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## The Balance of Power, Public Goods, and the Lost Art of Grand Strategy: American Policy toward the Persian Gulf and Rising Asia in the 21st Century

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**THE BALANCE OF POWER, PUBLIC  
GOODS, AND THE LOST ART  
OF GRAND STRATEGY: AMERICAN  
POLICY TOWARD THE  
PERSIAN GULF AND RISING ASIA IN THE  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

*Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett\**

INTRODUCTION

Just twenty years ago, the United States emerged from the Cold War with a multi-faceted supremacy the world had not witnessed for centuries. For some observers, even the British Empire at its heyday was an inadequate comparison; in their view, one had to go back to imperial Rome to find a suitable analogue to the United

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States at the dawn of the post-Cold War era. If, however, one compares where America was twenty years ago to where it is today, in terms of its ability to achieve its stated, high-priority objectives, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the United States is a declining power.

While no single factor explains the relative decline of American standing and influence in world affairs, one of the most important is the failure of American political and policy elites to define clear, reality-based goals and to relate the diplomatic, economic, and military means at Washington's disposal to realizing them soberly and efficaciously. Defining such ends and relating the full range of foreign policy tools to their achievement is the essence of what is known among students of international relations and national security practitioners as "grand strategy."<sup>1</sup> Questions of grand strategy are becoming an increasingly important element in America's emerging national security narrative—because of accumulating policy failures, relative economic decline, and the rise of new power centers in various regional and international arenas.

At its core, our argument is that, to arrest the ongoing decline in its global position and to put its foreign policy on a more constructive trajectory, the United States must recover a capacity for sound grand strategy. This proposition is especially applicable in evaluating Washington's posture toward two regions where the effectiveness of American policy will largely determine the United States' standing as a great power in the 21st century: the Middle East (with a focus on the Persian Gulf) and rising Asia (with a focus on China). Fundamental flaws in America's stance vis-à-vis these critical areas have contributed much to the erosion of the United States' strategic standing. Over time, deficiencies in policy toward each of them have become synergistic with deficiencies in policy toward the other. Recovering a capacity for sound grand strategy will require a thoroughgoing recasting of American policy toward both—and a more nuanced appreciation of the interrelationship between these vital parts of the world for U.S. interests.

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Rosecrance & Arthur A. Stein, *Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy*, in *THE DOMESTIC BASES OF GRAND STRATEGY* 3-5 (Richard Rosecrance & Arthur A. Stein eds., 1993).

We offer the present essay, organized in four sections, as a contribution to this process. The first section looks broadly at what has gone wrong with American grand strategy in the post-Cold War period. The second and third sections concentrate on the evolution of Washington's posture toward the Persian Gulf and toward China, looking in particular at what that evolution reveals about the deficiencies in U.S. grand strategy. The fourth section presents concluding observations.

### I. GLOBALIZATION, GRAND STRATEGY, AND AMERICAN PRIMACY

John Lewis Gaddis describes a great power's grand strategy as a framework for "the calculated relationship of means to large ends . . . relating all of the means at your disposal to the ends you have in view."<sup>2</sup> For any state, the most essential "large end" is protecting its territorial and political integrity. Beyond this, grand strategies—especially those of great powers like the United States—are typically designed to improve states' positions relative to others, by enhancing their ability to shape favorable strategic outcomes, maximizing their transnational influence, and bolstering their long-term economic prospects. Thus, a grand strategy should have embedded within it a theory of how the world works that can guide policymakers in marshaling the elements of national power toward their states' objectives.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, diplomacy—a state's capacity

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<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, Robert A. Lovett Professor of History, Yale University, Karl Von Der Heyden Distinguished Lecture at Duke University: What Is Grand Strategy? (Feb. 26, 2009) (transcript available at <http://tiss.sanford.duke.edu/documents/KEYNOTE.doc>).

<sup>3</sup> See BARRY POSEN, THE SOURCES OF MILITARY DOCTRINE: FRANCE, BRITAIN AND GERMANY BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS 13 (1984) (calling grand strategy "a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."); Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition*, in GRAND STRATEGY IN WAR AND PEACE 5 (Paul Kennedy ed., 1991) (elaborating that "the crux of grand strategy lies in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests."). These definitions distinguish grand strategy from more conventional uses of the word "strategy," which, for students of international affairs, tend to focus on applying military force to achieve particular goals. (Posen

to increase the number of states prepared to cooperate with it and reduce its actual or potential adversaries—is as much a part of grand strategy as military might.<sup>4</sup> Economic power—as the foundation for a nation’s military posture and as a source of influence in its own right—is also a critical aspect of grand strategy.<sup>5</sup>

Above all, grand strategies guide statesmen in their approach to the balance of power. One of the more confusing aspects of the established vocabulary for talking about international relations is multiple definitions of “balance of power.”<sup>6</sup> Even in this article, we cannot avoid multiple definitions. In one, the balance of power is simply an analytic framework for assessing the relative distribution of power among international actors. In another, the balance of power is a fundamental feature of life in the anarchic arena of international politics: by a logic as ancient as Thucydides, as a state grows more powerful, others have strong incentives to push back against it—that is, to engage in countervailing or “balancing” behavior.<sup>7</sup> To add a further level of terminological complexity, international relations

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refers to this notion of strategy as “military doctrine.”). *See also* SCOTT SIGMUND GARTNER, *STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT IN WAR 16-22* (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, *supra* note 3, at 5.

<sup>5</sup> On these aspects of economic power, see generally JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER, *THE TRAGEDY OF GREAT POWER POLITICS* 55-82 (2001); Paul Kennedy, *Strategy versus Finance in Twentieth-Century Britain*, in *STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY, 1870-1945: EIGHT STUDIES* 87-106 (1983); Paul Kennedy, Remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations (Dec. 14, 2009) (transcript available at <http://www.cfr.org/foreign-policy-history/sinews-power-rediscovering-foundations-national-strength/p21037>); ROBERT O. KEOHANE, *AFTER HEGEMONY: COOPERATION AND DISCORD IN THE WORLD POLITICAL ECONOMY* 32-39 (2005 ed. 1984); BENN STEIL & ROBERT E. LITAN, *FINANCIAL STATECRAFT: THE ROLE OF FINANCIAL MARKETS IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY* (2006); *INTERNATIONAL MONETARY POWER* (David M. Andrews, ed., 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *See generally* Ernst Haas, *The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda*, 5 *WORLD POL.* 442 (1953); INIS L. CLAUDE, JR., *POWER AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS* (1962); Martin Wight, *The Balance of Power and International Order*, in *THE BASES OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF C. A. W. MANNING* (Alan James ed., 1973).

<sup>7</sup> *See* Stephen M. Walt, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, *INT’L SECURITY*, Spring 1985, at 3 (drawing a distinction between the balance of power and the “balance of threat,” Walt argues that states do not necessarily balance against the most powerful state, but against what they see as the biggest threat to their interests).

scholars studying the concept of balancing distinguish between “internal balancing” (that is, a state mobilizing its own defense resources) and “external balancing” (forming alliances with other states).<sup>8</sup> In yet another definition, “balance of power” connotes an equilibrium in international affairs, a stable distribution of power among states toward which reality tends—or, more normatively, should be encouraged—to go.<sup>9</sup> This is perhaps the most challenging definition of all, for history shows that there is no consensus among students and practitioners of international politics about the conditions for such equilibrium.<sup>10</sup> Some argue that distributions of power are truly stable only if they accommodate the core interests of all relevant players. Others argue that such an approach is possible only among states that support established rules for international interaction; from this perspective, the recurrent phenomenon of states deemed to have rejected the prevailing international order means that only a preponderance of power in favor of those supporting the status quo can ensure stability.<sup>11</sup>

Over the past several decades, American policy has been pulled in opposite directions by two competing models of the United States’ optimal grand strategy. Both seek some form of primacy for the United States in international affairs. But each conceives of primacy very differently from the other. Operationally, the main difference between them is how they deal with the reality of deeply rooted structural incentives for states to balance against more powerful states that, at least potentially, threaten their interests.

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<sup>8</sup> See MEARSHEIMER, *supra* note 5, at 156-157.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul W. Schroeder, *The Nineteenth-Century System: Balance of Power or Political Equilibrium?*, 15 REV. OF INT’L STUD. 135 (1989) (suggesting that the term be replaced with “political equilibrium”).

<sup>10</sup> See Richard Little, *Deconstructing the Balance of Power: Two Traditions of Thought*, 15 REV. OF INT’L STUD. 87 (1989); Inis L. Claude, Jr., *The Balance of Power Revisited*, 15 REV. OF INT’L STUD. 77 (1989).

<sup>11</sup> *But see* Randall L. Schweller, *Neorealism’s Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?*, SECURITY STUD., Spring 1996, at 90 (arguing that the distinction is problematic because, among other reasons, it overlooks the fact that consequential states—including, for most of its history, the United States—usually seek to increase their power relative to others even as they work within prevailing frameworks of international order). Nevertheless, the distinction continues to influence the way in which Westerners, and especially Americans, think and talk about international relations.

### A. The Leadership Model

On one side, there is what we call the leadership model, whereby the United States seeks to maximize its international standing and influence by adroitly managing regional and global distributions of power and by promoting the processes of economic liberalization that have come to be known collectively as globalization. In every major area of the world, there are “natural” powers that inevitably figure prominently in their regional environments (e.g., Egypt, Iran, and Turkey in the Middle East and China, India, and Japan in Asia). Beyond such natural powers, globalization necessarily implies the diffusion of economic power—and, with it, at least certain kinds of political power—across national boundaries. Thus, in a globalizing world, new power centers are bound to emerge. The leadership model rests on the proposition that only distributions of power which accommodate the core interests of all relevant parties can be stable. In accordance with this model, American policymakers should seek to manage evolving distributions of power, in key regions and globally, to accommodate the core interests of rising states alongside those of established powers. So defined, leadership calls on the United States to practice what might be described as classical diplomacy—that is, to engage the full range of relevant players in important strategic arenas, across multiple axes of geopolitical and geo-economic alignment, with the aim of finding areas of common interest and building productive relationships while simultaneously managing areas of disagreement. By doing so, American foreign policy can reduce the risks of military confrontation and ensure that rising powers develop cooperative rather than conflictual relations with their neighbors and with the United States.

In the leadership model, America further justifies its management of regional and global distributions of power by playing a central role in creating and maintaining what economists call global public goods.<sup>12</sup> Conventionally, public goods are defined as

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Rebecca M. Bratspies, *Global Public Goods: An Introduction*, PROCEEDINGS OF THE 104<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING (AM. SOC'Y OF INT'L LAW), Mar. 24-27, 2010, at 147; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The American National Interest and Global Public Goods*, 78 INT'L AFF. 233 (2002).

