perceptions of Russia’s war with Georgia, its annexation of Crimea and other actions in Ukraine, as well as its support for Bashar al Assad’s regime in Syria have led to increased advocacy of an adversarial approach to Russia, again with the occasional exception of President Trump and some of his closest allies. All of these events have led to increased sanctions on Russia and on high-ranking Russian officials.119 Allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election have led to yet more domestic political pressure for hardline policies.

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116 Gholz et al., Come Home, 34, in Posen, Restraint, 76. In this regard the claim of Brooks and Wohlforth that “security provided from the outside is likely to make these regions more secure than they would be if security were provided locally” is somewhat perplexing. (America Abroad, 89).
In general, Restraint advocates have focused on the gap between Russian and American capabilities and have been skeptical of the claims that Russia is, or could become, a serious threat to the United States or the vast majority of its allies. Russia is facing a demographic crisis that demographer Nicholas Eberstadt has described as “ethnic self-cleansing.”\textsuperscript{120} The picture of a resurgent Russia ready to challenge the West is undermined by long term demographic decline.\textsuperscript{121} In 2012 Russia ranked 124\textsuperscript{th} in life expectancy at birth and 143\textsuperscript{rd} in male life expectancy.\textsuperscript{122} While the Russian government has heralded the gradual increase in birth rates alcoholism and accidental death continue to yield long-term demographic decline out of step even with other countries with declining populations.\textsuperscript{123}

This is not to say that Russia does not constitute a significant actor in security affairs. Rather, recent events seem to have demonstrated that Western criticisms of Russia’s military modernization did not adequately take into account the goals and advantages of the Russian military industrial complex. The war with Georgia and Russia’s seizure of Crimea demonstrated that the Russian military was not as inadequate as was widely believed in the West, but this does not imply that it is capable of constituting a significant threat to Europe.\textsuperscript{124}

Given this trajectory, most advocates of Restraint have emphasized one of a few views of America’s relations with Russia. In the first place, due to the combination of Russia’s long-term weakness but continuing military strength, Restraint advocates have viewed steps toward

\textsuperscript{120} Nicholas Eberstadt, "Drunken Nation: Russia's Depopulation Bomb," \textit{World Affairs}, Vol.171, No. 4 (2009), 51-62.
\textsuperscript{122} World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Observatory (http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main) in Brooke and Gans-Morse, "Putin’s Crackdown," 12.
\textsuperscript{123} Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Dying Bear: Russia's Demographic Disaster," \textit{Foreign Affairs} (2011), 95-108.
confrontation with Russia as serving no positive purpose and as risking conflict in the near term.\textsuperscript{125} Offensive realists have viewed Russia as primarily a potential partner in any future effort to contain China.\textsuperscript{126}

While Restraint advocates have recognized Russia’s near-term military potential they also have argued that Europeans are perfectly capable of dealing with Russia on their own. This is reasonably said to require additional expenditures and even the acquisition of nuclear weapons either by Germany or by the Europeans in concert.\textsuperscript{127} In addition, as noted above, Restraint advocates have questioned the extension of security guarantees to Eastern European states, especially former Soviet republics.\textsuperscript{128} At the same time, Russia’s nuclear forces continue to present a major issue for U.S. grand strategy. In particular, the desire to avoid confrontation with Russia has not been adequately reconciled with the adoption of adversarial stances in regard to Syria and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{129}

The United States must consider the combination of Russia’s short-to-medium term military revival in combination with its probable long-term decline in assessing policy toward Russia. The desire to maintain the integrity of borders in the post-Soviet space is understandable but should be weighed against long term U.S. interests particularly including the rise of China. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for example, Georgia had little practical chance of ever reasserting day-to-day rule even before the 2008 conflict. While large numbers of territorial changes within the former Soviet space could create significant instability, it seems incongruous

\textsuperscript{126} Mearsheimer, \textit{Tragedy}, 361-62.
\textsuperscript{128} See Core Issue 4.
for Western leaders to insist on the moral superiority of sovereignty decisions reached in the first case by Soviet leaders, Josef Stalin and Lavrenti Beria. The fact that Kosovo set a precedent for the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a fact that Western leaders have preferred to ignore.

In sum, Restraint advocates see little reason for long-term competition between the U.S. and a declining Russia. While Russia’s efforts to rescue its weakened military have been impressive, these developments do not fundamentally threaten the security of Western Europe. The Ukraine crisis, the war in Georgia and Russia’s involvement in Syria raise the question of whether the U.S. wants to confront Russia over issues that are marginal to U.S. interests or to seek cooperation in more important issues such as China’s rise. Even if the U.S. foregoes future attempts at cooperation with Russia its relative weakness means that the U.S. will not pay much of a price for such a policy unless it continues to pursue policies of opposing Russia in the post-Soviet republics. Russia’s obviously significant interests in the post-Soviet sphere along with Russia’s significant nuclear arsenal, however, mean that a continuation of a seemingly confrontational approach by Washington will constitute a counterproductive policy of bluff.

