



MIRANDA PRIEBE, BRYAN ROONEY, NATHAN BEAUCHAMP-MUSTAFAGA,  
JEFFREY MARTINI, STEPHANIE PEZARD

# Implementing Restraint

---

Changes in U.S. Regional Security Policies  
to Operationalize a Realist Grand Strategy  
of Restraint



For more information on this publication, visit [www.rand.org/t/RRR739-1](http://www.rand.org/t/RRR739-1)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data** is available for this publication.

ISBN: 978-1-9774-0630-9

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© Copyright 2021 RAND Corporation

**RAND**® is a registered trademark.

*Cover graphic by Yuriy Panyukov/Adobe Stock*

### Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit [www.rand.org/pubs/permissions](http://www.rand.org/pubs/permissions).

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

### Support RAND

Make a tax-deductible charitable contribution at  
[www.rand.org/giving/contribute](http://www.rand.org/giving/contribute)

[www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

## Preface

---

In recent years, there has been growing interest in rethinking the U.S. approach to the world. This report discusses one alternative to the current U.S. approach, a realist grand strategy of restraint, which has long been prominent in the academic security studies community. To help leaders and the public evaluate this option, which has now entered the policy discourse, this report describes how U.S. regional security policies would change if the United States adopted this grand strategy. For analysts, we also offer a framework for identifying the set of security policy issues that any grand strategy needs to inform for each region, focusing on conditions under which the United States would use force, U.S. relationships with potential adversaries and allies, military posture, and security cooperation activities. The report also identifies unanswered questions about a grand strategy of restraint and proposes next steps for clarifying the policy implications of such a strategy in each region.

The research in this report was completed in November 2020 and was conducted within the RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy. The center's mission is to inform the debate about the U.S. role in the world by more clearly specifying new approaches to U.S. grand strategy, evaluating the logic of different approaches, and identifying the trade-offs each option creates. Initial funding for the center was provided by a seed grant from the Charles Koch Institute. Ongoing funding comes from RAND supporters, and from foundations and philanthropists.

The center is an initiative of the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Divi-

sion (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the U.S. Intelligence Community, U.S. State Department, allied foreign governments, and foundations.

For more information on the RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy, see [www.rand.org/nsrd/isdp/grand-strategy](http://www.rand.org/nsrd/isdp/grand-strategy) or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).

# Contents

---

**Preface** ..... iii

**Figures** ..... vii

**Tables** ..... ix

**Summary** ..... xi

**Acknowledgments** ..... xv

**Abbreviations** ..... xvii

**CHAPTER ONE**

**Introduction** ..... 1

Overview of the Debate About U.S. Grand Strategy ..... 5

Overview of a Realist Grand Strategy of Restraint ..... 11

Approach ..... 23

Outline of This Report ..... 26

**CHAPTER TWO**

**Europe** ..... 27

U.S. Policy Toward Russia ..... 28

Alliances and Partnerships ..... 38

Posture ..... 41

Security Cooperation and Assistance ..... 45

Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy  
Toward Europe ..... 46

**CHAPTER THREE**

**The Asia-Pacific** ..... 49

U.S. Policy Toward China ..... 52

U.S. Policy Toward North Korea .....	63
Alliances and Partnerships .....	68
Posture.....	73
Security Cooperation and Assistance.....	78
Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward the Asia-Pacific .....	81

#### CHAPTER FOUR

<b>The Middle East</b> .....	83
U.S. Policy Toward Iran.....	85
U.S. Policy Toward Syria and Iraq .....	90
U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and Intrastate Conflict.....	95
Partnerships.....	98
Posture .....	102
Security Cooperation and Assistance.....	106
Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East.....	108

#### CHAPTER FIVE

<b>South Asia</b> .....	111
Ongoing Operations in Afghanistan .....	112
U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and State Collapse .....	114
Partnerships.....	117
Posture.....	121
Security Cooperation and Assistance .....	122
Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward South Asia .....	125

#### CHAPTER SIX

<b>Next Steps for Operationalizing a Grand Strategy of Restraint .....</b>	<b>127</b>
Findings.....	127
Recommendations for Developing the Policy Implications of a Grand Strategy of Restraint .....	130
Final Thoughts .....	139
<b>References .....</b>	<b>141</b>

**Figures**

---

1.1. Alternative Grand Strategies..... 6

1.2. Focus of This Report.....25



Tables

---

2.1. Identifying Threats and Clarifying When the United States  
Would Use Force Against Russia ..... 32

2.2. Developing U.S. Policy Toward Peacetime Relations with  
Russia..... 37

2.3. Developing U.S. Policy Toward Alliances and Partnerships  
in Europe ..... 41

2.4. Operationalizing Plans for U.S. Troop Withdrawal from  
Europe..... 44

2.5. Designing a New Security Cooperation Policy Toward  
Europe..... 46

3.1. Alternative Recommendations for U.S. Asia-Pacific Security  
Policy Proposed by Advocates of Restraint ..... 51

3.2. Identifying Threats and Clarifying When the United States  
Would Use Force Against China..... 59

3.3. Developing U.S. Policy Toward Peacetime Relations with  
China..... 63

3.4. Developing U.S. Policy Toward North Korea ..... 68

3.5. Developing U.S. Policy Toward Alliances and Partnerships  
in the Asia-Pacific..... 73

3.6. Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in the Asia-Pacific .... 79

3.7. Designing Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies  
Toward the Asia-Pacific..... 81

4.1. Developing U.S. Policy Toward Iran..... 90

4.2. Developing U.S. Policies Toward Syria and Iraq ..... 96

4.3. Developing U.S. Policies Toward Terrorism and Intrastate  
Conflict..... 97

- 4.4.    Developing U.S. Policy Toward Partnerships in the Middle East..... 102
- 4.5.    Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in the Middle East ..... 106
- 4.6.    Designing U.S. Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies Toward the Middle East..... 108
- 5.1.    Developing U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan ..... 114
- 5.2.    Developing U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and State Collapse..... 116
- 5.3.    Developing U.S. Policy Toward Political Relationships in South Asia ..... 121
- 5.4.    Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in South Asia..... 122
- 5.5.    Designing U.S. Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies Toward South Asia..... 123

## Summary

---

In recent years, there have been growing calls from both sides of the aisle for the United States to rethink its global role. Domestic challenges are putting additional pressures on the federal budget, and these pressures could lead to greater demands to reexamine the policy choices that drive national security spending. This report presents one option for a new U.S. approach to the world: a realist grand strategy of restraint. Like the current U.S. grand strategy, a grand strategy of restraint emphasizes great-power relations and identifies China as the greatest potential threat to the United States. Yet, in other regards, advocates of restraint disagree with the current U.S. approach. Under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States would have a much narrower conception of its interests, reduce its forward military presence, renegotiate or end many of its existing security commitments, resolve conflicts of interest and cooperate more with other great powers, and have a higher threshold for the use of military force.

In this report, we identify the broad approaches and specific regional security policy recommendations that advocates of restraint have articulated. We then examine what next steps are needed to operationalize a grand strategy of restraint. Where the policy implications of restraint are underdeveloped, we identify the questions that advocates of restraint need to answer and the additional analysis necessary for developing more-specific policy recommendations. We do not evaluate whether the arguments put forward by advocates of restraint are sound or whether adopting such a strategy is, on the whole, advisable. Rather, we take advocates of restraint on their own terms and explain how U.S. regional security policies would change if their proposals

were adopted. By identifying the policy prescriptions that flow from restraint and offering a roadmap for developing these implications further, this report can help policymakers and the public engage with the logic of a grand strategy of restraint and evaluate its costs and benefits.

## Findings

- Advocates of restraint have threat assessments and assumptions that differ from those of policymakers who have shaped U.S. grand strategy since the end of the Cold War.
- Generally, advocates of restraint would rely more on diplomacy to settle conflicts of interest, encourage other states to lead, and preserve military power to defend vital U.S. interests.
- If a grand strategy of restraint were used, the United States would have a smaller military, fewer security commitments and forces based abroad, and a higher bar for the use of military force compared with current grand strategy.
- The specific implications of this grand strategy vary by region depending on the level of U.S. interests and the risk that a single power could dominate the region.
- Advocates of restraint seek a more cooperative approach with current U.S. adversaries, such as Russia and Iran.
- The primary area of disagreement among advocates of restraint is the U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific.
- Advocates of restraint note that the rise of single powerful state in East Asia, Europe, or the Persian Gulf would imperil vital U.S. interests but have not yet offered policymakers guidance on how to know that such a threat is emerging.
- To generate more-specific policy implications for each region, advocates of restraint need to expand on their logic and conduct additional analysis.

## **Recommendations to Analysts for Developing the Policy Implications of a Grand Strategy of Restraint**

- Evaluate the core claims underlying a grand strategy of restraint to validate and refine its policy prescriptions.
- Develop risk-mitigation strategies to hedge against the possibility that one of the core assumptions of a grand strategy of restraint is fully or partially incorrect.
- Specify the conditions under which the United States would stop military retrenchment or even increase its military engagement within each region.
- Clarify what changes in great-power capabilities and behavior would constitute a serious threat to vital U.S. interests.
- Provide guidance on whether and how to respond to China's, Russia's, and Iran's gray zone activities.
- Identify the maritime areas where the United States should retain superiority.
- Offer prescriptions on how the United States should evaluate threats and operate in the space and cyber domains.
- Identify scenarios to guide U.S. Department of Defense planning and U.S. force posture decisions.
- Provide priorities for U.S. military peacetime activities, such as exercises.
- Develop policies toward Africa, the Americas, and the Arctic.
- Develop proposals on trade and other international economic issues.
- Assess the cost savings associated with core policy prescriptions.



## Acknowledgments

---

We thank the Charles Koch Institute for its support of the RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy. We also thank Jonah Blank and Michelle Grisé at RAND; Christopher Clary at the University at Albany, State University of New York; and Sameer Lalwani at the Stimson Center for taking the time to discuss the implications of a grand strategy of restraint in South Asia. Karl Mueller of RAND and reviewers Jasen J. Castillo of Texas A&M University and Stephen J. Flanagan of RAND provided thoughtful, detailed, and constructive comments on earlier drafts of this report.



# Abbreviations

---

CSL	cooperative security location
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
EU	European Union
FAS	Freely Associated States
FOS	forward operating site
INF	Intermediate Nuclear Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NORDEFCO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
NSS	National Security Strategy
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN	United Nations



## Introduction

---

As of summer 2020, a growing number of politicians and commentators on both sides of the aisle had begun asking whether the United States needs to rethink its approach to the world. For example, U.S. President Donald Trump had questioned the value of long-standing U.S. alliances, and Democratic presidential primary candidates, including eventual President-elect Joseph Biden, had called for withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and other countries where they believe the United States is engaged in endless wars.<sup>1</sup> Questions about U.S. grand strategy and its associated costs have taken on new urgency because of the direct costs and broader economic effects of responding to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Many more Americans are likely to question whether the United States needs to rethink its global role to focus on domestic challenges.

This report focuses on one option for the future of the U.S. role in the world: a realist grand strategy of restraint, sometimes referred to as *offshore balancing*. A *grand strategy* is a state's logic for how it will use all of its instruments of national power to defend and promote its vital interests given international and domestic constraints. Therefore, a grand strategy is more than a collection of national security policy

---

<sup>1</sup> For an example of Trump's critique of U.S. allies, see Nicholas Burns, "Trump Violates Diplomacy's Golden Rule," *The Atlantic*, December 4, 2019. For examples of Democratic presidential candidates' calls for ending U.S. wars, see Bill Barrow, "Biden Promises to End 'Forever Wars' as President," *MilitaryTimes.com*, July 11, 2019; Bernie Sanders, "Ending America's Endless War: We Must Stop Giving Terrorists Exactly What They Want," *Foreign Affairs*, June 24, 2019; and Elizabeth Warren, "We Can End Our Endless Wars," *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2020.

recommendations. Rather, it is a set of ideas that policymakers apply when they face decisions about novel or changing circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Still, in this report, we focus on the regional security policy implications of this grand strategy to help policymakers and the public better understand what this grand strategy would look like in practice.

There are many new proposals about how the United States could change its grand strategy.<sup>3</sup> For example, some strategists accept the basic logic that has driven the U.S. approach to the world since the end of the Cold War, but they encourage policymakers to be more skeptical about the ability of the U.S. military to impose democracy or remake societies.<sup>4</sup> Other analysts call on the United States to emphasize international laws and institutions over military power.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> There is no single agreed-upon definition of *grand strategy*. Our conception of grand strategy draws from the following sources: Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case Against Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2012; B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, New York: Meridian, 1991; Paul M. Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 5; and Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Some have questioned the value of debating and developing a grand strategy. We argue that, regardless of whether a nation’s leaders choose to spend the time developing a written strategy, the policies they choose reflect an underlying set of beliefs about how the world works, what the nation’s vital interests are, and what threats to those interests exist. Therefore, we start from the premise that these core ideas are worth stating and evaluating. From a practical perspective, a stated grand strategy should also provide guidance to the bureaucracy. For example, a well-written grand strategy should offer a sense of priorities that can guide decisions about resource allocation. For skeptical views on the value of grand strategy, see, for example, Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, “The End of Grand Strategy: America Must Think Small,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 3, May–June 2020; and Michael H. Fuchs, “America Doesn’t Need a Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Policy*, Fall 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016; and Michael J. Mazarr, “Rethinking Restraint: Why It Fails in Practice,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Vol. 128, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011; and G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, September 27, 2006.

In general terms, advocates of restraint tend to favor less frequent U.S. use of force, ending or reforming key U.S. security commitments, and a smaller U.S. forward military presence than has been typical since the end of the Cold War. Although some commentators use the term *restraint* and others use *offshore balancing*, none have explained whether the terms are intended to indicate a distinctive set of views.<sup>6</sup> For simplicity, we refer to analysts from this school of thought as *advocates of restraint* and explain when there are differences in logic and policy prescriptions between them.

We focus on a subset of these scholars motivated by realist principles. Proponents of realism describe the international system as anarchic, arguing that, in a self-help world, states seek security as a paramount goal and struggle to achieve a favorable distribution of power.<sup>7</sup> Given the U.S. power and geographic position, a realist grand strategy of restraint starts from a narrower conception of U.S. interests and a lower assessment of the threats that the United States faces than what has been found in recent U.S. grand strategy. It also begins from assumptions about the motives of other states and the effects of U.S. policy that are different from the assumptions of advocates of other restrained grand strategies.

---

<sup>6</sup> For those that use the term *restraint*, see, for example, Posen, 2014; Emma Ashford, “Unbalanced: Rethinking America’s Commitment to the Middle East,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2018a; and Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Spring 1997. As we show in the chapters that follow, the term *offshore balancing* is used by those who have different policy prescriptions, especially in the critical region of East Asia. See, for example, Jasen J. Castillo, “Passing the Torch: Criteria for Implementing a Grand Strategy of Offshore Balancing,” in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Center for a New American Security, 2019; Christopher Layne, “China’s Challenge to US Hegemony,” *Current History*, Vol. 107, No. 705, January 1, 2008; and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4, July–August 2016.

<sup>7</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001; Posen, 2014; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1979; and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987.

When advocates of restraint apply their beliefs to current conditions, they generate many recommended changes to existing U.S. policy. Because the level of U.S. interests and threats to those interests vary by region, so too do the prescriptions of advocates of restraint. For example, some advocates of restraint see greater threats to U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific and, therefore, promote much greater U.S. military involvement in that region than in Europe. Similarly, the specific policy prescriptions of advocates of restraint can change with time as conditions change. For example, most advocates of restraint favored a large military presence and strong U.S. alliances in Europe during the Cold War when they believed that the Soviet Union represented a serious threat to vital U.S. interests. However, advocates of restraint assess that Russia currently represents a much smaller threat than the Soviet Union and, therefore, requires a different strategy.<sup>8</sup>

Advocates of restraint have started at a high level of abstraction, offering an overarching logic for how the United States should approach the world and critiquing key elements of U.S. grand strategy since the end of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> They have articulated what they see as the country's vital interests (e.g., security of the homeland), threats to those interests, and broad approaches to promoting or defending U.S. interests. A grand strategy is not intended to articulate all of the detailed policies that the United States should pursue. Rather, as noted earlier, a grand strategy provides the framework that policymakers can apply to set priorities and identify appropriate policies in a given situation.

Still, as policymakers and the public begin to take greater interest in these proposals, there is a need for information on what a more restrained approach to grand strategy means in practical terms. Describing the strategy's policy recommendations for today's conditions can help policymakers and the public engage with the strategy's logic and give analysts more information to evaluate its costs and benefits. Moreover, if policymakers accept the logic of a grand strategy of

---

<sup>8</sup> Posen, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> For an early articulation of these ideas, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997. For an overview, see Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996–1997.

restraint, they might want to know how to implement it. Advocates of restraint have offered some policy recommendations, as we detail in the chapters that follow. But there is still more work to be done.

In this report, therefore, we take stock of their existing recommendations and identify next steps in operationalizing a grand strategy of restraint. To do so, we ask the following:

1. What broad and specific changes to U.S. security policies toward key regions have advocates of restraint already recommended?
2. Where do key policy prescriptions still need to be developed?
3. What type of analysis would help fill these gaps?

By answering these three questions, we focus on how U.S. policy would change under a realist grand strategy of restraint. We do not assess whether such a grand strategy rests on valid assumptions or is, on the whole, advisable. Prescriptions made by advocates of restraint are based on a series of causal claims about the way in which the world works. For example, advocates of restraint argue that when a state's survival is threatened, it will choose to balance against the threat rather than submit to being dominated.<sup>10</sup> Testing such causal claims is an important part of refining the logic and policy prescriptions of a grand strategy of restraint, evaluating whether its core logic is valid, and ultimately deciding whether it should guide the U.S. approach to the world. The RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy is assessing the validity of these assumptions in separate research. In this report, however, we take these causal claims as given to focus on a grand strategy of restraint's policy prescriptions.

## Overview of the Debate About U.S. Grand Strategy

It can be difficult to make sense of the debate about U.S. grand strategy, in part because analysts and commentators do not use terms consistently and often speak past one another rather than engaging

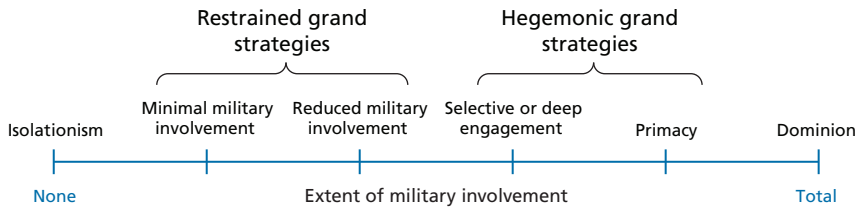
---

<sup>10</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997; Posen, 2014; Walt, 1987.

directly. Adding to the confusion, not every position in the debate has been clearly articulated or named. In this section, we explain how the various positions within the grand strategy debate relate to one another and where a realist grand strategy of restraint sits within this debate.<sup>11</sup>

In the public discourse, proposed grand strategies are characterized primarily by the extent of U.S. military involvement that they prescribe in key regions. By *military involvement*, we mean the number and depth of U.S. security commitments, the number of U.S. troops forward deployed abroad in peacetime, and the number of interests over which the United States would use force. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has adopted grand strategies that fall within the broad heading of a hegemonic grand strategy (see Figure 1.1). These grand strategies share a common belief that overwhelming U.S. power advantages and a high level of U.S. military engagement are required to promote U.S. interests.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1.1**  
**Alternative Grand Strategies**



<sup>11</sup> For more in-depth comparisons of alternative grand strategies, see Paul C. Avey, Jonathan N. Markowitz, and Robert J. Reardon, “Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, November 2018; and Posen and Ross, 1996–1997.

<sup>12</sup> This school of thought draws on a set of ideas, known as *hegemonic stability theory*, that fits within the realist school of thought (see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1981; and Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986). This set of realist ideas differs from that which has given rise to proposals for a realist grand strategy of restraint, as we discuss later. For a detailed discussion of how different strands of realism have given rise to different views in the grand strategy debate, see Christopher Layne, “Less Is More: Minimal Realism in East Asia,” *National Interest*, March 1, 1996.

But, as noted earlier, grand strategies are defined not only by their prescriptions but also by their underlying logic. A grand strategy's specific prescriptions can change depending on international conditions and can also encompass a broader range of issues beyond military engagement. For this reason, alternative grand strategies sometimes have additional modifiers to indicate the underlying logic. For example, scholars use the terms *liberal hegemony* or *liberal internationalism* to describe post–Cold War U.S. grand strategy prior to the Trump administration. Although there have been variations, grand strategies in this time period were defined not only by a belief in the value of U.S. hegemony but also by liberal ideas. These included the beliefs that democracies tend not to fight one another and that economic interdependence tends to promote global prosperity and reduce the risk of conflict.<sup>13</sup> During this period, the United States exercised its power through a system of rules and institutions that it helped create and support, referred to as the *liberal international order*.<sup>14</sup>

Not all hegemonic U.S. grand strategies have been liberal, however. For example, one scholar has suggested the term *illiberal hegemony* to describe U.S. grand strategy under the Trump administration.<sup>15</sup> This grand strategy includes a rejection of the value of free trade, economic interdependence, and international institutions. The Trump administration has also openly questioned its relations with democratic allies. However, grand strategy under the Trump administration is still predicated on U.S. hegemony, seeking to maintain economic and military superiority for the United States, and has an even more bellicose stance on competition with existing adversaries.

---

<sup>13</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2009; and Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Ikenberry, 2011; and Posen, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Barry R. Posen, "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 2, March–April 2018b.

Scholars have discussed at length how U.S. grand strategy should evolve in the future.<sup>16</sup> For example, scholars who accept the core elements of post–Cold War grand strategy but who are skeptical of what they see as its excesses—such as democracy promotion by force in the early 2000s and the antagonism of U.S. allies and partners and further militarization of foreign policy during the Trump administration—use such terms as *deep engagement* or *selective engagement*.<sup>17</sup> Still, advocates of deep and selective engagement believe in sustaining significant U.S. military involvement abroad. This comes from a belief that the United States can best promote its interests via a sizable U.S. forward military presence, the vast network of U.S. alliances, and, more generally, the United States setting the rules of the international system and using its military power to defend it.<sup>18</sup> The terms *primacy*, *deep engagement plus*, and *benevolent hegemony* describe hegemonic grand strategies that call for higher levels of military engagement, more-confrontational policies toward other great powers, and a greater willingness to use force in pursuit of U.S. interests.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Our descriptions of these alternative strategies to restraint are intended to show the broader landscape of the grand strategy debate rather than to be exhaustive. For a more extensive review of the schools of thought in grand strategy, see Avey, Markowitz, and Rendon, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Art is one of the core thinkers associated with the term *selective engagement*. Brooks and Wohlforth use the term *deep engagement*. These scholars broadly agree with the mainstream foreign policy positions of politicians who seek to maintain much of U.S. grand strategy but avoid future interventions in the vein of Iraq and Afghanistan. See Robert Art, “Selective Engagement in the Era of Austerity,” in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America’s Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012; Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020; and Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Although advocates of deep engagement and restraint agree on some areas, such as the need for more-judicious use of military power, the two groups subscribe to a different set of causal beliefs and also disagree on many core policy issues. For example, advocates of deep engagement support sustaining U.S. forward military presence and alliances because they believe states will fail to balance against aggression in the absence of U.S. leadership; see Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, “Should America Retrench? The Battle over Offshore Balancing: The Risks of Retreat,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 6, November–December 2016;

Advocates for restrained grand strategies, on the other hand, seek to significantly decrease U.S. military involvement abroad. They generally call for a decreased overseas military presence, cuts to the defense budget, and restrictions on the use of force. As we noted earlier, some analysts use the term *offshore balancing* while others use *restraint* to capture this set of policy prescriptions. Just as there are variations among those who promote hegemonic grand strategies, there are variations among those who promote more-restrained grand strategies. These variations include the level of reduction of military engagement they prescribe and the logic that motivates their prescriptions.<sup>20</sup> For example, progressive, libertarian, and some realist thinkers promote grand strategies that fall under the broad heading of restraint.<sup>21</sup>

We focus in this report on those motivated by a particular set of realist ideas that we describe in the next section.<sup>22</sup> However, we do not focus on all advocates of restrained grand strategies. This is because, in spite of many shared policy prescriptions, these strategists have different normative and theoretical priors. For example, we do not focus on advocates of progressive grand strategies, whose goals of creating a more just world, combating climate change, and reducing inequality at

---

Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006. This school of thought has no set nomenclature. Kagan, for instance, used the term *benevolent hegemony*. William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4, July–August 1996. For a discussion of the difference between deep engagement and more-ambitious hegemonic variants, see Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of the most-minimal engagement, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997; and Christopher Layne, "Offshore Balancing Revisited," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2002. For an example of a moderately restrained perspective, see Posen, 2014. For a restrained grand strategy that would entail less dramatic reduction compared with today, see Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> For a progressive perspective, see Stephen Wertheim, "The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn't Dominate the World," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020. For a libertarian perspective, see Christopher A. Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011. As noted earlier, not all realists are advocates of restraint. We detail the particular realist ideas that are associated with restraint in the next section.