“collective consumption goods” marked, as in the classic example of lighthouses, by two principal characteristics: they are non-rivalrous (that is, their consumption by one party does not reduce the quantity available to others) and non-excludable (no party can be blocked from consuming them). In a global context, public goods encompass the material and political arrangements necessary for globalization to be sustained. Examples range from efficient mechanisms for conducting, financing, and settling international exchanges of goods, services, and capital to viable governance structures for international financial and monetary relations, secure sea lanes, and a functioning nuclear non-proliferation regime. Following the leadership model, the United States assumes special responsibilities for the provision of global public goods, to reduce the myriad problems associated with collective action among sovereign states. Additionally, in this model Washington acts to enforce its leadership in accordance with widely accepted international norms and processes. Thus, the leadership model tends to be linked to a fairly traditional stance on use of force doctrine. It basically accepts that, in the modern world, there are two conditions under which the use of force is legitimate: when authorized by the U.N. Security Council through a Chapter VII resolution,<sup>13</sup> or under a narrow interpretation of the right of self-defense as codified in Article 51 of the U.N. Charter.<sup>14</sup>

Consider two examples of the leadership model “in action.” For adroit management of the relative distribution of power, especially through diplomacy, there is no better illustration than the U.S. opening to the People’s Republic of China in the early 1970s. As Henry Kissinger recounts, Richard Nixon entered the White House in 1969 faced with the challenge of guiding America

through the transition from dominance to leadership . . . for the age of America’s nearly total dominance of the world stage was drawing to a close. America’s nuclear superiority was eroding, and its economic supremacy was being challenged by the dynamic growth of Europe and Japan . . . Vietnam finally signaled that it was high time to reassess America’s

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<sup>13</sup> U.N. Charter art. 42.

<sup>14</sup> U.N. Charter art. 51.

role in the developing world, and to find some sustainable ground between abdication and overextension.<sup>15</sup>

In this context, Nixon understood that the United States needed an opening to China to shore up its position in Asia and revive its standing as a global power able to shape major strategic outcomes.

To this day, some commentators argue that, for Washington, Sino-American rapprochement was motivated primarily by an interest in “triangulating” against the Soviet Union. The argument is both historically and strategically wrong. While Kissinger and other Nixon associates acknowledge that the triangulation argument helped Nixon ameliorate domestic resistance to realigning relations with “Red China,” they also affirm that, among Nixon’s immediate motives for an opening to Beijing, getting out of Vietnam was more significant than triangulating against Moscow.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, Nixon saw rapprochement in broad terms, treating it, according to Kissinger,

as an opportunity to redefine the American approach to foreign policy and international leadership. He sought to use the opening to China to demonstrate to the American public that, even in the midst of a debilitating war, the United States was in a position to bring about a design for long-term peace.<sup>17</sup>

And that design required Washington to abandon a failed quest for hegemony in Asia; to pursue genuine rapprochement with the People’s Republic, based on mutual accommodation of each side’s core interests; and, by extension, to accept a more balanced distribution of power in Asia, in which China (the region’s ultimate natural power) would assume an increasingly important place. If Sino-American rapprochement had been solely or even primarily about triangulation against the Soviet Union, the U.S.-China relationship should have become less important after the Cold War

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<sup>15</sup> HENRY KISSINGER, *DIPLOMACY* 703-704 (1994).

<sup>16</sup> *See id.* at 707; HENRY KISSINGER, *ON CHINA* 213-214 (2011). The authors are grateful to Chas Freeman for his insights on this point.

<sup>17</sup> *See* KISSINGER, *ON CHINA*, *supra* note 16, at 214.

ended; instead, it has arguably become the most important bilateral relationship in the world.

As to the provision of global public goods, America's commitment to secure the flow of oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf to international energy markets serves as a rich case study. Since World War II, successive administrations have believed that the United States has a vital interest in exercising dispositive strategic influence over the security, production, and marketing of Persian Gulf hydrocarbons. But this interest has never had that much to do with America's own energy demand. The United States came out of World War II self-sufficient in oil; indeed, it had provided most of the oil that its allies had used. It would not become a net oil importer for nearly another 30 years. Yet, in the early decades of the postwar era, American policymakers judged that a reliable flow of Persian Gulf oil was critical to the economic recovery of Western Europe and Japan—which, in turn, they considered essential to the United States' own long-term economic prospects. U.S.-provided energy security would not only help to bind these countries to Washington as economic partners, but as consumers of U.S.-provided security more generally.<sup>18</sup> After the United States became a net oil importer in the 1970s, its own energy security became tied more directly to developments in the Persian Gulf. But America has never satisfied that high a portion of its own energy demand with supplies from the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it has assumed responsibility for securing these supplies, on which the global economy depends so heavily, to reinforce its strategic influence in other important parts of the world. This was driven home when a senior Japanese diplomat said to us that, if the United States did not guarantee the free flow of Persian Gulf hydrocarbons to Asian markets, it would lose many of its Asian allies.

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<sup>18</sup> See KEOHANE, *supra* note 5, at 139-141, 150-181, 190-195, and 202-206; STEPHEN J. RANDALL, UNITED STATES FOREIGN OIL POLICY SINCE WORLD WAR I: FOR PROFITS AND SECURITY 110-318 (2005); RASHID KHALIDI, SOWING CRISIS: THE COLD WAR AND AMERICAN DOMINANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST 40-62 (2009); DOUG STOKES & SAM RAPHAEL, GLOBAL ENERGY SECURITY AND AMERICAN HEGEMONY 1-53 (2010).

<sup>19</sup> See CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO ENERGY—U.S. DEPENDENCE ON FOREIGN OIL SOURCES, (July 28, 2011), <http://www.energy.org/cat00040918cmp00003628.html> (for data).

More broadly, providing the public good of secure oil and gas flows from the Persian Gulf has undergirded America's ongoing claims to global leadership. This historical reality has yet to gain real salience in nascent discussions about the shale gas and shale oil revolutions in the United States and their strategic ramifications. It appears increasingly clear that shale gas is going to make America self-sufficient (and then some) in natural gas. It seems less likely that shale oil will make America self-sufficient in oil again; still, it will reduce U.S. dependence on imported oil to some extent.<sup>20</sup> But, even if the United States reached a point at which it never needed to import another hydrocarbon molecule, this does not mean that it "could forget about the Middle East," as some suggest—unless it is going to get out of the great power business altogether. While one may argue that this is what the United States should do, proponents should acknowledge that ending the American commitment to ensure the free flow of Persian Gulf hydrocarbons would have profound implications for Washington's role and standing in world affairs.

#### B. The Transformation Model

Opposite the leadership model, there is what we call the transformation model, whereby the United States seeks not to manage distributions of power but to transcend them by becoming a hegemon, in key regions and globally. This model embodies the proposition that peace is only possible among states with a shared vision of international order. It is also congruent with a view that has been operative in American foreign policy debates at least since Woodrow Wilson: that to be truly secure, the United States must remake domestic polities in strategically consequential parts of the world, to create states inclined toward integration into U.S.-led political and security orders and the pursuit of market liberalization along U.S.-specified lines. Thus, the transformation model inevitably takes American policy beyond balancing towards what can

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<sup>20</sup> For analysis and projections, see Henning Gloystein & Oleg Vukmanovic, *World to Gain From Gas Glut If Regulation Right*—IEA, REUTERS, May 29, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/29/energy-gas-ica-idUSL5E8GT49420120529>; U.S. DEP'T OF ENERGY, ANNUAL ENERGY OUTLOOK 2012 EARLY RELEASE OVERVIEW, <http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/aeo/er/>; INT'L ENERGY AGENCY, WORLD ENERGY OUTLOOK 2011 (2011).

appropriately be called an imperial agenda—for molding states' domestic systems and external alignments is at the heart of any imperial project.

While, in the leadership model, Washington leads the institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms needed for globalization's advance to enhance its standing, in the transformation model globalization itself becomes a frame for subordinating others to American diktats. From this perspective, the United States is not interested in providing true—that is, non-rivalrous and non-excludable—public goods; it may, in fact, work to exclude certain states from various international institutional arrangements as a way of undermining them or leveraging their decision-making on issues that matter to Washington. In some cases, the transformation model has grounded U.S. support for “democracy promotion”; but, where democracy will produce governments resistant to subordination by Washington, the model's hegemonic logic turns U.S. policy decisively away from democratization. Through this prism, even the defense of “human rights” is reduced to a selectively applied tool to undermine Washington's opponents.<sup>21</sup>

In the Cold War's early days, transformationalist logic helped warp the grand strategy of containing the Soviet Union into what was, in many ways, a hegemonic project. As conceived by George Kennan, containment rejected Wilsonianism; as Gaddis notes, “[w]hat was required was not to re-make the world in the image of the United States, but simply to preserve its diversity against attempts to remake it in the image of others.”<sup>22</sup> But Kennan's fellow “wise

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<sup>21</sup> See ANDREW J. BACEVICH, *AMERICAN EMPIRE: THE REALITIES AND CONSEQUENCES OF U.S. DIPLOMACY* (2002); CHRISTOPHER LAYNE, *THE PEACE OF ILLUSIONS: AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY FROM 1940 TO THE PRESENT* (2006); Michael Desch, *America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy*, *INT'L SECURITY*, Winter 2007-2008, at 7; ANDREW J. BACEVICH, *WASHINGTON RULES: AMERICA'S PATH TO PERMANENT WAR* (2010); JAMES PECK, *IDEAL ILLUSIONS: HOW THE U.S. GOVERNMENT CO-OPTED HUMAN RIGHTS* (2011).

<sup>22</sup> JOHN LEWIS GADDIS, *STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF POSTWAR AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY* 55 (1982). See also IAN SHAPIRO, *CONTAINMENT: REBUILDING A STRATEGY AGAINST GLOBAL TERROR* 32-53 (2007) (offering a post-9/11 perspective).

men” had a different metric.<sup>23</sup> Years later, recounting what he saw as the distortion of his original idea, Kennan said, “Do you know what [Secretary of State Dean] Acheson’s problem was? He didn’t understand power.”<sup>24</sup> Kennan’s interlocutor elaborates that:

in Kennan’s eyes, Acheson and the other wise men’s mistake—and their extraordinary hubris—lay in their conviction that Washington could actually fashion and coordinate a global system that would leave it as capable of controlling its allies as of confronting its enemies. Instead, Kennan said, they would find . . . that Washington was no more able to prevent the emergence of independent centers of power than the Russians were in Eastern Europe.<sup>25</sup>

The hubris Kennan decried lies at the heart of the transformation model; in the Cold War, it conditioned multiple self-damaging policy choices, like the CIA’s 1953 coup that brought down a democratically elected Iranian government seeking a measure of strategic independence and restored Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. From the communist victory in China’s civil war in 1949 until Nixon and Kissinger’s opening to Beijing, it also produced two decades of dysfunctional China policy that undercut the U.S. position in Asia, culminating in the tragedy cum strategic stupidity of the Vietnam war.<sup>26</sup>

Since the Cold War, transformationalism has driven a plethora of bad policy choices by the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. In its neoconservative form, it prompts support for coercive regime change and, on use of force, disdain for the Security Council as insufficiently dominated by the United States and its partners, a definition of self-defense so broad that shifts in the distribution of power are a *casus belli*, and justification not just for

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<sup>23</sup> WALTER ISAACSON & EVAN THOMAS, *THE WISE MEN: SIX FRIENDS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE* (1986) (originating the phrase “wise men”).