Core Issue 6: China

As noted above, Unipolarity is the most important enabling factor of U.S. current grand strategy today. The rise of China is a primary focus of debate because it is the one occurrence most likely to undermine U.S. global preeminence and thus precipitate a shift in U.S. grand strategy. Following the Cold War and into the first decade of the millennium, debate over China was

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largely, but not exclusively, focused on the options of engagement and containment.\textsuperscript{132} Liberal optimists believed that by engaging with China economically the United States could both guarantee a Chinese stake in peace and stability and help further a transition toward a democratic political system.\textsuperscript{133} Realist pessimists, on the other hand, argue that conflict between the U.S. and a rising China is structurally determined and that the policy of engagement has only been making China richer and more powerful at the expense of U.S. security. These analysts favored limiting trade with China and pursuing – either now or in the future – a policy of containing China’s rise and preparing for intense security competition.\textsuperscript{134} Aaron Friedberg emphasizes, however, that policy-makers never truly accepted either position and that the U.S. has in fact followed a policy of “congagement” that favored economic cooperation but also sought to deter China from adopting a revisionist stance. He has also claimed that in spite of China’s revisionist aims, a policy of pure containment is both unrealistic and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{135}

Deep engagement advocates have varied in their preferred policies toward China. G. John Ikenberry advocated integrating China into the liberal international order believing this would allow for a peaceful Chinese ascent that would not endanger American interests. Furthermore, he asserted that this was China’s best option, since China would be able to constrain the U.S.


through norms and institutions while avoiding an overwhelming balancing coalition. More recently Ikenberry and Adam Liff have emphasized that China’s rise is creating contradictory incentives for conflict and cooperation and relations will have to be managed to avoid the emergence of a security dilemma or other disputatious relations.

According to the proponents of Deep Engagement the provision of security by an outside hegemonic power provides a more stable security environment in East Asia. Essential to this view is the claim that China’s rise, while significant, does not portend a shift away from Unipolarity, at least for the foreseeable future. Thus the U.S. remains the power with the greatest interest in and ability to maintain peace and stability in the region. Stephen Biddle has argued that even if China attains the ability to produce military technology comparable to that of the United States, mastering the modern system of force employment will be a significant hurdle that China will not necessarily overcome.

The first possible Restraint position toward China involves the question of the link between Unipolarity and Deep Engagement. According to this position China’s rise has now reached the point that Deep Engagement can no longer be sustained because China will be able to resist and

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perhaps balance against the U.S.\textsuperscript{140} This position is concerned primarily with trends in the relative economic and military positions of the two countries, but represents an extreme view of the state of relative capabilities. Indeed, a recent study found that while America’s military edge has eroded in the most important possible conflict scenarios, it is still significant and it seems China will not come close to equaling America’s relevant capabilities for the foreseeable future.\textsuperscript{141} This first Restraint position, however, holds that it is not necessary to the U.S. to contain China’s rise and that doing so risks unnecessary and potentially disastrous conflict that could accelerate America’s decline.

A second Restraint position holds similarly that China’s rise to peer competitor status is likely but argues for a more assertive response. According to this position, America’s global commitments weaken, rather than strengthen, the inevitable effort to contain China. This effort is necessary because China’s continued growth will put it in the position of a potential hegemon in Northeast Asia. The nature of international politics will lead to a structurally determined attempt by China to seek regional hegemony. Furthermore, due to China’s eventual strength relative to its neighbors U.S. power will be necessary to balance that of China. Due to the speculative nature of this argument the timeline for implementation is unclear.\textsuperscript{142}

A third view holds that while the rise of China is likely it is not imminent or certain, but the U.S. must begin to prepare itself by cutting its global commitments and encouraging China’s neighbors to defend themselves. Thus while the U.S. will likely have to play a role in containing


\textsuperscript{142} Mearsheimer, \textit{Tragedy}, Chap. 10, pp 360-411; Mearsheimer and Walt, “Offshore Balancing.” Mearsheimer argues that for practical reasons the U.S. will not pursue a policy of preventive war against China. For the best theoretical case for pursuing such a policy given America’s relative decline see Dale C. Copeland, \textit{The Origins of Major War} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
China this should not be the immediate focus of U.S. policy. While China may become a threat in the future it has not yet reached the status of a potential hegemon and thus the U.S. should withdraw some forces from East Asia and force South Korea to defend itself. Japan will continue to require assistance from the United States but to some degree that assistance should be lessened so as to stimulate Japan to improve its military capabilities and take a more active part in its own defense. 143