<sup>22</sup> This includes those associated with libertarian organizations, such as the Cato Institute, that also apply a realist logic.

home are served by less military engagement.<sup>23</sup> From a theoretical perspective, for example, progressives believe that reforming international institutions to be more democratic would reduce the risk of conflict between countries,<sup>24</sup> whereas realist thinkers believe that international institutions can and should reflect the interests of major powers and do not substantially constrain state behavior.

As a result of these normative and theoretical differences, we believe that realist and progressive advocates of restraint are likely to diverge in other issue areas. We say that these grand strategies are likely different because articulations of a progressive grand strategy are still emerging, making it difficult to fully assess areas of convergence and divergence with a realist grand strategy of restraint.<sup>25</sup> However, some differences have already emerged. For instance, one advocate of progressive restraint has argued that the greatest threat to the United States is climate change rather than the rise of a regional hegemon.<sup>26</sup> Others have argued that the United States should maintain its democratic allies to help combat authoritarianism and nationalism, while realist advocates of restraint question some of these U.S. commitments.<sup>27</sup>

Restrained grand strategies are distinct from isolationism, which calls for more-extreme U.S. retrenchment. Braumoeller defines *isolationism* as “the voluntary and general abstention by a state from security-related activity in an area of the international system in which

---

<sup>23</sup> Uri Friedman, “The Sanders Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*, February 11, 2020; Wertheim, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Van Jackson, “Toward a Progressive Theory of Security,” *War on the Rocks*, December 6, 2018; and Alex Ward, “Read: Bernie Sanders’ Big Foreign Policy Speech,” *Vox*, September 21, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> For an initial discussion of their differences and similarities, see Stephen M. Walt, “Socialists and Libertarians Need an Alliance Against the Establishment,” *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2018f.

<sup>26</sup> Wertheim, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, 2018; Adam Mount, “Principles for a Progressive Defense Policy,” in *Texas National Security Review, Policy Roundtable: The Future of Progressive Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2018; and Ganesh Sitaraman, “The Emergence of Progressive Foreign Policy,” *War on the Rocks*, April 15, 2019.

it is capable of action.”<sup>28</sup> Although advocates of restraint argue that the United States should do less in many regions, they do not call for the United States to end all involvement in security affairs in key regions under all conditions. This represents the core difference between grand strategies of restraint and those of isolationism.

Having distinguished a realist grand strategy of restraint from both those that make fundamentally different prescriptions and those that arise from different theoretical origins, we now turn to explaining the fundamental elements of a realist grand strategy of restraint.

## Overview of a Realist Grand Strategy of Restraint

At the core of any grand strategy is an articulation of a nation’s interests, an assessment of the threats the nation faces, a set of beliefs about how the world works, and broad prescriptions about how the nation should employ its limited resources to advance and defend its interests. This section provides a brief overview of these elements of a realist grand strategy of restraint as a basis for the detailed discussion of policy implications in the chapters that follow.

### Interests

Advocates of restraint define U.S. interests narrowly.<sup>29</sup> They consider the defense of the U.S. homeland, which includes U.S. sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the safety of U.S. citizens, to be a vital interest.

---

<sup>28</sup> Bear F. Braumoeller, “The Myth of American Isolationism,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2010, p. 354. For a discussion of the distinction between isolationism and restraint, see Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> Beyond security of the homeland, grand strategies often start from different conceptions of what interests are vital (see Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon, 2018, p. 33). For different articulations of U.S. interests, see Robert J. Art, “Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1998, pp. 83–97; Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Summer 1997; Mearsheimer, 2001; and Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005, pp. 26–27.

Advocates of restraint also seek to maintain the U.S. position as the most militarily capable country in the world, because U.S. military superiority enables the United States to protect these core interests.<sup>30</sup> Relatedly, advocates of restraint believe that continued U.S. economic strength is fundamental to maintaining U.S. military superiority.<sup>31</sup>

Current U.S. grand strategy, as stated in the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), describes some of the same interests, such as the security of the U.S. homeland and U.S. prosperity—although, as we explain throughout the report, with a very different conception from a grand strategy of restraint of how to protect these interests.<sup>32</sup> In one important way, however, the NSS has a more expansive view of U.S. interests. Although advocates of restraint have not consistently defined the level of power that the United States must hold moving forward, some have argued that it is a vital U.S. interest to maintain its power position and remain the most capable country in the world. The NSS suggests that the United States needs to have even greater power advantages—what it calls “overmatch.” The wording in all of these sources is vague, so the difference in wording is more one of tone about the level of U.S. power advantages needed than a clear statement of how they differ.<sup>33</sup>

Advocates of restraint diverge even more substantially from other post–Cold War NSSs in their articulation of U.S. interests. For example, advocates of restraint value cooperation with other states, but they do not consider the defense of U.S. allies and partners to be an intrinsic U.S. interest, instead viewing it as an objective that, in some cases,

---

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016; Posen, 2014, pp. 69–71.

<sup>31</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 70. Some go further and list economic prosperity as a vital interest, even if it were not the basis of U.S. power (see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 9).

<sup>32</sup> The NSS states key U.S. interests and threats to those interests, as well as how the United States will defend them, in the same section. It is only the narrow statements of U.S. interests that align with a grand strategy of restraint. As we discuss throughout the report, advocates of restraint differ substantially from the 2017 NSS in their threat assessments and how to achieve U.S. interests (White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, pp. 3–6).

<sup>33</sup> Compare the discussions in the following sources: Posen, 2014, pp. 69–71; White House, 2017, p. 28.

helps ensure U.S. security. Advocates of restraint see alliances as means, not ends. Similarly, unlike earlier U.S. NSS documents, advocates of restraint do not consider the spread of democracy to be a vital national interest.<sup>34</sup>

### Causal Beliefs

Advocates of restraint start from a particular set of realist beliefs about how the world works.<sup>35</sup> The first core belief is that the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no overarching authority to enforce the rules of the system. Although cooperation is possible, states ultimately rely on themselves for survival and security. States try to preserve their power, so, when a threat emerges, they seek to pass the buck in hopes that other states will bear the costs of facing the threat. At the same time, states balance when they are unable to pass the buck, building up their military capabilities, seeking allies, and even fighting wars to combat threats.<sup>36</sup> Advocates of restraint also tend to believe in the importance of nationalism, so they expect people and their governments to strongly resist domination, invasion, and occupation by other states.<sup>37</sup>

Advocates of restraint believe that nuclear weapons have significant effects on international politics. These strategists expect that states with a secure nuclear retaliatory capability, one that can be used to

---

<sup>34</sup> For an earlier example that lists alliances and the spread of democracy as U.S. interests, see White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., January 1987, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> There are many competing ideas within the realist school of thought, and not all realists are advocates of restraint. For example, proponents of deep engagement are realists who believe in hegemonic stability theory rather than balance of threat theory. Although hegemonic stability theory begins from the same underlying premise—i.e., that the international system is one of anarchy and self-help—it argues that peace arises when a single state acquires a preponderance of power and the ability to facilitate cooperation. Therefore, analysts with this perspective tend to support U.S. forward presence and active U.S. involvement to facilitate balancing against aggressors in key regions. Layne, 1996, provides a more detailed discussion of how different realist beliefs lead to different perspectives on grand strategy.

<sup>36</sup> Mearsheimer, 2001; Posen, 2014; Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018.

retaliate even after an adversary uses nuclear weapons first, can deter nuclear attacks. The possibility that conventional war could escalate to a nuclear exchange also induces caution, making nuclear-armed powers less likely to fight each other directly. At the same time, advocates of restraint argue that it is more difficult to credibly threaten to use nuclear weapons in defense of an ally, because doing so would invite nuclear retaliation. Therefore, states tend to adopt dangerous nuclear policies in an attempt to make such threats credible. As a result, the stakes involved in extending nuclear deterrence to allies are high, creating greater peacetime competition and greater risks in the event of war. Relatedly, advocates of restraint believe that countries are better able to credibly threaten nuclear use to protect themselves. As a result, advocates of restraint are more sanguine about nuclear proliferation as long as a country is able to develop a secure retaliatory capability and protect its stockpile from terrorist and other groups.<sup>38</sup>

Advocates of restraint see alliances as useful tools for aggregating capability and signaling commitments to deter aggression in the right circumstances, such as the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to defend Western Europe during the Cold War. Alliances, in these cases, require careful management to ensure that they effectively deter the adversary and that allies trust one another and do not worry about the risk of abandonment. However, advocates of restraint also believe that alliances come with risks. Alliance relationships, as well as policies adopted by allies to assure one another about their commitment to the relationship, can make adversaries more insecure, leading to increased competition and risk of war.<sup>39</sup> Advocates of restraint argue that alliance commitments can increase ally incentives to adopt riskier policies, knowing that their ally will protect them if war ensues. This creates the risk of *entrapment*—being pulled into an unwanted war—as states see their own credibility at stake in a greater

---

<sup>38</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 34; Layne, 1996; Posen, 2014, pp. 71–72, 75.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Castillo's discussion of forward troop presence; Castillo, 2019, p. 28. For a theoretical explanation and empirical evaluation of this point, see Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Spring 1999.

range of issues involving their ally.<sup>40</sup> Advocates of restraint argue that when the stakes are lower, such as when the adversary is relatively weak or when U.S. interests are low, such risks could outweigh the benefits.<sup>41</sup>

More generally, advocates of restraint are motivated by realist, not liberal, principles.<sup>42</sup> They do not believe that economic interdependence decreases the probability of conflict or promotes great-power peace.<sup>43</sup> Advocates of restraint do see the U.S. economy as a fundamental source of U.S. power, and they see U.S. maintenance of economic relations, such as trade and investment, with other nations as a positive good.<sup>44</sup> However, they do not consider defending these economic relations to be a central U.S. interest or fundamental to U.S. security. They argue that the U.S. economy is strong and diverse, making it less sensitive than the economies of other countries to global instability. For this reason, advocates of restraint do not believe that even the prevention of war globally is necessary for U.S. prosperity.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, advocates of restraint do not believe that a world of liberal democracies and strong international institutions is sufficient for a world of peace. Although all acknowledge the empirical regularity that democracies historically have been less likely to go to war with one another, advocates of restraint argue that there is no clear causal logic to the democratic peace theory and that, instead, the lack of war

---

<sup>40</sup> Castillo, 2019, p. 28; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007, p. 167; and Posen, 2014, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> This logic is not explicit but is implied by the policy prescriptions of advocates of restraint and their descriptions of trade-offs involved in alliances in the current operating environment.

<sup>42</sup> Mearsheimer, 2018, argues that nationalism will always undercut a liberal foreign policy.

<sup>43</sup> Realists have traditionally argued the opposite; see Waltz, 1979.

<sup>44</sup> For an early example, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn't Pay to Preserve the Peace," *Security Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Summer 2001; and Posen, 2014, p. 63.

between democratic states can be explained by realist principles.<sup>46</sup> As a result, democracy is not itself a goal, and regime type should not determine whom U.S. allies and adversaries should be. In addition, although advocates of restraint see international institutions as performing valuable practical functions, they do not believe that these institutions fundamentally transform state behavior.<sup>47</sup>

These foundational beliefs, as well as a larger set of assumptions about the international system detailed in their writings, lead advocates of restraint to disagree with many current U.S. policymakers on the effects of U.S. policy.<sup>48</sup> Current U.S. strategy documents emphasize the challenge of deterring other powers, such as Russia and China, from using force against U.S. allies and partners.<sup>49</sup> As we detail in the chapters that follow, advocates of restraint look at the problem of *extended deterrence*—detering attacks on allies and partners—differently from current U.S. policymakers. First, as we noted earlier, advocates of restraint believe that, in some cases, allies and partners should do more to deter aggression themselves and that the United States should not commit to defending as many places. While the 2017 NSS contends that “malign actors fill the void” whenever the United States does less,<sup>50</sup> advocates of restraint expect that U.S. partners will provide more for their own defense if the United States does less.<sup>51</sup> Second, advocates of restraint do not believe that U.S. deterrence is as easily undermined

---

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Layne, “Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1994; and Sebastian Rosato, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4, November 2003.

<sup>47</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994–1995.

<sup>48</sup> The RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy is conducting separate research to compile and assess these assumptions. For a more detailed discussion of the key assumptions underlying a grand strategy of restraint, see book-length treatments, such as Layne, 2007; and Posen, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> White House, 2017; and U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2018.

<sup>50</sup> White House, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 15–19; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 74; Posen, 2014, pp. 33–38.

as other commentators do.<sup>52</sup> Advocates of restraint do not believe, for example, that more-cooperative policies toward an adversary would make the United States look weak willed and provoke aggression. Advocates of restraint thus see fewer threats to deter and believe that the United States does not need to do as much to deter those threats.

Advocates of restraint also worry more about the effects of U.S. foreign policy on the national budget than those who defend traditional post–Cold War U.S. grand strategy. Advocates of restraint argue that recent U.S. military interventions have proven expensive and that these expenses might be increasingly difficult to sustain as domestic problems, such as public health and aging infrastructure, place greater demands on the national budget.<sup>53</sup> Advocates of restraint worry that economic fragility, brought on by domestic choices, could undermine the basis of U.S. power, and they tend to see a large defense budget as a drag on the U.S. economy.<sup>54</sup>

### **Threat Assessment**

Many of those who are now advocates of restraint believed in a very different grand strategy during the Cold War. Absent U.S. military commitments and forward military presence, they noted, the Soviet Union might have been able to dominate Western Europe or East Asia, threatening vital U.S. interests.<sup>55</sup> However, with the end of the Cold War, the threat environment changed substantially. Advocates of restraint do not believe that any state currently has the strength to achieve the

---

<sup>52</sup> Jasen J. Castillo and Alexander B. Downes, “Loyalty, Hedging, or Exit: How Weaker Alliance Partners Respond to the Rise of New Threats,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2020; and Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin H. Friedman and Christopher A. Preble, “Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint,” Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 667, September 21, 2010; Preble, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 87; and Stephen M. Walt, “US Grand Strategy After the Cold War: Can Realism Explain It? Should Realism Guide It?” *International Relations*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 2018b. Not all advocates of restraint feel that containment of the Soviet Union was warranted. For example, see John Mueller, “Assessing International Threats During and After the Cold War,” Cato Institute, May 6, 2020.

level of influence that the Soviets had during the Cold War.<sup>56</sup> It is this significantly less threatening environment, they argue, that allows the United States to draw down its military commitments, presence, and spending in a way that was not advisable during the Cold War.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from the demise of the Soviet Union, advocates of restraint point to several other features of the international system that contribute to U.S. security. The geographic distance of the United States from other powerful countries makes it unlikely that any other powers could invade the U.S. homeland.<sup>58</sup> U.S. economic diversity means that instability in other regions, while disruptive, is not usually a major threat to the U.S. economy.<sup>59</sup>

The rise of a regional hegemon, a state that is economically and militarily strong enough to dominate Europe, East Asia, or the Persian Gulf, would constitute a threat to U.S. interests.<sup>60</sup> As noted earlier, however, advocates of restraint do not expect such a state to arise in the foreseeable future in Europe or the Middle East. This is, in part, because advocates of restraint believe that if Russia or Iran became more powerful than either is today, other countries in the region would resist domination by banding together and increasing their own capabilities to confront the threat.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, as a backstop, the United States would retain significant military power and the ability to project power globally, enabling it to respond if such balancing failed. As we detail in Chapter Three, differences among advocates of restraint over

---

<sup>56</sup> As we discuss in later chapters, advocates of restraint have not yet defined exactly what level of power and influence a single state would need to have to dominate its region and, therefore, threaten vital U.S. interests.

<sup>57</sup> Castillo, 2019; Christopher J. Fettweis, "Threatlessness and US Grand Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 5, 2014; John Glaser, Christopher A. Preble, and A. Trevor Thrall, "Towards a More Prudent American Grand Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 5, 2019, p. 36; and Posen, 2014, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Layne, 2007; Posen, 2014, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Gholz and Press, 2001; Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997.

<sup>60</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 87; Walt, 2018b. As we mentioned earlier, not all advocates of restraint feel that containment of the Soviet Union was warranted. For example, see Mueller, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> For a partial exception, see the discussion in Chapter Three of disagreements among advocates of restraint over the threat that China poses.

the threat that China poses explain some of the differences in policy prescriptions for the Asia-Pacific.

In sum, advocates of restraint see the United States as quite secure today. As a result, they do not believe that the United States should spend as much on defense as it currently does. Moreover, to the extent that they see current or potential threats to the United States, advocates of restraint believe that a more restrained, and less expensive, grand strategy would be more effective at protecting U.S. interests.

### General Prescriptions

Because of their narrower conception of U.S. interests and different assumptions about the effects of U.S. policy, advocates of restraint recommend that the United States significantly alter how it protects and promotes its interests. The specific changes vary by region, as we detail in the chapters that follow, depending on the level of U.S. interests and the threat to those interests.

In broad terms, advocates of restraint argue that the United States should use military force less often; be less involved in providing security in key regions, such as Europe and Asia; have fewer forces based abroad; and reduce its overall force structure. Advocates of restraint emphasize the importance of abandoning the use of force to promote democracy,<sup>62</sup> and to prevent the abuse of human rights,<sup>63</sup> except in very narrow circumstances.<sup>64</sup> The United States should not attempt to address the root causes of violence through military intervention

---

<sup>62</sup> Emma Ashford, "Power and Pragmatism: Reforming American Foreign Policy for the 21st Century," in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2019, p. 9; Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, "Why the U.S. Military Budget Is 'Foolish and Sustainable,'" *Orbis*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Spring 2012, p. 184; and Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 10; Posen, 2014, pp. 53–56. Advocates of deep engagement likewise make these two points. See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Humanitarian operations of other kinds, however, are an acceptable use of the military; see Ashford, 2018a, p. 143.

or seek to reconstruct societies, given that there is little evidence that external interventions can build liberal democratic institutions in societies rent by conflict.<sup>65</sup>

Although advocates of restraint generally call for the United States to do less militarily and to encourage other states to take the lead in their own regions, they do not call for U.S. disengagement or isolationism. Advocates of restraint argue that the United States should be more active in its use of diplomacy and negotiations to settle conflicts of interest.<sup>66</sup> Although more skeptical of U.S. security guarantees,<sup>67</sup> advocates of restraint still promote U.S. engagement with current allies and partners, participation in international institutions, and international cooperation on shared challenges, such as climate change.<sup>68</sup> In addition, under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States would continue to play a central role in international commerce and would not revert to economic protectionism.<sup>69</sup> Although advocates of restraint seek to reduce U.S. forward military presence, they still seek to maintain U.S. command of the commons. The commons include space and maritime areas that “belong to no one state and that provide access to much of the globe,”<sup>70</sup> as well as the air at high altitudes that countries cannot practically control, because of the limits of integrated air defense and other technologies.<sup>71</sup> In his initial analysis, conducted in 2003, Posen argued that having command of the commons “means that the United States gets vastly more military use out of the sea, space, and air than

---

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs, “Intervention and Democracy,” *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2006; and Posen, 2014, pp. 53–56.

<sup>66</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “The End of Hubris: And the New Age of American Restraint,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 3, May–June 2019a.

<sup>67</sup> Layne, 2007, p. 167; Posen, 2014, pp. 33, 67.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Layne, 2002, p. 235; Mearsheimer, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 5–6.

<sup>70</sup> Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Summer 2003, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> In 2003, Posen put this at altitudes above 15,000 feet for many states, aside from more-capable adversaries, such as Russia and China—but that number might be higher, given changes in military technology since then (Posen, 2003, p. 8).

do others; that it can credibly threaten to deny their use to others.”<sup>72</sup> As we discuss throughout the report, advocates of restraint have been more vocal about U.S. command of the maritime commons than the other domains.

Ultimately, a grand strategy of restraint would aim to avoid squandering blood and treasure on issues that are not central to preserving U.S. security. Advocates of restraint seek to conserve U.S. resources to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in East Asia, Europe, or the Persian Gulf.<sup>73</sup> Although advocates of restraint do aim to reduce the U.S. defense budget, they do not seek to abandon U.S. forward presence or military operations entirely. Under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States would still be willing to use force outside the defense of its homeland to defend key interests and may maintain some key security commitments.<sup>74</sup> As a result, although the United States would have fewer security commitments and would use force less frequently, advocates of restraint still support the maintenance of a strong military.

### **Major Critiques of Restraint**

The grand strategy literature highlights several key potential risks that enacting a realist grand strategy of restraint would entail.<sup>75</sup> Advocates of restraint acknowledge that less military engagement might provoke U.S. allies, or former allies, to acquire nuclear weapons. This could lead to further proliferation by their neighbors. As we noted earlier in this chapter, advocates of restraint do not see this as a grave concern. Although advocates of restraint are concerned that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists or other nonstate actors, they believe that the likelihood of this is low, since states likely to prolifer-

---

<sup>72</sup> Posen, 2003, p. 8. Recent trends, which we discuss later in the report, might affect the assessment of where and to what extent the United States retains command of the commons today and in the future.

<sup>73</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 72.

<sup>75</sup> Given that we focus on policy implications of restraint rather than evaluating its advisability, we present only a brief overview of key critiques. For more-comprehensive treatment of these issues, see, for example, Brands and Feaver, 2016; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016.

ate have the capability to secure their stockpiles. On balance, therefore, advocates of restraint are willing to live with the risks of increased nuclear proliferation.

Second, proponents of hegemonic grand strategies argue that less U.S. military engagement will unleash regional competition, arms spirals, territorial disputes, and wars. These wars, they claim, will threaten to pull the United States back into the region, putting the United States at a greater disadvantage than if it had never left. Advocates of restraint acknowledge that some increase in regional instability is possible, but argue that it is not a threat to vital U.S. interests. Because advocates of restraint would not intervene as frequently in each region, they are less worried about being late to the fight because of having to deploy more forces from the U.S. homeland rather than from within the region. Still, as we detail in later chapters, advocates of restraint have not fully explained whether there are conditions under which they would consider deploying back to a region to try to prevent a conflict where U.S. interests were at stake or whether they would always prefer to accept the costs and risks of deploying once war had begun.

Lastly, some argue that if the United States draws down its forces or reduces its commitments in one region, this would make it more difficult to deter adversaries and reassure allies and partners in other regions. Advocates of restraint accept that allies might be rattled. But they argue that U.S. credibility with adversaries is not easily damaged. U.S. adversaries are more likely to consider the U.S. ability to bring capabilities to bear and the issues at stake on a case-by-case basis. As a result, advocates of restraint argue that alliances can be terminated or reshaped with little impact on other extant commitments.<sup>76</sup>

The chapters that follow illustrate several other disagreements between advocates of restraint and those who defend the key elements of post-Cold War U.S. grand strategy.

---

<sup>76</sup> Layne, 2007; Press, 2005.

## Approach

In this report, we take stock of the regional security policies proposed by self-identified advocates of restraint and identify next steps for further development. We propose a framework of the key security policy issues with which U.S. policymakers grapple within each region and that a grand strategy needs to inform.<sup>77</sup> These are as follows:

**Relationships with potential U.S. adversaries.** This includes identifying potential adversaries and characterizing the nature and extent of the threat they pose. Policymakers also need to know what possible changes in a region would constitute a greater threat to U.S. interests and, therefore, necessitate a change in U.S. regional policy. Any grand strategy should be able to offer guidance on how to manage relationships with potential adversaries in peacetime and the conditions under which the United States would use force. Because so much of U.S. defense planning is affected by the choice of warfighting scenarios, we describe these conditions in as much detail as is available.

**Relationships with allies and partners.** This includes a statement of who U.S. allies and partners should be and how the United States should manage these relationships.

**U.S. posture.** Posture has three elements: forces, footprint, and agreements. *Forces* refers to the number and type (e.g., air, ground, naval) of U.S. forces in the region. *Footprint* refers to the “locations, infrastructure, facilities, land, and pre-positioned equipment.”<sup>78</sup> *Agreements* refers to the formal arrangements that the United States and host governments have reached about the presence of activities of U.S. forces (e.g., treaties, status of forces agreements).<sup>79</sup>

**Security cooperation and assistance.** Security cooperation includes a range of peacetime activities, such as military-to-military exchanges, military exercises with U.S. partners, and training to build

---

<sup>77</sup> We do not focus on economic issues in each regional chapter, because this is the area that has been the least developed by advocates of restraint, as we discuss in Chapter Six.

