

# Don't Come Home, America

The Case against Retrenchment

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and  
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**C**onfronting a punishing budget crisis, an exhausted military, balky allies, and a public whose appetite for global engagement is waning, the United States faces a critical question. After sixty-five years of pursuing a globally engaged grand strategy—nearly a third of which transpired without a peer great power rival—has the time finally come for retrenchment? According to many of the most prominent security studies scholars—and indeed most scholars who write on the future of U.S. grand strategy—the answer is an unambiguous yes. Even as U.S. political leaders almost uniformly assert their commitment to global leadership, over the past decade a very different opinion has swept through the academy: that the United States should scale back its global commitments and pursue retrenchment. More specifically, it should curtail or eliminate its overseas military presence, eliminate or dramatically reduce its global security commitments, and minimize or eschew its efforts to foster and lead the liberal institutional order.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Barry R. Posen, "The Case for Restraint," *American Interest*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November/December 2007), pp. 7–17; Barry R. Posen, "A Grand Strategy of Restraint," in Michèle A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, eds., *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2008), pp. 81–102; Barry R. Posen, "Stability and Change in U.S.

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Retrenchment proponents argue that the current U.S. grand strategy of “deep engagement” has high and rising costs that dwarf its benefits.<sup>2</sup> The United States’ decline relative to potential rivals makes it ever harder to maintain its multitudinous commitments, while its allies can afford to defend themselves and should no longer be “subsidized.” America’s intrusive grand

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Grand Strategy,” *Orbis*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2007), pp. 561–567; Barry R. Posen, testimony given before the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, “A New U.S. Grand Strategy,” 110th Cong., 2d sess., July 15, 2008; Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Stephen M. Walt, “In the National Interest: A Grand New Strategy for American Foreign Policy,” *Boston Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February/March 2005), <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.1/walt.php>; Stephen M. Walt, “A New Grand Strategy for the War on Terrorism,” paper presented at the National Policy Forum on Terrorism, Security, and America’s Purpose, Capitol Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C., September 6–7, 2005; John J. Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” *National Interest*, No. 111 (January/February 2011), pp. 16–34; John J. Mearsheimer, “Pull Those Boots Off the Ground,” *Newsweek*, December 31, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/177380>; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn’t Pay to Preserve the Peace,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Summer 2001), pp. 1–57; Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 5–48; Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press, “Footprints in the Sand,” *American Interest*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (March/April 2010), pp. 59–67; Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Benjamin Valentino, “Time to Offshore Our Troops,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2006; Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Protecting ‘The Prize’: Oil and the U.S. National Interest,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 2010), pp. 453–485; Benjamin H. Friedman, Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey Sapolsky, “Restraining Order: For Strategic Modesty,” *World Affairs*, Fall 2009, pp. 84–94; Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, “Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring 2011), pp. 7–44; Christopher A. Preble, *Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009); Charles V. Peña, “A Smaller Military to Fight the War on Terror,” *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 289–306; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 86–124; Christopher Layne, “Offshore Balancing Revisited,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 233–248; Christopher Layne, “Less Is More: Minimal Realism in East Asia,” *National Interest*, No. 43 (Spring 1996), pp. 64–77; Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne, “A New Grand Strategy,” *Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002, pp. 36–42; Christopher Layne, “America’s Middle East Strategy after Iraq: The Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 5–25; Richard K. Betts, *American Force: Dangers, Delusions, and Dilemmas in National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Robert A. Pape, “It’s the Occupation, Stupid,” *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/18/it\\_s\\_the\\_occupation\\_stupid](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/18/it_s_the_occupation_stupid); Robert A. Pape, “Empire Falls,” *National Interest*, No. 99 (January/February 2009), pp. 21–34; Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

2. We agree with Joseph S. Nye Jr. that “deep engagement” is the best descriptor of the current

strategy, moreover, generates systemic pushback and resentment among both governments and foreign publics. Large-scale retrenchment would simultaneously defuse global anti-Americanism and disable free riding by U.S. allies. Furthermore, retrenchment advocates stress that even if allied governments did not step up to fulfill every mission the United States now performs, most of these roles are unrelated to U.S. security and create the risk of entrapping the United States in wars that are not in its national interest. In short, advocates maintain that retrenchment will not only save blood and treasure but also result in a more secure America.

The steady barrage of analyses calling for the United States to shift away from its current grand strategy accelerated in response to the 2003 Iraq War and reached a crescendo after the post-2008 economic and budget crisis. Thus far, the arguments for retrenchment have gone largely unanswered by international relations scholars. To be sure, scholars have examined the logic of the U.S.-led order and undermined some elements of the case for retrenchment.<sup>3</sup> These studies focus on only a subset of arguments in play, however, and many were written prior to the recent wave of analyses calling for retrenchment and thus fail to address many key claims based on the experience of the past decade—experience that retrenchment advocates argue strongly buttresses their case. As a result, scholars lack a systematic analysis that directly takes on the core claim of the retrenchment argument: that the current grand strategy is not in the national interests of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, we assess the case for retrenchment on its own terms. We argue that advocates of retrenchment radically overestimate the costs of the

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U.S. strategy. Nye, "East Asian Security: The Case for Deep Engagement," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (July/August 1995), pp. 90–102.

3. See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Robert J. Lieber, *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the United States Is Not Destined to Decline* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Stanley A. Renshon, *National Security in the Obama Administration: Reassessing the Bush Doctrine* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

4. Robert J. Art, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Peter Feaver take initial steps in this direction in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America's Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012), pp. 13–28, 43–56, and 57–70, respectively. Our substantive assessment of current U.S. grand strategy is closest to Art's, but our analysis here focuses on the evaluation of the case for retrenchment.

current grand strategy and underestimate its benefits. The United States' globe-girdling grand strategy is the devil we know, and retrenchment advocates effectively identify some of its risks and costs. A world with a disengaged United States is the devil we don't know, and we provide strong reasons why it would present much greater risks and costs. Retrenchment would in essence entail a massive experiment: How would the world work without an engaged, liberal leading power? International relations scholarship cannot provide a certain answer. What we can say is that the balance of what scholars know about international politics suggests that sustaining the core commitments of the current grand strategy is a wholly reasonable approach to pursuing narrow U.S. national interests in security, prosperity, and the preservation of domestic liberty. At the same time, scholars and policymakers need to know a lot more to make rational grand strategic choices. For that research to begin, however, there needs to be two sides to the scholarly debate on U.S. grand strategy.

We begin by describing the core elements of the current grand strategy, which are often mischaracterized by proponents of retrenchment. In subsequent sections, we assess the strategy's costs, its narrow security benefits, and its wider nonsecurity benefits. We conclude with the implications of our analysis for policy and international relations theory.

### *Deep Engagement*

For the first post-Cold War decade, the scholarly debate on U.S. grand strategy parsed a large number of options, including isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, collective security, and primacy.<sup>5</sup> After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the debate over the neoconservative foreign policy approach dominated.<sup>6</sup> Both ways of framing the debate obscured the fundamental choice between retrenchment and continuation of the globally engaged grand strategy.

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5. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 5–53; and Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*.

6. Notable statements of neoconservatism include Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *National Interest*, No. 70 (Winter 2002), pp. 5–18; and John R. Bolton, "Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?" *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 205–222.

DEFINING U.S. GRAND STRATEGY

Grand strategy is a set of ideas for deploying a nation's resources to achieve its interests over the long run.<sup>7</sup> For more than sixty years, the United States has sought to advance its core interests in security, prosperity, and domestic liberty by pursuing three overlapping objectives: managing the external environment to reduce near- and long-term threats to U.S. national security; promoting a liberal economic order to expand the global economy and maximize domestic prosperity; and creating, sustaining, and revising the global institutional order to secure necessary interstate cooperation on terms favorable to U.S. interests.

The pursuit of these three core objectives underlies what is arguably the United States' most consequential strategic choice: to maintain security commitments to partners and allies in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. U.S. administrations have consistently maintained that the security commitments in these regions are necessary to shape the global environment and thus advance the grand strategy's three core objectives. During the Cold War, the commitments served primarily to prevent the encroachment of Soviet power into regions containing the world's wealthiest, potentially most powerful, and most resource-rich states. After the Cold War, the aim became to make these same core regions more secure, and so make the world safer for the United States. The commitments also allow the United States to shape the security environment facing potential rivals to induce them to accommodate its core interests and, should that fail, constitute a hedge against the need to contain a future peer rival.

Woven through official U.S. speeches and strategy documents over the last six decades is a set of broader grand strategic arguments that the security commitments are a necessary condition of U.S. leadership, and that leadership is necessary to pursue the strategy's three core objectives. Without the security commitments, U.S. leverage for leadership on both security and nonsecurity issues declines. Leadership facilitates cooperation to address security challenges and expand the global economy, and moves the cooperative equilibrium closer to U.S. preferences. The commitments and associated leverage, moreover, are necessary pillars of a larger institutional and normative order whose mainte-

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7. See, for example, Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*; Betts, *American Force*; and Terry L. Diebel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

nance will make the United States more secure and prosperous over the long term. Embedding U.S. leadership in these institutions has major benefits for Washington and its partners: functional benefits (reduction of transaction costs, establishment of credible commitments, facilitation of collective action, creation of focal points, monitoring, etc.) as well as political and legitimacy benefits (mitigation of politically awkward aspects of hegemony). Because the United States is not strongly constrained by its institutional commitments, the benefits far outweigh the costs.

The three core objectives and the set of arguments for the central role of U.S. security commitments and leadership in pursuing them have been constants since the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> It was the decision of Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to retain these foundational elements after the Soviet Union's dissolution that first attracted retrenchment advocates' critical attention.<sup>9</sup> Now the key questions of whether the three objectives remain necessary for the United States and whether the security commitments are necessary to pursue them are at the core of the increasingly forceful arguments of top security scholars against the continuation of the current grand strategy.

Other aspects of U.S. foreign policy, such as democracy promotion, humanitarian intervention, and human rights, matter greatly but are neither constant nor defining elements of U.S. grand strategy. Rather, the United States' commitment to them has varied from administration to administration, and even within a single presidency. Jimmy Carter began his administration with a strong emphasis on human rights, but shifted course in midterm. George W. Bush began by emphatically eschewing democracy promotion, then shifted to make it a central feature, only to back away again toward the end of his second term. The commitment to humanitarian intervention is even more variable, with Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama

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8. Some may object that the George W. Bush administration did seek to back away from the third objective (supporting the institutional order), but this seeming exception actually proves the rule. The shift was strictly limited in scope: it affected primarily security institutions such as the United Nations and did not concern economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization. Moreover, this shift was decisively reversed in Bush's second term. In this regard, Thomas Christensen makes the case that Bush's second term was "multilateral to a fault" and was one of the most multilateral in U.S. history. See the interview with Christensen in Sarah E. Kreps, *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 42. Dwight Eisenhower chafed against the core commitment to Europe's defense, but was unable to alter it. See Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–63* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

9. See, most notably, Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, "Come Home, America."



veering between seeming denials of any U.S. obligation, soaring rhetoric affirming the “responsibility to protect,” and case-by-case conditional arguments.

The focus on U.S. grand strategy’s enduring elements inevitably obscures important variation. Even as they agreed on the core elements, different presidents altered the strategy in meaningful ways, as the Obama administration has done with its “pivot” to Asia. Much of the foreign policy discourse between the political parties and among experts concerns either such course alterations or the issue of how strongly to push democratic and humanitarian ideals. The debate over retrenchment, however, is about fundamentals. It is not about tweaking the strategy or considering optional choices about the degree to which Washington should push human rights or democracy. It is about whether the six-decade-old equation between the United States’ national interest and its deep engagement in the security affairs of three major regions remains valid.