<sup>24</sup> See PECK, *supra* note 21, at 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> See JAMES PECK, *WASHINGTON’S CHINA: THE NATIONAL SECURITY WORLD, THE COLD WAR, AND THE ORIGINS OF GLOBALISM* (2006) (on America’s policy toward China from the 1940s until the Nixon presidency).

preemption but for preventive wars (aka “aggression”).<sup>27</sup> In its liberal form, it also supports regime change (albeit with more concern that it be done with at least a multilateral veneer), as well as “humanitarian intervention,” the “responsibility to protect” (R2P), “peace building,” and creation of a “Concert of Democracies” as an alternative to the Security Council. Likewise, the transformation model conditions definitions of global public goods so broad (e.g., on terrorism, human rights, and nonproliferation) as to be functionally indistinguishable from neoconservatism.<sup>28</sup> Overall, it results in diplomatic obtuseness,

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Charles Krauthammer, *The Unipolar Moment*, FOREIGN AFF., no. 1—America and the World 1990/91, 1990-1991, at 23; Charles Krauthammer, *The Unipolar Moment Revisited*, NAT'L INT., Winter 2002-2003, at 5; William Kristol & Robert Kagan, *Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy*, FOREIGN AFF., July-Aug. 1996, at 18; Statement of Principles, PROJECT FOR A NEW AMERICAN CENTURY (June 3, 1997), <http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>; Max Boot, *Think Again: Neocons*, FOREIGN POL'Y, Jan.-Feb. 2004, at 20; Max Boot, Op-Ed., *U.S. Foreign Policy: In Praise of Nation-Building*, L.A. TIMES, July 5, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/05/opinion/la-oe-boot-isolationism-20110705>; Mission Statement, FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVE, <http://www.foreignpolicyi.org/about>; ROBERT KAGAN, *THE WORLD AMERICA MADE* (2012). For critical discussion, see generally STEFAN HALPER & JONATHAN CLARKE, *AMERICA ALONE: THE NEO-CONSERVATIVES AND THE GLOBAL ORDER* (2005); JACOB HEILBRUNN, *THEY KNEW THEY WERE RIGHT: THE RISE OF THE NEOCONS* (2008). On use of force, see John Yoo, *Using Force*, 71 U. CHI. L. REV. 729 (2004); Robert J. Delahunty & John Yoo, *Great Power Security*, 10 CHI. J. INT'L L. 35 (2009); John Yoo, *An Unavoidable Challenge*, NAT'L REV., Dec. 31, 2011, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/286953/unavoidable-challenge-john-yoo>. For critical discussion, see Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *America's Drive for Middle East Dominance Sets the Stage for Attacking Iran—Never Mind International Law (Or Even U.S. Interests)*, RACE FOR IRAN (Dec. 28, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/america%E2%80%99s-drive-for-middle-east-dominance-sets-the-stage-for-attacking-iran%E2%80%94never-mind-international-law-or-even-u-s-interests>; Eric Brill, *Time for the (Intellectually Indefensible) Case to Attack Iran?*, RACE FOR IRAN (Jan. 19, 2012), <http://www.raceforiran.com/time-for-the-intellectually-indefensible-case-to-attack-iran> (reviewing *An Unavoidable Challenge*).

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., SAMANTHA POWER, *A PROBLEM FROM HELL: AMERICA AND THE AGE OF GENOCIDE* (2003); Lee Feinstein & Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A Duty to Prevent*, FOREIGN AFF., Jan.-Feb. 2004, at 136; G. John Ikenberry & Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century*, FINAL REPORT OF THE PRINCETON PROJECT ON NATIONAL SECURITY (2006), <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report/FinalReport.pdf>; Ryan Goodman, *Humanitarian Intervention and Pretexts for War*, 100 AM. J. INT'L L. 107 (2006); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *America and Global Public Goods*, PROJECT SYNDICATE (Sept. 11,

chronic indulgence of what Paul Kennedy famously called “imperial overstretch,” and military deployments that explain why, in this presidential cycle, American servicemen and their families donated more money to Ron Paul’s campaign than to all other Republican candidates and President Obama combined.<sup>29</sup>

The chief reason U.S. foreign policy is failing is because, since the Cold War’s end, the global transformation model has gained almost complete ascendancy in American political circles. Policy deliberations in both major parties are today dominated by its champions: by neoconservatives in the GOP and by liberal internationalists in the Democratic Party.<sup>30</sup> That is problematic because transformationalists, whether on the right or the left, reject the leadership model’s main premise. This premise reflects a lesson that balance of power theorists and foreign policy realists—even those of the offensive realist variety (as John Mearsheimer refers to himself)—all know: while hegemony seems nice in theory, in the real world it is unattainable; not even a state as powerful as the United

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2007), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/america-and-global-public-goods>. For critical discussion, see Kristoffer Lidén, *Whose Peace? Which Peace? On the Political Architecture of Liberal Peacebuilding* (2006) (Master’s Thesis, Peace Research Institute Oslo) (on file with Peace Research Institute Oslo); Jeremy Moses, *Liberal Internationalist Discourse and the Use of Force: Blair, Bush and Beyond*, 47 INT’L POLITICS 26 (2010); Jacob Heilbrunn, *Samantha and Her Subjects*, NAT’L INT., May-June 2011, at 6; Christopher A. Preble, *The Trouble With Global Public Goods*, NAT’ INT. BLOG: THE SKEPTICS BLOG (Aug. 12, 2011), <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/trouble-global-public-goods-5757>.

<sup>29</sup> See PAUL KENNEDY, *THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GREAT POWERS: ECONOMIC CHANGE AND MILITARY CONFLICT FROM 1500 TO 2000* (1987); Lauren Fox, *Ron Paul Awash in Active Duty Military Donations*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP. (Feb. 6, 2012), <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2012/02/06/ron-paul-awash-in-active-duty-military-donations>; Adam Weinstein, *Why Does the Military Love Ron Paul*, MOTHER JONES, Feb. 24, 2012, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/02/ron-paul-military>.

<sup>30</sup> See Stephen Walt, *What Intervention in Libya Tells Us About the Neocon-Liberal Alliance*, FOREIGN POLICY: STEPHEN M. WALT – A REALIST IN AN IDEOLOGICAL AGE BLOG (Mar. 21, 2011, 11:16 AM), [http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/21/what\\_intervention\\_in\\_libya\\_tells\\_us\\_about\\_the\\_neocon\\_liberal\\_alliance](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/21/what_intervention_in_libya_tells_us_about_the_neocon_liberal_alliance).

States coming out of the Cold War can achieve it.<sup>31</sup> Pursuing hegemony is not just quixotic; it is counter-productive for a great power's strategic position, dissipating resources (Kennedy's imperial overstretch phenomenon again)<sup>32</sup> and sparking resistance from others. Pursuing hegemony ends up making you weaker. This is the critical factor that has undermined the effectiveness of American foreign policy over the last 20 years or so.<sup>33</sup>

## II. AMERICAN STRATEGY AND THE MIDDLE EAST'S SHIFTING BALANCE

The counter-productive results of hegemonic grand strategy are visible in the record of America's post-Cold War engagement in the Middle East. Currently, the Middle East is experiencing a period of historic political and social ferment, commonly called the Arab Awakening or Arab Spring. Many analysts and commentators, especially in the West, describe this as fundamentally a bottom-up phenomenon, as a manifestation of "people power." But for those who focus on foreign policy, it is important to look at this from another angle: as the breakdown of the U.S.-led political and security order in the region—essentially the collapse of America's post-Cold War effort to establish hegemony there.

To unpack this, it is useful to put current events in historical perspective. From the end of World War II, Washington has worked to establish a political and security order in the Middle East favorable to its interests. During the Cold War, the United States was constrained from pushing for all-out hegemony in the region: constrained by another external superpower, the Soviet Union, and by important regional powers linked to Moscow—Egypt and Iraq. Over the course of the 1970s, in a process that culminated in the 1978 Camp David accords, Egypt was "flipped" from the Soviet camp and became a U.S. ally. Nevertheless, America's ambitions in

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<sup>31</sup> John Mearsheimer, *Structural Realism*, in INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES: DISCIPLINE AND DIVERSITY (Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, & Steve Smith eds., 2006).

<sup>32</sup> See KENNEDY, *supra* note 29.

<sup>33</sup> For a brilliant exploration of this point see John Mearsheimer, *Imperial By Design*, NAT'L INT., Jan.-Feb. 2011, at 111.

the region were still limited by the reality of Soviet power and regional influence. As a result, Washington was compelled to play more along the lines of the leadership model than it might have otherwise.

A good example of this is the way the United States went about delivering on its commitment to assure the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. Though Washington defined this as a vital interest from World War II, for the first three and a half decades afterward, it did not commit the U.S. military to the task: in a Cold War context, it did not deploy significant forces on the ground in the Persian Gulf (or the Middle East more generally), so as not to give Moscow an excuse to do the same. Until 1971, successive administrations relied on Britain to provide day-to-day security in the Gulf.<sup>34</sup> After British forces withdrew from the region (part of a pull back from imperial positions “east of Suez”), Washington pursued a “twin pillars” policy, relying on Saudi Arabia and, especially, the Shah’s Iran to police the Gulf in line with U.S. preferences.<sup>35</sup> It was not until the beginning of 1980, following two portentous developments the previous year—the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—that the United States, as a matter of declaratory policy, committed its own forces as the first line of defense for oil and gas flows from the Persian Gulf.<sup>36</sup> Even then, for

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<sup>34</sup> Similarly, see ANDREW J. BACEVICH, *THE NEW AMERICAN MILITARISM: HOW AMERICANS ARE SEDUCED BY WAR* 180 (2005) (noting that, for the Cold War’s first three decades, America operated in the Middle East in a manner that “minimized overt U.S. military involvement); *see also* KHALIDI, *supra* note 18, at 6-16, 107-111 (on the U.S. military posture in and toward the region in this period).