<sup>78</sup> DoD Instruction (DoDI) 3000.12, *Management of U.S. Global Defense Posture (GDP)*, U.S. Department of Defense, May 6, 2016, Change 1, May 8, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> DoDI 3000.12, 2016, pp. 22–23.

partner capability or capacity. Security assistance includes such activities as selling military equipment and services to U.S. partners and subsidizing partner capability or capacity building.<sup>80</sup> Current U.S. strategy documents state that security cooperation and assistance are important peacetime missions.<sup>81</sup> Security cooperation activities are seen as a way to help build partner capabilities needed to fight alongside the United States, thereby reducing the burden on the United States, and to reassure allies about U.S. commitment to their defense.<sup>82</sup>

Within each of these topics, we consider both the broad approaches and the more detailed policies that advocates of restraint propose for each region. For example, broadly, advocates of restraint call for incentivizing allies to do more for their own defense by reducing U.S. forward presence in Europe. To operationalize that broad prescription, policymakers would want to consider additional details, such as how large the remaining forward presence should be, what kind of forces should remain, and where they should be located. Beyond those questions, even more details would be needed to implement these policies (e.g., date of withdrawal, coordinating the movement of forces with allies). This report focuses on explaining the broad approach and specific policy options rather than these more detailed considerations (Figure 1.2).

Because there might be multiple policy options that are consistent with the logic of a grand strategy of restraint, we note where advocates of restraint differ. Moreover, as noted earlier, the policy implications of a grand strategy evolve as conditions change. Therefore, we used our

---

<sup>80</sup> Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 23, 2017, p. II-4 (for discussion of security assistance specifically).

<sup>81</sup> DoD, 2018, p. 9.

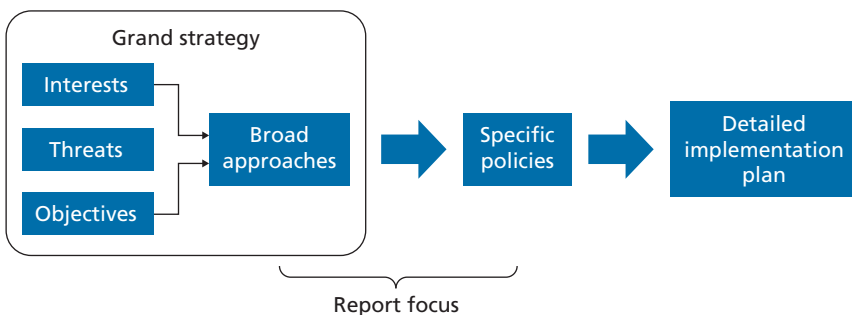
<sup>82</sup> Jennifer D. P. Moroney, David E. Thaler, and Joe Hogler, *Review of Security Cooperation Mechanisms Combatant Commands Utilize to Build Partner Capacity*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-413-OSD, 2013; and Angela O'Mahony, Ilana Blum, Gabriela Armenta, Nicholas Burger, Joshua Mendelsohn, Michael J. McEnerney, Steven W. Popper, Jefferson P. Marquis, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Assessing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Army Security Cooperation: A Framework for Implementation*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2165-A, 2018.

judgment to exclude earlier recommendations made by advocates of restraint that have been overtaken by events.

After taking stock of existing recommendations, we identify areas where either the broad approach or the specific policies associated with a grand strategy of restraint still need to be developed. Then, we look at the broad approaches that advocates of restraint recommend and identify key questions that policymakers would plausibly ask if they wanted to develop more-specific policies. We also consider the key strategic issues with which policymakers are grappling today within the issue areas presented earlier and ask whether advocates of restraint have offered prescriptions on these issues. To identify these current policy concerns, we draw on recent think tank reports and U.S. government policy statements about U.S. interests in key regions and policy areas (e.g., RAND reports, Congressional Research Service reports, State Department regional webpages), as well as insights from subject-matter experts in each region. When there are gaps in policy prescriptions from advocates of restraint, we ask whether other scholars and analysts have made relevant recommendations. We note instances where these commentators share the same underlying logic as advocates of restraint and, therefore, provide additional guidance on the policy implications of the strategy.

Finally, where the regional policy implications of restraint are underdeveloped, we identify the questions that advocates of restraint

**Figure 1.2**  
**Focus of This Report**



need to answer and additional analysis that might be useful for developing more-specific policy recommendations.

This report focuses on identifying the regional security policies that flow from the logic of a grand strategy of restraint, not on evaluating whether these policies are advisable or will achieve the outcomes that advocates of restraint desire.<sup>83</sup> By identifying the policy prescriptions that flow from restraint and offering a roadmap for developing these implications further, this report lays the groundwork for future assessments of the viability of and trade-offs associated with a grand strategy of restraint.

## Outline of This Report

Chapters Two through Five consider the implications of a grand strategy of restraint for key regions: Europe, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and South Asia.<sup>84</sup> Each regional chapter is organized around the framework discussed earlier—considering U.S. relationships with potential adversaries, allies, and partners, as well as posture and security cooperation and assistance. Chapter Six summarizes our findings and offers recommendations for next steps to operationalize a grand strategy of restraint.

---

<sup>83</sup> Moreover, this report discusses regional security policies and, therefore, does not discuss all of the policy implications of a grand strategy of restraint. For example, this report does not focus on how this strategy would change U.S. trade policy, U.S. force size and structure, or nuclear modernization priorities.

<sup>84</sup> Advocates of restraint have not offered policy recommendations for other regions, including Africa and the Americas, that they consider less important because there are no other great powers in those regions. We discuss key questions about these regions in Chapter Six.

## Europe

---

In this chapter, we apply our framework to the European context. In doing so, we will answer the following questions: How do advocates of restraint view the threat posed by Russia? What are the conditions under which the United States might use force against Russia? How should the United States manage its peacetime relationship with Russia? How should the U.S. relationship with NATO evolve? What kind of posture should the United States maintain in the region? And, finally, what is the role of security cooperation and assistance in Europe?

Advocates of restraint disagree substantially with current U.S. policy toward Europe. Advocates of restraint argue that, for now, no country can dominate the region, which is the only threat that could imperil vital U.S. interests in the region. Moreover, these strategists argue that local balancing should be able to prevent such a threat from also emerging in the future. As we detail in this chapter, advocates of restraint argue that this limits the need for the United States to be involved in European military affairs.<sup>1</sup> As one commentator put it, the United States is not accomplishing much in Europe, besides allowing European countries to “spend on social programs rather than defense.”<sup>2</sup>

In particular, advocates of restraint recommend that the United States dramatically reduce security commitments to countries in Europe, as well as military presence and activities in the region. As

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, we identify areas where more development is needed to assess and implement these broad recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 8.

the United States reduces its presence in Europe, it would encourage European countries to develop more of their own military capabilities. The United States would either seek to reform NATO and its collective defense commitment or leave NATO and enter a looser security cooperation agreement with its former allies. Moreover, advocates of restraint believe that the United States should adopt a less confrontational policy toward Russia.<sup>3</sup> This would include accepting a Russian sphere of influence on its periphery and compromising on existing conflicts of interest, such as NATO enlargement and U.S. aid to Ukraine. Importantly, advocates of restraint see few circumstances under which the United States should use force in Europe and do not support, for example, interventions for humanitarian operations in Europe, as the United States has done in the past.<sup>4</sup>

## U.S. Policy Toward Russia

Advocates of restraint do not argue that Russia poses a significant threat to vital U.S. interests, and they argue that focusing on Russia distracts from the larger threat posed by China. That said, they concede that Russia is the most plausible candidate to become a serious threat to vital U.S. interests in the future. This section outlines how advocates of restraint assess the threat that Russia poses, when they would recommend the use of force against Russia, and how they would manage peacetime relations with Russia to protect other U.S. interests and reduce the risk of war.

---

<sup>3</sup> Walt, 2019a; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, “What the Evolution of NATO’s Missions Means for the Future,” Cato Institute, January 27, 2019c. For critiques of past U.S. interventions in Europe, see Ted Galen Carpenter, “How Kosovo Poisoned America’s Relationship with Russia,” Cato Institute, May 19, 2017b; Christopher Preble, “New Rules for U.S. Military Intervention,” *War on the Rocks*, September 20, 2016; and Posen, 2014, p. 53.

### Threats to Vital U.S. Interests, and When the United States Should Use Force

Advocates of restraint note that Russia is economically and militarily weak compared with the Soviet Union during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Walt, for example, underlines that, in comparison with Russia, “the United States is vastly stronger on nearly every dimension that matters,” and that Russia, contrary to the Soviet Union, has no attractive ideology to offer—while the appeal of “America’s liberal brand” is global.<sup>6</sup> Advocates of restraint acknowledge that Russia is waging a war in Ukraine and a disinformation and influence campaign that has included U.S. allies as targets, but they disagree with many current U.S. policymakers who believe that these activities represent a serious threat to U.S. interests.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, advocates of restraint believe that the other European states could and would balance against Russia, Germany, or any other power that sought to dominate the region in the future.<sup>8</sup> Only if local balancing unexpectedly failed would advocates of restraint see a significant threat to vital U.S. interests that would necessitate greater U.S. military involvement in Europe, including the use of force.

Advocates of restraint have, therefore, provided a broad conception of how to assess the threat that Russia poses and identify when the United States should use force. There are, however, several details that would help policymakers apply this logic in practice. Importantly, although advocates of restraint have been clear that Russia is not currently a serious threat to vital U.S. interests, policymakers need to understand what changes in capabilities, behavior, or level of influence *would* make Russia a threat to vital U.S. interests. Given the realist logic

---

<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, “Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5, September–October 2016b; Castillo, 2019, pp. 29–30; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016; and Posen, 2014, pp. 87–88.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “I Knew the Cold War. This Is No Cold War,” *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2018c.

<sup>7</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, “Russia Sure Behaves Strangely for a Country Bent on Conquest,” Cato Institute, January 15, 2019b. Walt notes that “no Americans died as a result of Russia’s meddling” (Walt, 2018c).

<sup>8</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 88.

underlying a grand strategy of restraint, we expect that its proponents would focus primarily on changing military capabilities. However, it is not clear exactly what capabilities would enable Russian military domination. For example, would Russia need to have the military capability to conquer a key European power, such as Germany, to constitute a serious threat? Is there anything short of this that should worry U.S. policymakers? Finally, it unclear whether and to what extent advocates of restraint believe that forms of Russian influence beyond raw military power would allow Russia to dominate its region.

Once advocates of restraint clarify what the standard for a serious threat to vital U.S. interests should be, they should offer indicators that the United States can monitor to know whether such a threat is emerging. For example, if advocates of restraint believe that an ability to conquer Germany would make Russia a threat, they would need to identify what power projection capabilities would allow Russia to achieve this goal. In the longer term, if the United States draws down in Europe, as advocates of restraint advise, such an assessment would depend even more on the interaction of Russian and current allies' military investments.

Advocates of restraint assume that current U.S. allies will invest more in defense if the United States retrenches from Europe and, therefore, will prevent Russia's relative power from growing. However, advocates of restraint are attentive to the possibility that European states might not respond as advocates of restraint expect. Therefore, forecasts of how economic conditions and political constraints (including those created by Brexit) might affect Europe's defense investments would help assess the likelihood that local balancing will fail. Such analysis could also offer trends that U.S. policymakers could monitor to get advance warning that local balancing might be insufficient or policy interventions that could help European partners overcome impediments to balancing.

Finally, advocates of restraint have focused primarily on Russia's power in its own region. However, Russia has the capability to affect U.S. interests globally through its space and cyber capabilities. These Russian capabilities have been of particular concern to current U.S. policymakers. Russia's cyber capabilities are even cited as a direct threat

to U.S. democracy because of election interference via social media.<sup>9</sup> Advocates of restraint have not indicated to what extent they believe policymakers should be concerned about current or future Russian space capabilities and have devoted little attention to Russian cyber capabilities.<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of restraint have said that the United States should have a high bar for the use of force, although the exact criteria are not clear. Advocates of restraint believe that the United States would certainly intervene in cases in which it appeared that states in the region might be overrun by a single powerful country, such as when Germany threatened all of the other European powers during World War II. However, it is not clear what scenarios short of this, if any, would provoke U.S. intervention. Ultimately, advocates of restraint need to offer plausible, even if unlikely, situations in which the United States should intervene under a grand strategy of restraint or, instead, explicitly state that there are none. Without such specifics, it is impossible to identify the appropriate force structure or posture for U.S. forces, as we detail later.

Table 2.1 summarizes the next steps for identifying threats and clarifying when the United States would use force in Europe.

### **Managing Relations with Russia in Peacetime**

Advocates of restraint believe that many post–Cold War U.S. policies toward Russia have been counterproductive. NATO enlargement and democracy promotion in countries near Russia’s borders have, in their view, stoked Russian insecurity and provoked Russian aggression.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Daniel R. Coats, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, testimony presented before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> For recent U.S. government statements on Russian capabilities, see, for example, Defense Intelligence Agency, *Challenges to Security in Space*, Washington, D.C., January 2019; and Christopher A. Ford, *Arms Control in Outer Space: History and Prospects*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Vol. I, No. 12, July 24, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Advocates of restraint are not alone in highlighting the potential risks and costs of further expanding NATO and in proposing alternative regional frameworks to reduce tensions with Russia. See Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and*

**Table 2.1**  
**Identifying Threats and Clarifying When the United States Would Use Force Against Russia**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what scenarios would the United States use force in Europe?</li><li>• What changes in capabilities, behavior, or influence would make Russia imperil vital U.S. interests?</li><li>• What indicators would suggest that local balancing might be insufficient?</li><li>• How should the United States respond to Russian interference in U.S. elections? How should the United States respond to Russian disinformation and interference more broadly?</li><li>• When and how should the United States respond to Russian influence operations in Europe?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess European allies’ performance in hypothetical wars with Russia (using scenarios that are of concern to advocates of restraint).</li><li>• Assess how economic and political changes in Europe might affect current allies’ defense spending.</li><li>• Identify institutional and domestic obstacles to developing sufficient European capability to balance Russia and fight without the United States.</li><li>• Project how British defense relations with other European countries would evolve.</li><li>• Assess the extent to which non-military mechanisms of Russian influence over European publics and elites have undermined or could undermine core U.S. interests.</li></ul>

Importantly, the U.S. approach to Russia has created a distraction from the larger threat that China poses,<sup>12</sup> and has even encouraged a rapprochement between Russia and China.<sup>13</sup> Advocates of restraint recommend adopting a more cooperative approach toward Russia and seeking to settle outstanding conflicts of interest. Lind and Press, for example, suggest that the United States and its allies should commit to

*the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018; and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Beyond NATO: A New Security Architecture for Eastern Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Mearsheimer argues that, absent U.S. antagonism, the natural inclination of Russia will be to move closer to the United States over time, simply because an increasingly powerful China is the greater threat to Russia, given its geographical proximity. John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September–October 2014c; John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Spring 2019a; and Posen, 2014, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Walt, 2018c.

ending NATO and European Union (EU) enlargement in return for Russia committing to end its campaign of domestic interference in the West.<sup>14</sup>

Advocates of restraint propose several ways to deflate what they perceive as unnecessary tensions with Russia, although it is not clear whether these proposals should be made unilaterally or only in return for Russian concessions. For example, advocates of restraint argue that taking into account Russia's interests in its periphery could have prevented Russia's military operations in Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> They propose several steps to rectify this, such as tacitly accepting Russia's annexation of Crimea,<sup>16</sup> lifting the sanctions on Russia pertaining to the Ukraine conflict, ceasing sending arms to Ukraine and training Ukrainian military forces, and formally ending Ukraine's bid for membership in NATO.<sup>17</sup> A more conciliatory policy with Russia would allow the two states to reengage on important arms control treaties that are scheduled to lapse.<sup>18</sup> The United States could also work on improving ties beyond Europe. Mearsheimer and Walt argue, for instance, that, "in Syria, the United States should let Russia take the lead."<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, "Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April, 2020. Similarly, Mearsheimer and Bandow argue that the United States should reconsider NATO expansion, which has consistently antagonized Russia, including rejecting Ukraine's bid for membership (Doug Bandow, "Ukraine Should Not Be a Member of NATO," *National Interest*, November 27, 2018b; and Mearsheimer, 2014c).

<sup>15</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014c; and Joseph M. Parent and Paul K. MacDonald, "The Wisdom of Retrenchment: America Must Cut Back to Move Forward," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 6, November–December 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Doug Bandow, "Time to Extricate from Ukraine," *American Conservative*, October 17, 2019c; and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Ukraine Doesn't Deserve America's Blind Support," Cato Institute, November 29, 2018b.

<sup>17</sup> Bandow, 2019c; Ted Galen Carpenter, "Washington Quietly Increases Lethal Weapons to Ukraine," *American Conservative*, September 10, 2018a; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Don't Arm Ukraine," *New York Times*, February 8, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Emma Ashford, "How Reflexive Hostility to Russia Harms U.S. Interests. Washington Needs a More Realistic Approach," *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2018b.

<sup>19</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82. Posen also points to Syria as a good place to start improving ties with Russia, given that the conflicts of interest are less stark on that issue

Some regional experts—not advocates of restraint themselves—have offered proposals to resolve key conflicts of interest with Russia that are consistent with the broad logic of a grand strategy of restraint. For example, one group of experts suggests that the United States should initiate informal dialogue with Russia and the EU on the status of the “in-between” states of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.<sup>20</sup> These experts suggest that, after trust is built through this dialogue, Russia might commit to such steps as cutting back exercises near its western frontiers, ending aerial and maritime patrols in sensitive areas, ceasing interference in Western domestic politics, and reducing the level of violence in Ukraine. When such actions are implemented, the United States could reduce sanctions on Russia.<sup>21</sup> The parties could then commit to key principles, such as “seeking mutual agreement before pursuing any change to the region’s institutional architecture,” including a commitment not to use force or interfere in the domestic politics of the “in-between” states.<sup>22</sup>

Although advocates of restraint generally promote a more cooperative approach, they argue that the United States should reject some types of Russian behavior. Posen, for example, argues that Russian aggression, even in areas of low U.S. strategic interest, should be punished with economic sanctions to make it clear that Western cooperation is conditional on Russia’s behavior.<sup>23</sup> Carpenter argues that the United States should enforce the Monroe Doctrine and prevent further

---

(Barry R. Posen, “How to Think About Russia,” *National Interest*, November 29, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Charap and Colton, 2018; and Samuel Charap, Jeremy Shapiro, and Alyssa Demus, *Rethinking the Regional Order for Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-297-CC/SFDFA, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Charap, Shapiro, and Demus, 2018, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Charap and Colton, 2018, pp. 181–182. Advocates of restraint would not agree, however, with others who propose a new security architecture in Europe that requires further U.S. commitment.

<sup>23</sup> Posen, 2016.

activities, such as Russia's joint naval exercises in Venezuela, renewed military support for Cuba, and military cooperation with Brazil.<sup>24</sup>

Many advocates of restraint see Russian meddling in U.S. and allied domestic politics as a threat that merits a nonmilitary response. Ashford, for example, suggests that the United States could use its global financial intelligence network to collect information implicating key Russian figures in corruption and release this information publicly. She also suggests that the United States could respond with diplomatic expulsions and financial restrictions on Russian state companies. Most importantly, advocates of restraint call for the United States to invest in improvements to the U.S. electoral system and to make more information about the extent of recent attempts at Russian interference public to better defend against them.<sup>25</sup>

Advocates of restraint have offered the broad prescription that the United States should adopt a more cooperative approach to Russia but argue that there are some areas where the United States should push back. To help policymakers apply this logic in practice, advocates of restraint should offer more guidance on how to find the right mix of competition and cooperation. In doing so, advocates of restraint could start with recent analyses that identify key conflicts of interest in the U.S.-Russia relationship and highlight which of these conflicts they would be willing to resolve through unilateral concessions or negotiation. Importantly, they should offer policymakers guidance on how much the United States should be willing to concede to resolve differences with Russia.<sup>26</sup> Such an analysis should examine all ongoing dis-

---

<sup>24</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Enforce the Monroe Doctrine on Russian Moves in Latin America," Cato Institute, January 7, 2019a.

<sup>25</sup> Ashford, 2018b; and Barry R. Posen, "Starr Forum: US-Russian Relations: What's Next?" MIT Center for International Studies, 2018a. Some advocates of restraint argue that the extent of this threat has been overblown and that it has not been of sufficient scale to place free and fair elections at risk (see Doug Bandow, "Interfering in Democratic Elections: Russia Against the U.S., but U.S. Against the World," *Forbes*, August 1, 2017b; and Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Democratic Obsession with Russia, Explained," *National Interest*, January 28, 2020b).

<sup>26</sup> For recent work on major U.S.-Russia conflicts of interest and conflict resolution, see Christopher S. Chivvis, Andrew Radin, Dara Massicot, and Clint Reach, *Strengthening Stra-*

putes between the United States and Russia, from the war in Ukraine to the status of Crimea, Russia's involvement in Syria, the status of arms control agreements, ongoing sanctions, and U.S. policy toward countries in Russia's periphery. In developing these details, advocates of restraint should also identify issues on which the United States should not be willing to make concessions and where the United States should push back, as well as what tools the United States should employ to do so.

In making these recommendations, advocates of restraint will need to consider both U.S. interests and how Russia will respond to U.S. efforts to improve ties, given Russian domestic politics and Russia's long-standing mistrust of the United States. Analysis of the factors that drive Russian decisionmaking and the incentives of key political actors could help clarify useful starting points for cooperation. Historical assessments of how relationships between states have changed when concessions are made or when sanctions are removed could help identify the policies that would be most impactful in inducing cooperation or those that could undermine U.S. interests. In addition, this would inform an assessment of the possible risks to U.S. interests of negotiating with Russia and help the United States develop mitigation measures.

Developing proposals for how to improve relations with Russia might benefit particularly from a retrospective review of prior U.S. efforts to engage Russia. For example, the 2009 "reset" policy identified areas in which the United States could work with Russia and engage in a dialogue. This policy led to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), cooperation on Afghanistan, and increased civilian nuclear cooperation. Other areas, such as getting to an agreement on missile defense, proved more problematic.<sup>27</sup> Examining such past efforts could help identify where cooperation was successful and why,

---

*tegic Stability with Russia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-234-OSD, 2017; and Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Angela Stent, "US–Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration," *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 6, December 1, 2012, pp. 126–127.

as well as lessons that might apply to a current U.S.-Russia relationship. Relatedly, several European countries, including France and Germany, have chosen a strategy that combines engagement with Russia on issues of mutual interest with an uncompromising stand on other issues where fundamental disagreements remain, such as Ukraine. A review of such approaches could provide some options and lessons for the United States as it seeks a less confrontational relationship with Russia. Table 2.2 summarizes the next steps for developing U.S. policies toward Russia that are consistent with a grand strategy of restraint.

**Table 2.2**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Peacetime Relations with Russia**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What conflicts of interest should be the subject of U.S.-Russian negotiations? What compromises should the United States be willing to make?</li> <li>• What policy changes should the United States make unilaterally to improve relations with Russia?</li> <li>• Should the United States formally acknowledge Russia's annexation of Crimea or end related sanctions?</li> <li>• Should the United States and its allies explicitly state that Ukraine and Georgia will not be brought into NATO?</li> <li>• Should the United States end both security and nonsecurity assistance to countries near Russia?</li> <li>• What future Russian activities would merit sanctions?</li> <li>• Should the United States renew the New START?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify packages of policies—from mildly to highly conciliatory—that the United States could adopt toward Russia.</li> <li>• Identify the risks and trade-offs associated with such policies, as well as risk-mitigation strategies.</li> <li>• Review how European countries have conducted engagement with Russia, and identify potential lessons for the United States.</li> <li>• Identify Russian domestic constraints to an improved relationship with the United States.</li> <li>• Assess how U.S. policy affects relations between Russia and China.</li> <li>• Assess how state relationships have historically changed after one side lifts sanctions.</li> <li>• Assess the effects of the 2009 reset policy and whether it has lessons for how the United States should approach cooperation with Russia today.</li> <li>• Conduct historical research to identify when conciliatory policies embolden an adversary like Russia and when such policies improve relations between states.</li> </ul>

## Alliances and Partnerships

Advocates of restraint do not believe that the United States needs to offer a blanket commitment to defending its NATO allies to protect vital U.S. interests. Advocates of restraint further contend that NATO, as currently constructed, undermines U.S. interests by increasing the risk that the United States will be pulled into an unnecessary war. Advocates of restraint believe that the United States should commit to defending allies only in the extreme and that the United States should typically let Europeans handle problems themselves. Advocates of restraint acknowledge that the United States and its European allies share several common interests. Yet they believe that cooperation on shared interests could continue even if the United States reduced its role in the region.

Advocates of restraint therefore recommend encouraging European allies and partners to provide for their own security.<sup>28</sup> The United States would promote European leadership primarily by withdrawing U.S. forces, as discussed later in this section.<sup>29</sup> However, the United States also would seek to change its approach to security commitments in Europe. In particular, advocates of restraint recommend that the United States should stop NATO enlargement and avoid making any additional defense commitments in Europe. Moreover, advocates of restraint agree that it is time for a “reappraisal” of the U.S. relationship with NATO, although there are two different views about how the United States should remake the relationship.<sup>30</sup>

Some advocates of restraint call for the United States to stay in a reformed NATO. These reforms would be aimed at reducing entrapment risks and increasing burden-sharing, although the exact nature

---

<sup>28</sup> Richard K. Betts, “American Strategy: Grand vs. Grandiose,” in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America’s Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012, pp. 22–23.