This position also tends to be less concerned with the fate of Taiwan, viewing its defense as generally beyond U.S. capabilities. Some have argued that Taiwan’s status cannot effectively be guaranteed or is not worth a confrontation with the PRC. 144 As a result, the United States should either unilaterally end its commitment to Taiwan or seek concession from Beijing in exchange. 145 This position, however, is complicated by the fact that relations with Taiwan are governed by U.S. law and thus somewhat more difficult to recast. Given, however, that the Executive enjoys both significant power and practical latitude in foreign affairs, it is hard to believe that the Taiwan Relations Act could really be used to force an administration to resist a PRC attempt to occupy Taiwan. 146

China and other states in the region have a variety of overlapping claims regarding the South and East China Seas. 147 Since 2010 observers have noted that China has become increasingly

143 Posen, Restraint, p. 16-18.
144 Ibid, pp 104-106; John J. Mearsheimer, "Taiwan’s Dire Straits," The National Interest, Vol. 130 (2014), pp. 29-39; For the view that Taiwan could acquire the necessary capabilities to prevent its outright conquest by the PRC, see William S. Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," Naval War College Review, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Summer 2008), pp. 13-38.
147 Peter Dutton asserts that the claims over the South China Sea can be divided into “three severable categories”: disputes over territorial sovereignty, in the overlapping claims to the South China Sea’s islands, rocks, and reefs; disputes over which coastal states claim rightful jurisdiction over waters and seabed; and disputes over the proper
aggressive about asserting its expansive maritime claims in the South and East China Seas. The situation in the East China Sea may well be stabilizing but China appears to be in a stronger position than Japan.\textsuperscript{148} Many have generalized from this to paint a picture of a revisionist or “newly assertive” China.\textsuperscript{149} Others have argued, however, that this overgeneralizes from China’s approach to the particular issue of maritime boundary disputes.\textsuperscript{150}

China’s construction of manmade islands, including runways, and its seizure of a Japanese fishing vessel in 2010 put the U.S. in the middle of a potentially explosive situation. On the one hand, the U.S. primary interest involves freedom of navigation and guaranteeing that no state exerts territorial claims beyond the limits proscribed in the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea. Recently in the area of the Spratly Islands the U.S. has become more assertive in disputing China’s expansive claims, moving from a policy of conducting innocent passage to one of conducting exercises that positively assert the international nature of areas claimed by China.\textsuperscript{151}

While advocates of Deep Engagement claim that U.S. involvement damps down these disputes, advocates of Restraint are concerned that alliance commitments can encourage countries like Japan and the Philippines to assert aggressive counter claims or to provocatively inflame the balance of coastal-state and international rights to use the seas.” Peter Dutton, "Three disputes and three objectives: China and the South China Sea,” Naval War College Review, Vol. 64, No. 4 (2011), p. 42.


tensions much as the PRC has done in recent years. The real issue here for advocates of Restraint is the extent to which America’s policy of maintaining command of the commons would necessitate U.S. involvement in these disputes in any case. Furthermore, Restraint advocates evidently believe that limiting commitments to Japan, South Korea and other states would force these states to be more cautious in approaching these disputes. In any case, the possibility that conflict could erupt in the absence of U.S. alliance commitments must be weighed against the possibility that the U.S. might not be able to control every instance of dispute and thus may become involved in territorial conflict.

A final but no less important issue surrounds nuclear weapons and their role in the Sino-U.S. relationship. Although China has made progress in regard to its strategic arsenal, including the addition of a Jin-class SSBN, the vulnerability of China and its decision-making in this regard remains somewhat troubling. It has been widely claimed that China’s leaders have high confidence that the stakes in any Sino-U.S. conflict would be too low to justify the use of nuclear weapons. As a result they are pursuing a “limited ambiguity” strategy in which they seek to avoid an arms race with the U.S. but hope to deter the U.S. by not renouncing first use altogether. As Cunningham and Fravel point out, this policy may simply encourage the U.S. to pursue nuclear primacy.152

In sum, Restraint does not present a single argument as to the wisdom of disengagement from East Asia. The wisdom of disengagement depends largely on estimates of China’s future capabilities and the ability of regional states to provide for their own defense. In other words since East Asia may present the most likely arena for future great power competition the role of

the United States is still in question. Nonetheless, on balance, Restraint advocates tend to doubt either the necessity or the ability of the U.S. to provide its current level of security assistance. East Asia also presents the hardest trade-off between building future capabilities and making concessions to a possible peer competitor. The extent to which the U.S. is willing to rethink its attitude toward proliferation will be key to future developments. The willingness to move beyond opposition to India’s nuclear weapons program may provide a precedent, but the fact that the U.S. is currently committed to defend the potential nuclear weapons states of Japan and South Korea is a key difference. Overall, the choice for Restraint advocates in East Asia is one between preparing for China’s rise and the risk of unnecessary commitments should that rise be slower or less complete than is generally anticipated.