<sup>35</sup> *See* ANTHONY H. CORDESMAN, *SAUDI ARABIA ENTERS THE 21ST CENTURY: THE POLITICAL, FOREIGN POLICY, ECONOMIC, AND ENERGY DIMENSIONS* 110-111 (2003) (noting that in packaging this policy, the Nixon Administration “claimed to see both Iran and Saudi Arabia as key ‘pillars’ supporting moderate and anti-communist positions in the Gulf”; in practice, “the United States clearly relied largely on the [S]hah.”).

<sup>36</sup> In his January 1980 State of the Union address, President Jimmy Carter declared that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” This came to be known as “the Carter Doctrine.” President Jimmy Carter, State of the Union Address (Jan. 23, 1980) (transcript available at <http://>

the Cold War's last decade, it did this as an offshore balancer, acting from "over the horizon." It built up a robust naval presence in the Persian Gulf; it also pre-positioned equipment and made basing arrangements so that it could surge land and tactical air forces into the region in the event of a crisis. But it did not put substantial forces on the ground there on an open-ended basis.<sup>37</sup>

By 1989, however, the Soviet system was on the brink of collapse, leaving the United States effectively unconstrained in its perceived freedom to consolidate a highly militarized, pro-U.S. order in the Middle East—an order in which regional powers would be either coopted (like Egypt) or subverted. As a result, when Saddam Husayn's Iraq, Moscow's longtime ally, invaded Kuwait in 1990, Washington was able to deploy more than half a million U.S. and coalition troops to the region to forge what would become a largely pro-American political and security order there. This project continued after the first Persian Gulf war with the decision to leave a significant number of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia—a decision that led to the establishment of Al-Qa'ida and provided the rationale for the 9/11 attacks a decade later.<sup>38</sup> It encompassed the extension of sanctions against Iraq that killed more than a million Iraqis (including half a million children) after Iraqi troops fled Kuwait—sanctions that were meant not to change Iraqi policy but to change the Iraqi regime. It also included the imposition of what remains a comprehensive U.S. economic embargo against the Islamic Republic of Iran, supplemented by the threatened application of so-called secondary sanctions against third-country entities involved in developing Iranian

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[www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml)). In October 1981, in the "Reagan Corollary" to the Carter Doctrine, President Ronald Reagan committed the United States to defending the integrity of the political orders in Saudi Arabia and other regional energy-producing states allied to the U.S. See Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Carter Doctrine, The Reagan Corollary, and Prospects for United States Policy in Southwest Asia*, 41 INT'L J. 342, 345 (1986).

<sup>37</sup> See BACEVICH, *supra* note 34, at 181-183, 185-193 (discussing the Carter Doctrine and America's use of military force in the region during the 1980s).

<sup>38</sup> On this point, see ROBERT PAPE, *DYING TO WIN: THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF SUICIDE TERRORISM* 16-24, 38-60, 79-96, 102-135 (2005). See also BACEVICH, *supra* note 34, at 193-199, and Mearsheimer, *supra* note 33 (treating the decision to keep U.S. troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia after the first Gulf War as a turning point in America's regional posture).

hydrocarbons; over time, this threat has been extended to cover other types of business with Iran. After 9/11, America doubled down on its hegemonic drive, through invasions and prolonged occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and, in 2005, declaring a “freedom agenda”<sup>39</sup> for the region.

Now, less than twenty-five years after the Cold War’s end, in a perfect illustration of how the pursuit of hegemony is self-defeating, the highly militarized political and security order that the United States strove so hard to create in the Middle East is disappearing. On the eve of 9/11, Washington seemed to have cultivated what U.S. policymakers like to call a strong “moderate” camp in the region. In America’s diplomatic lexicon, moderates are so defined not because of their approach to domestic governance, but because they are receptive to strategic cooperation with the United States and at least theoretically open to peace with Israel. Barely more than a decade ago this camp included Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab monarchies, North African regimes except Libya, and Turkey. On the other side were the “radicals” —again defined as such not because of their internal governance, but by their posture toward the United States and Israel. Ten years ago, Iran had already emerged as the *de facto* leader of this camp, which included Syria and relatively weak non-state actors like Hizballah and HAMAS, along with Saddam Husayn’s Iraq and Qadhafi’s Libya. All of the other radicals were wary, to say the least, of Saddam’s Iraq. Syria was generally considered, in American foreign policy circles, as a “swing” state in the balance between the two camps—that it, as a state which, with a peace agreement whereby Israel returned the Golan Heights to Syrian control, could potentially be persuaded to cut back its ties to Hizballah, HAMAS, and Iran and shift decisively into the “moderate” camp, thereby tipping the regional balance even more squarely against more radical or revisionist actors. Libya, it turned out, was already in discussions with Washington about terrorism and weapons of mass destruction that would bring it out of the radical camp and put it at least on the margins of the moderate camp.

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<sup>39</sup> *E.g.*, Freedom Agenda, GEORGE W. BUSH, WHITE HOUSE, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/freedomagenda/>.

By the eve of Barack Obama's inauguration in January 2009—that is, in less than a decade—the regional balance had shifted significantly against the United States and its allies. Relations between Iran and Syria had become increasingly strategic in quality. Turkey, under the Justice and Development Party (widely known by its Turkish acronym, AKP), was moving away from a reflexively pro-American stance to chart a genuinely independent foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. HAMAS and Hizballah, now legitimated by real electoral successes, had emerged as not just effective paramilitary forces but as legitimate and decisively important political actors in Palestine and Lebanon. And post-Saddam Iraq was looking less and less like a strategic asset for the United States; it seemed ever more likely that Iraq's most important relationships would be with the Islamic Republic, Syria, and a more independent Turkey.

This decline in America's regional position was largely self-inflicted. American primacy in the Middle East has always rested on two things: capacity and legitimacy. In a powerful demonstration of hegemonic ambition's inherent dysfunctionality, the United States has, in the post-Cold War period, exceeded the limits of its capacity in the region while simultaneously undermining its legitimacy there.

With regard to capacity, America remains uniquely capable of projecting conventional military power into the Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf. No one else comes close to it in this regard; no one else, China included, will come close for years—indeed, decades—to come. But strategically failed occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan have underscored the limits of what the U.S. military can accomplish. And military power is becoming less relevant to the challenges Washington faces in the region.

As to legitimacy, Washington has tried under successive administrations to gain Arab states' buy-in to a U.S.-led, highly militarized political and security order in the Middle East on the grounds that this would bring good things to the region, including greater security and a resolution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. But, frankly put, America has not delivered. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost it dearly, not just in blood and treasure, but in the perceived legitimacy of its purposes in the region. Every

methodologically serious poll shows this. Likewise, it has become clear that America is not going to deliver on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Paradoxically, this is itself a kind of hegemonic assertion. American policy on Arab-Israeli issues is hardly grounded in balance of power politics—whereby aggressive pursuit of an Arab-Israeli settlement would be strongly warranted. Rather, the United States is playing the politics of hegemony, insisting that Palestinians and Arab states make peace with Israel on terms that are not just politically comfortable for Israel but that amount to the Arab states' permanent subordination. While we do not underestimate the Israel lobby, it is not the source of this problem. The lobby is effective because it is pushing on a door already opened by America's own hegemonic ambitions. Absent real peacemaking, Washington is seen as enabling an Israeli national security doctrine that, under the misleading label of deterrence, seeks a kind of regional hegemony for Israel, through open-ended occupation and freedom to use military force first, unilaterally, and disproportionately, for whatever purpose Israeli leaders deem desirable. That, too, has cost the United States in terms of the perceived legitimacy of its purposes in the Middle East.<sup>40</sup>

America's posture toward Iran has added to regional insecurity and further diminished local support for U.S. policy. While some Arab elites on the other side of the Persian Gulf see the growth of the Islamic Republic's standing over the last decade as a threat, polls show that the vast majority of (Sunni) Arabs do not see it that way.<sup>41</sup> Rather than trying to isolate, press, and undermine the Islamic Republic, the United States—for its interests, on balance of power grounds—needs to realign its relations with the Islamic Republic, just

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<sup>40</sup> On these points, *see, e.g.*, the annual *Arab Public Opinion Poll*, UNIV. OF MD.: ANWAR SADAT CHAIR OF PEACE AND DEV. & ZOGBY INT'L, <http://www.sadat.umd.edu/new%20surveys/surveys.htm>. For discussion, see JAMES ZOGBY, *ARAB VOICES: WHAT THEY ARE SAYING TO US, AND WHY IT MATTERS* (2010).

<sup>41</sup> *See* Shibley Telhami et al., *Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll*, UNIV. OF MD.: ANWAR SADAT CHAIR OF PEACE AND DEV. & ZOGBY INT'L (2010), <http://www.sadat.umd.edu/new%20surveys/surveys.htm>; Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *Who Says Iran Is Becoming Isolated in the Middle East?*, RACE FOR IRAN (Aug. 8, 2010), <http://www.raceforiran.com/who-says-iran-is-becoming-isolated-in-the-middle-east>; Shibley Telhami et al., *Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll*, UNIV. OF MD.: ANWAR SADAT CHAIR OF PEACE AND DEV. & ZOGBY INT'L (2011), <http://www.sadat.umd.edu/new%20surveys/surveys.htm>.

as it realigned relations with the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s. But that has not been the direction of American policy.<sup>42</sup>

In his 2008 campaign, Barack Obama pledged to put America's Middle East policy on a more effective and sustainable trajectory—in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Arab-Israeli arena, and by engaging Iran. But, as president, he has turned the United States into a quasi-permanent occupying power by surging troops into Afghanistan with no meaningful strategy for a political settlement, and he is presiding over the death of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He has also discredited engagement as a policy tool by saying that he tried but failed at reaching out to Tehran when, in fact, he never seriously tried. These developments have had a deeply negative impact on America's regional position. Polls show that, after a brief and rather small bump in positive attitudes about the United States following Obama's inauguration, his failures have driven its ratings back down; indeed, the perceived legitimacy of its purposes in the region is arguably lower today than when George W. Bush left office.<sup>43</sup> Now, on Obama's watch, the Arab Awakening has accelerated this decline. The collapse of Mubarak's regime in Egypt—a pillar of the U.S. position—was a particularly severe blow. In Bahrain, home of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, a Sunni monarchy detested by