<sup>29</sup> Betts, 2012, p. 37; Castillo, 2019, pp. 29–30; and Stephen M. Walt, “NATO Isn’t What You Think It Is,” *Foreign Policy*, July 26, 2018e.

<sup>30</sup> Barry R. Posen, “Trump Aside, What’s the U.S. Role in NATO?” *New York Times*, March 10, 2019.

of these reforms is unclear.<sup>31</sup> For advocates of restraint, staying within NATO would certainly mean adopting a different interpretation of U.S. commitments going forward. Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty commits each NATO member to assist any member subject to an armed attack by taking “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”<sup>32</sup> In the current U.S. foreign policy discourse, commentators usually assume that the United States would respond with force in response to any conventional attack on a NATO ally to uphold this commitment. But advocates of restraint suggest that the United States should instead take advantage of the leeway that the article offers countries in making choices about whether and how to respond. For example, the United States could stay out of a NATO intervention entirely or could offer limited contributions, such as logistical support, rather than leading the response.<sup>33</sup>

Another approach would be for the United States to gradually reduce its role in and eventually withdraw from NATO.<sup>34</sup> The United States might start with such steps as having a European take the senior military position of Supreme Allied Commander Europe.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the United States would support ongoing EU efforts to build common and independent defense capabilities outside NATO. U.S. leaders have often treated such developments with suspicion out of concern that a common European defense might result in limited European resources being spent on capabilities that duplicate or compete

---

<sup>31</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; and Joshua Shiffrinson, “Time to Consolidate NATO?” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Spring 2017.

<sup>32</sup> NATO, North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C., April 4, 1949.

<sup>33</sup> Brad Stapleton, “Trump and NATO—Redefining the U.S. Role,” *Cato at Liberty*, November 11, 2016b. For another example questioning whether the United States should uphold all NATO commitments, see Doug Bandow, “Would You Send Your Son or Daughter to Die for Montenegro?” Cato Institute, August 1, 2018a.

<sup>34</sup> For earlier proposals along these lines, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 17–19; Layne, 2007, pp. 187–188. Carpenter and Posen also note this as one option for the United States to consider; Ted Galen Carpenter, “NATO Is an Institutional Dinosaur,” *War on the Rocks*, August 25, 2016b; and Posen, 2014, pp. 90–91.

<sup>35</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 90–91.

with NATO.<sup>36</sup> The United States might further ease the transition to a less prominent role through arms sales, technology transfers,<sup>37</sup> and other methods of building partner capacity.<sup>38</sup> Lastly, the United States would write a new agreement as a replacement for NATO that includes mechanisms for consultation and weaker U.S. commitments to European countries.<sup>39</sup> It is not clear what these weaker commitments would include. In particular, advocates of restraint should clarify whether the United States should extend its nuclear umbrella over any countries in Europe, meaning that the United States would implicitly or explicitly threaten to retaliate with nuclear weapons in the event of a nuclear attack on one of these countries.

The next step toward operationalizing the broad prescription of promoting European leadership would be to more fully develop and compare the two proposals. For example, if NATO were to be reformed, what would need to change? Importantly, should the United States continue extending its nuclear umbrella over any of its allies in Europe? Are the necessary reforms politically feasible given NATO's requirement for building consensus among all members? Another question is whether there are alternatives to NATO—i.e., partnership arrangements involving more-limited commitments on the part of the United States—that might be attractive to both the United States and European countries. Additional analysis could consider the domestic politics of these alternative options for key states. Analysis of other existing regional security arrangements in Europe, such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), might also illuminate trade-offs associated with options for a new U.S. relationship with its current allies.

---

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the recommendation to support EU initiatives, see Carpenter, 2016b; Posen, 2014, p. 90. Then–U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright expressed concerns about such initiatives in 1998, outlining a U.S. position with regard to European defense that has changed little since then. Madeleine K. Albright, “Statement to the North Atlantic Council,” Brussels, Belgium, December 8, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 17–19; Layne, 2007, pp. 187–188.

<sup>38</sup> Layne, 2007, p. 190. Other advocates of restraint question the value of the United States training the militaries of European nations. Doug Bandow, “Why Are American Troops Still Stationed in Europe?” *Forbes*, October 29, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Layne, 2007, p. 187; Posen, 2014, pp. 90–91.

**Table 2.3****Developing U.S. Policy Toward Alliances and Partnerships in Europe**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the United States stays in NATO, what reforms and changes to the collective defense commitments would be required to reduce entanglement risks and increase allied burden-sharing?</li> <li>• If the United States withdraws from NATO, what kind of collective defense agreement with European allies should replace it?</li> <li>• Should the United States continue to extend its nuclear umbrella over any European allies?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify NATO reforms that are politically feasible given NATO's requirement for consensus.</li> <li>• Specify trade-offs associated with NATO withdrawal versus reform.</li> <li>• Develop options for alternative partnership arrangements between the United States and Europe that would be attractive for members but not threatening to Russia.</li> <li>• Assess whether regional security arrangements in Europe (e.g., NORDEFCO) offer alternative models or lessons.</li> </ul>

The trade-offs associated with the United States withdrawing from NATO rather than attempting to reform it should be examined carefully. This analysis should consider both peacetime implications and those that might emerge in contingencies in which the United States might still fight alongside current allies. For example, how significant are the effects of fighting through a coalition of the willing versus through a standing integrated command structure, such as NATO? Table 2.3 summarizes some of the next steps to develop U.S. policies toward alliances and partnerships in Europe.

## Posture

Advocates of restraint are united in their desire to reduce forward U.S. presence in Europe, and most advocates of restraint believe that nearly all onshore U.S. military forces should eventually be withdrawn from Europe.<sup>40</sup> Advocates of restraint argue that the withdrawal should

<sup>40</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Castillo, 2019, pp. 29–30; John Glaser, “Withdrawing from Overseas Bases: Why a Forward-Deployed Military Posture Is Unnecessary, Outdated, and Dangerous,” Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 816, July 18, 2017b; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016; and Posen, 2014, p. 90.

happen over time, perhaps over five or ten years.<sup>41</sup> The United States would remove forces from and end access agreements for most bases where the United States currently has forces, especially those associated with the Army.<sup>42</sup> Many of the remaining U.S. bases in Europe would also be closed or converted to forward operating sites (FOSs) or cooperative security locations (CSLs), more-austere facilities that could be used in a contingency.<sup>43</sup> In addition, to ensure U.S. command of the maritime commons, advocates of restraint agree that some U.S. naval bases, such as those located in or near the Mediterranean, should remain.<sup>44</sup>

Advocates of restraint have not yet conducted detailed analysis of U.S. posture. Therefore, developing these initial posture proposals will require several strands of additional analysis. For example, advocates of restraint have suggested withdrawal over time because they want European countries to be able to rebuild their own defenses to replace departing U.S. forces. Therefore, analysis on European ability to replace the essential capabilities that the United States currently supplies would be critical for determining the appropriate timeline. For example, for out-of-area interventions, the United States is the key provider of such capabilities “as air- and sea-lift; refueling; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.”<sup>45</sup> Analysts would need to identify

---

<sup>41</sup> These proposals were all rough estimates, and some of these timelines were proposed before 2014, when many U.S. and Russian policies in Europe changed (see Gordon Adams and Matthew Leatherman, “A Leaner and Meaner Defense: How to Cut the Pentagon’s Budget While Improving Its Performance,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1, January–February 2011, pp. 145–146; Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Andrew Bacevich, “Time for the United States to Leave NATO,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2013; Posen, 2014, p. 90).

<sup>42</sup> Glaser, 2017b; Posen, 2014, p. 159.

<sup>43</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 159. FOSs can support sustained operations but contain only a small permanent presence of support personnel. CSLs contain little or no permanent presence but are used to conduct security cooperation activities and provide contingency access. See James Jones, “Strategic Theater Transformation,” statement presented before the Senate Armed Services Committee, September 23, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Castillo, 2019, pp. 29–30. Posen, 2014, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> Kristin Archick, Paul Belkin, Shayerah Ilias Akhtar, and Derek E. Mix, *Transatlantic Relations: U.S. Interests and Key Issues*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R45745, last updated April 27, 2020, p. 8.

such European capability shortfalls for a major war with Russia and how quickly they could be replaced. To identify key gaps, advocates of restraint would need to identify the scenarios in which the United States wants its allies to be able to fight on their own and the capabilities that European allies would need to have to defend themselves in those scenarios. An assessment of how different rates of increase in defense spending would affect the political, economic, and societal stability of current U.S. allies in Europe also could contribute to decisions about the pace of withdrawal. Advocates of restraint should also specify whether any Russian behavior or capability developments should alter the U.S. timeline for withdrawal.

More analysis is needed to determine what residual posture advocates of restraint would recommend that the United States retain in Europe. Analysts would start by identifying what major contingencies with Russia, if any, should provoke a U.S. intervention and what support European countries would need in those scenarios. However, a holistic look would also account for the fact that U.S. forces in Europe are pre-positioned for potential operations not only in Europe but also in Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, remaining U.S. posture in Europe should also account for missions beyond Europe, such as counterterrorism operations, that advocates of restraint would support (as we discuss in later chapters). In considering postwithdrawal posture options, the United States would also need to consider which current allies would still be willing to host residual U.S. forces given the changed political relationship envisioned under a grand strategy of restraint.

A comprehensive posture analysis would also need to consider naval requirements. Advocates of restraint frequently talk about the United States maintaining control of the maritime commons. However, they also point to the need for local powers to do more to balance against aggression. Advocates of restraint should therefore be clear about whether the United States should depend on its allies to do more to protect maritime areas around Europe, such as in the Mediterranean and the Baltics,<sup>46</sup> or whether the United States should have suf-

---

<sup>46</sup> Preble, 2011, p. 152.

ficient forces to have superiority in maritime areas on its own. The answer to that question would affect the size and location of the U.S. naval presence needed near Europe. Table 2.4 summarizes the next steps for operationalizing U.S. posture policies under a grand strategy of restraint.

**Table 2.4**  
**Operationalizing Plans for U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Europe**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What scenarios does the United States want its allies to be capable of executing on their own?</li><li>• What capabilities should the United States encourage its allies to develop?</li><li>• How quickly should U.S. forces be withdrawn from Europe, where should withdrawal start, and where should Europe-based forces be redeployed?</li><li>• Should the rate or extent of withdrawal depend on allied or Russian behavior or capabilities?</li><li>• How should U.S. naval presence and activities near Europe change?</li><li>• What risks need to be managed as U.S. forces withdraw?</li><li>• What contingencies with Russia would provoke a U.S. intervention in Europe?</li><li>• Are there any other contingencies that the U.S. military should be prepared to execute (e.g., assistance in a major pandemic)?</li><li>• What residual posture should the United States sustain in Europe to respond to such contingencies?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify capabilities that European allies would need to develop to defend themselves without U.S. intervention, and identify development timelines.</li><li>• Identify U.S. capabilities that European allies would need to address contingencies with Russia that advocates of restraint support.</li><li>• Project how different rates of increase in defense spending would affect the political, economic, and societal stability of European states.</li><li>• Assess what U.S. naval access and presence is needed to sustain command of the maritime commons around Europe.</li><li>• Determine pre-positioned supplies, access, and other arrangements that the United States would need for contingencies that might bring the United States back to Europe under a grand strategy of restraint.</li><li>• Assess what posture in Europe is needed to support the interventions in Africa or the Middle East that some advocates of restraint would undertake.</li><li>• Analyze country willingness to host U.S. forces given the changed political relationships associated with a grand strategy of restraint.</li></ul>

## Security Cooperation and Assistance

Advocates of restraint have not offered many direct recommendations on security cooperation and assistance. The only case for which advocates of restraint have taken a clear stand on security cooperation is that of Ukraine, which is not a U.S. treaty ally. Advocates of restraint call for the United States to end lethal military aid, for example, because it hurts U.S. ties with Russia.<sup>47</sup> It is unclear what security cooperation activities with current NATO allies, if any, advocates of restraint would support.

Extending the logic of restraint suggests two possible views. First, advocates of restraint agree that it would still be in the U.S. interest to intervene militarily in Europe if Russia threatened to dominate the region. Such an intervention as the “balancer of last resort”<sup>48</sup> would likely take place alongside current European allies. Extending this logic, advocates of restraint might favor continuing to participate in multinational exercises designed to build and sustain interoperability with allies to prepare for such an eventuality. Moreover, military sales and subsidies could help allies develop the capabilities they would need to fight without the United States. After the United States draws down, the cost of some activities will be higher because more U.S. forces will have to deploy from the United States to participate rather than from bases in Europe. Still, compared with a large-scale U.S. presence, security cooperation activities aimed at strengthening states in Europe could be seen as a cost-effective way to protect U.S. interests in Europe.

Alternatively, advocates of restraint could argue that there is no plausible near-term scenario in which the United States should intervene and might worry more about the risk that continued U.S. involvement, even in the form of security cooperation, could disincentivize allies’ investments in their own defense.<sup>49</sup> Having more information

---

<sup>47</sup> Doug Bandow, “Military Force Will Not Achieve U.S. Objectives in Venezuela,” Cato Institute, May 8, 2019a; and Carpenter, 2018b.

<sup>48</sup> Castillo, 2019, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> However, it is not clear whether reductions in security cooperation would affect European countries’ decisions to acquire U.S. military systems if European countries do invest in their own defense.

about specific scenarios that advocates of restraint envision and the likelihood of these scenarios occurring would help determine which approach to security cooperation and assistance advocates of restraint would recommend. Analysis on how U.S. security cooperation activities have historically affected allied beliefs about U.S. commitments and allies’ willingness to invest in their own defense also could aid in assessment of the trade-offs associated with continuing these activities. Table 2.5 summarizes the next steps for designing a new security cooperation policy for Europe.

**Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward Europe**

Advocates of restraint agree that Europe is a region that currently presents few threats to U.S. strategic interests. The most powerful state, Russia, has economic and demographic weaknesses that limit its ability to dominate Europe and to imperil vital U.S. interests. As a result, advocates of restraint recommend reducing the U.S. footprint in Europe to limit the risk of the United States being pulled into a European war for lesser interests.

There has been little analysis of what a post-U.S. Europe might look like. As a result, there has not been a full accounting of the risks

**Table 2.5**  
**Designing a New Security Cooperation Policy Toward Europe**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What security assistance should the United States provide to European countries to prepare for U.S. withdrawal?</li><li>• What type of security cooperation, if any, will the United States engage in after withdrawal?</li><li>• Should the United States end all military aid to Ukraine?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine how a lighter U.S. footprint in Europe affects options for sustaining and building interoperability with U.S. allies.</li><li>• Analyze the costs and benefits of security cooperation with allies without a permanent U.S. presence in theater.</li><li>• Analyze the likelihood and impact of reduced interoperability between the United States and European states on combat effectiveness.</li></ul>

and benefits of changing U.S. strategy in Europe or of the policies that the United States could adopt to mitigate these risks. For example, a central assumption underlying a grand strategy of restraint is that current U.S. allies are likely to balance against, rather than submit to being dominated by, Russia if the United States retrenches. Advocates of restraint keep open the possibility of a U.S. return to Europe if local balancing fails. However, a more detailed assessment of risk factors for under-balancing by key countries, such as Germany, might reveal additional policies that the United States could adopt as a hedge against a core assumption being partially or entirely wrong.

There also has been little analysis of the possibility that U.S. withdrawal could lead China to play a more important role in Europe, particularly with regard to trade, infrastructure, and technology. Because this is an issue of concern to current U.S. policymakers, and advocates of restraint are most concerned with the threat posed by China, as we will detail in the following chapter, advocates of restraint should determine the extent to which this would constitute a threat to U.S. interests and, if so, how the United States should respond.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> White House, 2017, p. 47.



## The Asia-Pacific

---

In this chapter, we apply our framework to the Asia-Pacific. In doing so, we will answer the following questions: What is the level of threat posed by China and North Korea, and what are the conditions under which the United States might use force against these adversaries? How should the United States manage its peacetime relationship with China and North Korea? Should the United States reconsider its alliances and partnerships in the region? What kind of posture does the United States need to maintain in the region? And, finally, what is the role of security cooperation and assistance in the Asia-Pacific?

Advocates of restraint agree with current U.S. policymakers that the Asia-Pacific should be the region of greatest priority because it is the region where a single power, China, has the greatest chance of dominating its neighbors.<sup>1</sup> Advocates of restraint differ, however, in their assessment of how the United States should approach the region. The Asia-Pacific is a region where differences among advocates of restraint are most pronounced. Some advocates of restraint believe that Asia-Pacific policy should be broadly similar to policy in Europe—that is, the United States should seek minimal military involvement in the

---

<sup>1</sup> DoD, 2018; DoD, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, Washington, D.C., June 1, 2019; and White House, 2017. Although current national security documents refer to the Indo-Pacific region, we examine South Asia separately from the Asia-Pacific in this report because of differences in prescriptions between the regions.

region.<sup>2</sup> However, other advocates of restraint see important differences between Europe and the Asia-Pacific that lead them to different policy prescriptions. They worry that local balancing might not be as effective or efficient in Asia as it would be in Europe. Because of China's growing power, uncertainties about China's future intentions, and historical mistrust that could make cooperation among other powers difficult, some advocates of restraint see continued U.S. presence as an insurance policy against China's domination of the region. Therefore, these advocates of restraint recommend slower and less dramatic changes in U.S. policy toward Asia than in Europe, although they still recommend some reduction in U.S. presence. We refer to those who take this position as *advocates of reduced military involvement* (Table 3.1).<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we focus on policies associated with proponents of minimal U.S. military involvement with the region and proponents of a less dramatic reduction. But it is worth noting that other advocates of restraint at the global level, notably John Mearsheimer, see much larger differences between Europe and Asia.<sup>4</sup> As a result, they recommend containing China through deeper institutionalization of U.S. alliances in the region and sustaining or increasing U.S. presence in the region, unlike in the rest of the world.<sup>5</sup> This recommendation results from the belief that intense U.S.-China competition is now unavoidable

---

<sup>2</sup> It is unclear whether early advocates of restraint who initially proposed these ideas have changed their thinking in the intervening years. However, as we note later, there are some analysts who continue to advocate the full retrenchment position in their recent writings. For early articulations of this position, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997; Layne, 1997, p. 112; and Layne, 2007, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> Adams and Leatherman, 2011, p. 145; Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Ted Galen Carpenter and Eric Gomez, "East Asia and a Strategy of Restraint," *War on the Rocks*, August 10, 2016; and Posen, 2014, p. 159. Mearsheimer and Walt also share these concerns about balancing in the region, but they make different policy recommendations, as noted later (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, pp. 81–82).

<sup>4</sup> Walt also argues in favor of doing more to confront China, including improving relationships with U.S. allies in East Asia. Stephen M. Walt, "Yesterday's Cold War Shows How to Beat China Today," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2019b.

<sup>5</sup> Mearsheimer, 2019a, p. 30; and Peter Navarro, "Crouching Tiger: John Mearsheimer on Strangling China and the Inevitability of War," *RealClearDefense*, March 10, 2016.

**Table 3.1****Alternative Recommendations for U.S. Asia-Pacific Security Policy Proposed by Advocates of Restraint**

<b>Policy Prescription</b>	<b>Minimal Military Involvement</b>	<b>Reduced Military Involvement</b>	<b>Sustained or Increased Military Involvement</b>
Broad approach	Substantially reduce U.S. involvement in the region, but maintain the ability to return if local powers are unable to prevent China's domination.	Hedge against the possibility of Chinese domination and maintain the ability to assist local partners in balancing against China if they cannot do so alone.	Form a balancing coalition in East Asia to contain Chinese influence and prevent economic and military growth.
Alliances and partnerships	Withdraw all security commitments in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania.	Maintain alliances with Japan and South Korea, but gradually withdraw commitments to Taiwan.	Institutionalize and strengthen U.S. alliances and commitments.
U.S. posture	Eliminate all forward U.S. presence other than a small naval presence (kept far from China's periphery).	Withdraw U.S. forces from South Korea and reduce presence in the region. Maintain access to enable defense of Japan.	Maintain or increase U.S. troop presence.
Security assistance and cooperation	Facilitate the acquisition of military capabilities for former allies.	Continue arms sales and conduct combined exercises to show that the United States can fight with its partners.	Engage in security cooperation similar to NATO during the Cold War.

and cannot be offset with more-conciliatory U.S. policies.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Mearsheimer's policy prescriptions for Asia resemble current U.S. policy or even more-ambitious proposals for U.S. strategy in the region rather than the recommendations of most other restraint advocates. As a result, we do not focus on this minority view. Rather, when we refer to *advocates of restraint* in the remainder of this chapter, we mean those

<sup>6</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Winter 2010; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?" *National Interest*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2014a.

who support either minimal or reduced U.S. military involvement, and we highlight differences between these two camps where they exist.

## **U.S. Policy Toward China**

Advocates of restraint see a much more significant threat to vital U.S. interests from China than from Russia and would use force to defend these interests in at least some circumstances. Still, advocates of restraint believe that the United States should adopt a more cooperative approach toward China if possible. This section describes how advocates of restraint assess the threat that China poses, when the United States would resort to the use of force, and how the United States would manage peacetime relations with China.

### **Threat Posed by China**

As in Europe, advocates of restraint see a single country dominating East Asia as the key potential threat to U.S. interests that could arise in the region. Advocates of restraint do not believe that China is currently capable of dominating its region, in spite of the significant growth of its economic and military power and its more assertive behavior on its periphery. Moreover, advocates of restraint believe that local balancing, perhaps supplemented by a continued U.S. presence, can likely prevent China from dominating its region in the future. However, advocates of restraint acknowledge the possibility that greater U.S. involvement in the region could become necessary if these expectations prove wrong.<sup>7</sup>

As with Europe, advocates of restraint have been clear that they do not believe there is currently a single power that can dominate the Asia-Pacific. Advocates of restraint have not, however, offered policy-makers guidance on how they should assess threats in this region over time. Advocates of restraint have not yet defined what Chinese domination of the region would look like or identified specific military, political, or economic indicators that the United States should monitor

---

<sup>7</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 95–96; and Sebastian Rosato and John Schuessler, “A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2011, p. 813.

to know whether China is gaining that level of influence. Advocates of restraint have been clear that East Asia is their highest priority within the Asia-Pacific, consistent with traditional U.S. policy in the region.<sup>8</sup> However, advocates of restraint have not indicated to what extent China's growing influence in a larger area—which the United States calls the *Indo-Pacific*, and which includes India and the Indian Ocean region, along with Oceania—represents a threat.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they have not said whether a higher degree of Chinese influence in any part of the Asia-Pacific would represent a serious threat to vital U.S. interests.

Advocates of restraint have been clear that changes in China's military capabilities are most important to assessing the threat it poses. But they have not commented on U.S. policymakers' concerns that China's economic power enables its attempts at regional domination.<sup>10</sup> Some U.S. analysts argue that China's use of actual and de facto economic sanctions, such as limiting Chinese tourism and key exports to China, has successfully coerced other countries into acceding to China's demands.<sup>11</sup> Current U.S. policymakers are also concerned with

---

<sup>8</sup> China thinks about geography differently, speaking in terms of areas defined by a ring of island chains: the First Island Chain (running from Japan through Korea to Taiwan to the Philippines), the Second Island Chain (running from Japan through Guam to Indonesia), and the Third Island Chain (running from Alaska to Hawaii). Andrew S. Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific 'Island Chains,'" *China Quarterly*, Vol. 225, March 2016; and Roy Kamphausen, "Asia as a Warfighting Environment," in Thomas G. Mahnken and Dan Blumenthal, eds., *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and Future of Regional Security*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, November 3, 2019; DoD, 2019; and Stephen Dziedzic and Catherine Graue, "Donald Trump's Top Security Advisers Visit the Pacific, Signifying Growing US Focus in the Region," ABC News, last updated March 10, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> White House, 2017, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, *China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, June 2018. For example, analysts note that China used economic coercion to address the threat it perceived from the deployment of a U.S. ballistic missile defense system to South Korea in 2016, which is intended to defend against North Korean missiles. Chinese restrictions on South Korean food exports, car sales, and more caused South Korea's trade volume with China to drop by

the implications of China's efforts to create a "digital iron curtain" and force governments to choose between U.S. and Chinese technology.<sup>12</sup> Advocates of restraint should weigh in on whether and how they see economic influence affecting China's ability to dominate its region and to threaten vital U.S. interests.