Core Issue 7: Proliferation

The neoconservative Primacy and Deep Engagement arguments against proliferation agree that preventing the spread of nuclear weapons is a key U.S. interest, but they do not entirely agree on the reasons for this. Primacy advocates oppose the spread of nuclear weapons to particular types of regimes which they believe to be irrational and/ or expansionist by nature. As was shown in the rapprochement with India, however, these advocates of Primacy are willing to accept some proliferation to willing and cooperative allies or potential partners. Also, proliferation to current or potential adversaries would limit U.S. options to compel these states.153

Deep Engagement advocates, on the other hand, tend to oppose proliferation for broader reasons and do not always accept affinity between the U.S. and a potential proliferator as sufficient

grounds for relaxing this opposition. While reasons for opposition to proliferation are numerous, arguments include the supposed increased risk of nuclear use and the increased difficulty the U.S. will have in managing relations to its benefit without running excessively high risks. Furthermore, it is often asserted that the risk of use, whether advertent or inadvertent, increases as the number of nuclear powers increases.\textsuperscript{154}

Advocates of Restraint either view proliferation as a net positive or believe that management of this issue causes the United States to incur costs for an object that does not directly impact U.S. interests. In addition, some have claimed that forward presence does not do much to prevent hostile states from acquiring nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{155} Some advocates of Restraint believe that management of proliferation is in the U.S. interest but not to a degree that it justifies significant risk or costly interventions. Extended deterrence is also quite risky and it is not clear why the U.S. should prefer risking involvement in nuclear war to others risking nuclear war that does not involve the U.S.\textsuperscript{156}

Proliferation optimists such as Kenneth Waltz argue that nuclear weapons dramatically reduce uncertainty in international politics and virtually eliminate the possibility of a state’s taking action that would threaten the survival of a nuclear armed adversary.\textsuperscript{157} Although this argument is powerful, Keir Lieber and Daryl Press have noted that the belief in existential deterrence that Waltz essentially expounds is not supported by the historical record.\textsuperscript{158} States did not believe in MAD, and so bought a lot of overkill and counterforce. Furthermore, the counterforce revolution

\begin{footnotes}
\item{154} Brooks and Wohlfforth, \textit{America Abroad}, pp 105-110.
\item{156} Posen, \textit{Restraint}, 75-77.
\item{157} Kenneth N. Waltz, Chap. 1 “More May Be Better” in \textit{Spread of Nuclear Weapons}, pp 3-40.
\end{footnotes}
has disproven the nuclear revolution thesis. States face strong incentives to develop counterforce options. The precision revolution and vast improvements in sensing technology mean that survivability of strategic forces is now much harder to achieve and may be or become beyond the capacities of some states. This development has interesting, if somewhat uncertain, implications for U.S. grand strategy. Lieber and Press argue that foregoing counterforce is unlikely to be a palatable option due to the dangers in the new environment and the significant length of time that it takes to develop and field new nuclear forces.\textsuperscript{159}

On the one hand, should the U.S. stay ahead of this curve, then pursuing an aggressive forward grand strategy will be somewhat less risky, especially in regard to conflicts with countries possessing only small or antiquated strategic arsenals. On the other hand, counterforce provides an enormous insurance policy for the U.S. Should the U.S. disengage the cause of future conflict will be clear both to America and its adversaries. As a result any potential conflict will involve clearly vital American interests and the threat to employ counterforce options will be much more credible. Perhaps even more importantly, the work of Lieber and Press constitutes a significant blow to policy recommendations based on either liberal belief in arms control or defensive realism.\textsuperscript{160}

Nuclear proliferation does present the uncomfortable possibility that the United States will become involved in a crisis with a nuclear armed adversary facing a fight for its survival. It has been argued, however, that so long as the United States limits its aims in conventional conflict it can plausibly deter an adversary while reversing gains in, say, a hypothetical conflict in the


Persian Gulf. Overall, then, for advocates of Restraint, proliferation is less of a theoretical concern and necessarily will impede the U.S. to a lesser degree than under a forward-engaged grand strategy. Furthermore, given the recent tendency of the United States to pursue aggressive actions such as regime change, Deep Engagement cannot eliminate and to some extent may increase the incentives to acquire nuclear weapons. Indeed, if the fate of Muammar Gaddafi teaches a lesson it is that so-called rogue states might as well continue their quest for a bomb, since even dramatic shifts in policy may not fundamentally change the U.S. view of their regimes.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and P5+1 countries represents a significant development in counterproliferation policy. Some neoconservative commentators and Republicans in general have criticized the deal. The Republicans’ decision to support a rather transparent legislative trick to allow the agreement to pass the Senate demonstrated, however, that many of these objections are not serious. Analysis shows that the deal precludes the secret development of a nuclear weapons program during the life of the agreement but not necessarily after the agreement lapses. Overall, the agreement makes the implementation of a policy of Restraint more feasible insofar as it lessens Israeli and Saudi justification for preventive strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities. By the same token, the agreement makes Deep Engagement as applied to the Persian Gulf somewhat less risky.