#### WHY “DEEP ENGAGEMENT” BEST DESCRIBES THE CURRENT GRAND STRATEGY

Critics of deep engagement often call it “primacy,”<sup>10</sup> but this terminology obscures more than it clarifies because it begs the core strategic questions at issue. Primacy is not strategy but a fact of international life: even if America “came home” and slashed military spending, it would retain the world’s greatest latent power potential. Indeed, the grand strategy debate presumes primacy—it is the United States’ unrivaled power and favorable geographical position that give it such a wide range of strategic choice.<sup>11</sup> The strategic question is whether to translate that latent power into the global capacity to manage security affairs in multiple regions.

Other terms such as “international activism” make the opposite error by defining the strategy as a specific behavior—“the regular use of military power,” as Barry Posen puts it.<sup>12</sup> Such terms imply that U.S. global security commitments necessitate regularly using military force—either to impose democracy

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10. See, for example, Layne, “Offshore Balancing Revisited”; and Richard Betts, “The Political Support for American Primacy,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (January 2005), pp. 1–14.

11. Retrenchment advocates generally agree that the United States retains this strategic choice and will continue to do so for many years. An exception is Christopher Layne. See, for example, Layne, “Graceful Decline: The End of Pax Americana,” *American Conservative*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May 2010), pp. 30–33. For an analysis of the distribution of capabilities that supports the predominant view, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Assessing the Balance,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (July 2011), pp. 201–219.

12. Posen, “A Grand Strategy of Restraint,” p. 83.

on other societies, or, as Posen contends, “to change other societies so that they look more like ours.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, deep engagement’s focus on leadership—even assertive leadership—does not imply the aggressive use of force to overturn the international status quo or force U.S. preferences on other societies. Military power is indeed a central tool of influence, as we discuss below, but not in the way Posen and other retrenchment advocates imply. The use of military power—especially to promote democracy or respond to humanitarian crises—is a choice. Having a large global military presence enables this choice but does not necessitate it. Countries that have radically different grand strategies—Britain and France come to mind—also sometimes choose to intervene militarily for humanitarian or other purposes. Many countries use military power frequently, but their grand strategies are hardly comparable to the United States’.

The main point is that oft-used terms such as “primacy” and “international activism” miss the overarching questions at the center of the debate. First, should the United States continue to maintain a wide roster of global security commitments? Second, should it sustain a significant overseas military presence? And third, should it seek to lead the liberal institutional order? On many other pressing foreign policy questions—notably armed humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion—advocates of retrenchment and deep engagement do not have uniform opinions.<sup>14</sup> On these three questions, however, supporters of deep engagement uniformly answer “yes,” whereas advocates for retrenchment just as consistently answer “no.”<sup>15</sup> The question is, who’s right?

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13. Posen characterizes the current grand strategy as being based on the view that “[a] world of democracies would be the safest global environment for America, and the United States should be willing to pay considerable costs to produce such an outcome.” *Ibid.*, p. 91.

14. For example, prominent advocates of retrenchment voiced support for intervention in Libya. See Robert A. Pape, “When Duty Calls: A Pragmatic Standard of Humanitarian Intervention,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Summer 2012), pp. 41–80. Some scholars whose analyses lend support to deep engagement opposed intervention in Iraq. See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5 (September/October 2002), pp. 44–60. In turn, some have consistently opposed forceful democracy promotion. See, for example, Robert J. Art, “A Defensible Defense: America’s Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Spring 1991), pp. 5–53; and Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*.

15. Retrenchment advocates’ criticisms of U.S. leadership of the global liberal order are less well developed than their arguments for trimming the United States’ overseas military presence and commitments. Perhaps reflecting the underlying realist perspective that devalues the overall significance of institutions, these analysts have relatively little to say directly regarding why the United States should refrain from making efforts to foster the international institutions that make up the current order; hence, their criticism of this element of the current U.S. grand strategy is largely implicit.



### *The Costs of Deep Engagement*

Advocates for retrenchment have made their case against deep engagement admirably clear: it imposes heavy costs and yields scant benefits. In this section, we assess the costs, which fall into three general categories: budgetary cost, the systemic costs of hegemonic leadership, and the distortion of U.S. interests. The problem with these arguments about the costs of deep engagement is that they are either overstated or wrong.

#### BUDGETARY COST

Speaking for many retrenchment advocates, Christopher Layne maintains that “the nation’s ballooning budget deficits are going to make it increasingly difficult to sustain [the United States’] level of military commitments. . . . [I]ts strategic commitments exceed the resources available to support them.”<sup>16</sup> The budgetary cost of deep engagement is the difference between the expenditures the strategy demands and the amount required for its replacement. The problem is that there are no consensus estimates for either number. This challenge is particularly acute concerning the cost of the grand strategy that would replace retrenchment. Critics of deep engagement develop strong general arguments about the costs and risks of maintaining alliance commitments, but they typically leave unclear exactly what to do about them. Should all alliances and security commitments be summarily abrogated? If so, the savings would be significant. CATO Institute analysts Benjamin Friedman and Justin Logan estimate that this alternative—revoking all U.S. security guarantees and alliances, bringing all overseas deployed troops home, reconfiguring the navy to “surge to fight rare wars rather than patrol the world in the name of stability,” decommissioning large numbers of personnel in all branches, slashing the nuclear deterrent force, and dramatically scaling back weapons procurement—would save some \$900 billion over ten years.<sup>17</sup>

Few advocates of retrenchment are so specific, and fewer still unambiguously endorse the idea of reverting to the pre–World War II strategy of an “insular, maritime power” with limited reach beyond the Western Hemisphere. A

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16. Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Exit: Beyond the Pax Americana,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 2011), p. 153.

17. Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, “Why the U.S. Military Budget Is ‘Foolish and Sustainable,’” *Orbis*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 186–187. Note that this is a December 2011 estimate. Further Pentagon cuts would reduce the net expected savings.

decision to abandon allies and partners, close bases, shed personnel on a large scale, and trim major defense infrastructure would be exceedingly hard to reverse, dramatically raising the costs should the United States ever decide that an overseas intervention were necessary. Few retrenchment advocates appear sufficiently confident that no such overseas interventions will ever be necessary to recommend such a course.<sup>18</sup> Instead, their criticisms of deep engagement are usually accompanied by calls for “restraint,” “offshore balancing,” or “over the horizon” strategies rather than a wholesale abandonment of all major U.S. commitments. These strategies vary along two dimensions: force structure (decommissioning vs. redeployment home; downsizing vs. shifting from Army/Marines to Navy; eliminating the U.S. overseas military footprint everywhere or just in selected regions, etc.); and security commitments (whether to maintain commitments but defend them from offshore; cut some commitments but not all; or cut all commitments).<sup>19</sup>

The budgetary savings that such strategies would yield are unclear. They depend on which security commitments are to be abandoned outright and over what period of time, how U.S. allies would respond, and how much it would cost to make the remaining commitments credible from an over-the-horizon stance. If the alternative strategy requires keeping a similarly sized force in the United States, then the expected savings are modest given that host governments generally cover many infrastructure costs of U.S. forces and bases. And if it requires the maintenance of major expeditionary capacity, again, the savings, if any, might be modest owing to the need for continued or even enhanced investment in the kinds of weapons platforms that now eat up so much of the defense budget.<sup>20</sup> Until retrenchment advocates provide more

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18. Even Gholz and Press, who present arguably the clearest and least-hedged version of retrenchment, still see three possible scenarios that would call for quick and potent U.S. intervention in the Middle East if the United States were to pull back from the region: a cross-border invasion by an aggressor; an attempt to block the Strait of Hormuz; or domestic instability in Saudi Arabia. Gholz and Press, “Protecting ‘The Prize.’” For two of these missions—reversing an effort at conquest and keeping the Strait of Hormuz open—Gholz and Press maintain that air forces would probably be sufficient, but ground forces could need to be reintroduced into the region. *Ibid.*, pp. 476, 481.

19. To simplify a complex literature, the alternatives suggested by retrenchment advocates fall into three broad categories: those that would maintain the existing roster of U.S. security commitments, but would move U.S. forces offshore (e.g., Pape, *Dying to Win*); those that would cut a subset of commitments, while reducing U.S. forces in various regions (e.g., Posen, “The Case for Restraint”); and those that call for a more general curtailment of U.S. security commitments, as well as a widespread shift to move U.S. forces offshore (e.g., Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, “Come Home, America”).

20. If the United States is unable to use its overseas bases in regions where it has abandoned its security partnerships, then it may have to compensate by investing in platforms for projecting force

specifics, the most that can be said is that their alternatives might promise some savings, though considerably less than full strategic disengagement.

The other term in the cost equation—the budgetary demands of deep engagement—is also a moving target. Retrenchment advocates tend to write as if post-September 11 levels of defense spending are necessary to maintain the deep engagement strategy, but it is already clear that this is not the case. After the September 11 attacks, defense spending increased dramatically, owing in large part to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of course, not all of the increased defense spending since September 11 resulted from the costly occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan; a significant portion of the increase was caused by an augmented effort to field and use military tools in the wider war on terrorism. Both of these drivers of increased spending during the past decade have already begun to be reversed, as the United States winds down the two costly wars and begins to trim nonwar “base” spending. As of the fall of 2012, the Defense Department based planning on cuts of just under \$500 billion over the next five years, maintaining that these reductions would not compromise the national security strategy. A report published by the Center for a New American Security agreed that “America’s global engagement strategy as it is currently articulated” can be sustained with national defense cuts in the \$500 billion to \$550 billion range.<sup>21</sup> As figure 1 shows, these cuts are expected to bring defense expenditures as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) below 3 percent by 2017, even though spending in real terms will be roughly \$100 billion higher than the late 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, these figures may not represent the floor for spending to sustain the strategy over the long term: according to many experts, rebalancing security efforts from military to civilian tools and much-discussed reforms to the way the Pentagon does business—including

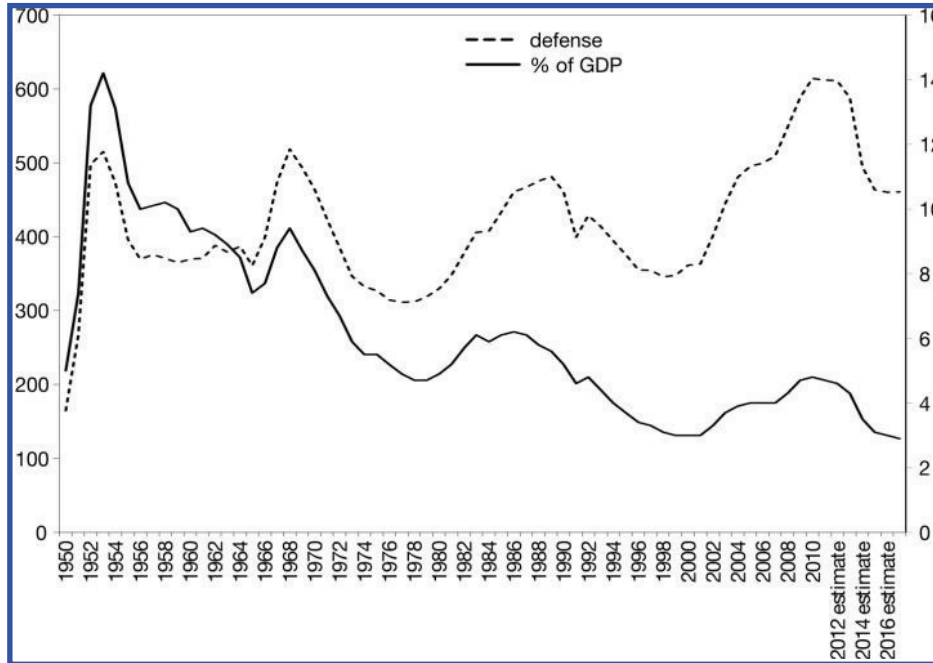
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that are particularly expensive. In turn, if the United States truly abandons its overseas bases, then they may have little utility: bases in places such as the Middle East cannot be mothballed and left empty, but instead require a significant, permanent source of noncombat personnel to remain effective. Adm. William Fallon, interview by Stephen G. Brooks, Hanover, New Hampshire, July 19, 2012.