Advocates of restraint have focused primarily on the threat that China could pose to the United States within the Asia-Pacific. They have not yet indicated whether they are concerned about the growth in China's space and cyber capabilities, which can be used against the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests globally. Current U.S. policymakers are concerned, for example, that China is developing cyber capabilities that can disrupt U.S. power projection capabilities and critical infrastructure in the homeland.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, the People's Liberation Army has developed a wide array of counterspace capabilities, including jammers, directed energy weapons, and ground-based anti-satellite missiles that can affect both commercial and military satellites.<sup>14</sup> Because China's space and cyber capabilities could affect three vital U.S. interests—preserving the security of the U.S. homeland, preventing Chinese domination of its region, and retaining U.S. command of

---

more than \$15 billion in 2016. Although South Korea still deployed the system, it later gave China three assurances to normalize relations: Seoul would agree to forgo future deployments of similar systems, to shun any further U.S. missile defense systems in the region, and to avoid a trilateral military alliance with the United States and Japan; Kim Bo-gyung, "South Korea-China Trade Volume Rises to Pre-THAAD Levels," *Korea Herald*, December 19, 2018; and Ankit Panda, "China and South Korea: Examining the Resolution of the THAAD Impasse," *The Diplomat*, November 13, 2017b.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the digital iron curtain, see Adam Segal, Cobus Van Staden, Elsa B. Kania, Samm Sacks, and Elliott Zaagman, "Is an Iron Curtain Falling Across Tech?" *Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Heginbotham, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, Jacob L. Heim, Jeff Hagen, Sheng Li, Jeffrey Engstrom, Martin C. Libicki, Paul DeLuca, David A. Shlapak, David R. Frelinger, Burgess Laird, Kyle Brady, and Lyle J. Morris, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-392-AF, 2015. See also Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019, pp. 13–22.

the commons—advocates of restraint should offer more details on the extent of threat that they believe these capabilities pose.

### **When the United States Would Use Force**

Advocates of restraint have offered only a few clues about their views about when the United States should use force against China. Although they are attentive to changes in China's military capabilities, advocates of restraint have not suggested that the United States should launch a preventative war against China, even if it becomes more powerful. However, advocates of restraint have indicated that they would be willing to use force to prevent China from conquering another power, such as Japan.<sup>15</sup> It is not, however, clear whether advocates of restraint would protect Japan in a conflict with China over an issue short of conquest. At least some advocates of restraint support a continued alliance with Korea, suggesting that they would support the defense of Korea in at least some circumstances. Advocates of restraint have not stated whether they would ever use force to protect weaker countries, such as the Philippines or Vietnam.

It is unlikely that advocates of restraint would support an armed intervention by the United States in response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The Taiwan Relations Act calls on the U.S. President to “maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan,”<sup>16</sup> and, traditionally, the United States has indicated that it would defend Taiwan in the case of an unprovoked invasion by China.<sup>17</sup> Calls by advocates of restraint for the United States to downgrade its relationship with Taiwan, discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, suggest that these analysts do not

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Posen, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Taiwan Relations Act, Bill 2479, April 10, 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Elbridge A. Colby, “Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Implementation of the National Defense Strategy,” January 29, 2019a. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the most recent publicly available list of U.S. planning scenarios, planned for a major conflict with China over Taiwan; Eric V. Larson, *Force Planning Scenarios, 1945–2016: Their Origins and Use in Defense Strategic Planning*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2173/1-A, 2019, p. 238.

believe that controlling the island would allow China to dominate the region, and so do not believe that a Chinese invasion would merit the use of force by the United States.

Beyond preventing China's domination of other local powers, such as Japan, advocates of restraint seek to maintain U.S. command of the commons in the Asia-Pacific. These strategists acknowledge that, as China grows, it will expand the *contested zone*, the airspace and area on its maritime periphery within which it can make U.S. military operations costly or difficult.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that they are willing to accept loss of U.S. command in some areas. However, advocates of restraint have not yet specified whether there is a point at which further growth in the contested zone should provoke greater U.S. military involvement in the region. Put another way, advocates of restraint should specify the geographic areas that constitute the commons within which the United States needs to retain superiority and the level of superiority that the United States needs to maintain within those areas. To offer policymakers indicators to monitor, advocates of restraint should then identify changes in Chinese air and naval power that would prevent the United States from sustaining the desired level of superiority.

Current U.S. policymakers consider China's claims and island-building activities in the South China Sea to be threats to U.S. interests and command of the commons.<sup>19</sup> U.S. naval forces conduct freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, suggesting that current U.S. policymakers might consider the use of force to prevent Chinese control of that area. Advocates of restraint have not said what U.S.

---

<sup>18</sup> In 2003, Posen described the contested zones as the areas within several hundred kilometers of the shore and in airspace below 15,000 feet. These figures may have changed in some regions because of the growth of military power and technological changes since that time (Posen, 2003, p. 22).

<sup>19</sup> White House, 2017, p. 46. U.S. allies are also deeply concerned about China's activities in these maritime areas; see DoD, 2018, pp. 3, 5–6; Ministry of Defense of Japan, "National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program," website, last updated 2018; Ministry of Defense of Japan, *Defense of Japan 2019*, Tokyo, Japan, 2019; and White House, 2017, pp. 12, 31.

policy in this maritime area should be.<sup>20</sup> For example, they have not indicated whether the United States should challenge or use force if China were to establish and enforce an air defense identification zone over the area. The policy position that advocates of restraint would take would likely turn on whether acknowledging China's claims or accepting its activities would substantially help China either threaten Japan or challenge U.S. command of the commons.<sup>21</sup> Analysis of the military value of these islands would therefore help further refine the policy implications of a grand strategy of restraint.<sup>22</sup>

In the East China Sea, the current U.S. policy is that Japan's administrative control of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is covered by the U.S.-Japan alliance.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, there appear to be at least some Chinese actions toward this dispute that could elicit a military response under current U.S. policy.<sup>24</sup> One advocate of restraint has said explicitly

---

<sup>20</sup> For an exception, see Ted Galen Carpenter, "Washington Needs to Jettison Its Commitment to Defend the Senkakus," Cato Institute, January 9, 2020a.

<sup>21</sup> Castillo, for example, suggests staying out of the disputes unless China gains the ability to command the commons (Castillo, 2019, p. 32).

<sup>22</sup> For examinations of this question, see Gregory B. Poling, "The Conventional Wisdom on China's Island Bases Is Dangerously Wrong," *War on the Rocks*, January 10, 2020; and Thomas Shugart, "China's Artificial Islands Are Bigger (and a Bigger Deal) Than You Think," *War on the Rocks*, September 21, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> For the U.S. statement regarding Japan, see White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan," Tokyo, Japan, April 24, 2014. Although U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that the United States would come to the defense of the Philippines if it came under attack in the South China Sea in 2019, his statements did not clarify the U.S. position on using force to defend Philippines-claimed territory; see Michael R. Pompeo, "Remarks with Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. at a Press Availability," remarks to the press, U.S. Department of State, March 1, 2019. For U.S. statements that include the offshore claims as part of U.S. defense commitments, see Ankit Panda, "Obama: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty," *The Diplomat*, April 24, 2014; and Ankit Panda, "Mattis: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty," *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2017a.

<sup>24</sup> Exactly what Chinese challenges would elicit such a U.S. response are not clear. For example, the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia sometimes surges nominally civilian fishing boats around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu waters to create a narrative of Chinese control. Senior U.S. defense officials have left open the possibility that the militia would be treated just like the Chinese military if the militia were operating under Chinese military control, but they have not definitively said so. "Japan Protests After Swarm of 230 Chinese

that the United States should abandon its policy of defending the Senkakus, but, given differences of opinion among advocates of restraint in this region, it is unclear whether this represents a consensus view.<sup>25</sup>

Table 3.2 summarizes the next steps for identifying threats and clarifying when the United States would use force against China.

### Managing Peacetime Relations with China

Many U.S. policymakers and commentators argue that China's aims are extremely expansive, and they have begun to question whether any form of cooperation with China is possible.<sup>26</sup> The mainstream consensus is now that China has global ambitions. The current debate is over the extent to which China will pursue economic, military, and ideological changes to the liberal international order, whether it seeks to completely displace or merely rival the United States, and whether it will use force to do so.<sup>27</sup> Advocates of restraint are realist scholars who

---

Vessels Enters Waters Near Senkakus," *Japan Times*, August 6, 2016; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2, 2018; and Randall G. Schriver, "Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Schriver Press Briefing on the 2019 Report on Military and Security Developments in China," transcript, U.S. Department of Defense, May 3, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Carpenter, 2020a. As noted earlier, advocates of restraint would likely focus on the military value of these islands to develop their policy. Some analysts might note that the U.S. decision to defend Japan's claims could affect Japan's alignment with the United States against China. However, advocates of restraint are likely to dismiss this consideration, arguing that Japan will continue to seek alignment with the United States regardless due to the greater threat that China poses.

<sup>26</sup> Evan A. Feigenbaum, "Why the United States and China Forgot How to Cooperate," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 28, 2020; Bruce Jones, "The Era of U.S.-China Cooperation Is Drawing to a Close—What Comes Next?" Brookings Institution, January 7, 2019; Patricia Kim, "Understanding China's Military Expansion," statement presented before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the U.S. House of Representatives during its hearing on "China's Worldwide Military Expansion," May 17, 2018; Michael R. Pompeo, "Communist China and the Free World's Future," speech, Yorba Linda, Calif.: U.S. Department of State, July 23, 2020; and U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, Washington, D.C., November 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Tobin, *How Xi Jinping's "New Era" Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing's Ambitions*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 8, 2020.

**Table 3.2**  
**Identifying Threats and Clarifying When the United States Would Use Force Against China**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes in China's military, economic, or geographic influence would imperil vital U.S. interests?</li> <li>• What territorial acquisitions or areas of Chinese domination can the United States accept?</li> <li>• What are the geographic areas that constitute the commons within which the United States needs to retain superiority?</li> <li>• What level of military superiority does the United States need to maintain within those areas?</li> <li>• Should the United States place more limits on when it would use force to defend allies (e.g., over offshore island claims)?</li> <li>• To what extent do Chinese cyber and space capabilities threaten the United States?</li> <li>• How should the United States respond to a Chinese cyber-attack or counterspace attack?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the indicators and warnings that would tell U.S. policy-makers that China is becoming a more serious threat to vital U.S. interests, as defined by advocates of restraint.</li> <li>• Determine what air and naval capabilities would allow China to contest the maritime commons in the Asia-Pacific.</li> <li>• Determine to what extent China's acquisition and militarization of offshore islands allows it to contest U.S. command of the commons or threaten the territory of its neighbors.</li> </ul>

start from the assumption that competition between powerful states and the risk of war are always present. However, these scholars dismiss the idea that intense U.S.-China competition is unavoidable.

Instead, they argue that changes in U.S. policy would reduce the intensity of the competition and risk of war between the United States and China.<sup>28</sup> They argue that, although the United States should maintain its military capability to prevent China from dominating its neighbors, attempting to contain China could bring about unnecessary conflict. Therefore, advocates of restraint recommend reducing U.S. military presence in the region. Moreover, advocates of restraint believe that the United States should accept some growth in regional influence

<sup>28</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 96; and Joshua Shiffrinson, "The Rise of China, Balance of Power Theory and US National Security: Reasons for Optimism?" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020.

for China.<sup>29</sup> For example, they suggest that the United States should decrease freedom of navigation operations and surveillance near disputed islands.<sup>30</sup> Beyond this example, however, advocates of restraint have not detailed what peacetime activities would be consistent with acknowledging a Chinese sphere of influence while still preventing Chinese domination.

Furthermore, advocates of restraint argue that there are several areas in which the United States and China have shared interests that might allow for cooperation. Both nations seek to combat climate change and terrorism and to forestall nuclear proliferation.<sup>31</sup> Advocates of restraint also favor negotiations to improve trade and investment relationships between the two nations, as well as to limit the size of their nuclear arsenals.<sup>32</sup> In addition, both countries seek stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>33</sup> Advocates of restraint have not, however, demonstrated that there is sufficient common ground on these issues such that bargains could be struck that are acceptable to both sides. For example, although both the United States and China seek stability on the Korean Peninsula, they have very different visions for how to achieve it. The next step for operationalizing the recommendations associated with a grand strategy of restraint, therefore, would be to propose approaches to the negotiations and compromises that the United States should be willing to make to bridge these differences. Moreover, advocates of restraint could discuss how the United States

---

<sup>29</sup> Castillo, 2019, p. 32; Christopher Layne, "The US-Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax Americana," *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1, January 1, 2018; and Posen, 2014, p. 96. Others have begun to share this view as well; see Graham Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> However, the United States and China increasingly disagree on who the terrorists are; Yew Lun Tian, "China Sanctions U.S. Lawmakers in Dispute over Uighur Muslims," Reuters, July 13, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Grabow, "Responsible Stakeholders: Why the United States Should Welcome China's Economic Leadership," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 821, October 3, 2017. Even Mearsheimer, who takes a harder line on China than other advocates of restraint, supports such negotiations; Mearsheimer, 2019a, pp. 44–45.

<sup>33</sup> Lind and Press, 2020.

should approach cooperation. For example, the United States might start with small confidence-building measures to test China's response to a more cooperative U.S. approach. Advocates of restraint should also determine in what circumstances the United States should consider unilateral concessions and in what circumstances it would demand reciprocity.

To further specify the types of cooperation that would be consistent with their broader recommendations, advocates of restraint might draw from prescriptions offered by China-focused security experts, such as Michael Swaine, Lyle Goldstein, Hugh White, James Steinberg, and Michael O'Hanlon, who favor a negotiated settlement with China. This school of thought generally starts from the assumption that the era of U.S. predominance is ending as China's *relative* power grows, so Washington should find a way to secure an acceptable role in the region while it still can. These scholars offer a series of specific policy proposals that are intended to offer balanced trade-offs to both sides and to resolve conflicts of interest. Goldstein, for example, suggests that the United States might cease its security cooperation with Vietnam and its surveillance flights near China's coast if China were to forgo a military-to-military relationship with the Philippines and Indonesia.<sup>34</sup> Swaine also proposes that Beijing accept Korean unification under a government in Seoul in return for the removal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula and a dramatically reduced U.S.–South Korean alliance.<sup>35</sup> It is unclear to what extent advocates of restraint favor these specific trade-offs. However, providing a similar level of

---

<sup>34</sup> Lyle J. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015, pp. 290–291.

<sup>35</sup> Michael D. Swaine, Wenyan Deng, and Aube Rey Lescure, *Creating a Stable Asia: An Agenda for a U.S.-China Balance of Power*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, pp. 80–84. For other examples of cooperative approaches to China, see James Steinberg and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014; Michael D. Swaine, *America's Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011; and Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013.

specificity would help define the relationship between the United States and China that advocates of restraint hope to cultivate.

One additional question is how the United States should approach economic relations with China. Some analysts outside the restraint community believe that interdependence benefits the United States by creating U.S. leverage to change Chinese behavior—via incentives or tariffs—and by increasing the costs of war.<sup>36</sup> The current administration and other analysts, in contrast, argue that interdependence makes the United States vulnerable to Chinese coercion and economic predation. Analysts in this latter school often argue for economic disengagement, or “decoupling,” as a way to improve U.S. security.<sup>37</sup> Advocates of restraint have not weighed in on U.S. economic relations with China in any detail. However, they would likely consider that decoupling could undermine their overarching goal of an improved relationship with China and ask whether the gains of decoupling would outweigh the harm to the U.S. economy. Given the importance of U.S.-China economic ties, advocates of restraint should offer explicit policy prescriptions on this topic.

Although advocates of restraint seek a more cooperative relationship with China, they seek to prevent China’s domination of the region, including the maritime commons. Part of their response is to retain a U.S. presence in the region to deter certain Chinese behavior. However, advocates of restraint should offer more details on the areas where they would push back on China’s behavior and what tools, such as economic sanctions, they would employ to do so. Table 3.3 specifies the next steps for developing policy for managing peacetime relations with China.

---

<sup>36</sup> Henry M. Paulson, Jr., “Delusions of Decoupling,” speech at New Economy Forum, Beijing, China, November 2019.

<sup>37</sup> For a recent report on decoupling, see Charles W. Boustany and Aaron L. Friedberg, *Partial Disengagement: A New US Strategy for Economic Competition with China*, Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report No. 82, November 4, 2019. For a Chinese view, see Julian Gewirtz, “The Chinese Reassessment of Interdependence,” *China Leadership Monitor*, June 1, 2020. For a snapshot of the policy discussion, see Keith Johnson and Robbie Gramer, “The Great Decoupling,” *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2020.

**Table 3.3**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Peacetime Relations with China**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What conflicts of interest should be the subject of U.S.-China negotiations? What compromises should the United States be willing to make?</li> <li>• Should the United States sustain or increase economic interdependence with China or attempt to decouple some parts of the two economies?</li> <li>• What Chinese behaviors should the United States push back on, and what tools should the United States use to do so?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key conflicts of interest in the U.S.-China relationship.</li> <li>• Assess what types of concessions or compromises historically have resolved conflicts of interest between great powers and what trade-offs they create.</li> <li>• Project how economic decoupling would affect the U.S. and Chinese economies and U.S.-China relations.</li> </ul>

## U.S. Policy Toward North Korea

Although advocates of restraint do not see North Korea as posing a threat on the scale of China, they do see some areas of concern. That said, advocates of restraint do not support the use of force to address these threats, as we detail in this section.

### Threat Posed by North Korea, and When the United States Would Use Force

The 2017 NSS describes North Korea as a rogue state seeking to challenge U.S. power. It has called North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons a global threat and has called for complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>38</sup> Although advocates of restraint believe that North Korea's nuclear weapons are a threat to U.S. interests, they disagree about the nature of this threat and the manner in which the United States should respond. These strategists do not believe that sanctions and diplomatic pressure would be sufficient to convince North Korea to give up its weapons, so they believe that denuclearizing North Korea would require a dangerous and costly military intervention. Advocates of restraint do not believe that the United States should undertake such an operation. Rather, they note

<sup>38</sup> White House, 2017, pp. 46–47.

that the United States has been able to deter nuclear-armed adversaries in the past, and they argue that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un can also be deterred, contrary to what other commentators have suggested.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, advocates of restraint believe that the United States should be willing to live with a nuclear North Korea, at least in the short term.<sup>40</sup>

Advocates of restraint also have been clear that they disagree with U.S. policymakers who believe that the United States should intervene to secure nuclear weapons in North Korea in the event of a North Korean regime collapse.<sup>41</sup> Advocates of restraint argue that South Korea and China would have a clearer interest in the crisis and should take the bulk of the responsibility for resolving it.<sup>42</sup> The United States might offer humanitarian assistance, logistical support, and specialized assistance in dismantling weapons of mass destruction, but advocates of restraint believe that the involvement of U.S. troops in combat likely would make the situation even more volatile.<sup>43</sup> Advocates of restraint argue that U.S. involvement would put U.S. and Chinese troops in

---

<sup>39</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "Never Call Kim Jong Un Crazy Again," *Foreign Policy*, June 14, 2018d. For arguments that the United States should consider the use of force, see, for example, Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, "If Necessary, Strike and Destroy: North Korea Cannot Be Allowed to Test This Missile," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Establishing an Acceptable Relationship with a Nuclear North Korea," Cato Institute, February 1, 2019d; and John Glaser, "On North Korea, Diplomacy Is the Sensible Option," *Cato at Liberty*, July 7, 2017a.

<sup>41</sup> Doug Bandow, "What Comes Next for North Korea," *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2020d; and Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-331-SRF, 2013. For this as a defense planning scenario as recently as 2010, see Larson, 2019, p. 238.

<sup>42</sup> Because South Korea is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, conducting such operations might be a violation of Article II, which prohibits nonnuclear countries from controlling nuclear weapons; United Nations, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Washington, D.C., July 1, 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Doug Bandow, "If North Korea Goes Down, the U.S. Should Stay Out," *American Conservative*, May 8, 2020e.

close proximity, which could lead to inadvertent escalation and even conflict.<sup>44</sup>

Current policymakers also suggest that North Korea poses a direct threat toward South Korea. There is some ambiguity about the conditions under which advocates of restraint would support defending South Korea against a North Korean attack. While advocates of minimal military involvement would seek to remove all U.S. commitments in East Asia, as detailed later, advocates of reduced military involvement advise sustaining the U.S.–South Korean alliance. This raises the questions of how they assess the level of threat that North Korea poses to South Korea and whether the United States would intervene to defend its ally.

Posen suggests that the conventional threat posed by North Korea against South Korea is very low. He argues that the geography of the Korean Peninsula favors defense for three reasons, all of which would make any offensive maneuvers difficult: the short border separating North Korea and South Korea, the rough terrain along this border, and the well-fortified positions by both sides past the demilitarized zone. Furthermore, although South Korea's army likely has fewer soldiers, it possesses superior weaponry, as Posen notes. As a result, Posen argues, the North Korean odds of victory in a conventional conflict are slight—therefore, South Korea should be able to deter a conventional attack on its own.<sup>45</sup>

However, the United States and South Korea are currently more concerned with North Korean long-range artillery and missiles that could target South Korean population centers, including Seoul, than with the threat of an invasion.<sup>46</sup> Advocates of reduced military involve-

---

<sup>44</sup> Emma Ashford and Matthew Kroenig, "What Would North Korea's Collapse Mean for U.S. Security?" *Foreign Policy*, May 1, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 2017*, Arlington, Va.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017; and Gian Gentile, Yvonne K. Crane, Dan Madden, Timothy M. Bonds, Bruce W. Bennett, Michael J. Mazarr, and Andrew Scobell, *Four Problems on the Korean Peninsula: North Korea's Expanding Nuclear Capabilities Drive a Complex Set of Problems*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TL-271-A, 2019.

ment, therefore, could develop their recommendations further by explaining whether, in the event that deterrence fails, they would support the U.S. use of force to defend South Korea in this type of scenario. More generally, they could clarify whether the United States should defend South Korea against any North Korean attack or fight only under certain conditions. In addition, current policymakers in Washington and Seoul are concerned about potential conflicts in the Yellow Sea and gray zone coercion, such as North Korean cyberattacks against the U.S. and South Korean economies.<sup>47</sup> As with China, advocates of restraint have not yet specified whether and how the United States should respond to such attacks on its ally.

### **Managing Peacetime Relations with North Korea**

As we have noted, advocates of restraint believe that the current threat posed by these nuclear weapons is not sufficient to require the use of force. Furthermore, because advocates of restraint believe that any other campaign of U.S. pressure is likely to be fruitless, they accept North Korean nuclearization as a reality. If any limitations on North Korea's nuclear program or agreements on arms control are possible, they argue, they will come from diplomacy. As a result, advocates of restraint call for the United States to undertake a policy of increased engagement with North Korea rather than one of increased pressure.<sup>48</sup>

Advocates of restraint have offered one potential pathway toward cooperation with North Korea. The United States should first increase diplomatic contact with North Korea, including the exchange of permanent diplomatic representation in both capitals.<sup>49</sup> The United States should also revoke the ban on U.S.–North Korean travel to encourage

---

<sup>47</sup> Erickson, 2017; Gentile et al., 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Doug Bandow, "A Modest Proposal: Open Ties with North Korea," *Foreign Policy*, June 4, 2020f.

<sup>49</sup> Doug Bandow, "How Donald Trump Can Jumpstart Diplomacy with North Korea," Cato Institute, February 18, 2020a.

private individuals and organizations, especially humanitarian non-governmental organizations, to establish relationships.<sup>50</sup>

In the security realm, advocates of restraint argue that the goal of total denuclearization should be set aside. The United States might seek a more limited agreement whereby North Korea would suspend nuclear and ballistic missile tests and the United States would put U.S.–South Korean military exercises on hold.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, the United States might consider lifting or reducing the sanctions on North Korea. One advocate of restraint suggested doing so in exchange for a permanent freeze on North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, verified by international inspections.<sup>52</sup> Others have been less clear on the concessions they would require in exchange for removing sanctions.

Advocates of restraint also believe that, as the more interested party, South Korea should take the lead in building relations with North Korea. Still, some advocates of restraint suggest that the United States also should remove barriers to reconciliation between South Korea and North Korea. A removal of U.S. sanctions, for example, could be one option, since the threat of U.S. retaliation deters South Korean companies from developing economic relationships with North Korea.<sup>53</sup> The United States could also work toward negotiating a formal peace treaty to replace the armistice agreement that ended the Korean War.<sup>54</sup> Analysis of options for settling the Korean War or moving toward Korean reconciliation could inform the development of

---

<sup>50</sup> Doug Bandow, "How to Solve the North Korea Crisis Once and for All," *National Interest*, September 22, 2019b.

<sup>51</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, "Incentivizing China on N. Korea Requires Creative U.S. Diplomacy," Cato Institute, March 24, 2017a; and Carpenter, 2019d. The United States and North Korea briefly had an implicit bargain of this kind in both 2018 and late 2019. However, neither bargain held for long. Dan Lamothe, "Trump Pledged to End Military Exercises with South Korea. But Will It Ever Happen?" *Washington Post*, June 12, 2018; and "U.S. Postpones Military Exercises with South Korea in Nod Toward North Korea," *Politico*, November 17, 2019b.

<sup>52</sup> Carpenter, 2019d.

<sup>53</sup> Bandow, 2019b.

<sup>54</sup> Bandow, 2019b; Carpenter, 2019d.