The issue of North Korea’s nuclear program and its ongoing attempts to further modernize that program presents significant questions for a grand strategy of Restraint. According to standard Realist logic any weakening of the U.S. commitment to South Korea and Japan should increase the need of these countries to pursue an independent nuclear capacity. Indeed, Donald Trump quite frankly acknowledged that this would be the result of his apparent plan to force these countries to contribute more to their own defense.\textsuperscript{164} The Restraint position is that the risk associated with allowing South Korea and Japan to acquire nuclear weapons is less than the risk associated with providing extended deterrence to these countries. The biggest question is whether the United States should actively coordinate the scaling down of commitments to these countries with the development of their indigenous nuclear weapons capacities.\textsuperscript{165} Such a move would seem to contradict at least the spirit of U.S. commitment to non-proliferation. On the other hand, failure to coordinate the scaling down of commitments with the development of indigenous Japanese and Korean nuclear weapons programs could provide at least China and, less likely, North Korea with incentives to carry out preemptive strikes, especially against Japan’s nuclear program.

Thus, the question of scaling back commitments in East Asia is tied to a willingness on the part of the U.S. to question which international norms are truly consistent with its security and self-interest. Recent work has found that commitment to fighting the spread of weapons of mass destruction has not been a constant normative principle of U.S. policy but a strategic


\textsuperscript{165} Gholz, et al., “Come Home, America, 23.
commitment to be changed and manipulated according to perceptions of self-interest. At the same time, the U.S. view of WMD has not been infinitely flexible. Rather, this view has been constrained somewhat by previous definitions.\textsuperscript{166} Thus an evolution away from strict commitments to nonproliferation such as that foreshadowed by the U.S. arrangement with India will probably be the most politically feasible way to handle a decision not to oppose Japanese or South Korean acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Core Issue 8: Cybersecurity

Of all the topics discussed cyber has the least obvious theoretical implications for the choice of U.S. grand strategy. The cyber topic has been divided into “degrading an enemy’s military capabilities, penetrating networks to shut down civilian infrastructure, web based criminal activity, and cyber espionage.”\textsuperscript{167} Of these topics only the degrading of military capabilities and the targeting of civilian infrastructure are even possibly related to U.S. grand strategy. Among those who worry the most about cyber threats it is feared that cyber attacks could do major damage to civilian infrastructure and even result in a “cyber 9/11” with mass loss of life.\textsuperscript{168} In 2010 the U.S. military created a Cyber Command for the purpose of coordinating cyber activities across all military services.\textsuperscript{169} The degrading of U.S. military capabilities either in conjunction

\textsuperscript{168} J. Arquilla “Click, Click. Counting Down to Cyber 9/11,” San Francisco Chronicle, July 26, 2009; Erik Gartzke, “The Myth of Cyberwar.”
with attacks against the U.S. or its allies or in response to U.S. military action has also been raised by cyber hawks.

While cyber may have added new elements to warfare, there is as yet little evidence that these elements are strategically revolutionary.170 It has even been argued by some that cyber war is practically impossible because cyber weapons could not be utilized to achieve the purposes of warfare.171 Cyber skeptics point out that those who believe in an ominous cyber threat have generally presented hypothetical scenarios instead of concrete evidence of risk. Further, these scenarios repeat anxiety and pessimism that has typically accompanied the appearance of significant new technology.172 Cyber security is a broad topic and the important potential weaknesses such as critical infrastructure are also among the easiest to protect, for example, public infrastructure can be largely protected by separating it from the public internet.173 At present, the U.S. does not have a clear policy on which forms of cyber attacks merit a response or what type of response different attacks merit.174

Attempts at Congressional regulation of cyber security – much of which is concerned with foreign threats – have been criticized on the grounds that the evidence supporting the necessity for such legislation is either absent or grossly mischaracterized. Indeed, many cyber warnings are impossible to assess because no evidence has been presented to support them. The classification

of information regarding cyber threats often is unnecessary and allows analysts to make apocalyptic predictions that, in fact, have little basis. Finally, cyber terrorism appears to be extremely unlikely. While some small scale operations may be possible, terrorist organizations have not been shown to possess the capacity to carry out sophisticated damaging attacks.

In sum, even if the cyber threat were significant it is unclear that this would favor the adoption of one grand strategy over another. As it is, there is significant reason to doubt the connection between cyber activity and significant threats to the United States. Gartzke argues that analysts of cyber issues have yet to demonstrate any convincing link between this topic and U.S. grand strategy. While it is possible that future revolutions in cyber technology may yet revolutionize international conflict, there is “virtually” no evidence for such predictions. As a result, cyber issues should continue to inform different areas of policy, including military planning, but do not, as of now, require any paradigmatic shift in the analysis of U.S. grand strategy.