21. “Cuts” are defined as reductions from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) baseline of current nonwar budget authority adjusted for the rate of inflation. See David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel, and Travis Sharp, *Hard Choices: Responsible Defense in an Age of Austerity* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2011).

22. The data in figure 1 are for “national defense,” the budget function that adds the Department of Energy’s nuclear weapons programs and some parts of defense in other departments to the Defense Department base budget. These data represent actual spending in a given year, which may differ from money the Defense Department is allocated, termed “budget authority.” They include only the costs of the wars incurred up until the budget year, because the Defense Department and the administration generally do not budget in advance for war costs. The authors thank Cindy Williams for helpful email consultation on these issues.

Figure 1. Defense Expenditures in Constant 2005 Dollars and as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).



SOURCE: "Composition of Outlays: 1940 to 2017," Historical Tables of the Budget of the United States, Fiscal Year 2013 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget, February 2013), table 6.1: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>.

procurement practices and compensation policies—potentially could save significant additional sums.<sup>23</sup>

Two points about budget costs emerge. First, the United States can sustain the budgetary cost of deep engagement, even if a future administration should decide to increase funding substantially. Even the largest defense increase seri-

23. Numerous expert panels and task forces have identified needed reforms to the Pentagon's procurement, compensation, health-care, and other policies that could yield \$30–\$50 billion in additional annual savings. CBO estimates that reforms to Tri-Care, the military health-care system, could yield an additional \$200 billion over ten years; the Defense Business Board estimates some \$900 billion in savings over twenty-five years by reforming military retirement plans. See Barno, Bensahel, and Sharp, *Hard Choices*. Regarding rebalancing, the Task Force on a Unified Security

ously discussed in the 2012 presidential campaign would not bring military spending as a share of GDP back to its 2011 level. Given the vast gap in military capabilities between the United States and China, the absence of real counterbalancing (discussed below), and the fact that deep engagement has made U.S. allies of most of the world's most advanced and capable military powers, China's economic rise will not demand a dramatic increase in U.S. military efforts anytime soon.<sup>24</sup> To be sure, the politics of the defense budget may well become contentious in a tough fiscal climate.<sup>25</sup> However, that prospect hardly means that deep engagement cannot be sustained. Rather, it underlines the increased importance of the grand strategy debate this article seeks to advance.

Second, the budgetary cost of the types of offshore balancing or over-the-horizon stances most often suggested by retrenchment advocates remains unclear, but it is certainly more than "coming home" via full strategic disengagement and, at least for some versions, may be either roughly the same or not dramatically lower than current forecasts of deep engagement's price tag. This may explain why the budgetary cost does not figure more prominently in the case for retrenchment. Arguably the most influential scholarly article on retrenchment yet written, Eugene Gholz, Daryl Press and Harvey Sapolsky's "Come Home, America," was published in 1997—just as U.S. defense spending was approaching a fifty-year low as a percentage of GDP at 3 percent.<sup>26</sup>

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Budget for the United States recommends increases in nonmilitary programs funded by cuts in military programs, and the latter can exceed the former. Its 2011 budget yields a net savings of \$38 billion, while the 2012 report nets \$50 billion in savings. Lawrence Korb and Miranda Pemberton, *Report of the Task Force on a Unified Security Budget for the United States, FY 2012* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, July 2011), [http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/unified\\_security\\_budget\\_fy2012](http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/unified_security_budget_fy2012); and Lawrence Korb and Miranda Pemberton, *Report of the Task Force on a Unified Security Budget for the United States, FY 2011* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, August 2010), [http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/USB\\_fy\\_2011](http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/USB_fy_2011).

24. For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century," Dartmouth College, unpublished book manuscript, in progress. On the specific issue of military power, Michael Beckley shows that by many measures the military gap between the United States and China is actually increasing. See Beckley, "China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 41–78.

25. Cindy Williams, "The Future Affordability of U.S. National Security," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 28, 2011; and Michael Mandelbaum, *The Frugal Superpower: America's Global Leadership in a Cash-Strapped Era* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).

26. Figures from both the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget show U.S. defense spending bottoming out at 3 percent of GDP from 1999 to 2001. See SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>; and "Composition of Outlays: 1940 to 2017," Historical Tables of the Budget of the United States, Fiscal

Deep engagement's other costs (as well as its alleged lack of benefits) are clearly the centerpieces of the case for retrenchment.

SYSTEMIC PUSHBACK: THE COSTS OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Critics contend that deep engagement's focus on U.S. leadership generates systemic costs. U.S. foreign policy is "self-abrading" in Posen's words: "[T]he very act of seeking more control injects negative energy into global politics as quickly as it finds enemies to vanquish."<sup>27</sup> The United States' latent material capabilities are not the problem. If they were, then retrenchment could not logically be the solution. Rather, the argument is that efforts to translate those latent capabilities into a position of global leadership generate systemic responses that speed the diffusion of capabilities away from the United States. As Richard Betts puts it, "[A]ttempts at running the world generate resistance."<sup>28</sup>

BALANCING. Some advocates of retrenchment suggest that deep engagement in the security affairs of the world's key regions "prompts other states to balance against U.S. power however they can."<sup>29</sup> Such counterbalancing could take the form of alliance formation (institutionalized interstate security cooperation against the United States that would not occur if America retrenched), "internal balancing" (the conversion of latent capacity into military power that would not occur if the United States retrenched), or "soft balancing" (the use of institutions and other nonmilitary means to hamstring U.S. policy that would not occur if the United States retrenched).

It is now generally understood that the current grand strategy of deep engagement runs no risk of generating "hard" counterbalancing. When properly specified, realist balance of power theory does not predict counterhegemonic balancing against the United States: the conditions that sparked internal and external counterbalancing against past leading states—notably the existence of contiguous peer rival great powers—do not apply.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, recent scholar-

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Year 2013 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget, February 2013), table 6.1, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>.

27. Barry R. Posen, "From Unipolarity to Multipolarity: Transition in Sight?" in G. John Ikenberry, Michael M. Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 333; and Posen, "The Case for Restraint," p. 13.

28. Betts, *American Force*, p. 278.

29. Posen, "The Case for Restraint," p. 12. See also Posen, "From Unipolarity to Multipolarity," p. 329; Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing," p. 113; and Betts, *American Force*, p. 278.

30. William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1



ship strongly supports the proposition that the deep engagement strategy—and the maintenance of the formidable military power that underwrites it—slows rather than hastens the speed at which capabilities might diffuse to a more balanced distribution. As we argue below, securing partners and allies in key regions reduces their incentives to generate military capabilities.<sup>31</sup> Less often noted is that these same security guarantees provide leverage to prevent U.S. allies—which comprise the majority of the most modern and effective militaries in the world—from transferring military technologies and production techniques to potential rivals. The U.S. dominance of the high-end defense industry also allows Washington to trade access to its defense market for compliance on key security issues, such as technology transfers to potential geopolitical opponents.<sup>32</sup> The embargo on military sales to China—in place since 1989—is a case in point. More generally, recent years have witnessed an outpouring of scholarship directly refuting the proposition forwarded by many retrenchment proponents that U.S. military preeminence sparks a diffusion of military power. On the contrary, there are many settings in which the first mover's military innovations are unlikely to be adopted successfully by potential rivals.<sup>33</sup> Path dependence, scale economies, learning effects regarding production techniques, and barriers to entry in the production of high-end military power make the maintenance of unmatched capabilities far easier than many retrenchment advocates suggest—particularly in today's environment in which modern weaponry is so much more complex both to produce and to use than in past eras.<sup>34</sup> A United States less committed to global leadership with a less

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(Summer 1999), pp. 5–41; William C. Wohlforth, “U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World,” in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 98–118; Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, pp. 22–59; Brooks and Wohlforth, “Assessing the Balance”; Daniel H. Nexon, “The Balance of Power in the Balance,” *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 2009), pp. 330–359; and David W. Blagden, Jack S. Levy, and William R. Thompson, “Correspondence: Sea Powers, Continental Powers, and Balancing Theory,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), pp. 190–202.

31. Moreover, interviews with Obama administration officials confirm the oft-noted notion that U.S. security leverage augments sales of American weaponry to allies of the United States. Obama administration officials, email interviews by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

32. Mark Zachary Taylor, “Toward an International Relations Theory of National Innovation Rates,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 2012), pp. 113–152; and Stephanie Neuman, “Power, Influence, and Hierarchy: Defense Industries in a Unipolar World,” *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (February 2010), pp. 105–134.

33. Michael C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

34. See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks, *Producing Security: Multinational Corporations, Globalization, and the Changing Calculus of Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jona-

dominant military posture would have far less capacity to control the diffusion of military power.

Concerning balance of threat theory, its author, Stephen Walt, concludes that because of the numerous systemic factors that mitigate other powers' perceptions of U.S. threats to their security, the United States would have to "have the same expansionist ambitions [as] Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union" to spark a hard balancing coalition.<sup>35</sup> Expanding the theoretical lens to encompass domestic and international institutions only strengthens the case. Deep engagement allows the United States to institutionalize its alliances and wrap its hegemonic rule in a rules-based order. The result is to make the U.S. alliance system—especially among its core liberal members—far more robust and harder to challenge than if the United States were to disengage.<sup>36</sup>

Needless to say, the evidence is perfectly consistent with this near consensus regarding the nature of balancing in today's system. The United States has pursued a grand strategy of deep engagement in a unipolar setting for twenty years. For at least a portion of his eight-year administration, George W. Bush followed a more "unilateral" foreign policy that many scholars (critics and defenders of deep engagement alike) saw as being far more threatening to other states.<sup>37</sup> Yet multiple, comprehensive analyses find no evidence of external or internal balancing by major powers.<sup>38</sup>

Because it is a slippery concept that is difficult to distinguish from standard diplomatic bargaining and competition, soft balancing is harder to evaluate.<sup>39</sup>

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than D. Caverley, "United States Hegemony and the New Economics of Defense," *Security Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October/December 2007), pp. 597–613; and Brooks and Wohlforth, "America Abroad."

35. Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 86–120.

36. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*.

37. Assessing the Bush administration's policy, Robert A. Pape asserted in 2005 that "[t]he Bush strategy of aggressive unilateralism is changing the United States' long-enjoyed reputation for benign intent and giving other major powers reason to fear its power." Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), p. 9.

38. Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*; and Michael Beckley, "The Unipolar Era: Why American Power Persists and China's Rise Is Limited," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2012.

39. See Stephen Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 72–108; and Gerard Alexander and Keir A. Lieber, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 109–139.

Case studies of headline episodes widely seen as soft balancing fail to find much evidence that balancing dynamics were really in play.<sup>40</sup> Michael Beckley's efforts to evaluate quantitative indicators (voting patterns at the United Nations, arms sales to U.S. adversaries, and foreign public opinion) also show no consistent trend other than evidence of political resistance to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>41</sup> For the purposes of assessing U.S. grand strategy, however, the most important point about soft balancing is that it is defined in a way guaranteed to miss the real question: Does the current grand strategy give the United States or its potential adversaries more soft balancing-style leverage? Almost all definitions of soft balancing are about actions below the significance of hard balancing that other states can take to constrain the United States. They focus on the use of international institutions and coordinated action to restrain the United States, in part by denying it legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> Yet, precisely the same tools are available to the United States: it too can use international institutions and undertake coordinated actions to constrain other powers. In this sense, the United States is "soft balancing" other states all the time.<sup>43</sup>

For example, in 2011 Washington coordinated action with a number of Southeast Asian states to oppose Beijing's claims in the South China Sea by highlighting established international law and norms to deny China's claim legitimacy. This fits all definitions of soft balancing—except that it is directed against China. It takes only a moment's thought to see that this sort of action goes on constantly—sometimes explicitly, often implicitly. The United States is clearly the world's number one "soft balancer." Moreover, the institutions, norms, rules, and standards of legitimacy that it uses to constrain others are largely of its own creation.<sup>44</sup> As noted above, a core proposition of the deep engagement strategy is that sustaining a global presence enables systematic use

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40. See the discussion in Brooks and Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing"; and Alexander and Lieber, "Waiting for Balancing."