**Table 3.4**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward North Korea**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under what conditions should the United States defend South Korea from a North Korean attack?</li><li>• How should the United States respond to a North Korean cyberattack?</li><li>• Under what conditions should the United States reduce or remove sanctions on North Korea?</li><li>• How, if at all, should the United States cultivate improved relations between South Korea and North Korea?</li><li>• Should the United States pursue a formal end to the Korean War or encourage Korean unification?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify the capabilities and shortfalls that South Korea has in a conventional conflict with North Korea, including long-range artillery attacks.</li><li>• Identify how past U.S. policies have affected the pace of North Korea’s nuclear program.</li><li>• Identify the interests of key parties (e.g., North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, United States) to generate options for reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula.</li></ul>

these proposals. Table 3.4 specifies the next steps for developing U.S. policy toward North Korea.

**Alliances and Partnerships**

Although current U.S. strategy documents call for both strengthening alliances and expanding the number of U.S. partnerships,<sup>55</sup> advocates of restraint take a different view, arguing that the United States should refrain from adding new military partners in East and South-east Asia, particularly along China’s borders.<sup>56</sup> In addition, they call for the United States to revise its position toward Taiwan. They argue that Taiwan is increasingly difficult to defend given its proximity to China and China’s growing power.<sup>57</sup> Advocates of restraint further note that the issue is a substantial point of friction with China and that it is an issue that will always be more salient to China than to the United

<sup>55</sup> DoD, 2018; DoD, 2019; White House, 2017, pp. 46–47.

<sup>56</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016; Lind and Press, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “Say Goodbye to Taiwan,” *National Interest*, February 25, 2014b; and Posen, 2014, p. 104.

States.<sup>58</sup> It is not clear, however, how they would recommend implementing such a change, although they recommend that the United States gradually downgrade its implied commitment to Taiwan to give Taiwan time to improve its own defenses.<sup>59</sup> It remains to be specified, for example, whether advocates of restraint recommend explicitly stating that the United States will no longer consider intervening if China invades Taiwan, or whether they recommend that the United States rescind or amend the Taiwan Relations Act.

There are, however, clear differences among advocates of restraint about U.S. commitments to Japan and South Korea. Advocates of minimal military engagement believe that U.S. alliances in Asia are costly and dangerous because they risk pulling the United States into an unnecessary war. Therefore, they call for the United States to extricate itself from all alliances in East Asia. They anticipate that, in the absence of U.S. defense commitments, states in East Asia will spend more on their own defense and form the regional security agreements necessary to balance against China.<sup>60</sup> Advocates of minimum military engagement expect Japan and South Korea to seek nuclear weapons to replace the U.S. nuclear umbrella. In their view, the United States should support these programs, because both Japan and South Korea have the financial resources and technical capabilities to develop a safe and secure nuclear weapons arsenal,<sup>61</sup> and doing so will better allow them to balance against regional adversaries.

---

<sup>58</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 104.

<sup>59</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016; Glaser, 2017b; Layne, 2007, pp. 187–188.

<sup>60</sup> Doug Bandow, “It’s Time for America to Cut South Korea Loose,” *Foreign Policy*, April 13, 2017a; Doug Bandow, “Time to Let Japan Be a Regular Military Power,” *National Interest*, October 29, 2017c; and Friedman and Logan, 2012, p. 180. However, advocates of minimal military engagement do suggest continued security cooperation in case balancing fails; Doug Bandow, “What Should the U.S. Do in Okinawa? Bring America’s Troops Home from Japan,” *Forbes*, June 8, 2016b. For earlier statements of this view, see Layne, 1997, p. 112; Layne, 2007, p. 189.

<sup>61</sup> The United States would mitigate the risk of instability associated with nascent nuclear programs by sustaining U.S. commitments until Japan and South Korea had a secure second strike—i.e., the ability to launch a nuclear weapon even if another state were to attempt a disarming first strike (see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 22–23).

Advocates of reduced military engagement take a different view of both U.S. alliances and proliferation in the region. They call for sustaining U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea as an insurance policy to help balance against the rise of China.<sup>62</sup> Posen argues that, without U.S. commitments, historical animosities between Japan and South Korea could inhibit cooperation and balancing against China. Most importantly, advocates of restraint worry that, in the event of a total withdrawal of U.S. security commitments, Japan would pursue a nuclear weapons program. South Korea, these strategists claim, would be threatened by Japan's program, provoking a South Korean program and making it less likely that the two countries would work together to counter China. Therefore, advocates of restraint recommend maintaining the nuclear umbrella over South Korea and Japan to prevent these countries from going nuclear and to enable cooperation between them.<sup>63</sup>

Although advocates of reduced military engagement believe that the United States should sustain many of its alliances and oppose proliferation, they call for other aspects of these relationships to change.<sup>64</sup> For example, these analysts propose renegotiating the terms of the U.S.-Japan alliance to require Japan to provide more for its own security and commit to mutual defense and to helping defend the commons.<sup>65</sup> The full extent of how these analysts would revise the security agreement remains unclear, however. For example, advocates of restraint should specify whether the revised treaty with Japan should cover the Senkaku Islands, which are disputed with China, the Kuriru (Kuril) Islands,

---

<sup>62</sup> Betts, 2012, p. 39; Posen, 2014, p. 104; Rosato and Schuessler, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> However, Posen notes that the United States should support independent proliferation in the event that China becomes sufficiently expansionist, and he stresses the dangers of maintaining the level of commitment necessary to deter nuclear proliferation (Posen, 2014, pp. 100–104, 167).

<sup>64</sup> For each of the alliances or partnerships that advocates of reduced military engagement hope to sustain, analysis of what changes would be politically possible, given the interests of both the United States and each ally, would be helpful for defining U.S. options.

<sup>65</sup> Castillo, 2019, p. 31; Posen, 2014, p. 101; Preble, 2011, p. 152.

which are disputed with Russia, or the Liancourt Rocks, which are disputed with South Korea.

It is also not clear whether advocates of restraint would recommend any changes to terms of the U.S.–South Korean alliance. As we have noted, advocates of restraint should clarify whether they would recommend conditions on when they would use force to defend South Korea against North Korea and whether the United States should exclude the defense of South Korea's claims to offshore islands near the Northern Limit Line. Similar to proposed changes in the Japanese alliance, advocates of restraint might call for South Korea to commit to make contributions to regional security beyond the Korean Peninsula.

Advocates of restraint do not often explicitly discuss other extant U.S. relationships in the region.<sup>66</sup> However, some advocates of minimal military engagement have argued that the United States should end its alliance with the Philippines, because its territorial conflicts with China increase the risk of entrapment and because of the more general unreliability of the government of Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, some have implied that the United States should end its alliance with Thailand.<sup>68</sup>

Prescriptions also need to be developed for Oceania. Advocates of minimal military engagement call for the termination of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty and a greater role for Australia and New Zealand in providing for their own defense.<sup>69</sup> However, Posen, an advocate of reduced military engagement, contends that commitments to states like Australia are more sensible and

---

<sup>66</sup> Advocates of restraint of Mearsheimer's ilk presumably would maintain or extend these commitments as part of the larger East Asian alliance.

<sup>67</sup> Doug Bandow, "The U.S. Doesn't Need the Philippines," *New York Times*, last updated October 18, 2016c; Ted Galen Carpenter, "It's Time to Suspend America's Alliance with the Philippines," *National Interest*, October 1, 2016c; and Glaser, 2017b, p. 10. However, Bandow hopes to maintain some level of basing access. U.S. military access to the Philippines also might be less important if the United States no longer plans on defending Taiwan.

<sup>68</sup> Glaser has argued that Thailand's defense should be its own responsibility but offers few specifics, while Bandow argues that the United States should not intervene in Thailand even in the case of war (Glaser, 2017b, p. 17; Bandow, 2017c).

<sup>69</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, p. 20; Glaser, 2017b, p. 17.

less costly than other alliances and, therefore, should be maintained. But he, too, notes that Australia underinvests in its own defense, suggesting that some reform might be needed.<sup>70</sup> Preble offers one possible prescription. He argues that the alliances should be reformed to require Australia to take on a larger role in ensuring that vital sea lines of communication stay open in the Western Pacific.<sup>71</sup>

Advocates of restraint also could be more explicit about U.S. partnerships, cooperative relationships that do not involve a formal treaty commitment. As noted earlier, advocates of restraint discourage the creation of new partnerships. However, it is unclear whether advocates of restraint would want to end or change the nature of U.S. engagements with such countries as Singapore.

Finally, advocates of restraint might wish to develop recommendations on U.S. relations with the Freely Associated States (FAS), which consist of the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Compacts of Free Association agreements with these states provide for U.S. assistance to the FAS and exclusive U.S. air, land, and sea access to this strategic region, which is located west of Hawaii. Analysis of the role of current U.S. agreements with these countries in helping the United States maintain command of the commons and access to the Asia-Pacific would inform the development of policy prescriptions that are consistent with a grand strategy of restraint, particularly as China builds closer ties with the FAS.<sup>72</sup> Table 3.5 describes the next steps for developing policies on U.S. alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific.

---

<sup>70</sup> Mina Pollmann, "A Discussion on Grand Strategy and International Order with Barry Posen," interview transcript, Center for International Maritime Security, January 3, 2017; Posen, 2014, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> Preble, 2011, p. 152.

<sup>72</sup> Derek Grossman, Michael S. Chase, Gerard Finin, Wallace Gregson, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Logan Ma, Jordan R. Reimer, and Alice Shih, *America's Pacific Island Allies: The Freely Associated States and Chinese Influence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2973-OSD, 2019.

**Table 3.5**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Alliances and Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over what countries should the United States be willing to extend its nuclear umbrella?</li> <li>• How should the United States change its commitments to Taiwan (e.g., should the United States alter its interpretation of or revoke the Taiwan Relations Act)?</li> <li>• How should the U.S. treaties with Japan and South Korea be revised?</li> <li>• In what circumstances should the United States defend Japan or South Korea?</li> <li>• In what circumstances should the United States defend Japanese or South Korean claims to disputed territory (e.g., the Senkakus)?</li> <li>• What steps should the United States take to improve cooperation between South Korea and Japan?</li> <li>• Should the United States revise or revoke treaties with Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand?</li> <li>• How should the United States approach relations with the FAS?</li> <li>• Should the United States sustain, alter, or end partnerships with other countries in the region?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify options and trade-offs for downgrading U.S. relations with Taiwan.</li> <li>• Analyze implications of increased nuclearization of East Asia on regional stability.</li> <li>• Assess what changes to treaty relationships Japan and South Korea would be willing to accept and whether there are any U.S. demands that could cause them to align with China.</li> <li>• Review how ending an alliance or changing its terms historically has affected subsequent relations between the two states and with adversaries.</li> <li>• Review lessons from past alliance renegotiations or terminations about how to mitigate risks (e.g., inadvertently emboldening adversaries).</li> <li>• Assess the value of U.S. agreements with Oceania and the FAS for U.S. command of the commons and access to the Asia-Pacific.</li> </ul>

## Posture

The current U.S. way of war is predicated on working “by, with, and through our allies and partners.”<sup>73</sup> This is necessary to execute current U.S. grand strategy because the only U.S. territory in the region is Guam, a remote outpost from which to attempt to command the commons of Asia and defend all current U.S. allies and partners. Given existing military technology, it is difficult to project the necessary

<sup>73</sup> DoD, 2018, p. 5.

combat power from the U.S. homeland to meet current U.S. objectives with sufficient speed and over a sustained period of time. Advocates of restraint have not yet offered detailed prescriptions on how they would modify U.S. posture in the Asia-Pacific to account for changes in U.S. commitments and other policies. However, they have offered many broad ideas on how U.S. posture in the region would change under a grand strategy of restraint.

Advocates of minimal military engagement seek to dramatically reduce the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific, removing virtually all U.S. forces on China's periphery.<sup>74</sup> They argue that U.S. bases in East Asia are in high-threat areas and susceptible to Chinese attack in the event of war, and, therefore, these bases should not be maintained. Advocates of minimal military engagement would start with a phased withdrawal of the U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula, perhaps as an inducement in negotiations for the denuclearization of North Korea.<sup>75</sup> The U.S. presence in Japan also would be gradually reduced, beginning with the U.S. Marine Corps presence in Okinawa; the U.S. bases would be turned back over to the Japanese government.<sup>76</sup> These analysts have not yet said how quickly U.S. withdrawal should occur.

Advocates of minimal military engagement would retain a naval presence in the Asia-Pacific far from China's periphery. Glaser notes that a substantial portion of China's seaborne oil imports pass through sea-lanes and critical choke points, such as the Strait of Malacca, making them vulnerable to interdiction by the U.S. Navy. Therefore, these analysts recommend basing U.S. naval presence out of U.S. territory in Guam to reduce China's threat perceptions.<sup>77</sup> Although Diego Garcia is located outside the region, advocates of restraint generally agree that U.S. bases at Diego Garcia, which is desirable because of its

---

<sup>74</sup> Bandow, 2017a; Bandow, 2017c.

<sup>75</sup> Bandow, 2017a; Layne, 2007, p. 189.

<sup>76</sup> Bandow, 2016b.

<sup>77</sup> Glaser, 2017b.

strategic location and distance from U.S. adversaries, would be maintained to enable future military operations in Asia.<sup>78</sup>

Advocates of reduced military engagement agree that South Korean forces should be the first line of defense against North Korea and advise that the United States should remove all of its forces from the Korean Peninsula, starting with ground forces.<sup>79</sup> Although not explicit, the recommendation that the United States should maintain an alliance with South Korea suggests that some U.S. forces might return in the event of war. Therefore, advocates of partial restraint might recommend maintaining some amount of access to allow for this possibility, although this is not fully specified.

Advocates of reduced military engagement would gradually reduce rather than withdraw from other parts of the region. The United States would maintain a smaller force presence in Japan that would be sufficient only to defend it against a surprise attack, presumably by China, until additional U.S. forces could be deployed. It is not clear what the composition or magnitude of this smaller force should be.<sup>80</sup> To enable additional forces to return to Japan in the event of war, many existing bases could be gradually converted into FOSs and cooperative security locations that contain little or no permanent presence but provide contingency access. The United States also would conduct large-scale deployment exercises, like the Cold War Reforger or the more recent Defender Pacific exercises, to show that it retained the ability to quickly reinforce Japan's defenses.<sup>81</sup> Advocates of restraint have not, however, conducted detailed analysis to determine the regional posture—forces, access, and pre-positioned equipment—and cost for this approach to Japan's defense.

---

<sup>78</sup> Glaser, 2017b. We further discuss Diego Garcia in Chapter Five.

<sup>79</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Castillo, 2019, p. 31; Posen, 2014, p. 105. Betts, however, suggests that air forces might stay indefinitely (Betts, 2012, p. 39).

<sup>80</sup> Parent and MacDonald, 2011, p. 43; Posen, 2014, p. 100.

<sup>81</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 100, 161. For a discussion of Defender Pacific exercises, see Jen Judson, "US Army's 'Defender Pacific' Drill to Focus on South China Sea Scenario," *Defense News*, March 27, 2019.

Advocates of both minimal and reduced military engagement argue that U.S. naval forces are needed to sustain U.S. command of the commons, limit China's capacity to expand, and retain the ability to flow forces into the region.<sup>82</sup> However, these groups diverge over the size and location of this presence. As noted earlier, advocates of minimal military engagement call for the United States to keep its naval presence away from China's periphery. Advocates of reduced military engagement, however, have argued that, in addition to Guam and the out-of-region Diego Garcia, the United States should continue operating from naval facilities in Japan and Australia.<sup>83</sup> Posen has argued that access to naval facilities in Singapore would also be useful to maintain because the government of Singapore has constructed a pier capable of handling U.S. nuclear aircraft carriers.<sup>84</sup> However, because Singapore sits at the tip of the Strait of Malacca, an area of concern for China, other advocates of partial retrenchment might not support this recommendation. Even U.S. efforts to retain command of the commons from more-distant locations, such as Diego Garcia, might continue to threaten China to some degree. Therefore, advocates of restraint will need to clarify how to manage tensions between their recommendations for improving relations with China and their recommendations for retaining U.S. command of the commons.

As with Europe, it is unclear whether either group would support increased reliance on U.S. allies and partners for maritime operations or whether these groups believe that the United States by itself should retain command of the commons. The answer to this question would affect U.S. naval posture in the region under a grand strategy of restraint.

To move beyond these initial recommendations, advocates of restraint need to further articulate the conflict scenarios and peacetime activities (e.g., patrolling the sea-lanes) that they think the United States should be prepared to undertake. Analysis of the political viability of alternate posture options also might be helpful, since changes in

---

<sup>82</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016; Castillo, 2019, p. 31; Posen, 2014, pp. 136–144.

<sup>83</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Betts, 2012, p. 39; Carpenter and Gomez, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 161.

alliances and the overall size of the U.S. presence in the region might affect the level of access that current U.S. allies and partners are willing to provide.

More research is also needed on which posture options that are consistent with a grand strategy of restraint, if any, are likely to prove less provocative to China. Advocates of restraint seek a mutual accommodation with China while also retaining U.S. command of the commons. As the Chinese leadership increasingly emphasizes that its national interests lie beyond its territory and must be protected with military forces, especially along maritime routes, it is not clear whether there is a U.S. military presence in Asia that is both robust enough to maintain command of the commons and capable of reducing China's threat perceptions sufficiently to allow for a more cooperative relationship with the United States.<sup>85</sup> If such a presence is not possible, advocates of restraint will need to clarify how they recommend negotiating this trade-off between their policy priorities. Future research on Chinese threat perceptions and redlines could help identify less provocative posture options and assess the viability of simultaneously pursuing these two policy prescriptions.

One posture issue that advocates of restraint might wish to focus on, given the current salience of this issue in the policy discourse, is the disposition of long-range strike systems in the region. In particular, U.S. policymakers are considering the deployment of missiles with greater range to the region now that the United States has withdrawn from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia.<sup>86</sup> There is no formal U.S. plan yet, but public DoD statements suggest that the United States is considering deploying missiles throughout

---

<sup>85</sup> Thomas J. Bickford, *Haiyang Qiangguo: China as a Maritime Power*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, March 15, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> The Trump administration formally withdrew from the INF Treaty in August 2019, citing Russian violations of the treaty. The administration also touted the value of intermediate-range missiles to counter growing Chinese military power in the Asia-Pacific, leading some to assess that this was the real motivation for U.S. withdrawal; Joe Gould, "With INF Treaty Dead, Esper Seeks New Missiles in the Pacific. Is Capitol Hill on Board?" *Defense News*, August 7, 2019; and David E. Sanger and Edward Wong, "U.S. Ends Cold War Missile Treaty, with Aim of Countering China," *New York Times*, August 1, 2019.

the theater that are capable of striking targets on the Chinese mainland.<sup>87</sup> Advocates of restraint might see this issue differently. On the one hand, advocates of restraint likely would be concerned that the placement and range of some INF-range systems could provoke Chinese insecurity, especially if these systems were controlled by U.S. forces. INF-range systems intended to defend a U.S. ally or partner that can also reach mainland China could theoretically be used for offensive purposes, such as a strike on Chinese leadership or nuclear targets. That possibility could contribute to Chinese insecurity. On the other hand, advocates of restraint think that the United States should encourage allies to acquire missiles capable of attacking invading forces as part of a broader defense-oriented strategy.<sup>88</sup> On the whole, therefore, advocates of restraint might argue in favor of encouraging allies and partners (rather than U.S. forces) to invest in missiles, focusing on those that are of short enough range that they cannot strike the Chinese mainland. Table 3.6 describes the next steps for understanding how to operationalize posture change in the Asia-Pacific.

## Security Cooperation and Assistance

Advocates of restraint point to the need for other states, especially wealthy countries, to bear more of the costs of their own security. Still, they support some security assistance to facilitate U.S. withdrawal from the region, including military transfers.<sup>89</sup> Advocates of restraint have

---

<sup>87</sup> Samantha Bowers, "Where Could the US Put Its Post-INF Missiles?" *Defense One*, February 11, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Eugene Gholz, Benjamin Friedman, and Enea Gjoza, "Defensive Defense: A Better Way to Protect US Allies in Asia," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter 2020, pp. 179–180. For other arguments along these lines, see Kingston Reif and Shannon Bugos, "Building Post-INF Missiles Would Be a Waste, or Worse," *Defense One*, January 10, 2020. Despite not being a party to the treaty, and despite developing a suite of missiles over the past 20 years that would be banned under the treaty, Beijing has strongly criticized Washington for its withdrawal from the treaty, suggesting that the withdrawal could spark an arms race in the region; Alan Yuhas, "China Warns U.S. Against Sending Missiles to Asia Amid Fears of an Arms Race," *New York Times*, August 6, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 19–25.

**Table 3.6**  
**Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in the Asia-Pacific**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How quickly should the United States draw down forces in Korea and Japan?</li> <li>• What forces should remain in Japan?</li> <li>• What posture should the United States adopt in Asia to maintain command of the commons?</li> <li>• Does the United States need to retain command of the commons on its own, or can it do so in collaboration with allies?</li> <li>• What war scenarios and peacetime military activities should guide overall posture planning for the region?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify posture options for the defense of South Korea in contingencies that advocates of restraint would undertake.</li> <li>• Identify U.S. forces, access, and pre-positioned equipment and supplies that would be needed to defend Japan against a surprise attack by China.</li> <li>• Identify posture options to support U.S. command of the commons in the region.</li> <li>• Assess countries' willingness to provide U.S. access given other policy changes associated with a grand strategy of restraint (e.g., renegotiating alliance terms, limiting implied U.S. commitments).</li> <li>• Assess whether there are options for U.S. posture in the region that might lower Chinese threat perceptions.</li> </ul>

suggested, for example, providing security assistance to less wealthy U.S. partners, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, to improve their self-defense capabilities.<sup>90</sup> In particular, they suggest that the United States should assist and even subsidize its allies in acquiring anti-access, area denial capabilities that would make Chinese aggression more difficult rather than encouraging investments in offensive capabilities. According to Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza, this policy might be a good first step toward changing the U.S. role in the region.<sup>91</sup>

The main area of disagreement among advocates of restraint regarding security cooperation and assistance pertains to Taiwan. Although some believe that the United States should continue arms

<sup>90</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016; and Thomas Maddux, Diane Labrosse, and George Fujii, eds., "ISSF Roundtable on Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy," *H-Diplo*, Vol. VIII, No. 16, July 11, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Although at least some of the authors favor a grand strategy of restraint, they take U.S. grand strategy as a given for the purposes of this article. Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza, 2020.

sales to help improve Taiwan's self-defense capabilities,<sup>92</sup> others suggest that even arms sales must be halted to completely remove this significant source of tension with China. Thrall and Dorminey argue that arms sales to Taiwan signal to both Taiwan and China an implicit U.S. commitment to fight on Taiwan's behalf and that breaking off arms sales is necessary to avoid provocation or entanglement in a future conflict.<sup>93</sup> Gomez argues that stopping the sale of arms to Taiwan could lead China to make concessions of its own, such as reducing the number of short-range ballistic missiles that are within firing range of Taiwan.<sup>94</sup>

Advocates of restraint also should develop policy recommendations on what priorities should guide security cooperation activities that remaining U.S. forces would undertake in peacetime. If advocates of restraint seek to reduce U.S. commitments while increasing or sustaining security cooperation, another important analytic question will be how to manage allies' and adversaries' perceptions. The act of providing arms to a country, especially one facing a common adversary, could have effects on beliefs about U.S. commitments, as analysts have argued is the case in the current U.S.-Taiwan relationship. Therefore, continuing security cooperation might inadvertently continue to signal a U.S. commitment to the ally while also remaining provocative to the adversary. More analysis of how security cooperation and assistance affect allied and adversary assessments of a state's intentions could help advocates of restraint refine their recommendations on these activities. Table 3.7 describes the next steps for designing security cooperation and assistance policies for the Asia-Pacific.

---

<sup>92</sup> Carpenter and Gomez, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> A. Trevor Thrall and Caroline Dorminey, "Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 836, March 13, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Gomez, "A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 800, September 28, 2016.

**Table 3.7****Designing Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies Toward the Asia-Pacific**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of arms, if any, should the United States sell to Taiwan?</li> <li>• What type of security cooperation activities should the United States undertake, and with whom?</li> <li>• What should be the goal of U.S. security assistance (e.g., build capacity, inspire regional cooperation, maintain relationships)?</li> <li>• With which countries would the United States continue to exercise, and what would be the goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify types of arms sales and other forms of security cooperation that could most help allies and partners defend themselves.</li> <li>• Assess whether different types of arms sales to Taiwan are more or less provocative to China.</li> <li>• Assess how security cooperation activities affect a country's willingness to provide U.S. access to defend another country or to sustain command of the commons.</li> <li>• Determine how arms sales and other security cooperation activities affect perceptions of U.S. commitments by both allies and adversaries.</li> </ul>

**Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward the Asia-Pacific**

Advocates of restraint have had more-thoughtful discussions about the possibility that core assumptions about local balancing could prove incorrect for the Asia-Pacific, compared with Europe. Although advocates of restraint find common ground on such issues as increasing cooperation with China and removing any U.S. commitment to Taiwan, they differ on the prospects for local balancing. For some advocates of restraint, the threat of balancing failure is sufficiently low that the United States ought to retain only a minimal presence in the Asia-Pacific. Therefore, they would recommend ending all U.S. security commitments and withdrawing most forward forces. However, because China's relative power is greater and the relationships between local states are more fraught than in Europe, others in the restraint community see greater risks if their assumptions prove incorrect. As a result, they have proposed a reduced, rather than minimal, military engagement—that is, maintaining some continued U.S. presence and commitments as an insurance policy against greater Chinese growth or under-balancing by key states, such as Japan.