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<sup>42</sup> Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *The United States, Iran and the Middle East's New 'Cold War'*, INT'L SPECTATOR, Mar. 2010, at 74; FLYNT LEVERETT & HILLARY MANN LEVERETT, GOING TO TEHRAN: WHY THE UNITED STATES MUST COME TO TERMS WITH THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN (forthcoming 2013) (Introduction, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

<sup>43</sup> See Telhami, 2010 Poll, *supra* note 41; Leverett & Leverett, *supra* note 41; James Zogby, *Arab Attitudes, 2011*, ARAB AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOUNDATION, [http://aai.3cdn.net/5d2b8344e3b3b7ef19\\_xkm6ba4r9.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/5d2b8344e3b3b7ef19_xkm6ba4r9.pdf); Glenn Greenwald, *US More Unpopular in the Arab World Than Under Bush*, SALON, July 13, 2011, <http://www.salon.com/2011/07/13/arabs/>; Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *America Goes from Bad to Worse in the Middle East's 'Soft Power War'*, RACE FOR IRAN (July 15, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/america-goes-from-bad-to-worse-in-the-middle-east%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Csoft-power-war%E2%80%9D>; Telhami, 2011 Poll, *supra* note 41; *Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 17, 2011), <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1997/international-poll-arab-spring-us-obama-image-muslim-publics>; *Global Opinion of Obama Slips*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (June 13, 2012), <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2284/obama-usimage-image-abroad-global-economic-power-drone-strikes-policy-military-terrorism-china-economy>.

its Shi'a-majority population was saved, for the time being, only through armed intervention by Saudi Arabia. Yemen's pro-Western political order, a major U.S. counter-terrorism collaborator, has been seriously stressed. And Iraq has continued becoming an ever more important partner for Iran—as underscored, inter alia, by Baghdad's insistence on the removal of all U.S. forces by the end of 2011.<sup>44</sup> The Arab Awakening is not just changing the distribution of power in the Middle East; it is changing the very essence of power in the region: from hard power, where America has long enjoyed and will continue to enjoy unique advantages for the vastly foreseeable future, to “soft power,” defined by Harvard's Joseph Nye as the capacity to get people to “want what you want” rather than coercing them through hard military or economic power.<sup>45</sup> As public opinion matters more, in more situations, than in the past, this shift inevitably gains momentum.

Before the Arab Awakening, the biggest beneficiary of America's regional decline was clearly Iran. Through astute politicking and diplomacy, the Islamic Republic and its allies took advantage of the damage that U.S. policy choices did to the American position to boost their own standing and influence—not by increasing their hard power capabilities, but by building up their soft power. In effect, Tehran is seeking to shift regional politics from a traditional balance of power, based on hard power capabilities in which the United States has strong advantages, to what might be called a balance of influence, based on soft power assets in which the U.S. is at a severe disadvantage. Once the Arab Awakening began, Iranian policymakers judged—and, against conventional wisdom in Washington, still believe—that it would play out to Iran's benefit. In their estimate—and it has the advantage of being true—any regional government that becomes more representative of its people's

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<sup>44</sup> Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *America's Defeat in Iraq . . . and Iran's Gain*, RACE FOR IRAN (Oct. 21, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/americas-defeat-in-iraq-and-irans-gain>; Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *Taking Stock of America's Defeat in Iraq . . . and Iran's Regional Role*, RACE FOR IRAN (Dec. 20, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/taking-stock-of-america%E2%80%99s-defeat-in-iraq%E2%80%A6and-iran%E2%80%99s-regional-role>.

<sup>45</sup> JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., BOUND TO LEAD: THE CHANGING NATURE OF AMERICAN POWER 31 (1990).

preferences and values is bound to become less enthusiastic about strategic cooperation with America and Israel and more interested in foreign policy independence. And that works to Tehran's advantage.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than charting a genuinely new strategy for the United States, Obama and his team have tried to use the Arab Awakening to rejuvenate America's hegemonic aspirations in the region. Above all, the Obama Administration has sought to exploit the Arab Spring to marginalize Iran.<sup>47</sup> This approach is grounded in an inaccurate assessment of the Islamic Republic as internally fragile and easily isolated. It also rests on the logic-defying proposition that the same currents empowering Islamists in Arab countries will, in Iran, change the Islamic Republic into a secular liberal state. Moreover, it has led Washington to make common cause with what we have described elsewhere as Saudi Arabia's "counter-revolutionary" posture toward the Arab Awakening—ultimately not a winning hand for America.<sup>48</sup>

One can see these factors in play in the Obama Administration's response to the outbreak of what was initially a minor rebellion and then a low-grade civil war in Libya. To be sure, there was a range of influences shaping Obama's decision to intervene in Libya. In his administration, there were and are influential advocates of humanitarian intervention and "R2P," who

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<sup>46</sup> See Leverett & Leverett, GOING TO TEHRAN, *supra* note 42, at Ch. 2. For earlier statements of this argument, see Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *Obama Is Helping Iran*, FOREIGN POLY, Feb. 23, 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/23/obama\\_is\\_helping\\_iran](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/23/obama_is_helping_iran); Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *Soros Is Wrong: The Islamic Republic Will Survive and Benefit From the Arab Awakening*, HUFFINGTON POST (Feb. 24, 2011), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/flynt-and-hillary-mann-leverett/soros-is-wrong-the-isamic-republic-of-iran-will-survive-and-benefit-from-the-arab-awakening\\_b\\_827615.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/flynt-and-hillary-mann-leverett/soros-is-wrong-the-isamic-republic-of-iran-will-survive-and-benefit-from-the-arab-awakening_b_827615.html). For an Iranian perspective, see Seyed Mohammad Marandi, *American Misreading of Iran and the Changing Reality of the Middle East*, RACE FOR IRAN (June 1, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/american-misreading-of-iran-and-the-changing-reality-of-the-middle-east>.

<sup>47</sup> David Sanger, *The Larger Game: Iran*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 3, 2011, at WK1 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9900E2D91130F930A35757C0A9679D8B63&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=1>.

<sup>48</sup> Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, *The Arab Spring and the Saudi Counter-Revolution*, RACE FOR IRAN (Apr. 16, 2011), <http://www.raceforiran.com/the-arab-spring-and-the-saudi-counter-revolution>.

wanted to use the Libya case to consolidate a new doctrine (and even a new mechanism, one might say) for humanitarian intervention.<sup>49</sup> There were also those who saw the Libya intervention as a necessary “price” to pay for America’s continued leadership in world affairs: with Europeans and the Arab League coming to the United States and asking it to organize an intervention in Libya, if Washington did not respond, what would happen the next time it wanted Europeans and Arab states to support an intervention the United States really wanted? But, above all, President Obama and his advisers wanted to define an alternative narrative about the wave of popular agitation for political change in multiple Arab countries and about America’s role in it—a narrative that could be used against both Al-Qa’ida and the Islamic Republic. This misplaced calculation helped drive the Obama Administration’s decision to provide critical military support for multinational intervention to overthrow Qadhafi’s government.

In the end, though, the Libya intervention has not worked to boost America’s regional position or to marginalize Iran. Polls show that the United States got no bump in its regional standing as a result of the Libya campaign. On other fronts, the campaign did further damage to the U.S. position. Among other things, it has discredited counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism through diplomacy—after what America and its allies did to Qadhafi, why should any government trade off its nuclear/WMD capabilities and/or give up ties to actors that Washington deems terrorists in return for what seem to be U.S. security assurances, grounded in a “new” relationship with Washington?

The Libya intervention also polarized great power dynamics between the United States, on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. Both Moscow and Beijing saw the campaign, as it unfolded, not as a humanitarian exercise but as U.S.-led coercive regime change that was part of a broader effort to reshape the Middle East’s balance of power. From that, they came to see their

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<sup>49</sup> This camp included U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice, National Security Council senior director for multilateral affairs and human rights Samantha Power, and Hillary Clinton’s first Director of Policy Planning Anne-Marie Slaughter (who has since left the Administration but continues to advocate intervention in various Middle Eastern states on the op-ed pages of major international newspapers).

acquiescence to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized “all necessary measures . . . to protect civilians and civilian populated areas” in Libya (including through imposition of a no fly zone), as a “mistake.”<sup>50</sup>

At roughly the same time, the Obama Administration acquiesced in Saudi Arabia’s armed intervention to repress a truly broad-based popular movement for political change in Bahrain—because the Khalifa monarchy’s demise was judged too big a prospective gain for Tehran. Yet, soon after unrest began in Syria in March 2011, the administration determined that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad “must go.”<sup>51</sup> This was not rooted in an objective assessment of on-the-ground conditions in Syria, but rather in a sense that regime change there would constitute a major blow to Iran’s regional position. Before March 2011, there were significant reasons to believe that the Assad government enjoyed the support of slightly more than half of Syrian society. If one considers where opposition activity has been most intense, it is in those parts of the country in which one would anticipate antipathy to the established order. There is no indication that either the protestors or the insurgents represent a majority of Syrians; available evidence suggests that, even today, Assad and his government retain the backing of just over half the

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<sup>50</sup> S.C. Res. 1973, ¶ 4, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1973 (Mar. 17, 2011). Russia and China abstained (a “no” vote from either country would have vetoed the measure), as did non-permanent members Brazil, Germany, and India. Within days, then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was sharply criticizing the resolution. See *Putin Likens U.N. Libya Resolutions to Crusade Call*, RIA NOVOSTI (Russ.), Mar. 21, 2011, [http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110321/163126957.html%20\(Russia%20and%20China%20abstained\)](http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110321/163126957.html%20(Russia%20and%20China%20abstained)). By late April 2011, Putin was rebuking what he characterized as Western abuse of the resolution. See Ellen Barry, *Putin Criticizes West for Libya Incursion*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 27, 2011, at Foreign Desk Column O, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/world/europe/27putin.html? r=0>. Putin’s views quickly became determinative of Russian policy regarding the Libya intervention. As for China, in conversations with the authors in June 2011, Chinese analysts and officials were already describing Beijing’s decision to let Resolution 1973 through the Council as a “mistake.”

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Flock, *Obama: Assad Must Go*, WASH. POST, Aug. 18, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/obama-it-is-time-for-syrias-assad-to-go/2011/08/18/gIQABVPvNJ\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/obama-it-is-time-for-syrias-assad-to-go/2011/08/18/gIQABVPvNJ_blog.html).

populace.<sup>52</sup> Like the Bush Administration vis-à-vis Iraq, the Obama Administration has made its Syria policy in defiance of on-the-ground reality. The result has been ineffective at best, with the potential to inflict additional damage on America's strategic position.

