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What Is This Vast "Defense" Structure *For*?

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This is a debate we have to have, not just because of the relative decline of America's economic power but because of its accelerating bankruptcy, and the desperate need to find budget savings if we are not going to get the massive Bush tax hike that's been pending since 2001. And yet questioning the value of being a global hegemon doesn't seem to enter into the mindset of those in the pundit-version of the military-industrial complex. Maybe they are too close to it to see the mounting contradictions. Or maybe these arguments are too telling to be countered, rather than just ignored. But the case for American retrenchment is both fiscal and prudential. [Christopher Preble](#):

Some scholars, however, questioned the logic of hegemonic stability theory from the very beginning. A number continue to do so today. They advance arguments diametrically at odds with the primacist consensus. Trade routes need not be policed by a single dominant power; the international economy is complex and resilient. Supply disruptions are likely to be temporary, and the costs of mitigating their effects should be borne by those who stand to lose — or gain — the most. Islamic extremists are scary, but hardly comparable to the threat posed by a globe-straddling Soviet Union armed with thousands of nuclear weapons. It is frankly absurd that we spend more today to fight Osama bin Laden and his tiny band of murderous thugs than we spent to face down Joseph Stalin and Chairman Mao. Many factors have contributed to the dramatic decline in the number of wars between nation-states; it is unrealistic to expect that a new spasm of global conflict would erupt if the United States were to modestly refocus its efforts, draw down its military power, and call on other countries to play a larger role in their own defense, and in the security of their respective regions.

But while there are credible alternatives to the United States serving in its current dual role as world policeman / armed social worker, the foreign policy establishment in Washington has no interest in exploring them. The people here have grown accustomed to living at the center of the earth, and indeed, of the universe. The tangible benefits of all this military spending flow disproportionately to this tiny corner of the United States while the schlubs in fly-over country pick up the tab.

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