There are several questions for which more-detailed development is still needed. For example, advocates of restraint need to define the extent and nature of the sphere of Chinese influence that they think the United States should be willing to live with in Asia. Advocates of restraint also must consider whether and how the United States should respond to unwelcome Chinese behavior that remains below the threshold of major war, such as gray zone activities, the weaponization of space, and nonmilitary coercion. Would these actions ever be sufficiently threatening to U.S. interests to merit a change in U.S. strategy? Is there a role for the U.S. military to play in gray zone activities in the region, or should these be handled exclusively by allies and partners? Lastly, advocates of restraint should generate more-detailed posture options for Asia. A key intellectual building block is to identify the scenarios for which the U.S. military must prepare.

## The Middle East

---

In this chapter, we apply our framework to the context of the Middle East, answering the following questions: What are the threats posed by Iran and terrorist groups in the region? How should the United States manage its peacetime relationship with Iran and Syria? How should the United States combat terrorism, and should the United States be concerned with intrastate violence? Should the United States maintain its partnerships in the region? What kind of posture should the United States maintain in the region, and should it continue any security cooperation and assistance activities?

Advocates of restraint agree with the current NSS and National Defense Strategy (NDS) that the United States should reduce the level of resources devoted to the Middle East and should place greater priority on other regions.<sup>1</sup> Advocates of restraint also agree with stated U.S. policy that the key U.S. interests in the region should be preventing the domination of Persian Gulf oil by a single power and stopping terrorist groups based in the region from attacking the U.S. homeland.<sup>2</sup> In spite of these similarities, current U.S. policymakers and advocates of restraint disagree on how the United States should interpret and implement this vision.

One key difference between current U.S. policymakers and advocates of restraint is their assessment of the level of threat that the United States faces in the region. Current U.S. policymakers see Iran

---

<sup>1</sup> DoD, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> White House, 2017, pp. 48–50.

as a significant threat that could potentially dominate the region, and so they seek to combat Iran's influence. Advocates of restraint disagree with this threat assessment. Although they see Iran as the state that is most likely to undermine U.S. interests in the region, they do not see Iran as powerful enough to dominate other regional powers.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, these analysts argue, the United States should reduce its presence in the region, which they expect would encourage such countries as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel to overcome their differences and balance against Iran.<sup>4</sup>

Advocates of restraint do not believe that terrorist groups currently operating in the Middle East are a significant threat to the U.S. homeland. This view of a relatively low threat environment drives prescriptions about the continued use of force in the region. Advocates of restraint recommend ending some ongoing counterterrorism operations in the region, including against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and avoiding large-scale U.S. military operations in the future. They believe that U.S. presence exacerbates the terrorist threat and that military operations are ineffective at preventing transnational terrorism and addressing its root causes.<sup>5</sup>

Advocates of restraint see a role for Washington to remain diplomatically and economically engaged in the region, even as they call for a reduced U.S. military presence.<sup>6</sup> The United States would continue to collect intelligence to monitor for the possibility of threats that would require a U.S. return to the region.<sup>7</sup> However, the United States

---

<sup>3</sup> For a similar view from another supporter of restraint generally, but not necessarily the realist variant, see Trita Parsi, "The Middle East Is More Stable When the United States Stays Away," *Foreign Policy*, January 6, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ashford, 2018a, p. 138; and Joshua Rovner, "After America: The Flow of Persian Gulf Oil in the Absence of US Military Force," in Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic, eds., *Crude Strategy: Rethinking the US Military Commitment to Defend Persian Gulf Oil*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House, 2005, p. 247.

<sup>6</sup> Ashford, 2018a, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, "Less Is More: The Future of the U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3, Fall 2014, p. 57.

would continue ongoing operations with only a minimal onshore military presence.

## U.S. Policy Toward Iran

Advocates of restraint believe that, as with the other powers discussed in previous chapters, the United States has historically overstated the threat posed by Iran. They would prefer that Iran not acquire nuclear weapons but are not willing to use force to prevent it.

### Threat Posed by Iran, and When the United States Would Use Force

Moving forward, advocates of restraint argue that the only major threat to U.S. vital interests in the Middle East would be if a single state threatened to dominate the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf.<sup>8</sup> Advocates of restraint agree with the 2017 NDS that Iran remains the most threatening state in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> However, advocates of restraint have also said that they currently do not see Iran or any other country in the region as powerful enough to dominate the Persian Gulf and do not expect Iran to achieve this status in the near future.<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of restraint do not support a preventive war to end the Iranian nuclear program. Posen makes this argument most forcefully. He argues that Iran would not become more aggressive if it acquired nuclear weapons, because its nuclear and conventional capabilities would still be outmatched by Israel and other countries in the region. Posen also argues that there is no evidence that Iran would act irrationally with nuclear weapons. Furthermore, although there might be some worry of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, Posen suggests that this is unlikely. For instance, Posen notes that Saudi Arabia lacks

---

<sup>8</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> DoD, 2018, p. 1; and Middle East Institute, “The Middle East in an Era of Great Power Competition: A Conversation with Barry Posen and Stephen Walt,” video and transcript of online event, April 16, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Barry R. Posen, “We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran,” MIT Center for International Studies *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom*, 06-05, March 2006.

the domestic scientific, engineering, and industrial base necessary to build a self-sustaining nuclear program in the near future, while Egypt relies on foreign assistance that would be at risk if Egypt were to violate nuclear norms. As a result, although Iranian nuclear proliferation would run counter to U.S. interests, it is not likely to be dangerous enough to require U.S. intervention.<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, some ambiguities in the restraint position on the use of force against Iran. As we detail later, many advocates of restraint support a peacetime naval presence to secure the sea-lanes and, thereby, the flow of oil. This seems to imply both that they see some level of threat to U.S. interests and that they would support use of force under certain conditions to secure the maritime commons. At the same time, advocates of restraint emphasize the importance of allies playing the primary role in regional balancing. So, it is not clear when advocates of restraint would recommend U.S. intervention. For example, should the United States use force if Iran attacked commercial shipping, or should the United States leave that to local powers? Should the United States intervene against a more expansive Iranian attack on the sea-lanes? Analysis of Iran's capability to close the Strait of Hormuz and regional countries' ability to stop its closure might help clarify whether local powers can handle the threat on their own.<sup>12</sup>

Surprisingly, given their calls for reducing the U.S. role in the region, some advocates of restraint have said that the United States should defend Persian Gulf partners, such as Saudi Arabia, against a conventional interstate attack—which would include an attack by Iran.<sup>13</sup> However, it is not clear whether all advocates of restraint would support a U.S. role in an interstate war in the region. It is also unclear whether those who support a continued U.S. commitment would support a U.S. intervention in any conventional interstate war or only in

---

<sup>11</sup> Posen, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> For similar analysis focusing on U.S. capabilities to prevent Iran from closing the strait, see Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Summer 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press, "Footprints in the Sand," *American Interest*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2010; and Posen, 2014, pp. 109–110, 112.

one that involved invasion and occupation. For example, advocates of restraint have not commented on how they view the threat posed by Iran's ballistic and cruise missile programs and the possibility that they could be used in a coercive campaign short of full-scale invasion.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, those who support a continued U.S. commitment have not said how U.S. policy should change if Iran obtains a nuclear weapon. For example, should the United States be willing to threaten nuclear retaliation for an Iranian nuclear attack on a U.S. partner? Advocates of restraint should clarify their views on the U.S. role in deterring nuclear use and interstate aggression in the region.

### **Managing Peacetime Relations with Iran**

While the Trump administration has pursued a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran and argued that the United States needs to compete with Iran for regional influence,<sup>15</sup> advocates of restraint argue that U.S. interests would be best served by pursuing less-conflictual peacetime relations with Iran.<sup>16</sup> They believe that many aspects of Iranian behavior are driven by insecurity, particularly insecurity driven by the possibility that the United States could pursue or support regime change. The possibility of Iran moderating its behavior in response to changes in U.S. policy is consistent with the realist thought that underlies a grand strategy of restraint, which suggests that Iran's security interests are a more important factor in its decisionmaking than its ideological background. More generally, advocates of restraint believe that engagement could empower moderate groups inside Iran in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Robert Einhorn and Vann H. Van Diepen, *Constraining Iran's Missile Capabilities*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 2019; and Shahryar Pasandideh, "Under the Radar, Iran's Cruise Missile Capabilities Advance," *War on the Rocks*, September 25, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Goldberg, "Trump Has an Iran Strategy. This Is It," *New York Times*, January 24, 2020; and Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Lays Out Demands for New Iran Deal," *Wall Street Journal*, last updated May 21, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82.

long term, especially among a younger generation that desires a freer society,<sup>17</sup> leading Iran to adopt a more moderate foreign policy.<sup>18</sup>

Advocates of restraint argue that engagement is the best way to forestall an Iranian nuclear program.<sup>19</sup> Several advocates of restraint have called for the United States to remove preconditions for resuming diplomatic talks with Iran, cease sanctions, and come back into compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.<sup>20</sup> Advocates of restraint also have offered some other policies to address Iran's security concerns. For example, the United States might initially propose a prisoner exchange to begin to bring down tensions and improve dialogue between the two nations.<sup>21</sup> Bandow suggests that the United States also could cut arms sales to the Saudis and Emiratis, end support for the Yemen war, or withdraw U.S. forces from Syria and Iraq, although he does not specify Iranian concessions in return.<sup>22</sup>

Advocates of restraint have some overlap with other foreign policy voices on Iran. For example, Elbridge Colby, a primary author of the 2018 NDS, agrees that the Middle East should be a lower-priority

---

<sup>17</sup> Emma Ashford and John Glaser, "Unforced Error: The Risks of Confrontation with Iran," Cato Institute, October 9, 2017; and Doug Bandow, "Trump Must Understand a War with Iran Would Be Hell," *National Interest*, November 21, 2019d.

<sup>18</sup> Ashford and Glaser, 2017; Bandow, 2019d.

<sup>19</sup> Friedman and Logan, 2012, p. 185; Christopher Layne, "America's Middle East Grand Strategy After Iraq: The Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, pp. 16–17; John J. Mearsheimer, "Iran Is Rushing to Build a Nuclear Weapon—and Trump Can't Stop It," *New York Times*, July 1, 2019b; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82; and Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018a, p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Bandow, 2019d; and Cato Institute, "U.S.-Iran Policy," December 4, 2019b. Other advocates of restraint, whose policy prescriptions might not flow from realist thought, also support compromise; see, for example, Tyler Cullis and Trita Parsi, "In Tortured Logic, Trump Begs for a Do-Over on the Iran Nuclear Deal," *Responsible Statecraft*, May 1, 2020; and Trita Parsi, "If Trump Really Wants to Talk to Iran, Here's What He Should Do," *Middle East Eye*, May 27, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel R. DePetrus, "The US and Iran Could Bring Down Tensions If They're Willing to Talk About One Issue," *Business Insider*, April 2, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Bandow, 2019d.

region and argues that, “if Iran’s provocations need to be answered, Washington must do so in a way that limits military involvement in the Middle East.”<sup>23</sup> Over the years, many recommendations have been put forward for how to achieve a more cooperative U.S.-Iran relationship. Some have focused on practical tools, such as a maritime hotline to de-escalate crises in the Gulf,<sup>24</sup> while others have advocated for the United States to change its rhetoric toward Iran so as to lower Iran’s sense of threat.<sup>25</sup> But advocates of restraint and regional experts alike could be more specific on options for how the United States could manage its relationship with the only significant state threat in the Middle East.

Additional analysis could help further the development of policy recommendations for a more conciliatory approach to Iran. Advocates of restraint still seek to maintain some level of U.S. naval presence in the region to retain command of the maritime commons. Therefore, they appear to have some limits on what Iranian behavior the United States would accept, leading to a more, but not necessarily purely, conciliatory approach to Iran. Additional policy analysis could help advocates of restraint identify options for such an approach. In particular, it would be helpful to systematically assess the relationship between U.S. policy toward Iran and Iranian military actions. For example, how did Iran respond to cases of U.S. military responses (e.g., Operation Praying Mantis) to Iranian attacks on naval vessels versus cases of U.S. restraint following Iranian attacks on naval vessels? Analysis of the effects of past U.S. sanctions against Iran, and Iranian responses, also could be helpful in assessing whether and how to lift sanctions on Iran. Table 4.1 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policy toward Iran.

---

<sup>23</sup> Elbridge A. Colby, “Don’t Let Iran Distract from China,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2019b.

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, *The Urgent Need for a U.S.-Iran Hotline*, Crisis Group Middle East Briefing No. 77, April 23, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Frederic Wehrey, David E. Thaler, Nora Bensahel, Kim Cragin, Jerrold D. Green, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Nadia Oweidat, and Jennifer Li, *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-781-AF, 2009.

**Table 4.1**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Iran**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What changes in Iran’s capabilities or behavior would allow it to seriously threaten vital U.S. interests?</li><li>• Should the United States extend its nuclear umbrella over states in the region if Iran acquires nuclear weapons?</li><li>• Under what conditions, and how, should the United States respond to an Iranian attack on commercial shipping or U.S. and partner naval forces?</li><li>• What compromises with or concessions to Iran should the United States be willing to pursue? What compromises or concessions should the United States require from Iran in return?</li><li>• Are there conditions under which the United States should pursue nonmilitary measures (e.g., sanctions) to coerce Iran?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify capability gains that would enable Iran to win a conventional conflict against its neighbors.</li><li>• Assess the ability of local powers to prevent Iran from closing the Strait of Hormuz or otherwise disrupting the flow of oil by sea.</li><li>• Assess the relationship between U.S. policy toward Iran and Iranian military actions. In particular, analyze past U.S. military responses (e.g., Operation Praying Mantis) and nonresponses to Iranian attacks on naval vessels.</li><li>• Assess the effect of sanctions on Iran’s behavior.</li></ul>

**U.S. Policy Toward Syria and Iraq**

Advocates of restraint argue that the United States should end operations and remove U.S. forces from Syria and Iraq.<sup>26</sup> They disagree with the justifications for continued operations in these countries. At the outset of the conflict, advocates of restraint consistently argued that ISIS posed little threat to the U.S. homeland.<sup>27</sup> Since then, ISIS

<sup>26</sup> On withdrawal from Iraq, see Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Doug Bandow, “On Iraq, Is Donald J. Trump Morphing into George W. Bush?” Cato Institute, March 19, 2020b; Gil Barndollar, “Dealing with the Remnants of ISIS,” Defense Priorities, February 2020; A. Trevor Thrall and Erik Goepner, “Step Back: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy from the Failed War on Terror,” Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 814, June 26, 2017; and Walt, 2019a. On withdrawal from Syria, see Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Bandow, 2020e; and Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Emma Ashford, “Dealing with ISIS in Iraq and Syria,” *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017; and Barndollar, 2020. Posen had argued for a strategy of containment from the outset; Barry R. Posen, “Contain ISIS,” *The Atlantic*, November 20, 2015. See also Stephen M. Walt, “ISIS as Revolutionary State: New Twist on an Old Story,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 6, November–December 2015.

has suffered substantial defeats and has lost control over its territorial holdings, leaving its fighters without coherent organization and spread across multiple locations, further undermining its ability to inflict harm on the United States.<sup>28</sup> As a result, advocates of restraint believe that remaining U.S. ground forces should be removed from the fight with ISIS and have argued that the United States should encourage countries in the region to fight the terrorist group.

Advocates of restraint argue that, in addition to ending the defeat-ISIS mission, the United States should cease its role in the Syrian civil war, remove its remaining military presence from the country, and accept Russia's involvement in resolving the conflict.<sup>29</sup> They also argue that the United States should accept the likely victory of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Advocates of restraint contend that a Syria under Assad would pose little threat to U.S. interests and that the United States historically has proven able to work with his regime.<sup>30</sup> With its military forces removed, the United States should lend its support to the peace process but not seek to be a core participant.<sup>31</sup>

Advocates of restraint also argue that the United States should end military operations in Iraq. U.S. operations in Iraq already have been greatly reduced, but some operations against ISIS and training of Iraqi forces are ongoing.<sup>32</sup> Advocates of restraint note that the Iraqi parliament voted for the United States to leave following the assassination of Qasem Soleimani in 2020. In addition, the remaining U.S. troops are vulnerable to ongoing militia attacks.<sup>33</sup> As a result, there

---

<sup>28</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Bandow, 2020e.

<sup>30</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82; and Christopher A. Preble and Doug Bandow, "America's Ill-Fated Syria Intervention: The Lessons Washington Must Learn," *National Interest*, October 15, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> For example, see John Glaser, "The Trump Administration's Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field," testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Thrall and Goepner, 2017; Walt, 2019a.

<sup>33</sup> Bandow, 2020b.

is little reason to remain, and advocates of restraint argue that the United States should begin to remove its forces immediately.<sup>34</sup> In one proposal, Pillar and colleagues recommend withdrawing according to a schedule that is consistent with Iraqi abilities to contend with a possible resurgence of ISIS but that is not subject to any U.S. attempt to add additional rationales for maintaining U.S. forces in Iraq, as has been the case in Syria.<sup>35</sup> However, no specific timeline is given for how long complete withdrawal should take, and there is no specification of what conditions would cause advocates of restraint to rethink complete withdrawal.

Although advocates of restraint have not detailed how they would manage a withdrawal, they have put forward ideas of what residual activities U.S. forces should conduct. The United States would limit its involvement in the conflict to continuing to provide arms, intelligence, and military training to other regional powers that are combating ISIS.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the United States would coordinate with factions on the ground to ensure that ISIS detention centers do not release prisoners.<sup>37</sup> U.S. air or ground operations would resume only in the event of a significant ISIS resurgence that could not be handled by local actors.<sup>38</sup>

Advocates of restraint have not yet specified how the United States should interact with either Syria or Iraq once U.S. forces have been withdrawn. These strategists could draw on proposals put forward by several prominent foreign policy practitioners and regional specialists who, although they do not necessarily self-identify as advocates of restraint, agree that U.S. operations are becoming unsustainable as

---

<sup>34</sup> Bandow, 2020b; Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Paul R. Pillar, Andrew Bacevich, Annette Sheline, and Trita Parsi, *A New U.S. Paradigm for the Middle East: Ending America's Misguided Policy of Domination*, Washington, D.C.: Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, Quincy Paper No. 2, July 2020, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Barndollar, 2020. Castillo argues that victory could be declared only when ISIS no longer controlled territory. As a result, support of reinsertion in the event of territorial control would be consistent with his prescriptions. Castillo, 2019, pp. 30–31.

the Syrian regime reconsolidates its control. These former practitioners and regional specialists also note that current U.S. policymakers see the defeat-ISIS campaign as part of the effort to combat Iran's influence in the region. Combating Iranian influence in Syria, the experts argue, is an unachievable goal, especially given the relatively small U.S. force in Syria, creating a risk of mission creep and open-ended U.S. operations in Syria.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, advocates of restraint generally advise against treating Iraq as an arena of competition between the United States and Iran.<sup>40</sup>

These experts agree with advocates of restraint that the United States should recognize Russia's interests in Syria, which long predate the emergence of ISIS, and work with Russia, which shares the U.S. interest in combating international terrorism, to push local actors to reach an accommodation. U.S. administrations have made some steps in this direction, with the types of cooperation envisioned with Russia having changed as the conflict evolved. The administration of former President Barack Obama, for example, aimed to increase intelligence-sharing with Russia on terrorist activity in Syria.<sup>41</sup> More-recent Trump administration proposals have focused on how the United States might find a pathway to reinterpret the political settlement and reforms called

---

<sup>39</sup> Robert Ford, former U.S. ambassador in Damascus; Jon Finer, former Director of Policy Planning at the State Department; Robert Malley, former senior National Security Council official in the Obama administration; and Joshua Landis, one of the top American academics on modern Syria, have all argued for limiting or ending the U.S. military mission in Syria. Robert S. Ford, "Trump's Syria Decision Was Essentially Correct. Here's How He Can Make the Most of It," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2018; Jon Finer and Robert Malley, "Trump Is Right to Seek an End to America's Wars," *New York Times*, January 8, 2019; and Joshua Landis, "Stay Out of Syria," *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Pillar et al., 2020.

<sup>41</sup> The 2016 agreement between former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was premised on U.S. intelligence-sharing with Russia and enhanced coordination of strikes against terrorist groups in return for Russian support to ground the Syrian Air Force. However, the agreement unraveled after the United States conducted an accidental strike on Syrian forces in the days after the agreement was reached and Russian and Syrian forces destroyed a UN aid convoy (see Julian Borger and Spencer Ackerman, "Russian Planes Dropped Bombs That Destroyed UN Aid Convoy, US Officials Say," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2016).

for in United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2254, so as to leave a pathway for Assad to remain in power.<sup>42</sup>

Given the Trump administration's partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, some experts recommend that the next step should be for the United States to help facilitate—or at least not stand in the way of—an agreement between the Syrian regime and the current U.S. armed partner in Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to jointly counter ISIS. These experts propose that the United States should extract itself from the conflict by enabling the reintegration of the primarily Kurdish SDF with the Syrian state on terms that preserve some Kurdish autonomy in northeast Syria. Their logic is that the Syrian regime would gain another force that would be well positioned to continue the fight against ISIS and that the United States would be able to withdraw from Syria without leaving its partner to an uncertain future. This was the essence of Ford's recommendation that the Trump administration

should offer Russia cooperation in smoothing the way for a deal between the SDF and Damascus that would allow Syrian troops to return to eastern Syria in a manner that meets Turkish security concerns and gives no new space to the Islamic State.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from military tools, one of the more hotly debated issues among Syria analysts is whether the United States should continue to increase the scope of sanctions against Syria, as it recently did with the Caesar Act, as a tool to punish Syria for its conduct and provide the United States with a “stick” that it can wield to press for changes in

---

<sup>42</sup> For an example of U.S. diplomats signaling their potential acceptance of Assad remaining in power if the regime adopts reform, see the following statement by Ambassador James Jeffrey: “We’re not about regime change. We’re about a change in the behavior of a government and of a state, and that’s not just our view. That’s the view in a whole series of international agreements related to Syria since 2012, culminating in the resolution of 2254” (James F. Jeffrey, “Briefing on Syria,” transcript of special briefing to the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., November 14, 2018).

<sup>43</sup> Ford, 2018. Advocates of restraint have devoted little attention to the role of Turkey in this conflict.

Syrian regime behavior.<sup>44</sup> Skeptics have argued that this tool is more likely to punish the Syrian people by denying them basic commodities than to change regime behavior.<sup>45</sup>

Advocates of restraint could usefully contribute to this debate by articulating their views as to the efficacy of economic sanctions against Syria. Specifically, would advocates of restraint see economic sanctions against the regime as a low-cost form of leverage that could spare the deployment of U.S. military forces, or, alternatively, as a punitive measure that would be unlikely to achieve the intended strategic aims? Advocates of restraint have noted previously that, although economic sanctions have proven effective at times, they have not demonstrated a consistent pattern of changing state behavior.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, as we have noted, advocates of restraint seek to reduce sanctions on Iran. As a result, we believe that advocates of restraint are unlikely to favor the use of economic sanctions against Syria, given the low strategic value that advocates of restraint place on Syria, although this position remains to be clarified. In the event that advocates of restraint recommend ending the use of sanctions, they should clarify whether this will be done unilaterally or whether, instead, the United States should push Syria for concessions before eliminating sanctions. Table 4.2 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policies toward Syria and Iraq.

## U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and Intrastate Conflict

Advocates of restraint believe that nationalism is a powerful force that makes populations resist foreign interventions and occupation. Therefore, advocates of restraint oppose large-scale U.S. counterterrorism missions and interventions in intrastate conflicts, which they expect

---

<sup>44</sup> Will Christou and Mohammad Abdulsattar Ibrahim, "The Caesar Act: The Beginning or End of US Syria Policy?" Syria Direct, January 5, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Hanania, "Ineffective, Immoral, Politically Convenient: America's Overreliance on Economic Sanctions and What to Do About It," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 884, February 18, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Glaser, Preble, and Thrall, 2019, p. 37.