41. Beckley, "The Unipolar Era."

42. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States"; Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World"; and T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 46–71.

43. See Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy toward China," *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 363–395; and G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China: Power, Institutions, and the Western Order," in Robert S. Ross and Feng Zhu, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 89–114.

44. The challenges that this tendency presents to potential revisionist powers is discussed in Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer 2011), pp. 41–72.

of soft balancing–style tools to restrain and shape others’ behavior. To be sure, other powers sometimes use the same tools, but to define soft balancing as action that can be taken only against the United States misses the forest for a few trees.

**HEGEMONIC DECLINE AND IMPERIAL OVERSTRETCH.** Some retrenchment advocates argue that, as a strategy of systemic leadership, deep engagement implicates the works of scholars such as Robert Gilpin, Paul Kennedy, and David Calleo concerning the connection between hegemony and U.S. decline.<sup>45</sup> If we follow Gilpin and define hegemony as “the leadership of one state (the hegemon) over other states in the system,” then the contemporary United States qualifies, and it is fair to describe deep engagement as a hegemonic grand strategy.<sup>46</sup> The argument is that monetary and human resources devoted to deep engagement are unavailable for other, possibly more productive purposes—infrastructure, education, civilian research and development, innovation, and so on—that would enhance U.S. competitiveness. The forward-leaning grand strategy, meanwhile, creates incentives for allies to free ride. With lower military expenditures, the argument goes, they are able to grow faster than they otherwise would, and do so at the United States’ expense. As a result, deep engagement will fall prey to the same fate as past hegemonic grand strategies: it will tend to be self-defeating over time, ultimately causing other states to increase capabilities faster—and the hegemon to decline faster relative to those other states—than would be the case if the hegemon retrenched.

In this vein, Layne argues that “the United States now is facing the dilemmas that Gilpin and the other declinists warned about.”<sup>47</sup> Layne’s observation may be true, but it does not mean that the United States’ deep engagement grand strategy is the problem or that major retrenchment is the solution. Newer scholarship has transformed 1980s vintage conventional wisdom about hegemonic decline and imperial overstretch. The key is that the canonical works (and many of today’s retrenchment advocates) fail to distinguish between causes of decline that are exogenous to hegemony and the international system

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45. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987); and David P. Calleo, *The Imperious Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

46. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 116 n. 6. Needless to say, there are many other more stringent definitions that would disqualify the contemporary United States.

47. Christopher Layne, “This Time It’s Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2012), pp. 203–213. See also Layne, “The Unipolar Exit,” p. 153, where he notes: “Simply put, the United States is imperially overstretched.”

and those that are causally connected to being the hegemon or pursuing leadership. Mechanisms of decline that directly stem from being the hegemon or pursuing leadership have rarely been identified, and those that have are weakly grounded in logic and poorly supported by evidence. A new wave of scholarship has emerged over the last two decades showing that, if anything, leading states can use their position to slow decline and mitigate its effects.

Most of the causes of decline featured in the 1980s texts have nothing to do with the United States' current situation. Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, for example, did indeed document repeated overextension of great powers—but in every case the key mechanism causing overstretch was counterbalancing by other major powers. Given that the counterbalancing constraint does not apply to the United States under unipolarity, Kennedy's evidence is not probative for the current debate. Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* presented a theory of decline that has implications for hegemony, but did not establish a causal connection between the pursuit of hegemony and decline. Gilpin identifies a tendency "for the economic costs of maintaining the status quo to rise faster than the economic capacity to support the status quo."<sup>48</sup> He explains this by reference to a set of processes, most of which are entirely exogenous to the international system: declining rates of economic growth (essentially, the neoclassical growth model developed by Robert Solow); the rising costs of military power; the tendency of private and public consumption to grow; the tendency for economic activity to shift to services; and the corrupting influence of affluence. These can be expected to bedevil any rich state regardless of its position in the international system. They all affect a state's ability to sustain hegemony, but none is caused by being a hegemon or pursuing policies of leadership. Indeed, they would presumably all conspire to hinder any state on the same growth path as the hegemonic leader from mounting a challenge.

The main link between hegemonic grand strategy and decline that figures in Gilpin, as well as in the works of Calleo and Kennedy, is diversion of resources away from productive investment toward system maintenance and protection.<sup>49</sup> Simply paying the costs of protecting clients and maintaining the system—military expenditures, subsidies to allies, and so on—exacerbates the larger, growth-sapping trend toward consumption and away from invest-

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48. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 156.

49. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*; and Calleo, *The Imperious Economy*.

ment. This amounts to a claim that the opportunity cost of its grand strategy will cause a hegemon's rate of growth to slow more markedly than a nonhegemonic state as it proceeds along Solow's path from poor and rapidly growing to rich and slowly growing. Conversely, other states whose security and prosperity are underwritten by the hegemon will be spared these opportunity costs and will perform relatively better. Always present in realist arguments for strategic retrenchment, this proposition began to figure even more prominently as U.S. defense expenditures began to climb after 2001.<sup>50</sup>

The problem with the claim that pursuing leadership imposes growth-sapping opportunity costs is that subsequent research has found virtually no evidence for it. Research in economics has yielded no consensus theory or accepted empirical finding to support the assumption that reduced U.S. military spending would improve the country's economic growth. As one review summed it up, the "literature in economics has not found military expenditure to be a significant determinant of growth."<sup>51</sup> This finding is robust to all three major growth models in economics, a huge array of identification strategies, various country groupings (e.g., developed vs. developing), and concerning the United States itself. Indeed, when considered in the aggregate, the most common finding is a positive relationship between military spending and growth.<sup>52</sup> In a departure from the broader research in economics, political scientists Karen Rasler and William Thompson conducted a study tailored to the specific claims about the costs of hegemonic grand strategies. Their findings "do not support the argument that consumption-driven investment tradeoffs are critical to an understanding of the relative decline of system leaders."<sup>53</sup> Obviously, there are some limits to this overall claim: if the United States were a dramatic outlier among the advanced economies, spending Soviet Union-type

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50. See, for example, Gholz, Press, Sapolsky, "Come Home, America"; and Posen, "The Case for Restraint."

51. J. Paul Dunne, Ron Smith, and Dirk Willenbockel, "Models of Military Expenditure and Growth: A Critical Review," *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (December 2005), pp. 449–461. Note that the claim in both the economics literature and that on hegemonic decline is about the link between military spending and growth, not welfare or happiness.

52. See Betu Dicle and Mehmet F. Dicle, "Military Spending and GDP Growth: Is There a General Causal Relationship?" *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (June 2010), pp. 311–345. On the United States, see Uk Heo, "The Relationship between Defense Spending and Economic Growth in the United States," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 760–770.

53. Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490–1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 134.



levels on defense (20 to 25 percent) over decades, this would surely complicate its growth trajectory and relative competitiveness. But even when fully engaged in the Afghan war and with many of the expensive militarized responses to the September 11 attacks still in place, the United States is not spending a historically high proportion of its GDP on the military (4.5 percent in 2012) either in absolute terms or in relation to its primary economic competitors.

The flip side of this finding is that the economic performance of U.S. allies is unrelated to any security subsidy they receive from Washington. The contention that lower military expenditures facilitated the economic rise of Japan, West Germany, and other U.S. allies seemed plausible when Gilpin, Calleo, and Kennedy were publishing their signature books in the 1980s. Their relative position vis-à-vis the United States essentially stopped improving subsequently, however, as their per capita wealth approached U.S. levels—just as standard growth models would expect. Over the past twenty years, the United States' total and per capita GDP relative to key European allies and Japan has either held steady or improved despite a growing gap in respective military efforts.

In sum, there is scant theoretical or empirical reason to link rates of growth to either the distribution of power or the specific policies the United States pursues to sustain its leadership. As Thompson notes, it is unclear “why uneven growth should be viewed as a function of unbalanced power.”<sup>54</sup> No scholarly theory or empirical findings clearly link the 2007–09 financial collapse, great recession, and consequent ballooning of the U.S. budget deficit to the international system (at least, as scholars of international security construe it). Nor does any established research finding show a connection between any U.S. security commitment and the causes of the economic downturn. Nor is there reason to expect that resources freed up from global commitments would necessarily be diverted to uses more advantageous for long-term U.S. growth. The downturn might affect the United States' willingness to sustain defense spending at 3 to 4 percent of GDP and may even prompt Washington to reevaluate some of its security commitments, but that does not mean that defense spending or security commitments or any other policy associated with U.S. hegemony caused the downturn in the first place.

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54. William R. Thompson, “Systemic Leadership, Evolutionary Processes, and International Relations Theory: The Unipolarity Question,” *International Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2006), p. 17.

Thus, even if U.S. allies are free riding, it will not likely affect U.S. long-term economic performance and so will not conspire to make the pursuit of leadership self-defeating. On the contrary, other states' reliance on U.S. security guarantees means that they fail to invest in significant military modernization, which simply serves to entrench U.S. military dominance. Moreover, as we note in a later section, the United States derives positive economic benefits from its global security role.

Retrenchment advocates' focus on allied free riding faces an even bigger challenge, however. It is far from clear that lower allied military expenditures actually constitute free riding. For allied security behavior to be considered free riding, U.S. security guarantees must be a collective good. Collective goods have two key properties: nonexcludability and nonrivalry (i.e., the consumption of the good by one does not reduce its consumption by others). As recent scholarship stresses, U.S. security guarantees violate these two assumptions.<sup>55</sup> The consumption of U.S. security guarantees by some states (e.g., NATO) arguably can reduce the security of others (e.g., Russia). In addition, Washington can exclude any state it wants, which means that its bargaining leverage is greater than the theory implies. Indeed, Beckley argues that foreign aid and peacekeeping more closely resemble true public goods, and there the United States is the free rider, contributing far less than its allies.<sup>56</sup> Once it is clear that the proper theory is not collective goods but bargaining, the possibility emerges that allied undersupply of conventional military capabilities and oversupply of foreign aid and postconflict peacekeeping are part of a complex hegemonic bargain. The question—which we address later in this article—is whether this bargain is favorable to U.S. national interests.

#### DISTORTING U.S. INTERESTS: ENTRAPMENT AND TEMPTATION

The costs of U.S. foreign policy that matter most are lives that might be lost if the country's strategy goes awry. Supporters of retrenchment express grave worry that the United States' multifarious commitments might drag it into an unnecessary shooting war, or that its massive global military presence feeds a dangerous expansion of interests that results in young Americans dying in battles for other nations' causes. We consider each of these potential costs in turn.

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55. Carla Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage: U.S. Hegemony and International Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 167–191; and Beckley, "The Unipolar Era."

56. Beckley, "The Unipolar Era."

ENTRAPMENT. Drawing on studies of alliance politics by Glen Snyder and others, advocates of retrenchment often highlight the risk of entrapment.<sup>57</sup> In this view, securing smaller allies courts moral hazard by emboldening them to take risks they would not otherwise accept, pulling the superpower sponsor into costly wars. Spurious concerns about the reputational costs of failing to honor alliance commitments or the pernicious influence of foreign interest group lobbying might cause U.S. leaders to go to war even when the interests at stake are not American.