Core Issue 9: International Cooperation: Hegemony vs. Market Adaptation

For both advocates of Primacy and advocates of Deep Engagement support for a forward engaged grand strategy is based on a belief in the importance of hegemonic leadership in facilitating international cooperation. Thus, to one degree or another, these analysts have accepted key components of hegemonic stability theory (HST). This theory proceeds from the analysis of the Great Depression by Charles Kindleberger. According to Kindleberger, the

175 Jerry Brito and Tate Watkins, "Wired Opinion: Cyberwar Is the New Yellowcake," Wired, 14 February 2012. Brito and Watkins recommend three steps for reducing cyber alarmism: Stop the apocalyptic rhetoric; declassify evidence relating to cyber threats; and disentangle the disparate dangers that have been lumped together under the “cybersecurity” label.


Depression could have been prevented had the United States been willing to execute the functions essential to the maintenance of an open global economic order.\footnote{Charles Poor Kindleberger, \textit{The World in Depression, 1929-1939} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). The necessary functions are these: maintaining a relatively open market for distress goods; providing countercyclical, or at least stable, long-term lending; policing a relatively stable system of exchange rates; ensuring the coordination of macroeconomic policies; acting as a lender of last resort by discounting or otherwise providing liquidity in a financial crisis.}

Robert Gilpin’s version of HST posits a cycle in which a leading state constructs and maintains the economic and security order. In doing so, however, the leading state weakens itself and strengthens other states, providing the basis for a challenge by a rising power seeking to rewrite the rules of the system. Such a challenge results in hegemonic war, restarting the cycle.\footnote{Robert Gilpin, \textit{War and Change in World Politics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).} Liberal versions of HST such as those of Keohane and Ikenberry have sought to examine how international institutions can create mechanisms that facilitate cooperation even after hegemonic decline. Ikenberry’s version, as noted earlier, argues that a liberal victor of a hegemonic war is uniquely well-suited to create binding institutions that lock in its favorable position while reassuring weaker states that they will neither be abandoned nor dominated.\footnote{Robert O. Keohane, \textit{After Hegemony}; Ikenberry, \textit{After Victory}; Ikenberry, \textit{Liberal Leviathan}.} Carla Norrlof argues that contrary to traditional HST the U.S. does not bear disproportionate costs for maintaining the global order. Instead, America’s economic and military dominance combined with its active role in maintaining stability and open markets leads states to favor the U.S. in economic flows, thus providing a significant return on its investments in global stability.\footnote{Carla Norrlof, \textit{America's Global Advantage: US Hegemony and International Cooperation} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).}

Brooks and Wohlforth have been somewhat ambiguous about the role of HST in their analysis of U.S. grand strategy. On the one hand, their theory appears to be primarily based on HST, but, on the other hand, they tend to focus on mid-level theories and have not offered a thorough
explanation of the role of HST in their explanation of Deep Engagement.\textsuperscript{182} Neoconservative Primacy advocates likewise believe that hegemony is key to the maintenance of a favorable international order, including economic openness. Robert Kagan has argued that an open world market is not a natural state of affairs. It is only obtained through prudent leadership of the system best exercised by a predominant power with the will to engage and defeat challenges from hostile actors. This thesis is concerned more with the use of power to achieve liberal ends than with any need to constrain or institutionalize that power.\textsuperscript{183} Arthur Brooks, Edwin Feulner and William Kristol also stress gains for the U.S. from global preponderance and an active strategy. They claim that American defense spending should not be reduced because it is a net benefit to the United States. Instead they argue for cutting entitlements which they claim -- without providing any evidence -- are “wasteful.”\textsuperscript{184}

The majority of Restraint advocates are critical of HST. A small number, however, adopt some aspects of the theory to advocate the scaling down of US commitments. According to these authors the U.S. is in relative decline due to the inevitable mismatch between its resources and its commitments. As a result the U.S. puts itself at risk of involvement in significant conflict that will further weaken its position.\textsuperscript{185} Advocates of Restraint emphasize that HST has not been clearly formulated, is not supported by tests of the theory, and does not explain the mechanisms that tie security and economic variables together. In addition, it is unclear exactly how much

\textsuperscript{182} Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}.
power disparity is necessary for the theory to operate either in the security or the economic realm.186

Most Restraint advocates believe that HST has been disproven and that it underestimates the flexibility of markets and overestimates the value of leadership. As noted above, Gholz and Press emphasize the flexibility of markets and argue that the opportunities for adaptation during wartime equal or outweigh the disruption caused to the trade of neutral countries. As a result, economic well-being does not depend on the maintenance of peace by a predominant power.187

Some have argued that U.S. alliance commitments are not a public good consistent with HST because they are rivalrous; use by one country reduces resources available to another. In other words, far from serving to maintain the hegemonic order these commitments undermine each other because they cannot all be fulfilled. By absorbing the costs of hegemonic leadership, the U.S. weakens its comparative advantage and allows other states to spend more money domestically relative to the U.S. than they would otherwise.188

For Restraint advocates the vast majority of consequential economic decisions are made by decentralized private actors whose main considerations are economic and who consider political developments primarily when they directly impede their actions.189 Advocates of Deep Engagement exaggerate the weaknesses inherent in the global economy. Instead of a brittle structure the global economy should be seen as a “complex web” in which the removal of