Obama's Syria policy has also further polarized U.S. relations with China and Russia. The Western approach to Syria confirmed Chinese and Russian assessments from the Libya intervention that America had embarked on a campaign to remake the balance of

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<sup>52</sup> *E.g.*, an Internet poll conducted in December 2011 by an independent pollster with no discernible ideological or political agenda found that 55 percent of Syrians wanted President Assad to remain, YOU GOV SIRAJ, SYRIA'S PRESIDENT ASSAD – SHOULD HE RESIGN? (Dec. 25, 2011), <http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/doha/polling/YouGovSirajDoha%20Debates-%20President%20Assad%20report.pdf> (revealingly, the poll's sponsors, the Qatar Foundation's Doha Debates, billed the results as Arabs Want Syria's President Assad to Go—Opinion Poll, THE DOHA DEBATES, Jan. 2, 2012, <http://www.thedohadebates.com/news/item/index.asp?n=14312>). Analysis of 18 large-sample Facebook surveys also suggests that Assad “still enjoys the support of a thin majority of the Syrian people,” see Camille Otrakji, *Analyzing the Largest Syria Crisis Facebook Polls*, THE SYRIA PAGE (Syria) (Jan. 24, 2012), <http://creativesyria.com/syriapage/?p=129>. See also Camille Otrakji, *The Real Bashar al-Assad*, THE SYRIA PAGE (Syria) (Apr. 2, 2012), <http://creativesyria.com/syriapage/?p=150>. The Syrian government claims that 57.4 percent of the electorate participated in the February 2012 referendum on a new constitution, and that roughly 90 percent of those who voted supported it, *89 Percent Vote in Favor of New Syrian Constitution*, RUSSIA TODAY (Russ.), Feb. 27, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/syria-referendum-constitution-results-307/>. More recently, in May 2012, the Syrian government reported that just over 51 percent of eligible voters participated in the first parliamentary elections held under the new constitution. All of these results suggest that, even after more than a year of sustained unrest, just over half of the population continues to support retaining Assad as head of state and reforming the existing order over a wholesale change of regime. Additionally, in June 2012 Gallup reported the results of a survey conducted in five Arab states directly impacted by the Arab Awakening: Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. In every one of these states except Syria, large majorities of the population held that shari'a (Islamic law) should be either “a” source or the only source of law; in Syria, by contrast, a narrow majority believed that shari'a should not be a source of law. See Dalia Mogahed, *Arab Women and Men See Eye to Eye on Religion's Role in Law*, GALLUP WORLD (June 25, 2012), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155324/Arab-Women-Men-Eye-Eye-Religion-Role-Law.aspx> (these findings are further evidence that just over half of Syria's population continues to support the model of a secular state as embodied by the Assad government).

power in the Middle East. As early as June 2011, Beijing indicated that it opposed Libya-like intervention in Syria and was prepared, with Moscow, to use its Security Council veto to block proposals along these lines.<sup>53</sup> Since then, China and Russia have done so three times—in October 2011, February 2012 and July 2012.<sup>54</sup> With Chinese backing, Russia has pushed for a multilateral “contact group” on Syria. The Obama Administration, however, rejects the idea—because Beijing and Moscow believe that Iran’s participation is essential to a contact group’s effectiveness and because they will not agree to a process requiring, in its terms of reference, Assad’s departure.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See *As-safir as-sini li ‘is-safir’: bikin wa musku tarfdan at-tadakbal fi ish-shan id-dakhili is-suri* [Chinese ambassador to “As-Safir”: Beijing and Moscow reject intervention in internal Syrian affairs], AS-SAFIR (Leb.), June 27, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Russian FM Sergei Lavrov’s Interview to Russian Radio Stations Including the Voice of Russia, THE VOICE OF RUSSIA (Oct. 22, 2011), <http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/10/22/59151160.html>; FM Lavrov Explains Russian Veto of Syria Resolution in UN, RIA NOVOSTI (Russ.), Feb. 5, 2012, <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20120205/171151527.html>; Vitaly Churkin, CHARLIE ROSE (Feb. 6, 2012), <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/12137>; Chris Buckley, *China Defends Syria Veto, Doubts West’s Intention*, REUTERS, Feb. 6, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/06/china-syria-un-idUSL4E8D60VK20120206>; Rick Gladstone, *Friction at the U.N. as Russia and China Veto Another Resolution on Syria Sanctions*, N.Y. TIMES, July 20, 2012 at A8, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/russia-and-china-veto-un-sanctions-against-syria.html>.

<sup>55</sup> See generally Liu Linlin, *Differences Over Syria Continue During G20*, GLOBAL TIMES, June 21, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/716285.shtml>; *Syrian Crisis Should Be Resolved Constitutionally—Putin*, RIA NOVOSTI (Russ.), June 20, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20120620/174136736.html>; Sergei Lavrov, *On the Right Side of History*, HUFFINGTON POST (June 15, 2012), [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sergei-lavrov/russia-syria-on-the-right-side-of-history\\_b\\_1596400.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sergei-lavrov/russia-syria-on-the-right-side-of-history_b_1596400.html); Tian Wenlin, *Promoting Syrian Regime Change Lacks Strategic Foresight*, PEOPLE’S DAILY ONLINE (China), June 12, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90777/7843574.html>; Foreign Minister Lavrov Syria Briefing (YOUTUBE, June 9, 2012), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7GZfTlsN9g&feature=youtu.be>; Charles Clover, *Russia Insists on Iranian Role in Syria Peace Plan*, FIN. TIMES, June 9, 2012, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/bde43340-b24a-11e1-8a6e-00144feabdc0.Authorised=true.html?\\_i\\_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fbde43340-b24a-11e1-8a6e-00144feabdc0.html&\\_i\\_referer=#axzz1yRS76NZ1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/bde43340-b24a-11e1-8a6e-00144feabdc0.Authorised=true.html?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fbde43340-b24a-11e1-8a6e-00144feabdc0.html&_i_referer=#axzz1yRS76NZ1); Ellen Barry, *In Its Unyielding Stance on Syria, Russia Takes Substantial Risks in the Middle East*, N.Y. TIMES, June 9, 2012, at A8, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/>

Apart from tactical adjustments, Obama has retained the commitment to consolidating American dominance in the Middle East that he inherited from his predecessors. He has been no more willing than they to accept the incipient reality of a more balanced distribution of power in the region, or to institutionalize such a situation by pursuing real rapprochement with indigenous powers like the Islamic Republic. By continuing America's post-Cold War quest for hegemony in the Middle East, Obama is compounding the damage that his predecessors have done to U.S. interests in the region.

Beyond the ongoing decline of its regional position, America's pursuit of Middle Eastern hegemony is undercutting its claim to provide the public good of energy security, with negative long-term implications for its global standing. Since the early 1990s, U.S. policy has done much to weaken the productive capacity of Iraq and Iran, two of the world's major hydrocarbon provinces. Today, Washington's efforts to compel Tehran to surrender the development of indigenous nuclear fuel cycle capabilities—through sanctions and the continuing threat of U.S.-initiated (or Israeli-initiated and U.S.-supported) military action—are the leading threat to the security of Persian Gulf hydrocarbon flows. Moreover, the expansion of Iran-related secondary sanctions to cover simple purchases of Iranian crude oil and most non-energy-related

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[09/world/middleeast/in-stance-on-syria-russia-takes-substantial-risks.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9320576/Syria-West-rebuffs-proposal-to-work-with-Iran-to-solve-crisis.html); Adrian Bloomfield, Syria: *West Rebuffs Proposal to Work With Iran to Solve Crisis*, THE TELEGRAPH ONLINE, June 8, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9320576/Syria-West-rebuffs-proposal-to-work-with-Iran-to-solve-crisis.html>. See also Bassem Aly, *Geneva Conference on Syria: A Diplomatic Victory for Moscow?*, AHAM ONLINE (Egypt), July 3, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/46781/World/Region/Geneva-conference-on-Syria-A-diplomatic-victory-fo.aspx> (reporting that at the first meeting of the “Action Group on Syria,” held under U.N. auspices in June, China and Russia insisted that draft language excluding figures from a conflict resolution process whose participation would block creation of a national unity government—language that the United States and other Western powers interpreted to mean Assad—be removed from the final communiqué). For discussion of the first meeting of the Action Group on Syria, with links to special envoy Kofi Annan's draft and to the final text, see Laura Rozen, *Draft Communiqué From Action Group on Syria*, AL MONITOR, July 1, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/hillary-clinton-china-russia-mus.html>.

transactions with Iran is incentivizing emerging powers in the global South to develop alternatives to established, U.S.-dominated mechanisms for conducting, financing, and settling international transactions.<sup>56</sup>

### III. AMERICAN STRATEGY AND CHINA'S RISE

In the Cold War's wake, America's newly enabled impulse to pursue hegemony more vigorously focused most immediately on the Middle East—because of the opening created by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and because dominating the Middle East seemed “do-able.” With the Soviet Union's retreat and eventual collapse, there was no external power to constrain U.S. ambitions in the region; after the first Gulf War, there was no longer a regional power that appeared to pose “hard power” obstacles to Washington's designs.

In Asia, by contrast, there was the looming reality of China, as well as the diplomatic and strategic legacy of the bargain that Nixon and Kissinger had struck with the founding fathers of the People's Republic in the early 1970s. Sino-American rapprochement allowed China to pursue deep cutbacks to its military in the 1980s, freeing up resources for economic development. But the 1989 Tiananmen Square episode, followed by America's display of overwhelming military might during the first Gulf War in 1990-1991, prompted Chinese decision-makers to invest once again in the armed forces. Still, from June 1989 to September 11, 2001, Beijing and Washington managed to forestall an all-out competition for regional hegemony in Asia.<sup>57</sup> After 9/11, Sino-American tensions were, to an appreciable degree, put “on hold” as the United States tightened its focus on the Middle East. And for all that Chinese officials were concerned by what they saw as the destabilizing consequences of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Neelam Deo & Akshay Mathur, *BRICS 'Hostage' to West Over Iran Sanctions, Need Financial Institutions*, FIN. TIMES BLOG (June 27, 2012), <http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2012/06/27/guest-post-brics-hostage-to-west-over-iran-sanctions-need-their-own-financial-institutions/?catid=666&SID=google#axzz1ziHwBAfE> (for a provocative analysis by a former Indian diplomat and an Indian researcher on geoeconomics).

<sup>57</sup> See ROBERT L. SUETTINGER, *BEYOND TIANANMEN: THE POLITICS OF U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS, 1989-2000* (2003).

Iraq war and other Bush era initiatives, China also benefited in significant ways from America's preoccupation with the region. (This was underscored when, a few years ago, a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official wryly told us that "keeping the United States bogged down in pointless wars in small Middle Eastern countries" was a high priority on China's foreign policy agenda.)