At first glance, entrapment would seem to defy realist expectations. After all, the scenario it posits of a weaker ally pulling the stronger patron into a war not in its interest turns Thucydides on his head, saying, in effect, that “the weak do what they can and the strong suffer what they must.” Scholarship that has appeared in the three decades since the initial work on entrapment has in significant part rescued realism from this potential anomaly. Rational states might be expected to anticipate the danger of entrapment and seek to protect themselves from it. As it turns out, this is exactly what they do. TongFi Kim, for example, shows that most alliance agreements are written to protect the allies from entrapment—a problem that is greater for the smaller partner, whose bargaining leverage, as realism would expect, is generally dwarfed by that of the great power patron. This helps to explain why it is nearly impossible to find a clear case of entrapment actually occurring.<sup>58</sup> Cases of the related phenomenon of “chain ganging,” in which alliance ties expand wars beyond the real interest of some or all alliance members, are also now far more contested than they were two decades ago. According to new research by a growing cadre of historians and political scientists, even the canonical case of World War I does not qualify.<sup>59</sup>

More recent scholarship has also ratified Paul Schroeder’s discussion of alliances as not just power-aggregating mechanisms but also tools for controlling risks and exerting influence.<sup>60</sup> In a study spanning nearly two centuries, Jesse Johnson and Brett Leeds found “support for the hypothesis that defensive alli-

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57. Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

58. TongFi Kim, “Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (August 2011), pp. 350–377.

59. Dominic Tierney, “Does Chain-Ganging Cause the Outbreak of War?” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 285–304; and Keir A. Lieber, “The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 155–191.

60. Paul W. Schroeder, “Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management,” in

ances deter the initiation of disputes but no evidence in support of the claims that states with defensive allies are more likely to initiate disputes in the international system." They conclude that "defensive alliances lower the probability of international conflict and are thus a good policy option for states seeking to maintain peace in the world."<sup>61</sup> Much about the United States' experience contains evidence to support this view. Victor Cha shows how each post-World War II U.S.–East Asian alliance was a "powerplay . . . designed to exert maximum control over the smaller ally's actions," where one key aim was "to constrain anticommunist allies in the region that might engage in aggressive behavior against adversaries that could entrap the United States in an unwanted larger war."<sup>62</sup> Recent developments in the United States–Taiwan relationship—arguably the most salient entrapment concern for advocates of retrenchment—also constitute a case in point. After repeated cross-strait tensions in the 1990s and early 2000s, U.S. officials became concerned that the policy of strategic ambiguity regarding support for Taiwan was leaving them exposed to the risk of entrapment. The George W. Bush administration adjusted the policy to clarify dual deterrence: deterring China from an unprovoked attack, but also deterring Taiwan from provocative moves toward independence that might give Beijing cause to resort to force.<sup>63</sup> Although it is impossible to rule out speculation that the United States might get "dragged in" no matter what, all the observable evidence is consistent with the view that major power patrons can ward against moral hazard and use their alliances to control risks.

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Klaus Knorr, ed., *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975), pp. 227–263, quotes at p. 227 and p. 256, respectively. For a theoretical analysis that captures the points made herein about alliances as risk management tools, see Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003). See also Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), which shows that, when a great power is willing to "throw its weight around," it can reliably restrain smaller allies.

61. Jesse C. Johnson and Brett Ashley Leeds, "Defense Pacts: A Prescription for Peace?" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 45–65.

62. Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Winter 2009/10), p. 158.

63. Thomas Christensen recounts that in 2002–03 and again in 2007–08 the United States actively opposed Taiwanese moves to unilaterally change the status quo across the strait and actually "coordinated international criticism" of Taiwanese moves, but it did so while criticizing China's military buildup around the strait and taking steps to deepen U.S. defense ties with Taiwan. As Christensen argues, the United States was not entrapped by its security commitment to Taiwan but—on the contrary—used the security commitment, along with careful diplomacy, to restrain and deter both sides. See Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 242–255.

TEMPTATION. For many advocates of retrenchment, the mere possession of peerless, globe-girdling military capabilities leads inexorably to a dangerous expansion of U.S. definitions of national interest that then drag the country into expensive wars.<sup>64</sup> For example, sustaining ramified, long-standing alliances such as NATO leads to mission creep: the search for new roles to keep the alliance alive. Hence, critics allege that NATO's need to "go out of area or out of business" led to reckless expansion that alienated Russia and then to a heedless broadening of interests to encompass interventions such as those in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya. In addition, peerless military power creates the temptation to seek total, non-Clausewitzian solutions to security problems, as allegedly occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> Only a country in possession of such awesome military power and facing no serious geopolitical rival would fail to be satisfied with partial solutions such as containment and instead embark on wild schemes of democracy building in such unlikely places. In addition, critics contend, the United States' outsized military creates a sense of obligation to use it if it might do good, even in cases where no U.S. interests are engaged. As Madeleine Albright famously asked Colin Powell, "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about, if we can't use it?"

Undoubtedly, possessing global military intervention capacity expands opportunities to use force. If it were truly to "come home," the United States would be tying itself to the mast like Ulysses, rendering itself incapable of succumbing to temptation. Any defense of deep engagement must acknowledge that it increases the opportunity and thus the logical probability of U.S. use of force compared to a grand strategy of true strategic disengagement. Of course, if the alternative to deep engagement is an over-the-horizon intervention stance, then the temptation risk would persist after retrenchment. The main problem with the interest expansion argument, however, is that it essentially boils down to one case: Iraq. Sixty-seven percent of all the casualties and 64 percent of all the budget costs of all the wars the United States has fought since 1990 were caused by that war. Twenty-seven percent of the casualties and 26 percent of the costs were related to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. All the other interventions—the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War, the

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64. See especially Preble, *Power Problem*.

65. See Betts, *American Force*, chap. 13.

subsequent airstrike campaigns in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Libya, and so on—account for 3 percent of the casualties and 10 percent of the costs.<sup>66</sup>

Iraq is the outlier not only in terms of its human and material cost, but also in terms of the degree to which the overall burden was shouldered by the United States alone. As Beckley has shown, in the other interventions allies either spent more than the United States, suffered greater relative casualties, or both. In the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War, for example, the United States ranked fourth in overall casualties (measured relative to population size) and fourth in total expenditures (relative to GDP). In Bosnia, European Union (EU) budget outlays and personnel deployments ultimately swamped those of the United States as the Europeans took over postconflict peacebuilding operations. In Kosovo, the United States suffered one combat fatality, the sole loss in the whole operation, and it ranked sixth in relative monetary contribution. In Afghanistan, the United States is the number one financial contributor (it achieved that status only after the 2010 surge), but its relative combat losses rank fifth.<sup>67</sup> In short, the interest expansion argument would look much different without Iraq in the picture. There would be no evidence for the United States shouldering a disproportionate share of the burden, and the overall pattern of intervention would look “unrestrained” only in terms of frequency, not cost, with the debate hinging on whether the surge in Afghanistan was recklessly unrestrained.<sup>68</sup>

How emblematic of the deep engagement strategy is the U.S. experience in Iraq? The strategy’s supporters insist that Iraq was a Bush/neoconservative aberration; certainly, there are many supporters of deep engagement who strongly opposed the war, most notably Barack Obama. Against this view, opponents claim that it or something close to it was inevitable given the grand strategy. Regardless, the more important question is whether continuing the current grand strategy condemns the United States to more such wars. The

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66. Casualties as of 2010 calculated from Hannah Fischer, *U.S. Military Casualty Statistics: Operation New Dawn, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2010). Costs are actual budget outlays (not estimated total cost) as of 2011, calculated from Stephen Daggett, *Costs of Major U.S. Wars* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, June 2010); Jeremiah Gertler, *Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, March 2011); and Nina M. Serafino, *Military Contingency Funding for Bosnia, Southwest Asia, and Other Operations: Questions and Answers* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, 1999), <http://stuff.mit.edu/afs/sipb/contrib/wikileaks-crs/wikileaks-crs-reports/98-823.pdf>.

67. Data from Beckley, “The Unipolar Era.”

68. The initial operations in Afghanistan were widely supported, including by prominent advocates of retrenchment, many of whom went on to oppose the surge in 2010. Some 40 percent of total U.S. casualties have occurred since the surge.



Cold War experience suggests a negative answer. After the United States suffered a major disaster in Indochina (to be sure, dwarfing Iraq in its human toll), it responded by waging the rest of the Cold War using proxies and highly limited interventions. Nothing changed in the basic structure of the international system, and U.S. military power recovered by the 1980s, yet the United States never again undertook a large expeditionary operation until after the Cold War had ended. All indications are that Iraq has generated a similar effect for the post-Cold War era. If there is an Obama doctrine, Dominic Tierney argues, it can be reduced to “No More Iraqs.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the president’s thinking is reflected in the Defense Department’s current strategic guidance, which asserts that “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”<sup>70</sup> Those developments in Washington are also part of a wider rejection of the Iraq experience across the American body politic, which political scientist John Mueller dubbed the “Iraq Syndrome.”<sup>71</sup> Retrenchment advocates would need to present much more argumentation and evidence to support their pessimism on this subject.

### *Assessing the Security Benefits of Deep Engagement*

Even if deep engagement’s costs are far less than retrenchment advocates claim, they are not worth bearing unless they yield greater benefits. We focus here on the strategy’s major security benefits; in the next section, we take up the wider payoffs of the United States’ security role for its interests in other realms, notably the global economy—an interaction relatively unexplored by international relations scholars.

A core premise of deep engagement is that it prevents the emergence of a far

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69. Dominic Tierney, “The Obama Doctrine and the Lessons of Iraq” (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 9, 2012), <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201205.tierney.obama-doctrine-iraq.html>. Afghanistan has also shaped Obama’s thinking, as David Sanger reports: “The lessons Mr. Obama has learned in Afghanistan have been crucial to shaping his presidency. Fatigue and frustration with the war have defined the strategies his administration has adopted to guide how America intervenes in the world’s messiest conflicts. Out of the experience emerged Mr. Obama’s ‘light footprint’ strategy, in which the United States strikes from a distance but does not engage in years-long, enervating occupations. That doctrine shaped the president’s thinking about how to deal with the challenges that followed—Libya, Syria and a nuclear Iran.” Sanger, “Charting Obama’s Journey to a Shift on Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2012.

70. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 2012), p. 6.

71. John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 6 (November/December 2005), pp. 44–54.

more dangerous global security environment. For one thing, as noted above, the United States' overseas presence gives it the leverage to restrain partners from taking provocative action. Perhaps more important, its core alliance commitments also deter states with aspirations to regional hegemony from contemplating expansion and make its partners more secure, reducing their incentive to adopt solutions to their security problems that threaten others and thus stoke security dilemmas. The contention that engaged U.S. power dampens the baleful effects of anarchy is consistent with influential variants of realist theory. Indeed, arguably the scariest portrayal of the war-prone world that would emerge absent the "American Pacifier" is provided in the works of John Mearsheimer, who forecasts dangerous multipolar regions replete with security competition, arms races, nuclear proliferation and associated preventive war temptations, regional rivalries, and even runs at regional hegemony and full-scale great power war.<sup>72</sup>

How do retrenchment advocates, the bulk of whom are realists, discount this benefit? Their arguments are complicated, but two capture most of the variation: (1) U.S. security guarantees are not necessary to prevent dangerous rivalries and conflict in Eurasia; or (2) prevention of rivalry and conflict in Eurasia is not a U.S. interest. Each response is connected to a different theory or set of theories, which makes sense given that the whole debate hinges on a complex future counterfactual (what would happen to Eurasia's security setting if the United States truly disengaged?). Although a certain answer is impossible, each of these responses is nonetheless a weaker argument for retrenchment than advocates acknowledge.

The first response flows from defensive realism as well as other international relations theories that discount the conflict-generating potential of anarchy under contemporary conditions.<sup>73</sup> Defensive realists maintain that the high ex-

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72. See John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 360–402; John J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (September/October 2001), pp. 46–61; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why Is Europe Peaceful Today?" *European Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2010), pp. 387–397; and John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 2010), pp. 381–396. The term "American pacifier" originated in Josef Joffe, "Europe's American Pacifier," *Foreign Policy*, No. 54 (Spring 1984), pp. 64–82.

73. See, for example, the defensive realist arguments of Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell

pected costs of territorial conquest, defense dominance, and an array of policies and practices that can be used credibly to signal benign intent, mean that Eurasia's major states could manage regional multipolarity peacefully without the American pacifier.