186 Posen, Restraint, 62.
187 Gholz and Press, “Neutral Countries”; Gholz and Press, “Protecting ‘the Prize’.”
individual relationships leads to their replacement by others who respond to the market incentives created by disruption.\textsuperscript{190}

Recent work has questioned the connection between military primacy and economic favoritism, arguing that evidence does not support the claim that foreign direct investment is attracted to countries with high levels of military spending. As a result, the thesis that America’s maintenance of the global security order leads it to be favored by investors cannot be sustained. Drezner and Hite argue that foreign direct investment is not attracted to countries that invest heavily in military capabilities, as Norrlof has claimed. If anything, increases in military expense exhibit diminishing marginal returns and have a negative impact on the U.S. economy. Furthermore, Drezner and Hite assert that Norrlof’s findings are based merely upon correlation and ignore numerous economic and other factors.\textsuperscript{191}

In sum, the debate between those who emphasize hegemonic leadership and those who emphasize market flexibility in the global economy is crucial to the larger debate over U.S. grand strategy. For advocates of Restraint, belief in the utility of hegemonic order for ensuring cooperation is both theoretically incoherent and unsupported by the evidence. International markets are robust and do not require the prevention of all significant shocks and geopolitical disruption. Furthermore, economic actors primarily pursue profit and are willing to accept a degree of increased risk. Finally, advocates of Deep Engagement seem to blur political and


economic motivations of actors and do not always present a clear explanation of the relative importance of these factors.

**Core Issue 10: Guns vs. Butter**

The question of the guns vs. butter tradeoff is closely related to the question of the utility of international hegemony. If international hegemony is essential for the functioning of the world economy, then the guns vs. butter tradeoff becomes a mere issue of the most efficient means of managing an expensive global grand strategy. On the other hand, if hegemony is not necessary to the functioning of the world economy – or only marginally beneficial – then guns vs. butter takes on more salience. Advocates of Deep Engagement insist on the former interpretation and thus urge tax increases as a means of paying for an ambitious U.S. grand strategy.192 Most neoconservative Primacy advocates avoid even this concession and insist that defense spending should be paid for by cutting public health insurance, Social Security, and other “entitlements.”193

Restraint advocates note that a globally engaged grand strategy is unavoidably inefficient. As a result, claims that the Pentagon can be cost effective are the equivalent of “Balkan teenagers” generating fake news.194 According to Barry Posen, the guns vs. butter tradeoff must incorporate grand strategy but will ultimately be determined by the interplay of grand strategy and domestic political factors.195 Risk analyst Howard Kunreuther’s question in regard to terrorism could be asked in regard to U.S. defense spending in general: “How much should we be willing to pay for

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a small reduction in probabilities that are already extremely low?" 196 Whereas hawks prefer to emphasize that failure to invest in U.S. Primacy and various forms of threat mitigation is reckless, in fact it is quite irresponsible to spend the public’s money needlessly in a way that does not significantly enhance their security. 197

Advocates of Restraint have emphasized that by spending inordinate sums of money to defend other countries the U.S. is in effect subsidizing foreign competitors of U.S. firms. The results of U.S. commitments include these companies paying lower taxes than they would if their own countries had to defend themselves. 198 In addition, a more restrained grand strategy might encourage better long-term economic trends such as higher investment or increased savings within the U.S. 199 Furthermore, government spending on defense does not on balance constitute beneficial economic stimulus because the same amount of money spent either by private actors or by the government on other programs would not produce less stimulus. 200

According to the late President Dwight Eisenhower, America’s large spending on its military was inherently undesirable since it deprived citizens of necessary and important economic and social opportunities. Furthermore Eisenhower recognized that this spending created entrenched interests that would seek to perpetuate it regardless of strategic need. 201 Indeed, some have argued that post-Cold War U.S. grand strategy is characterized primarily by manipulative tricks such as the “Two Major Regional Contingency (MRC).” standard that seek merely to perpetuate

197 Mueller and Stewart, Chasing Ghosts, p 251.
199 Ibid., p. 24.
previous levels of spending. While this is somewhat cynical, at least superficially the idea that defense spending should be pegged to a percentage of GDP resembles tithing more than strategy. More specifically, the overcapacity of the defense industry combined with the low threat levels faced by the United States has led defense procurement to be dominated by pork barrel politics. The federal government can resolve this issue by “buying out” the excess capacity of the U.S. defense industry, thus eliminating the demand for wasteful procurement. The broader point here, however, is that large military budgets do redistribute wealth from the broad base of the population to a small special interest. The consequences of this redistribution should also be weighed as a cost of U.S. grand strategy.