As noted earlier, China is perhaps the ultimate natural power in Asia. Since 1978, Beijing's embrace of the main elements of globalization has fueled impressive levels of economic growth and modernization in China. As this unfolded, the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis marked a turning point in Asia's geopolitics and, more particularly, China's regional role.<sup>58</sup> Even if the Chinese economy does not expand as fast in coming years as in the three decades between 1978 and the 2008 global financial crisis, it is virtually certain that China will become an ever more important player in regional and global affairs.<sup>59</sup>

Historically, the rise of new powers alongside already dominant states—especially established great powers with aspirations to hegemony, like the United States—is dangerous, often culminating in great power (or, after Robert Gilpin, "hegemonic") wars.<sup>60</sup> Beijing, though, seems less interested in replacing Washington's hegemonic ambitions with its own than in moving from the more-or-less unipolar world of the early post-Cold War period to what Chinese analysts and officials describe as a more genuinely multipolar

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<sup>58</sup> See DAVID B.H. DENOON, *THE ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC RISE OF CHINA AND INDIA: ASIAN REALIGNMENTS AFTER THE 1997 FINANCIAL CRISIS* (2007).

<sup>59</sup> See JOHN LEE, *UNDERSTANDING AND PRESERVING THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICA'S ADVANTAGE IN ASIA* 8 (2009).

<sup>60</sup> See ROBERT GILPIN, *WAR AND CHANGE IN WORLD POLITICS* (1981). See also Randall Schweller, *Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory*, in *ENGAGING CHINA: THE MANAGEMENT OF AN EMERGING POWER* 1-32 (Alastair Iain Johnston & Robert S. Ross eds., 1999). For a sobering assessment of the long-term structural risks of Sino-American conflict posed by China's rise see also MEARSHEIMER, *supra* note 5, at 360-401; John J. Mearsheimer, *China's Unpeaceful Rise*, *CURRENT HISTORY* (Apr. 2006); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia*, *CHINESE J. INT'L POL.*, Winter 2010, at 381.

international order.<sup>61</sup> Military modernization in the People's Republic has been heavily focused on the development of what Western military analysts call "anti-access/area-denial" (A2AD) capabilities.<sup>62</sup> Beijing's efforts to expand its power projection capacities (i.e., by developing "blue water" naval forces) seem aimed primarily at giving Chinese decision-makers better options for defending their country's increasingly global interests (as when the PLA Navy deployed to the Mediterranean to oversee the evacuation of 35,000 Chinese nationals during NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya). There is no evidence that the PLA is out to establish an offense-dominant posture vis-à-vis the U.S. military; rather, it is out to reduce the U.S. military's offensive prerogatives against China.<sup>63</sup> Politically, the People's

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<sup>61</sup> On China's interest in moving to a more multipolar international order, see generally Wang Jisi (王缉思), *Multipolarity Versus Hegemonism: Chinese Views of International Politics* (多極化與霸權主義: 中國的國際政治觀), <http://www.sis.pku.edu.cn/faculty/blue/article.aspx?userid=12&classid=4&id=282>; AVERY GOLDSTEIN, *RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE: CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY* (2005); YUAN-KANG WANG, *CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY AND U.S. PRIMACY: IS CHINA BALANCING POWER?* (2006).

<sup>62</sup> See Andrew Erickson & Gabe Collins, *Near Seas 'Anti-Navy' Capabilities, Not Nascent Blue Water Fleet, Constitute China's Core Challenge for U.S. and Regional Militaries*, CHINA SIGNPOST 洞察中国 Mar. 7, 2012, <http://www.chinasignpost.com/2012/03/near-seas-%E2%80%99Canti-navy%E2%80%9D-capabilities-not-nascent-blue-water-fleet-constitute-china%E2%80%99s-core-challenge-to-u-s-and-regional-militaries/> (on the place of A2AD in China's military modernization efforts, co-authored by a research professor at the U.S. Naval War College). The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments has defined "anti-access" as enemy actions which inhibit military movement into a theater of operations, and "area-denial" as activities that seek to deny freedom of action within areas under the enemy's control, see Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts, and Robert Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge*, CTR. FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY ASSESSMENTS, May 2003, at ii, <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2003/05/a2ad-anti-access-area-denial/>.

<sup>63</sup> On offense dominance, see STEPHEN VAN EVERA, *CAUSES OF WAR: POWER AND THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT* 1-192 (1999). Of course, perceived difficulties in distinguishing between offensive and defensive military capabilities lie at the heart of what international relations theorists call the "security dilemma," see Robert Jervis, *Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma*, 30 *WORLD POL.* 167(1978). In the case of the Sino-American military balance, however, these difficulties stem less from objectively ambiguous military and technological realities than from the United States' hegemonic preferences; through the prism of the global transformation model, purely defensive military preparations by states seeking to preserve a measure of strategic independence are a threat to American interests. (A

Republic has sought to boost its regional influence not by intimidating its neighbors but by becoming Asia's economic hub and through active participation in multilateral regional institutions.<sup>64</sup>

Notwithstanding their focus on the Middle East, Washington political and policy elites have taken note of China's rise as a major long-term challenge to their notions of American primacy. After the initial opening to China in the early 1970s and normalization of relations at the end of the decade, U.S. administrations sought to maintain a clearly hierarchical political and security order in Asia, with the United States just as clearly at the top of that hierarchy. But the ongoing power transition defined by China's rise and America's relative decline means that, as the distribution of power shifts more in its favor, Beijing will inevitably seek a larger role in the management of international affairs.<sup>65</sup> It will also seek international—above all, American—recognition of the legitimacy of China's claim to such a role. This evolution challenges the United States to recognize China's growing regional weight and to negotiate adjustments in the mechanisms governing the provision of various global public goods to reflect emerging economic and political reality.

Washington, though, seems less interested in charting such adjustments than in reasserting its strategic dominance over the People's Republic—a development that is spurring mounting

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good example of this in the Middle Eastern context is U.S. opposition to Russia's proposed sale of S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Iran—a sale that Washington opposed because it would make Iranian nuclear facilities potentially less vulnerable to U.S. and/or Israeli attack). On this point, see also Randall L. Schweller & Xiaoyu Pu, *After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline*, INT'L SECURITY, Summer 2011, at 45-46 (noting that balancing is inevitably seen as “revisionist behavior” under conditions of unipolarity).

<sup>64</sup> See Jane Perlez, *For Clinton, an Effort to Rechannel the Rivalry With China*, N.Y. TIMES, July 8, 2012, at A7 (reporting that China has now surpassed the United States to become ASEAN's largest trading partner, going from being an inconsequential trading partner in the region as recently as the late 1990s to a two-way trade volume of \$293 billion in 2010). See also John Lee, *China's ASEAN Invasion*, NAT'L INT., May-June 2007, at 89 (providing a more detailed explication of China's multilateral “charm offensive” by an Australian analyst who supports American military primacy in Asia).

<sup>65</sup> For discussion, see DAVID LAI, *THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA IN POWER TRANSITION* (2011).

concern in Beijing. In George W. Bush's second term, as China's rise passed the point of deniability, Washington began exhorting Beijing to become a "responsible stakeholder" within a U.S.-led Asian order, as well as in U.S.-led global systems; in effect, "responsible stakeholder" was diplomatic code for China doing what the United States wanted on major regional and international issues.<sup>66</sup> The Bush Administration also launched a new strategic partnership between the United States and India which was obviously motivated, in large part, by an interest in containing China.

Under President Obama, Washington has become even more focused on the prospects for reasserting U.S. hegemony in Asia, and Sino-American tensions are ratcheting up once again.<sup>67</sup> In part, Chinese concerns are directed at the Obama Administration's self-declared "strategic pivot" from the Middle East to Asia.<sup>68</sup> The term is a misnomer: while the United States was obliged to withdraw its forces from Iraq and is clumsily stage managing a protracted draw down in Afghanistan, it is hardly abandoning its drive to dominate the Middle East, as attested by Obama's policies toward the Arab

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<sup>66</sup> See Thomas Christensen, *Shaping the Choices of a Rising China: Recent Lessons for the Obama Administration*, WASH. Q., June 2009, at 91 (in which Christensen, who, as a State Department official in the Bush Administration's second term, helped craft the "responsible stakeholder" paradigm for America's China policy, explains its logic: "It is in China's strategic interest as a rising power to exert greater effort to help maintain the system" that has enabled its rise; consequently, American policy should help "channel China's competitive energies in more beneficial and peaceful directions.").

<sup>67</sup> See LEE, *supra* note 59, at 9-13. We have adapted the notion of a hierarchical security order in Asia from Lee. While Lee contrasts hierarchy and hegemony, we hold that the kind of hierarchical order that Lee describes is, in effect, the platform from which the United States, under the Obama Administration, is now trying to assert something much closer to outright hegemony in Asia.

<sup>68</sup> See Hillary Clinton, *America's Pacific Century*, FOREIGN POL'Y, Nov. 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century). See also Kenneth Lieberthal, *The American Pivot to Asia*, FOREIGN POL'Y, Dec. 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/21/the\\_american\\_pivot\\_to\\_asia?page=0,0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/21/the_american_pivot_to_asia?page=0,0); Zheng Wang, *American Conspiracy: Strategic Suspicion and U.S. Re-engagement in Asia*, ASIA POL'Y, July 2011, at 27-28 (reviewing Chinese reactions).

Awakening and Iran.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the Obama Administration is undertaking a series of military and political initiatives that, in the eyes of Chinese elites, are meant to “keep China down” by containing its rise as a legitimately influential player in Asian affairs.<sup>70</sup>

On the military front, Chinese analysts acknowledge that the steps taken by the United States so far in the course of its “rebalancing” in Asia—e.g., the deployment of up to 2,500 U.S. Marines to Australia<sup>71</sup> and expanded military relationships with multiple regional partners<sup>72</sup> (including Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam)—are more symbolic moves than meaningful upgrades to American power projection capabilities in the Pacific theater. But symbolism is not unimportant; the Obama Administration’s decision not to invite China to participate with the U.S. Pacific Command in naval exercises in June 2012—exercises to which India and even Russia were invited— “stung even some pro-American policymakers in China who saw it as further evidence of a deliberate containment policy.”<sup>73</sup> And future steps are likely to be more substantial; Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta recently declared that, by 2020, 60 percent of America’s naval assets would be

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<sup>69</sup> On this point, Obama Administration officials have amended their vocabulary, relying more on the term “rebalancing” rather than “strategic pivot.”

<sup>70</sup> This was an important theme in our conversations with Chinese analysts, officials, and scholars during research trips to China in June 2011 and June 2012. See also Kenneth Lieberthal & Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series No. 4 (2012), at 7-19 (for a powerful elaboration of Chinese perceptions and attitudes in this regard, especially in the chapters by Wang Jisi).