Retrenchment would be a bet on this scholarship, particularly in regions where the kinds of stabilizers that nonrealist theories point to—such as democratic governance or dense institutional linkages—are either absent or weakly present. There are three other major bodies of scholarship, however, that might give decisionmakers pause before making this bet. First is regional expertise. Needless to say, there is no consensus on the net security effects of U.S. withdrawal. Regarding each region, there are optimists and pessimists. Few experts expect a return of intense great power competition in a post-American Europe, but many doubt European governments will pay the political costs of increased EU defense cooperation and the budgetary costs of increasing military outlays.<sup>74</sup> The result might be a Europe that is incapable of securing itself from various threats that could be destabilizing within the region and beyond (e.g., a regional conflict akin to the 1990s Balkan wars), lacks capacity for global security missions in which U.S. leaders might want European participation, and is vulnerable to the influence of outside rising powers.

What about the other parts of Eurasia where the United States has a substantial military presence? Regarding the Middle East, the balance begins to swing toward pessimists concerned that states currently backed by Washington—notably Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—might take actions upon U.S. retrenchment that would intensify security dilemmas. And concerning East Asia, pessimism regarding the region's prospects without the American pacifier is pronounced. Arguably the principal concern expressed by area experts is that Japan and South Korea are likely to obtain a nuclear capacity and increase their military commitments, which could stoke a destabilizing reaction from China. It is notable that during the Cold War, both South Korea and

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University Press, 2001); Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Reconsidered," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 128–161; and Shing Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For the liberal theoretical arguments, see, for example, Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); and Erik Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 166–191.

74. Mearsheimer did indeed predict conflict in Europe after the Cold War, although he also predicted a U.S. withdrawal. See Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future."

Taiwan moved to obtain a nuclear weapons capacity and were only constrained from doing so by a still-engaged United States.<sup>75</sup>

The second body of scholarship casting doubt on the bet on defensive realism's sanguine portrayal is all of the research that undermines its conception of state preferences. Defensive realism's optimism about what would happen if the United States retrenched is very much dependent on its particular—and highly restrictive—assumption about state preferences; once we relax this assumption, then much of its basis for optimism vanishes. Specifically, the prediction of post-American tranquility throughout Eurasia rests on the assumption that security is the only relevant state preference, with security defined narrowly in terms of protection from violent external attacks on the homeland. Under that assumption, the security problem is largely solved as soon as offense and defense are clearly distinguishable, and offense is extremely expensive relative to defense. Burgeoning research across the social and other sciences, however, undermines that core assumption: states have preferences not only for security but also for prestige, status, and other aims, and they engage in trade-offs among the various objectives.<sup>76</sup> In addition, they define security not just in terms of territorial protection but in view of many and varied milieu goals. It follows that even states that are relatively secure may nevertheless engage in highly competitive behavior. Empirical studies show that this is indeed sometimes the case.<sup>77</sup> In sum, a bet on a benign postretrenchment Eurasia is a bet that leaders of major countries will never allow these nonsecurity preferences to influence their strategic choices.

To the degree that these bodies of scholarly knowledge have predictive leverage, U.S. retrenchment would result in a significant deterioration in the security environment in at least some of the world's key regions. We have already

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75. As the Vietnam War ended and economic problems mounted, President Richard Nixon's administration took some steps to reduce U.S. defense burdens and overseas security commitments, moves that made some allies worry. South Korea, for example, took the first steps toward a nuclear weapons program, including securing a deal with France for the delivery of a plutonium reprocessing facility. In April 1975, the United States stepped in to put pressure on South Korea both to cancel the program and to ratify the Nonproliferation Treaty. Despite this, later in the year the Korean government indicated that it would need to recommence work toward a nuclear capability should the U.S. nuclear umbrella be removed. See Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 83–84, 91.

76. See, for example, Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: The Past and Future of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 28–57.

77. See, for example, Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, pp. 22–59.

mentioned the third, even more alarming body of scholarship. Offensive realism predicts that the withdrawal of the American pacifier will yield either a competitive regional multipolarity complete with associated insecurity, arms racing, crisis instability, nuclear proliferation, and the like, or bids for regional hegemony, which may be beyond the capacity of local great powers to contain (and which in any case would generate intensely competitive behavior, possibly including regional great power war).

Hence it is unsurprising that retrenchment advocates are prone to focus on the second argument noted above: that avoiding wars and security dilemmas in the world's core regions is not a U.S. national interest. Few doubt that the United States could survive the return of insecurity and conflict among Eurasian powers, but at what cost? Much of the work in this area has focused on the economic externalities of a renewed threat of insecurity and war, which we discuss below. Focusing on the pure security ramifications, there are two main reasons why decisionmakers may be rationally reluctant to run the retrenchment experiment. First, overall higher levels of conflict make the world a more dangerous place. Were Eurasia to return to higher levels of interstate military competition, one would see overall higher levels of military spending and innovation and a higher likelihood of competitive regional proxy wars and arming of client states—all of which would be concerning, in part because it would promote a faster diffusion of military power away from the United States.

Greater regional insecurity could well feed proliferation cascades, as states such as Egypt, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Saudi Arabia all might choose to create nuclear forces.<sup>78</sup> It is unlikely that proliferation decisions by any of these actors would be the end of the game: they would likely generate pressure locally for more proliferation. Following Kenneth Waltz, many retrenchment advocates are proliferation optimists, assuming that nuclear deterrence solves the security problem.<sup>79</sup> Usually carried out in dyadic terms, the debate

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78. In this respect, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah emphasized in a private conversation in 2009 with Dennis Ross that "[i]f they [the Iranians] get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons." Chemi Shalev, "Dennis Ross: Saudi King Vowed to Obtain Nuclear Bomb after Iran," *Haaretz*, May 30, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/dennis-ross-saudi-king-vowed-to-obtain-nuclear-bomb-after-iran-1.433294>. Needless to say, the probability of postretrenchment nuclear proliferation cascades continues to be debated. See, for example, William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, "Divining Nuclear Intentions: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Summer 2008), pp. 139–169.

79. See, for example, Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 248–249. Pape notes that "Iran's political leaders from the Ayatollah Khomeini to today's clerics have never demonstrated a reckless disregard for America's capacity to retaliate for unprovoked aggression against it, and so we have no actual ba-

over the stability of proliferation changes as the numbers go up. Proliferation optimism rests on assumptions of rationality and narrow security preferences. In social science, however, such assumptions are inevitably probabilistic. Optimists assume that most states are led by rational leaders, most will overcome organizational problems and resist the temptation to preempt before feared neighbors nuclearize, and most pursue only security and are risk averse. Confidence in such probabilistic assumptions declines if the world were to move from nine to twenty, thirty, or forty nuclear states. In addition, many of the other dangers noted by analysts who are concerned about the destabilizing effects of nuclear proliferation—including the risk of accidents and the prospects that some new nuclear powers will not have truly survivable forces—seem prone to go up as the number of nuclear powers grows.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the risk of “unforeseen crisis dynamics” that could spin out of control is also higher as the number of nuclear powers increases. Finally, add to these concerns the enhanced danger of nuclear leakage, and a world with overall higher levels of security competition becomes yet more worrisome.

The argument that maintaining Eurasian peace is not a U.S. interest faces a second problem. On widely accepted realist assumptions, acknowledging that U.S. engagement preserves peace dramatically narrows the difference between retrenchment and deep engagement. For many supporters of retrenchment, the optimal strategy for a power such as the United States, which has attained regional hegemony and is separated from other great powers by oceans, is offshore balancing: stay over the horizon and “pass the buck” to local powers to do the dangerous work of counterbalancing any local rising power. The United States should commit to onshore balancing only when local balancing is likely to fail and a great power appears to be a credible contender for regional hegemony, as in the cases of Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union in the mid-twentieth century.

The problem is that China’s rise puts the possibility of its attaining regional hegemony on the table, at least in the medium to long term. As Mearsheimer notes, “The United States will have to play a key role in countering China, because its Asian neighbors are not strong enough to do it by them-

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sis to doubt that we could live with a nuclear Iran.” For Waltz’s argument, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better*, Adelphi Paper, No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981); and Kenneth N. Waltz, “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (July/August 2012), pp. 2–5.

80. See, for example, Scott D. Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).



selves.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, unless China’s rise stalls, “the United States is likely to act toward China similar to the way it behaved toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War.”<sup>82</sup> It follows that the United States should take no action that would compromise its capacity to move to onshore balancing in the future. It will need to maintain key alliance relationships in Asia as well as the formidably expensive military capacity to intervene there. The implication is to get out of Iraq and Afghanistan, reduce the presence in Europe, and pivot to Asia—just what the United States is doing.<sup>83</sup>

In sum, the argument that U.S. security commitments are unnecessary for peace is countered by a lot of scholarship, including highly influential realist scholarship. In addition, the argument that Eurasian peace is unnecessary for U.S. security is weakened by the potential for a large number of nasty security consequences as well as the need to retain a latent onshore balancing capacity that dramatically reduces the savings retrenchment might bring. Moreover, switching between offshore and onshore balancing could well be difficult.

Bringing together the thrust of many of the arguments discussed so far underlines the degree to which the case for retrenchment misses the underlying logic of the deep engagement strategy. By supplying reassurance, deterrence, and active management, the United States lowers security competition in the world’s key regions, thereby preventing the emergence of a hothouse atmosphere for growing new military capabilities. Alliance ties dissuade partners from ramping up and also provide leverage to prevent military transfers to potential rivals. On top of all this, the United States’ formidable military machine may deter entry by potential rivals. Current great power military expenditures as a percentage of GDP are at historical lows, and thus far other major powers have shied away from seeking to match top-end U.S. military capabilities. In addition, they have so far been careful to avoid attracting the “focused en-

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81. Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” p. 33.

82. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” p. 390. See also Sebastian Rosato and John Schuessler, “A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 2011), p. 813.

83. On the Obama administration’s strategic pivot, which is also described as “rebalancing,” see Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” speech given at Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>. In Obama’s words, “After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region.” See also Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century: The Future of Politics Will Be Decided in Asia, Not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States Will Be Right in the Center of the Action,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 189 (November 2011), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century).

mity" of the United States.<sup>84</sup> All of the world's most modern militaries are U.S. allies (America's alliance system of more than sixty countries now accounts for some 80 percent of global military spending), and the gap between the U.S. military capability and that of potential rivals is by many measures growing rather than shrinking.<sup>85</sup>

In the end, therefore, deep engagement reduces security competition and does so in a way that slows the diffusion of power away from the United States. This in turn makes it easier to sustain the policy over the long term.

### *The Wider Benefits of Deep Engagement*

The case against deep engagement overstates its costs and underestimates its security benefits. Perhaps its most important weakness, however, is that its preoccupation with security issues diverts attention from some of deep engagement's most important benefits: sustaining the global economy and fostering institutionalized cooperation in ways advantageous to U.S. national interests.

#### ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Deep engagement is based on a premise central to realist scholarship from E.H. Carr to Robert Gilpin: economic orders do not just emerge spontaneously; they are created and sustained by and for powerful states.<sup>86</sup> To be sure, the sheer size of its economy would guarantee the United States a significant role in the politics of the global economy whatever grand strategy it adopted. Yet the fact that it is the leading military power and security provider also enables economic leadership. The security role figures in the creation, maintenance, and expansion of the system. In part because other states—including all but one of the world's largest economies—were heavily dependent on U.S. security protection during the Cold War, the United States was able not only to foster the economic order but also to prod other states to buy into it and to support plans for its progressive expansion.<sup>87</sup> Today, as the discussion in the

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84. See the discussion in Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World."

85. See Beckley, "China's Century?"; and "Threatening a Sacred Cow: America's Fiscal Crisis Has Put Defence Spending in the Crosshairs," *Economist*, February 10, 2011, pp. 33–34.