In sum, for advocates of Restraint the excessive levels of expenditure inherent in America’s global engaged grand strategy are an unnecessary drain on the U.S. economy and do not, in the aggregate, generate positive externalities. While the question of guns vs. butter is hard to resolve independent of one’s position on the utility of hegemony the long-term social and economic costs of U.S. grand strategy are an important component of a reasonable decision-making process. At the same time the issues of political economy involved are more focused on the domestic rather than the international economy. This issue should remind analysts that U.S. grand strategy impacts not only those involved in the international economy but the abilities of private actors and government to meet pressing domestic needs.

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CONCLUSION

This review provides the basis for several conclusions regarding the state of the debate over U.S. grand strategy. In the first place, the case for Deep Engagement appears stronger in general terms than it does for specific issues. This could stem from a few factors. First of all, Deep Engagement is primarily about achieving a favorable environment and less about achieving tangible political objectives. More problematic is that it is hard to derive consistent criteria from the goals of this approach. It is one thing to argue that conflict among significant actors needs to be averted. It is another thing to clearly articulate the extent of U.S. involvement that could achieve this goal. Second, the theoretical underpinning of Deep Engagement is surprisingly weak given its enormous consequences. The exact role of hegemonic stability theory in supporting a forward-engaged grand strategy is unclear. Nonetheless, Deep Engagement treats geopolitical stability as the *sine qua non* of productive international economic exchange. This not only neglects the flexibility of markets but ignores the real tradeoffs between risk and profit. While expressing belief in the superiority of global capitalism, Deep Engagement nonetheless views markets as extraordinarily skittish and vulnerable. Indeed, the line between circumstances under which markets function optimally and those under which intervention and management are necessary become less clear the more Deep Engagement analyzes specific strategic and economic issues.

The case for Restraint, on the other hand, is strong, but there is some disconnect between some versions of this argument and the grand strategy debate as a whole. In particular, Brooks and Wohlforth are not wrong to assert that many advocates of Restraint pay insufficient attention to economic questions and to some extent overemphasize pure security issues. This is surprising, however, given that, as we have seen, the economic arguments for Restraint are quite strong and
are more consistent with the American commitment to free markets than is the case for Deep Engagement.

Of course neoconservative-style Primacy advocates tend to focus less on economic issues but their arguments are so Manichean, and the results so disastrous, that they could not form the basis of a sustainable strategy. One thing Deep Engagement and Primacy advocates have in common, however, is the tendency to resort to extreme examples and to deny the general applicability of theory. For example, as we have seen, Deep Engagement depends less on the possibility that the flow of Persian Gulf oil will be disrupted and more on negative political trends that will somehow make future operation in the Gulf impossible. Of course the problem here is that imagining potential problems is not the same as proving that they are plausible.

Deep Engagement advocates tend to link America’s continued wealth and power to foreign policy choices rather than to its power position and free market economic system. Deep Engagement and Primacy advocates emphasize the importance of Unipolarity, but Unipolarity is said to enable “system shaping” policies. The notion that U.S. presence is a most effective way of deterring conflict is not an entirely weak argument, but Deep Engagement advocates consistently discount the costs of deterrence failure by assuming that U.S. power preponderance will yield successful results even if deterrence fails. While this may be true it ignores both the complexity of real warfare and the credibility of the commitment to engage in conflict essentially for the purpose of deterrent conflict.

As for the particular core issues discussed in this review some are more likely than others to determine the course of U.S. grand strategy. The proliferation issue provides both incentives for grand strategy of Restraint and problems that this strategy must solve. On the one hand,
controlled proliferation may allow some states like Japan and South Korea to compensate for lower levels of U.S. commitment. On the other hand, a clear plan for managing such proliferation so as to deter preventive strikes against these countries’ weapons programs would be both politically and technically complex. The issue of China’s rise is crucial because it will help to determine the level of possible U.S. retrenchment as well as the magnitude of future incentives to reengage.\textsuperscript{204} The issue of terrorism illustrates both how U.S. grand strategy can exacerbate problems facing the U.S. and the limits of U.S. military force. The extent to which the U.S. is willing to tie its security to states with underdeveloped militaries that benefit from American largesse is central for Restraint.

Further exploration of the mechanism by which alliances alter perceptions and interests or lead to the unproductive use of force should be undertaken on a theoretical and empirical basis. Finally as noted above the strong economic arguments for Restraint should be further developed and integrated with security rationales. Such progress could not guarantee the future implementation of a grand strategy of Restraint. It can, however, help to ensure that should such a shift occur it will be supported by the best possible arguments and given the best possible chance of success.

\textsuperscript{204} Brooks and Wohlforth refer to a grand strategy of Restraint as “retrenchment.” See Brooks and Wohlforth, \textit{America Abroad}, p. 4, n ii. This would seem inexact, however. Rather, retrenchment should more correctly be used to signify the phase of transition between a forward-engaged grand strategy and a grand strategy of Restraint. Thus, levels of retrenchment should refer to the extent of withdrawal of overseas forces and the revocation of alliance commitments.