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., *UPDATE 2-First Marines in Australia as U.S. Ramps up Asia-Pacific Focus*, REUTERS, Apr. 3, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/04/usa-marines-australia-idUSL2E8F3DU920120404>; Matt Siegel, *As Part of Pact, U.S. Marines Arrive in Australia, in China’s Strategic Backyard*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 5, 2012, at A8, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/05/world/asia/us-marines-arrive-darwin-australia.html>.

<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., Rick Rozoff, *America Threatens China: Pentagon Prepares for Confrontation in the Asia-Pacific Region*, GLOBAL RES., June 3, 2012, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/america-threatens-china-pentagon-prepares-for-confrontation-in-the-asia-pacific-region/>.

<sup>73</sup> Perlez, *supra* note 64.

deployed in the Pacific.<sup>74</sup> Politically, Chinese elites believe that Washington is encouraging Japan and several Southeast Asian states to be more assertive regarding their territorial claims vis-à-vis China in the South China Sea.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the Administration has launched the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which one Chinese analyst described to us as “a smaller APEC” meant by Washington as a new regional economic mechanism excluding China.

Also, the Administration is not just upping the pressure on China in Asia; it understands that an ongoing quest for hegemony in the Middle East impels the United States to deal with China’s growing presence and influence there, too. In this regard, the prospect of a more strategic relationship between China and Iran, whereby the two countries literally fuel one another’s independence and relative rise, is fundamentally at odds with America’s hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East and Asia; it is thus a particular focus for Washington.<sup>76</sup> More generally, the American response to the Arab Awakening has, as noted, affirmed Beijing’s concerns that the United States is out to remake the balance of power in the Middle East in ways that would be harmful to Chinese interests.

This is a counter-productive and high-risk approach, rooted in an increasingly anachronistic assessment of China’s strategic outlook. In the post-Cold War period, the United States has gotten used to a particular (and relatively comfortable) sort of relationship

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<sup>74</sup> Leon E. Panetta, Secretary of Defense, Speech at the Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore (June 2, 2012) (transcript available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1681>).

<sup>75</sup> See Frans-Paul van der Putten, *The United States’ Dangerous Game in the South China Sea*, CLINGENDAEL ASIA STUDIES AND CLINGENDAEL ASIA FORUM (Neth.), June 28, 2011, [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2011/20110628\\_cas\\_clingendael\\_asia\\_forum\\_fputten.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2011/20110628_cas_clingendael_asia_forum_fputten.pdf) (for an empathetic review of the Chinese perspective). See also John Lee, *The End of the Charm Offensive*, FOREIGN POL’Y, Oct. 26, 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/26/the\\_end\\_of\\_the\\_charm\\_offensive?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/26/the_end_of_the_charm_offensive?page=0,1) (for discussion of the perspective of smaller Asian states).

<sup>76</sup> See John Garver, Flynt Leverett, & Hillary Mann Leverett, *Moving (Slightly) Closer to Iran: China’s Shifting Calculus for Managing Its “Persian Gulf Dilemma”*, Asia-Pacific Policy Papers (2009), [http://www.sais-jhu.edu/centers/reischauer/moving\\_slightly\\_closer.pdf](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/centers/reischauer/moving_slightly_closer.pdf) (on Sino-Iranian relations and their implications for the United States).

with China. It seemed that, as long as the People's Republic followed an export-led growth model requiring both access to the American market and managing the value of the yuan to keep Chinese exports competitive, China would have a powerful strategic interest in avoiding confrontation with the United States. This, in fact, was enshrined as a major tenet of China's foreign policy under what the current, fourth generation of Chinese leaders (who will be leaving office during 2012-2013) called "the new diplomacy."<sup>77</sup> Increasingly, however, China judges that its economic accomplishments are simultaneously tied to a positive relationship with the United States and threatened by bad American policies. As the United States has faltered—through costly invasions of other countries, with other policies that prevent hydrocarbons from coming to market, and in its own economy—China's economic vitality has been put at risk. Moreover, after the 2008 financial crisis—a largely "Made in America" affair, from a Chinese perspective—and in the face of Obama Administration policies that are seen in Beijing as inimical to Chinese interests, China's willingness to defer to America's international leadership is less than it once was.

Consequently, Chinese policymakers are becoming more assertive in defending what they see as necessary to sustaining their country's economic lifeline and strategic independence. To be sure, Beijing still does not want a confrontation with Washington. But its willingness to engage in what Robert Pape calls "soft balancing" in order to push back against what it sees as overly hegemonic assertions by the United States is growing.<sup>78</sup> China's three vetoes of Syria-related resolutions in the Security Council are an important marker in this regard. So too is the recent upturn in Sino-Russian

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<sup>77</sup> See Evan Medeiros & M. Taylor Fravel, *China's New Diplomacy*, FOREIGN AFF., Nov.-Dec. 2003, at 22.

<sup>78</sup> As Pape notes, directly confronting U.S. military preponderance through traditional hard balancing measures "is too costly for any individual state and too risky for multiple states operating together." Instead, major powers are likely to adopt "soft balancing" measures: "actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral [American] policies." Such "mechanisms of soft balancing include territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition." See Robert Pape, *Soft Balancing Against the United States*, INT'L SECURITY, Summer 2005, at 7, 9-10, 36.

strategic cooperation—on Syria, Central Asia, and a range of other high-profile international issues.<sup>79</sup> In the near-to medium term, soft balancing of this sort seeks to constrain the harder aspects of America’s hegemonic ambition; in the longer term, it is aimed at delegitimizing (or delegitimizing) U.S.-centered unipolarity and dispersing power more evenly throughout the system.<sup>80</sup>

On the economic front, China is consolidating its position as Asia’s economic powerhouse; as a prominent Chinese expert on Beijing’s relations with the United States and Asia told *The New York Times*, “Asian integration without the United States is the real competition . . . the real challenge to the United States.”<sup>81</sup> It is not clear to what extent China will shift from an export-oriented growth model to one placing relatively greater emphasis on domestic consumption. But Chinese officials have clearly and repeatedly enunciated a long-term goal for the yuan to become an internationally significant reserve and transactional currency—a trend that will further reinforce Beijing’s capacity to take foreign policy positions on various issues at odds with American preferences.

As Chinese interests in the Middle East expand and deepen, the region is likely to become a progressively more salient arena for working out the balance of competitive and cooperative dynamics in the U.S.-China relationship. If Washington were actually to impose secondary sanctions against major Chinese companies and/or financial institutions over their dealings with Iran—a growing likelihood, given the extent of congressional activism on the issue and the Obama Administration’s supine collaboration with the Hill on sanctions policy—this would almost certainly prompt a substantial “soft balancing” response from Beijing. It would also provide an

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<sup>79</sup> See *Hu Jintao Holds Talks With Russian President Putin*, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (中國人民共和國外交部), June 5, 2012, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t939577.htm>; Michael Sainsbury, *China and Russia Seal Power Pact*, *THE AUSTRALIAN* (Austl.), June 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/china-and-russia-seal-power-pact/story-e6frg6so-1226388074073>.

<sup>80</sup> See Schweller & Pu, *supra* note 63, at 46-47, 52-57 (on “delegitimation” and “deconcentration” as essential aspects of China’s emerging strategy to “contest U.S. hegemony within the established [international] order,”).

<sup>81</sup> Perlez, *supra* note 64.

already skeptical Chinese leadership with conclusive evidence that the United States is not interested in providing the public good of energy security where the People's Republic is concerned—that, in fact, Washington wants to use its influence over the security of hydrocarbon flows from the Persian Gulf as a lever against China. That would be a profoundly negative development for America's long-term position as a global leader.

#### IV. RECASTING AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY

One of the most critical steps that American policymakers could take toward strategic recovery would be to revive and broaden the original Nixon-Kissinger grand bargain with China. This means reaffirming both U.S. recognition of the People's Republic as a legitimate political entity representing legitimate national interests and America's positive disposition toward China's economic advancement. It also means acknowledging that a positive disposition toward China's economic advancement implies significantly more than it did in the 1970s, when the People's Republic was hardly a commercial presence in Asia (much less a global economic heavyweight) and largely self-sufficient in energy.

Today, a revived Sino-American grand bargain needs to be backed up with credible U.S. policies in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East that help to create an environment conducive to the free flow of hydrocarbons to international markets. Such an environment should also be conducive to the Middle East's ever deeper integration into various modalities of globalization—a process in which China could reasonably expect to play an expanding role. After World War II, the United States enabled Western Europe and Japan's economic recovery and revitalization, to a considerable degree by guaranteeing adequate oil supplies from the Persian Gulf to European and Japanese markets. Today, America can choose to play a similar role with respect to China and other emerging economies in Asia that depend on hydrocarbon flows from the Persian Gulf. If, however, Washington prioritizes its quixotic quest for Middle Eastern hegemony over the public good of energy security, China (and others) will use soft balancing tools to restrain American initiatives and create the space in which they can negotiate the deals they need

with Persian Gulf energy producers to ensure adequate hydrocarbon supplies. This will marginalize the United States even further.

In this regard, perhaps the most crucial step that the United States could take to restore its standing as a great power capable of shaping important strategic outcomes, not only in the Persian Gulf but also vis-à-vis China and other rising powers in the global South, is to pursue genuine rapprochement with Iran. To reverse the ongoing decline of America's international position, in the Middle East and globally, Washington needs to revise its policy toward the Islamic Republic as fundamentally and comprehensively as it revised its policy toward the People's Republic in the early 1970s. "Nixon-to-China"-style rapprochement with Tehran—based on acceptance of the Islamic Republic as a legitimate political order representing legitimate national interests—would reflect a decisive turn away from the failed model of global transformation. It would also reflect a clear reorientation of American grand strategy toward the imperatives of global leadership. Alternatively, a U.S.-initiated war against the Islamic Republic—or a U.S.-facilitated attack by Israel—would have potentially devastating consequences for America's international standing.<sup>82</sup>

A leading Chinese academic expert on the Middle East recently remarked to us that the only force which can weaken the United States internationally is the United States itself. We agree. Over the next decade—perhaps even within the next year—Washington will make decisions that will largely determine whether America plays a positive role in shaping the transition to a more genuinely multipolar world, based on realistic management of the distribution of power in key regional and global arenas and effective provision of important public goods for a still globalizing world, or whether it is ultimately the biggest loser in this transition. The choice is up to Americans and their leaders.

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<sup>82</sup> For further discussion, see Leverett & Leverett, *GOING TO TEHRAN*, *supra* note 42, at Prologue to Pt. III, Ch. 9.