86. Robert Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1946).

87. See Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, pp. 159–220. On how the United States used its provision of security assistance as direct leverage to get its allies to accede to U.S. plans for the management of the global economy, see, for example, Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of Inter-*

previous section underscores, the security commitments of deep engagement support the global economic order by reducing the likelihood of security dilemmas, arms racing, instability, regional conflicts and, in extremis, major power war. In so doing, the strategy helps to maintain a stable and comparatively open world economy—a long-standing U.S. national interest.

In addition to ensuring the global economy against important sources of insecurity, the extensive set of U.S. military commitments and deployments helps to protect the “global economic commons.” One key way is by helping to keep sea-lanes and other shipping corridors freely available for commerce.<sup>88</sup> A second key way is by helping to establish and protect property/sovereignty rights in the oceans. Although it is not the only global actor relevant to protecting the global economic commons, the United States has by far the most important role given its massive naval superiority and the leadership role it plays in international economic institutions. If the United States were to pull back from the world, protecting the global economic commons would likely be much harder to accomplish for a number of reasons: cooperating with other nations on these matters would be less likely to occur; maintaining the relevant institutional foundations for promoting this goal would be harder; and preserving access to bases throughout the world—which is needed to accomplish this mission—would likely be curtailed to some degree.

Advocates of retrenchment agree that a flourishing global economy is an important U.S. interest, but they are largely silent on the role U.S. grand strategy plays in sustaining it.<sup>89</sup> For their part, many scholars of international political

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*national Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Francis J. Gavin, “Ideas, Power, and the Politics of America’s International Monetary Policy during the 1960s,” in Jonathan Kirshner, ed., *Monetary Orders: Ambiguous Economics, Ubiquitous Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 195–217; Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Troops, Monetary Policy, and West Germany’s Relations with the United States and Britain, 1950–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Andrew Walter, “Domestic Sources of International Monetary Leadership,” in David M. Andrews, ed., *International Monetary Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 56–57.

88. See, for example, Norrlof, *America’s Global Advantage*, p. 16. It is easy to overestimate the significance of this mission and presume that maintaining key transportation corridors throughout the world is necessary to prevent an outright disruption of the global economy. Gholz and Press are correct that this is not the case, with the Strait of Hormuz being a notable exception. They write, “Shipping patterns are chosen because they are the most efficient routes in normal circumstances; when threats arise, shippers compare their normal patterns to their next best alternative and pick the best option.” Gholz and Press, “Protecting ‘The Prize,’” p. 462. Ultimately, maintaining the openness of sea-lanes and other shipping corridors is important for ensuring that transportation costs remain as low as possible, which helps to further the expansion of global commerce.

89. The main exception is Gholz and Press, “The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries.” There is a strong analysis, but it relies heavily on a World War I case study. For a thorough discussion of why

economy have long argued that economic openness might continue even in the absence of hegemonic leadership.<sup>90</sup> Yet this does not address the real question of interest: Does hegemonic leadership make the continuation of global economic stability more likely? The voluminous literature contains no analysis that suggests a negative answer; what scholars instead note is that the likelihood of overcoming problems of collective action, relative gains, and incomplete information drops in the absence of leadership.<sup>91</sup> It would thus take a bold if not reckless leader to run a grand experiment to determine whether the global economy can continue to expand in the absence of U.S. leadership.

Deep engagement not only helps to underwrite the global economy in a general sense, but it also allows the United States to structure it in ways that serve the United States' narrow economic interests. Carla Norrlof argues persuasively that America disproportionately benefits from the current structure of the global economy, and that its ability to reap these advantages is directly tied to its position of military preeminence within the system.<sup>92</sup> One way this occurs is via "microlevel structuring"—that is, the United States gets better economic bargains or increased economic cooperation on some specific issues than it would if it did not play such a key security role. As Joseph Nye ob-

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fundamental shifts in production, trade, and finance render the core assumptions of their study untenable in today's global economy, see Brooks and Wohlforth, "America Abroad."

90. See, for example, Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (September 1985), pp. 579–614.

91. In a recent summary of the prevailing scholarly knowledge about leadership and cooperation, Robert O. Keohane notes that "we know that in the absence of leadership, world politics suffers from collective action problems, as each state tries to shift problems, as each state tries to shift the burdens of adjustment to change onto others. . . . We know that leadership is exercised most effectively by creating multilateral institutions that enable states to share responsibilities and burdens. . . . We know that leadership is costly and states other than the leader have incentives to shirk their responsibilities. . . . [And] we know that among democracies in the world today, only the United States has the material capacity and political unity to exercise consistent global leadership." Keohane, "Hegemony and After: Knowns and Unknowns in the Debate over Decline," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (July/August 2012), pp. 117–118.

92. Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage*, pp. 6, 45–46. Norrlof underscores that "military preeminence is necessary for key currency status" and shows in her analysis that there are many "economic advantages for the United States of having the key currency. In addition to the benefits in the form of seignorage, the United States gains substantially from valuation adjustments, reinforcing policy autonomy, and the gains derived from the asymmetry in the structure of borrowing and lending" (pp. 2–3). Regarding trade, she stresses that "the size of the American market, the role of the dollar, and American military power interact to make a trade deficit policy rewarding and buffer the United States from the extreme consequences that a sustained deficit policy would otherwise have" (p. 3).

serves, “Even if the direct use of force were banned among a group of countries, military force would still play an important political role. For example, the American military role in deterring threats to allies, or of assuring access to a crucial resource such as oil in the Persian Gulf, means that the provision of protective force can be used in bargaining situations. Sometimes the linkage may be direct; more often it is a factor not mentioned openly but present in the back of statesmen’s minds.”<sup>93</sup> Although Nye is right that such linkage will generally be implicit, extensive analyses of declassified documents by historians shows that the United States directly used its overseas security commitments and military deployments to convince allies to change their economic policies to its benefit during the Cold War.<sup>94</sup>

The United States’ security commitments continue to bolster the pursuit of its economic interests. Interviews with current and past U.S. administration officials reveal wide agreement that alliance ties help gain favorable outcomes on trade and other economic issues. To the question, “Does the alliance system pay dividends for America in nonsecurity areas, such as economic relations?” the typical answer in interviews is “an unequivocal yes.”<sup>95</sup> U.S. security commitments sometimes enhance bargaining leverage over the specific terms of economic agreements and give other governments more general incentives to enter into agreements that benefit the United States economically—two recent examples being the 2012 Korea–United States Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) and the United States–Australia FTA (which entered into force in 2005).<sup>96</sup> Officials across administrations of different parties stress that the desire of Korea and Australia to tighten their security relationships with the United States was a core reason why Washington was able to enter into free

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93. Joseph S. Nye Jr., “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Summer 1990), p. 181.

94. Gavin, “Ideas, Power, and the Politics of America’s International Monetary Policy during the 1960s,” especially pp. 196–197, 205, 207, 209, 215; Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, especially pp. 6, 12, 30–31, 113, 162, 165–166; and Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, especially pp. 103, 107, 140, 227.

95. Officials from the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, email interviews by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

96. The Korea–U.S. Free Trade Agreement, according to various calculations, will add \$10 billion to \$25 billion to U.S. GDP over a ten-year period. See William Cooper, Mark Manyin, Vivian Jones, Stephen Cooney, and Remy Jurenas, *The Proposed U.S.–South Korean Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA): Provisions and Implications* (Washington, D.C.: CRS, February 12, 2010), p. 6. Bilateral trade with Australia has increased 60 percent since the U.S.–Australia FTA was established in 2005 (with trade totaling approximately \$60 billion in 2011), while U.S. direct investment in Australia doubled from 2006 to 2011, from \$67 billion to \$136 billion.

trade agreements with them and to do so on terms favorable to U.S. economic interests. As one former official indicates, “The KORUS FTA—and I was involved in the initial planning—was attractive to Korea in large measure because it would help to underpin the US-ROK [South Korea] alliance at a time of shifting power in the region.”<sup>97</sup> Korean leaders’ interest in maintaining a strong security relationship with the United States, another former official stressed, made them more willing to be flexible regarding the terms of the agreement because “failure would look like a setback to the political and security relationship. Once we got into negotiations with the ROK, look at how many times we reneged even after we signed a deal. . . . We asked for changes in labor and environment clauses, in auto clauses and the Koreans took it all.”<sup>98</sup>

U.S. security leverage is economically beneficial in a second respect: it can facilitate “macrolevel structuring” of the global economy. Macrolevel structuring is crucial because so much of what the United States wants from the economic order is simply “more of the same”—it prefers the structure of the main international economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund; it prefers the existence of “open regionalism”<sup>99</sup>; it prefers the dollar as the reserve currency; and so on. U.S. interests are thus well served to the extent that American allies favor the global economic status quo rather than revisions that could be harmful to U.S. economic interests. One reason they are often inclined to take this approach is because of their security relationship with the United States. For example, interviews with U.S. officials stress that alliance ties give Washington leverage and authority in the current struggle over multilateral governance institutions in Asia. As one official noted, “On the economic side, the existence of the security alliance contributes to an atmosphere of trust that enables the United States and Japan to present a united front on shared economic goals—such as open markets and transparency, for example, through APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation].”<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Japan’s current interest in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Obama administration’s most important long-term economic initiative in East Asia, is widely understood to be shaped less by specific Japanese

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97. Michael Green, former senior director for Asia, White House National Security Council, email interview by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

98. Former administration official, email interview by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

99. See C. Fred Bergsten, “Open Regionalism,” Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) Working Paper, No. 97-3 (Washington, D.C.: PIIE, 1997).

100. Obama administration official, email interview by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

economic interests than by the belief of Yoshihiko Noda's administration that it will strengthen alliance ties with the United States.<sup>101</sup> As one former administration official stressed, this enhanced allied interest in supporting U.S.-favored economic frameworks as a means of strengthening security ties with the United States helps to ensure against any shift to "a Sino-centric/nontransparent/more mercantilist economic order in Asia."<sup>102</sup>

The United States' security leverage over its allies matters even if it is not used actively to garner support for its conception of the global economy and other economic issues. This is perhaps best illustrated by the status of the dollar as the reserve currency, which confers major benefits on the United States.<sup>103</sup> For many analysts, the U.S. position as the leading superpower with worldwide security commitments is an important reason why the dollar was established as the reserve currency and why it is likely to retain this status for a long time.<sup>104</sup> In the past, Washington frequently used direct security leverage to get its allies to support the dollar.<sup>105</sup> There are a number of subtler mechanisms, however, through which the current U.S. geopolitical position serves the same end. First, Kathleen McNamara builds on the logic of focal points to argue that the U.S. global military role bolsters the likelihood that the dollar will long continue to be the currency that actors converge upon as the "natural" dominant currency.<sup>106</sup> Second, Norrlof emphasizes the significance of a mechanism that U.S. officials also stress: the United States' geopolitical position gives it the ability to constrain certain forms of Asian regionalism that, if they were to eventuate, could help to promote movement away from the dollar.<sup>107</sup> Third, Adam Posen emphasizes that the EU's security dependence on the United States makes it less likely that the euro countries will develop a true

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101. Former administration officials, email interviews by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

102. Former administration official, email interview by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

103. Useful overviews of this point include Eric Helleiner and Jonathan Kirshner, "Summing Up and Looking Ahead: The Future of the Future of the Dollar," in Helleiner and Kirshner, eds., *The Future of the Dollar* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 216–228; Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage*; and Kathleen McNamara, "A Rivalry in the Making? The Euro and International Monetary Power," *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 2008), pp. 439–459.

104. Helleiner and Kirshner label this general theoretical perspective the "geopolitical approach." See Helleiner and Kirshner, "Summing Up and Looking Ahead," pp. 15–17.

105. See, for example, Gavin, "Ideas, Power, and the Politics of America's International Monetary Policy during the 1960s"; Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*; and Zimmermann, *Money and Security*.

106. McNamara, "A Rivalry in the Making?" p. 447.

107. See Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage*, pp. 193, 195–196, 206.



global military capacity and thus “that the dollar will continue to benefit from the geopolitical sources of its global role” in ways that the euro countries will never match.<sup>108</sup>

In sum, the United States is a key pillar of the global economy, but it does not provide this service for free: it also extracts disproportionate benefits. Undertaking retrenchment would place these benefits at risk.

#### INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS

What goes for the global economy also applies to larger patterns of institutionalized cooperation. Here, too, the leadership enabled by the United States’ grand strategy fosters cooperation that generates diffuse benefits for many states but often disproportionately reflects U.S. preferences. This basic premise subsumes three claims.

First, benefits flow to the United States from institutionalized cooperation to address a wide range of problems. There is general agreement that a stable, open, and loosely rule-based international order serves the interests of the United States. Indeed, we are aware of no serious studies suggesting that U.S. interests would be better advanced in a world that is closed (i.e., built around blocs and spheres of influence) and devoid of basic, agreed-upon rules and institutions. As scholars have long argued, under conditions of rising complex interdependence, states often can benefit from institutionalized cooperation.<sup>109</sup>

In the security realm, newly emerging threats arguably are producing a rapid rise in the benefits of such cooperation for the United States. Some of these threats are transnational and emerge from environmental, health, and resource vulnerabilities, such as those concerning pandemics. Transnational nonstate groups with various capacities for violence have also become salient in recent decades, including groups involved in terrorism, piracy, and organized crime.<sup>110</sup>

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108. Adam S. Posen, “Why the Euro Will Not Rival the Dollar,” *International Finance*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (May 2008), p. 76. See also Norrlof, *America’s Global Advantage*, p. 233.

109. See Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Autumn 1990), pp. 731–764; and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

110. One section of Brooks and Wohlforth, “America Abroad,” critically analyzes Robert A. Pape’s argument that the U.S. policy of deep engagement promotes anti-U.S. terrorism. Here, let us simply note that even if we accept everything about Pape’s analysis, his research at most points to a geographically specific recommendation—to remove U.S. troops from the Middle East—and has no bearing on the wisdom of maintaining U.S. forward military presence in all other regions. The authors thank Pape for a helpful conversation on this point. In turn, it is important to recognize that the number of troops that should be based in the Middle East is ultimately a tactical question

As is widely argued, these sorts of nontraditional, transnational threats can be realistically addressed only through various types of collective action.<sup>111</sup> Unless countries are prepared to radically restrict their integration into an increasingly globalized world system, the problems must be solved through coordinated action.<sup>112</sup> In the face of these diffuse and shifting threats, the United States is going to find itself needing to work with other states to an increasing degree, sharing information, building capacities, and responding to crises.<sup>113</sup>

Second, U.S. leadership increases the prospects that such cooperation will emerge in a manner relatively favorable to U.S. interests. Of course, the prospects for cooperation are partly a function of compatible interests. Yet even when interests overlap, scholars of all theoretical stripes have established that institutionalized cooperation does not emerge effortlessly: generating agreement on the particular cooperative solution can often be elusive. And when interests do not overlap, the bargaining becomes tougher yet: not just how, but whether cooperation will occur is on the table. Many factors affect the initiation of cooperation, and under various conditions states can and have cooperated without hegemonic leadership.<sup>114</sup> As noted above, however, scholars acknowledge that the likelihood of cooperation drops in the absence of leadership.

Finally, U.S. security commitments are an integral component of this leadership. Historically, as Gilpin and other theorists of hegemonic order have shown, the background security and stability that the United States provided facilitated the creation of multilateral institutions for ongoing cooperation across policy areas.<sup>115</sup> As in the case of the global economy, U.S. security provi-

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rather than one that concerns the fundamental nature of U.S. foreign policy objectives. Many U.S. troops are now based in the region, but their presence is largely associated with the legacy of the Iraq War, and most, if not all, could potentially be removed without undercutting the ability of the United States to pursue the goals of the current grand strategy given the current capabilities of U.S. naval forces.

111. See, for example, Robert O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

112. See Bruce Jones, Carlos Pascual, and Stephen John Stedman, *Power and Responsibility: Building International Order in an Era of Transnational Threats* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010); and G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 2006).

113. See, for example, Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and G. John Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 533–550.

114. See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

115. Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation*; and Robert Gilpin, "Economic Interde-

sion plays a role in fostering stability within and across regions, and this has an impact on the ability of states to engage in institutional cooperation. Institutional cooperation is least likely in areas of the world where instability is pervasive. It is more likely to flourish in areas where states are secure and leaders can anticipate stable and continuous relations—where the “shadow of the future” is most evident. And because of the key security role it plays in fostering this institutional cooperation, the United States is in a stronger position to help shape the contours of these cooperative efforts.

The United States’ extended system of security commitments creates a set of institutional relationships that foster political communication. Alliance institutions are in the first instance about security protection, but they are also mechanisms that provide a kind of “political architecture” that is useful beyond narrow issues of military affairs. Alliances bind states together and create institutional channels of communication. NATO has facilitated ties and associated institutions—such as the Atlantic Council—that increase the ability of the United States and Europe to talk to each other and do business.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, the bilateral alliances in East Asia also play a communication role beyond narrow security issues. Consultations and exchanges spill over into other policy areas.<sup>117</sup> For example, when U.S. officials travel to Seoul to consult on alliance issues, they also routinely talk about other pending issues, such as, recently, the Korea–United States Free Trade Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This gives the United States the capacity to work across issue areas, using assets and bargaining chips in one area to make progress in another. It also provides more diffuse political benefits to cooperation that flow from the “voice opportunities” created by the security alliance architecture.<sup>118</sup> The alliances provide channels and access points for wider flows of communication—

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pendence and National Security in Historical Perspective,” in Klaus Knorr and Frank N. Trager, eds., *Economic Issues and National Security* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1977), pp. 19–98.

116. For discussions of the wider social structures that have grown up around the Atlantic security alliance, see G. John Ikenberry, “Democracy, Institutions, and American Restraint,” in Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled*, pp. 213–238; and Thomas Risse, “U.S. Power in a Liberal Security Community,” in *ibid.*, pp. 260–283.

117. See Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, “The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 179–196.

118. On voice opportunities, see Joseph M. Grieco, “State Interests and Institutional Rule Trajectories: A Neorealist Interpretation of the Maastricht Treaty and Europe Economic and Monetary Union,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 261–306.

and the benefits of greater political solidarity and institutional cooperation that follow.

The benefits of these communication flows cut across all international issues, but are arguably enhanced with respect to generating security cooperation to deal with new kinds of threats—such as terrorism and health pandemics—that require a multitude of novel bargains and newly established procedures of shared responsibilities among a wide range of countries. With the existing U.S.-led security system in place, the United States is in a stronger position than it otherwise would be to strike bargains and share burdens of security cooperation in such areas. The challenge of rising security interdependence is greater security cooperation. That is, when countries are increasingly mutually vulnerable to nontraditional, diffuse, transnational threats, they need to work together to eradicate the conditions that allow for these threats and limit the damage. The U.S.-led alliance system is a platform with already existing capacities and routines for security cooperation. These assets can be used or adapted, saving the cost of generating security cooperation from scratch. In short, having an institution in place to facilitate cooperation on one issue makes it easier, and more likely, that the participating states will be able to achieve cooperation rapidly on a related issue.<sup>119</sup>

The usefulness of the U.S. alliance system for generating enhanced non-security cooperation is confirmed in interviews with former State Department and National Security Council officials. One former administration official noted, using the examples of Australia and South Korea, that the security ties “create nonsecurity benefits in terms of support for global agenda issues,” such as Afghanistan, Copenhagen, disaster relief, and the financial crisis. “This is not security leverage per se, but it is an indication of how the deepness of the security relationship creates working relationships [and] interoperability that can then be leveraged to address other regional issues.” This official notes, “We could not have organized the Core Group (India, U.S., Australia, Japan) in

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119. As one example, consider the intelligence-sharing network within NATO, which was originally designed to gather information on the threat from the Soviet Union; once in place, it could be quickly adapted to deal with new unforeseen issues, such as the threat from terrorism. For good accounts of the ways in which NATO has established habits and capacities for cooperation that extend beyond traditional European and Atlantic defense into nontraditional security and other areas, see Daniel Hamilton, Charles Barry, Hans Binnendijk, Stephen Flanagan, Julianne Smith, and James Townsend, *Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Washington NATO Project, 2009); and Peter Barschdorff, *Facilitating Transatlantic Cooperation after the Cold War* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2001).

response to the 2004 tsunami without the deep bilateral military relationships that had already been in place. It was much easier for us to organize with these countries almost immediately (within forty-eight hours) than anyone else for a large-scale humanitarian operation because our militaries were accustomed to each other.”<sup>120</sup>

The United States’ role as security provider also has a more direct effect of enhancing its authority and capacity to initiate institutional cooperation in various policy areas. The fact that the United States is a security patron of Japan, South Korea, and other countries in East Asia, for example, gives it a weight and presence in regional diplomacy over the shape and scope of multilateral cooperation not just within the region but also elsewhere. This does not mean that the United States always wins these diplomatic encounters, but its leverage is greater than it would be if the United States were purely an off-shore great power without institutionalized security ties to the region.

In sum, the deep engagement strategy enables U.S. leadership, which results in more cooperation on matters of importance than would occur if the United States disengaged—even as it pushes cooperation toward U.S. preferences.

### *Conclusion*

Should America come home? A prominent and ever growing group of international relations scholars emphatically argue the answer is yes. Yet a sustained evaluation of their case finds the balance of what scholars know about international politics leaning against the retrenchment argument. Advocates of a clean break with the United States’ sixty-year tradition of deep engagement overstate its costs, underestimate its narrow security benefits, and generally ignore its crucial wider security and nonsecurity benefits. Many, moreover, conflate the core grand strategy of deep engagement with issues such as forceful democracy promotion and armed humanitarian intervention—important matters, but optional choices rather than defining features of the grand strategy.

Although we have stressed the continued validity of long-standing precepts of U.S. grand strategy, our analysis does not support resistance to all foreign policy change. Nothing in our argument suggests that every commitment must be retained at all costs. Nor does our study impugn rebalancing the strat-

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120. Former administration official, email interview by G. John Ikenberry, September 2012.

egy to adapt to new constraints and challenges—as President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger did after Vietnam and President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appear to be doing after Iraq. On the contrary, these rebalancing episodes belie the argument that the United States cannot adapt to a changing world.

Our analysis has significant implications not just for policy, but also for international relations theory. With few exceptions, analysts advocating retrenchment are either self-proclaimed realists or explicitly ground their strategic assessment in signature works of realist scholarship. This generates the impression that realism yields an unambiguous verdict in favor of retrenchment for a state in the United States' strategic setting; that other international relations theories either yield similar implications or are irrelevant or wrong; and that U.S. foreign policy since the Cold War's end stands as a massive anomaly for realism. Indeed, to many realist scholars the current grand strategy is so patently suboptimal that its persistence after the Soviet Union's demise can be explained only by domestic political pathologies or the pernicious influence of America's liberal ideology.<sup>121</sup> Our analysis reverses all of these implications. We showed that realism does not yield an unambiguous verdict in favor of retrenchment; that other theoretical traditions do help to explain U.S. grand strategy; that America's post-Cold War strategic behavior is not a self-evident anomaly for international relations theory in general or realism in particular; and that explaining this behavior does not necessarily demand delving deep into the peculiarities of American domestic politics or ideology. In the end, the fundamental choice to retain a grand strategy of deep engagement after the Cold War is just what the preponderance of international relations scholarship would expect a rational, self-interested, leading power in the United States' position to do.

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121. Walt maintains that "the United States allowed its foreign policy to be distorted by partisan sniping, hijacked by foreign lobbyists and narrow domestic special interests, blinded by lofty but unrealistic rhetoric, and held hostage by irresponsible and xenophobic members of Congress." Walt, "In the National Interest." Layne notes that "[m]ore than most, America's foreign policy is the product of . . . ideas, and U.S. foreign-policy elites have constructed their own myths of empire to justify the United States' hegemonic role." Layne, "Graceful Decline," p. 30.