**Table 4.2**  
**Developing U.S. Policies Toward Syria and Iraq**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How quickly should the United States remove its forces from Syria and Iraq?</li> <li>What conditions, if any, should the United States place on withdrawal from Syria and Iraq?</li> <li>What residual activities, if any, should U.S. military forces continue to conduct in Syria and Iraq?</li> <li>Are there conditions under which the United States should pursue nonmilitary measures (e.g., sanctions) to coerce Iran or Syria?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze how the way in which the United States has ended counterterrorism missions in the past has affected the future strength of terrorist groups.</li> <li>Assess the relationship between U.S. policy toward Iran and Iranian military actions. In particular, analyze past U.S. military responses (e.g., Operation Praying Mantis) and nonresponses to Iranian attacks on naval vessels.</li> <li>Assess the effect of sanctions on Syria’s behavior.</li> </ul>

to be unsuccessful and self-defeating.<sup>47</sup> Pillar and colleagues argue that “the foremost driver of anti-U.S. terrorism has been the U.S. military presence and military operations abroad.”<sup>48</sup> Advocates of restraint believe that U.S. policymakers overreact to the terrorist threat and that this overreaction undermines U.S. interests.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, although the United States might prefer to limit domestic instability in oil-producing countries, advocates of restraint argue that the United States should not intervene in the event of a civil war or domestic unrest, even in oil-rich partners, such as Saudi Arabia.<sup>50</sup>

At least some advocates of restraint would support small-scale interventions, conducted primarily by special operations forces, against terrorist groups that threaten the United States directly.<sup>51</sup> However,

<sup>47</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, New York: Random House, 2016a.

<sup>48</sup> Pillar et al., 2020, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Taming American Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5, September–October 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 112–113. Posen further suggests that there is no cost-effective way to intervene in these countries (pp. 109–110).

<sup>51</sup> Ashford, 2018a, p. 143. In 2014, Posen recommended an open-ended counterterrorism mission against al Qaeda in Afghanistan, but it is unclear whether this recommendation still applies; Posen, 2014, p. 121.

advocates of restraint have not recently discussed which specific ongoing U.S. missions should continue or the conditions under which future activities should take place.

Even if advocates of restraint do not have enough information to take a position on ongoing operations, these analysts could operationalize their recommendation for smaller-scale counterterrorism operations by specifying conditions that should provoke a U.S. intervention. For example, the level of capability of terrorist groups, the territory controlled by terrorist groups, and host-nation counterterrorism capabilities could all be factors that advocates of restraint could consider. Subsequent analysis of whether these conditions are present would then be helpful in identifying which U.S. operations should be continued and when new ones should be initiated. In addition, advocates of restraint should specify which military tools (e.g., drone strikes, partnered raids, intelligence-sharing) they consider to be best suited to different types of terrorist groups. Table 4.3 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policies toward terrorism and intrastate conflict.

**Table 4.3**  
**Developing U.S. Policies Toward Terrorism and Intrastate Conflict**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What ongoing counterterrorism missions should the United States continue to undertake?</li> <li>• What limitations, in terms of size and scope, should be placed on future U.S. counterterrorism missions?</li> <li>• What terrorist actions would be significant enough to merit a U.S. military response against the terrorists or states that provided sanctuary for them?</li> <li>• What tools should the United States use for counterterrorism missions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify terrorist groups that have the intent and capability to attack the U.S. homeland.</li> <li>• Analyze the forces and access needed for counterterrorism operations that would continue.</li> <li>• Determine whether and to what extent terrorist control of territory facilitates attacks on the United States.</li> </ul>

## Partnerships

Advocates of restraint argue that, as long as the United States is seen as a backstop, such countries as Saudi Arabia, Turkey,<sup>52</sup> and Israel will not balance effectively against Iran. These thinkers contend that U.S. forward presence and security commitments encourage countries in the region to underprovide for their own defense. Moreover, regional partners taking U.S. military support for granted could lead these states to set off a new regional war with the expectation that the United States will enter it on their side. Although advocates of restraint have focused on changes to U.S. posture, as we detail later, they also have some initial ideas on how the United States should change its political relationships with current partners in the region.

### The Persian Gulf States

Although the United States does not have treaty allies in the region, such countries as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Oman have been partners that have hosted U.S. troops and cooperated with the United States on military operations in the region.<sup>53</sup> As noted earlier, some advocates of restraint call for the United States to defend these states against interstate aggression but to stay out of other aspects of regional politics. It is unclear whether defense of these states would include only aggression by Iran or whether it would include future conflict between these states.

Advocates of restraint have made the most-concrete policy recommendations on the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia. They believe that Saudi Arabia has been emboldened by U.S. support to act aggres-

---

<sup>52</sup> We include Turkey in our larger discussion of NATO in Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> "A Look at Foreign Military Bases Across the Persian Gulf," Associated Press, September 3, 2019. Key characteristics of the defense cooperation agreements between the United States and its Gulf partners are classified, including the circumstances under, and the extent to which, the United States has committed to these partners' protection. Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R44017, last updated March 15, 2019.

sively and to recklessly inflame regional tensions.<sup>54</sup> For example, Pillar and colleagues observe that, when the Trump administration did not respond with a retaliatory strike on Iran in response to Iranian attacks on Persian Gulf shipping and a Saudi oil refinery in 2019, Saudi Arabia pursued greater diplomatic outreach to Iran to settle their ongoing conflicts.<sup>55</sup>

In particular, advocates of restraint oppose U.S. support to Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen, which includes arms sales and a small contingent of U.S. personnel. Limited public reporting suggests that U.S. forces are not involved in operations against the Houthis in Yemen but are instead involved in defending Saudi Arabia against ballistic missile attacks and advising the Saudis on how to limit collateral damage, among other missions.<sup>56</sup> However, the Saudi intervention, advocates of restraint contend, has contributed to political instability and fostered the growth of the terrorist group al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. association with the conflict also undermines U.S. statements about its commitment to human rights and fuels anti-Americanism. Therefore, advocates of restraint call for ending U.S. assistance to this intervention immediately.<sup>58</sup>

Advocates of restraint also recommend that the United States take steps to reduce its dependence on oil and its vulnerability to both supply- and demand-side shocks. The United States could do this by expanding its strategic petroleum reserve and convincing other countries to do the same, as well as by taking steps to limit demand, such as

---

<sup>54</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; John Glaser, "Let's Face It: US Policy in the Middle East Has Failed," *Cato at Liberty*, October 19, 2018; and Posen, 2014, pp. 109–110.

<sup>55</sup> Pillar et al., 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, "Army Special Forces Secretly Help Saudis Combat Threat from Yemen Rebels," *New York Times*, May 3, 2018; Robert Karem, "SFRC Hearing on Yemen," April 17, 2018; and Walsh and Schmitt, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> A. Trevor Thrall and Caroline Dorminey, "American Weapons in Yemen: A Cautionary Tale," *Cato at Liberty*, February 5, 2019. For a discussion of the U.S. role in Yemen, see Karem, 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Doug Bandow, "Withdraw US Support from Saudi Arabia," Cato Institute, April 23, 2020c; Enea Gjoza and Benjamin H. Friedman, "End US Military Support for the Saudi-Led War in Yemen," *Defense Priorities*, January 2019; and Pillar et al., 2020.

raising fuel efficiency standards or increasing taxes on oil. The United States also could encourage Persian Gulf states to make investments in defending the free flow of oil and reducing their vulnerability to a closure of the Strait of Hormuz by increasing the capacity of pipelines that bypass the strait. Furthermore, advocates of restraint suggest that the United States should urge states in the region to continue to invest in the redundancy of oil infrastructure.<sup>59</sup>

## Israel

Advocates of restraint do not see protection of Israel as a vital interest and argue that the U.S. security relationship with Israel must change.<sup>60</sup> They argue that Israel has a capable military and defense industry that it has shown it can use to effectively defend itself against its neighbors, requiring little in the way of direct U.S. assistance.<sup>61</sup> Posen argues that, moreover, Israel has become so confident in the U.S. commitment that it behaves more recklessly than it would without U.S. support.<sup>62</sup> The U.S. relationship with Israel also may inhibit balancing by reducing Israel's incentives to cooperate with other regional states. As Ashford

---

<sup>59</sup> Layne, 2007, pp. 188–190; Posen, 2014, pp. 111–112. Glaser and Kelanic apply much of the same logic as advocates of restraint and support eventual U.S. withdrawal from the region, conditional on Iran's power remaining low, but, unlike advocates of restraint, these scholars argue that the United States should reduce its dependence on oil before initiating withdrawal (Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic, "Getting Out of the Gulf: Oil and U.S. Military Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 1, January–February 2017, p. 130). Although not stated, support for fracking within the United States also would be consistent with reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

<sup>60</sup> Walt and Mearsheimer also argue that U.S. policy toward Israel should change for these reasons. In a controversial 2007 book, they examine the special interest groups that they see as an impediment to adopting prescriptions of a grand strategy of restraint in the Middle East. Given the book's focus on U.S. domestic politics—rather than the realist logic that underlies their prescriptions for the region—and its controversial status, even among advocates of restraint, we do not detail the book's arguments here (see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Macmillan, 2007). For a critique of the book's assessments by another advocate of restraint, see Andrew J. Bacevich, "John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2008, pp. 787–795.

<sup>61</sup> Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 26–29; Posen, 2014, p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 44–45.

notes, when President Obama announced that the United States would pivot away from the Middle East, private rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia increased.<sup>63</sup>

Advocates of restraint also have examined the ill effects of U.S. cooperation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>64</sup> They believe that U.S. support emboldens Israel to expand settlements and refuse to make concessions that are needed to settle the conflict. As a result, some advocates of restraint recommend ending assistance to Israel entirely.<sup>65</sup> Posen suggests that the United States might make any future assistance conditional on a freeze on the expansion of settlements, although he also argues that military subsidies should be reduced.<sup>66</sup> Pillar and colleagues argue that assistance should be conditional on Israel ending all human rights violations in Palestine.<sup>67</sup> Layne argues for more-dramatic measures, such as pressuring for the creation of a Palestinian state and insisting on the removal of all Israeli settlements in the West Bank.<sup>68</sup> Advocates of restraint should clarify whether U.S. cooperation with Israel should depend on progress in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. Table 4.4 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policy toward partnerships in the Middle East.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ashford, 2018a.

<sup>64</sup> Advocates of restraint have been joined in their critiques by voices typically associated with very different foreign policy orientations. For example, Martin Indyk, the longtime adviser to U.S. presidents on the Middle East peace process, argues that the Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking process “is now clearly hopeless” and that Israel can defend itself against Iran through its own nuclear arsenal and its relationship with other states in the region (Martin Indyk, “The Middle East Isn’t Worth It Anymore,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2020).

<sup>65</sup> Doug Bandow, “U.S. Should Stop Subsidizing Bad Israeli Economic and Occupation Policies,” *Forbes*, February 16, 2016a; and Pillar et al., 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 46, 119, 132.

<sup>67</sup> Pillar et al., 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Layne, 2007, pp. 188–190.

**Table 4.4**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Partnerships in the Middle East**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How should U.S. political relationships with current Persian Gulf partners change?</li><li>• How should the United States respond in the event of a conventional interstate attack? How extensive should an intervention be?</li><li>• Should U.S. assistance to Israel be eliminated or made conditional?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct a “what if” analysis of Gulf Arab states’ reactions to the United States limiting commitments to these states’ security.</li><li>• Analyze the influence of the Saudi intervention in Yemen on the growth of terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda, in the Arabian Peninsula.</li><li>• Examine the plausible pathways for reducing U.S. dependence on oil.</li><li>• Examine the impact of changes in U.S. behavior on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.</li></ul>

## Posture

Under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States would reduce its forces in the region below current levels, although the size of the force that would remain is not yet clear. U.S. withdrawal would begin with the removal of troops that are engaged in the interventions in Iraq and Syria, as we have noted. In addition to ending many ongoing military operations, advocates of restraint call for dramatically reducing the steady-state onshore presence in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> This minimal onshore military presence is a key point that differentiates advocates of restraint from other strategists who seek to reduce the role of the United States in the Middle East but who do not identify offshore balancing as the solution.<sup>70</sup>

This distinction is important because the force involved in peacetime operations is larger in size than those involved in contingency operations. For example, the U.S. forward presence in Kuwait and

<sup>69</sup> Ashford, 2018a, pp. 143–144; Layne, 2009, pp. 12–13, 22–23; Pape, 2005, p. 247; Posen, 2014, p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, F. Gregory Gause III, “Should We Stay or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East,” *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 5, October–November 2019; and Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “America’s Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 1, January–February 2019.

the presence in Qatar, each of which consists of roughly 13,000 U.S. troops, both individually dwarf the combined U.S. presence in Iraq and Syria.<sup>71</sup> There has not been detailed analysis on the appropriate timeline for proposed changes to U.S. posture in the region. Advocates of restraint have specified that the remaining U.S. force posture should be designed to focus on three tasks: countering terrorism, ensuring the free flow of oil, and maintaining the capability to flow forces back to the region in the event that a single state, such as Iran, becomes capable of dominating the region.

Advocates of restraint argue that U.S. ground forces and ground-based air forces in the region should be largely withdrawn.<sup>72</sup> U.S. combat aircraft in the region would redeploy, although the United States might retain airborne intelligence capabilities and other combat enablers in the region.<sup>73</sup> A residual ground force would be involved in intelligence collection and training for partners that would remain engaged in cooperation with the United States to combat militant groups.<sup>74</sup> A small special operations force also could remain to conduct counterterrorism activities.<sup>75</sup> Advocates of restraint have not conducted detailed analyses on the number of air and ground forces that would be needed for these missions.<sup>76</sup> However, some advocates of restraint have proposed that the residual force should be based in Kuwait, because a substantial portion of U.S. forces are already located there, the Kuwaiti government covers basing costs, and the Kuwaiti population does not

---

<sup>71</sup> Each deployment is also roughly the size of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan (see Miriam Berger, "Where U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2020).

<sup>72</sup> Ashford, 2019, p. 9; Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997, pp. 26–29. Some go farther and call for eliminating all onshore U.S. presence in the region (see Betts, 2012, p. 37; Glaser, 2017b).

<sup>73</sup> Rovner and Talmadge, 2014, pp. 54–55.

<sup>74</sup> Ashford, 2018a, pp. 143–144; Castillo, 2019, pp. 30–31; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016; Posen, 2014, pp. 86, 159.

<sup>75</sup> Ashford, 2018a, pp. 143–144.

<sup>76</sup> One initial estimate suggests that this would be up to a few thousand ground forces, although other advocates of restraint might favor a lower number; Rovner and Talmadge, 2014, p. 56.

oppose the U.S. presence.<sup>77</sup> Other bases used by U.S. ground- and land-based air forces would be closed or downsized.<sup>78</sup> The United States also would ask some Persian Gulf countries to maintain some facilities in case the United States needs to return in the future.<sup>79</sup>

Many advocates of restraint argue for maintaining a naval presence that could operate from or project power into the region to ensure the free flow of oil.<sup>80</sup> Some advocates of restraint recommend retaining a U.S. naval presence in the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>81</sup> This type of force might include intelligence ships and countermine vessels to guard against any Iranian attempts to close the Strait of Hormuz in the future.<sup>82</sup> Many scholars advocate retaining the naval facilities in Manama, Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. 5th Fleet, to enable such U.S. operations in the region.<sup>83</sup> Gholz and Press, however, have argued for an over-the-horizon strategy. They suggest a strategy that includes a U.S. naval presence at bases outside the Middle East, such as Diego Garcia, that moves into the Gulf only as needed.<sup>84</sup>

In a sign of how much headway advocates of restraint have made in shaping the debate around U.S. posture in the Middle East, many foreign policy practitioners and intellectuals who would not self-identify as advocates of restraint have adopted the posture critiques of

---

<sup>77</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 159; Rovner and Talmadge, 2014, p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> Ashford argues that the United States should close or substantially downsize bases in Kuwait, Qatar, and Turkey (Ashford, 2019, p. 9). Sweeney suggests that the United States might return to the Cold War-era strategy in which permanent basing was limited to two locations—Bahrain and Turkey—but notes that all bases in the Middle East should be evaluated for elimination (Mike Sweeney, “Considering the ‘Zero Option’: Cold War Lessons on U.S. Basing in the Middle East,” *Defense Priorities*, March 2020).

<sup>79</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 113; Rovner and Talmadge, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 112–113.

<sup>81</sup> Layne, 2007, p. 189; Layne, 2009, p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> Rovner and Talmadge, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Ashford, 2018a, pp. 143–144; Castillo, 2019, pp. 30–31; Rovner and Talmadge, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>84</sup> Gholz and Press, 2001.

advocates of restraint. For example, Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes write:

In reality, U.S. military bases across the Gulf countries have strategic implications because they create a moral hazard: they encourage the region's leaders to act in ways they otherwise might not, safe in the knowledge that the United States is invested in the stability of their regimes.<sup>85</sup>

Like advocates of restraint, however, these commentators do not provide detailed proposals for how to reduce U.S. military presence in the region.

As noted earlier, there has not yet been detailed analysis of how the United States would implement the broad posture recommendations made by advocates of restraint. Analysis of the posture requirements for the counterterrorism and naval operations that advocates of restraint support would be a helpful starting point. To aid in identification of politically viable posture options to support these missions, this analysis should also consider how partner willingness to host U.S. forces and provide access might change as the United States withdraws and renegotiates its political relationships.

Because advocates of restraint suggest that they might intervene in the event of at least some interstate war scenarios in the region, a detailed posture analysis should consider the posture needed to facilitate the return of larger numbers of U.S. forces. This analysis also should consider the U.S. role in assisting with air and missile defenses, as the United States has done during past contingencies, particularly in response to the danger posed by Iranian conventional intermediate-range ballistic missiles.<sup>86</sup> Table 4.5 describes the next steps for operationalizing U.S. posture changes in the Middle East.

---

<sup>85</sup> Karlin and Wittes, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of policy questions surrounding the U.S. role in air and missile defense in the region, see Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Challenge of Missile Defense: Net Assessment Indicators*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 26, 2019.

**Table 4.5**  
**Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in the Middle East**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How quickly should the United States withdraw forces from the region?</li><li>• What air and ground forces should remain in theater for counterterrorism and intelligence missions? Where should these forces be based?</li><li>• What naval forces should remain in theater to maintain command of the commons?</li><li>• What forward posture, if any, should the United States retain to enable a return to the region in the event of interstate war?</li><li>• Where should the United States retain access? Should the United States seek to maintain basing access in Iraq after ending military operations?</li><li>• What role should the United States have in air and missile defense in the region?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine the size and type of forces necessary to continue counterterrorism and intelligence missions that advocates of restraint support.</li><li>• Identify the aspects of current posture that are most important for enabling a return of U.S. forces in the event of interstate war.</li><li>• Assess how partner willingness to continue hosting U.S. forces or providing access might change in light of U.S. retrenchment.</li><li>• Identify the incentives, if any, that are necessary to persuade Gulf Arab states to maintain bases and allow for future U.S. access in the event of a contingency.</li></ul>

**Security Cooperation and Assistance**

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, advocates of restraint have not always specified their views on security cooperation activities. Advocates of restraint have, as noted earlier, suggested that some U.S. counterterrorism training missions might continue. However, it is not clear which, and to what extent, partner capacity-building missions would continue under a grand strategy of restraint. Analysis of the cost and efficacy of current programs could inform such an assessment.

Some advocates of restraint have expressed concerns about U.S. arms sales in the region, but they have not fully specified which sales would continue in order to help partners prepare for a U.S. withdrawal. These advocates of restraint note with alarm how U.S. military technology has made its way into the hands of ISIS in Iraq and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen following the defeat of U.S.-backed forces, potentially endangering the lives of U.S. troops and exposing some sensitive U.S. military technology to Iran. In addition, Saudi Arabia

and the United Arab Emirates have deliberately transferred American-made weapons to local factions that are countering the Houthi rebels in their war in Yemen, including al Qaeda–linked fighters.<sup>87</sup> As a result, these advocates of restraint have argued that ending arms sales to high-risk countries might be the only way to avoid such negative downstream effects.<sup>88</sup> These scholars have suggested that, if the United States wishes to provide assistance to these nations, it should do so by means other than the provision of arms,<sup>89</sup> although it is not clear how widely held these views are within the restraint community.

However, there might be other areas, such as ballistic missile defense, where advocates of restraint would support continued sales to support local balancing against Iran. As advocates of restraint formulate a broader set of policy prescriptions on arms sales in the region, it might be helpful to assess what weapons states in the region need most for the prevention of Iranian domination and to determine the trade-offs associated with sales of different systems. Analysis of the economic impact to the U.S. defense industrial base if there was a sharp reduction in foreign military sales to the Gulf Arab states also might inform the development of more-detailed recommendations.

Although advocates of restraint have been clear that the United States should place conditions on or terminate security assistance to Israel, they have not stated whether the United States should consider security cooperation activities of any kind. Table 4.6 describes the next steps for developing U.S. security cooperation policies toward the Middle East.

---

<sup>87</sup> Nima Elbagir, Salma Abdelaziz, Mohamed Abo El Gheit, and Laura Smith-Spark, “Sold to An Ally, Lost to An Enemy,” CNN, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Thrall and Dorminey, 2018; Thrall and Dorminey, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Thrall and Dorminey, 2018.

**Table 4.6**  
**Designing U.S. Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies Toward the Middle East**

Policy Questions to Answer	Supporting Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Should the United States continue to provide arms to Gulf partners?</li><li>• How should the United States use security cooperation to support local balancing against Iran?</li><li>• Should the United States continue any security cooperation activities with Israel?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine safeguards to prevent U.S. adversaries from acquiring U.S.-made weapons and military technology.</li><li>• Determine what weapons Gulf states would need to balance Iran.</li><li>• Analyze the economic impact of a reduction in military sales to the Gulf states.</li></ul>

**Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East**

Advocates of restraint have argued that U.S. policy in the Middle East has been based on an inflated threat assessment and has undermined U.S. interests. Advocates of restraint do not necessarily see a benign threat environment in the Middle East, but they disagree with current and past U.S. policymakers about the magnitude of the threat to U.S. interests. Advocates of restraint argue that the United States should limit its involvement in Middle East to preventing Iranian domination, retaining U.S. command of the commons, and thwarting terrorist threats to the homeland. Advocates of restraint prefer a posture that relies primarily on U.S. sea power and small deployments of special operations forces. Advocates of restraint also would limit the scope of other U.S. military activities in the region, such as the myriad of security cooperation activities that the United States conducts with its partners in the Middle East.

Although advocates of restraint already have affected U.S. national security debates with their challenges to post–Cold War Middle East strategy, their contributions could be developed further in terms of policy implementation. Specifically, advocates of restraint have not identified clear indicators that would demonstrate that Iran or another regional state was capable of dominating the region and thus merited a more activist U.S. military response. Advocates of restraint also could add detail to their proposals of how to wind down current U.S. inter-

ventions and could expound on how they see nonmilitary tools, such as economic sanctions, contributing to policy goals in the absence of military interventions.

Furthermore, advocates of restraint have not commented on the concerns of those who see costs and risks to their prescriptions. For example, advocates of restraint should explain whether they would see it as a threat if U.S. withdrawal were to provoke states in the region to seek security guarantees from Russia or China, and, if so, how they would mitigate that risk. More-specific policy prescriptions should also explain how significant posture changes would be, given ongoing counterterrorism, intelligence, training, and naval missions. Finally, advocates of restraint need to increase clarity on how they would maintain the U.S. regional basing access required for their proposed ongoing operations while changing political relationships with U.S. partners.



## South Asia

---

In this chapter, we apply our framework to South Asia, considering the following questions: How should the United States terminate its ongoing intervention in Afghanistan? What is the level of threat posed by terrorism and state collapse, and under what circumstances should the United States use force to intervene? What relations should the United States seek with Pakistan and India? What kind of posture should the United States maintain in the region, if any? And, finally, what is the role of security cooperation with and assistance to Pakistan and India?

Advocates of restraint uniformly support terminating the ongoing intervention in Afghanistan. Yet, outside this intervention, South Asia is the region where current U.S. policies align most closely with those put forward by advocates of restraint. Current strategy documents imply,<sup>1</sup> and advocates of restraint explicitly state, that there are no vital U.S. security interests at stake in South Asia.<sup>2</sup> As a result, advocates of restraint see no significant threats in the region. Under a grand strategy of restraint, the changes to U.S. goals in South Asia would be much less stark compared with those in Europe and the Asia-Pacific, although there are some important differences in implementation. Advocates of restraint would continue to counter terrorist groups that can target

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the 2018 NDS, which does not discuss South Asia. DoD has an Indo-Pacific strategy, but it also focuses on balancing against China.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher A. Preble, “Leaving Unipolarity Behind: A Strategic Framework for Advancing US Interests in the Indian Ocean Region,” in Peter Dombrowski and Andrew C. Winner, eds., *The Indian Ocean and US Grand Strategy: Ensuring Access and Promoting Security*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014, pp. 67–68.

the United States, although only through small-scale counterterrorism missions. Improving nuclear security in Pakistan and preventing nuclear war between India and Pakistan would remain U.S. goals, but it is not clear exactly how U.S. policy on these issues would change. Like current U.S. policymakers, advocates of restraint see India as a natural counterweight to Chinese ambitions and seek to promote a positive relationship between the United States and India. However, it is unclear what policy changes advocates of restraint would advise to sustain or deepen that relationship.<sup>3</sup>

## Ongoing Operations in Afghanistan

Advocates of restraint call for ending ongoing operations in Afghanistan. Although advocates of restraint supported a counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001,<sup>4</sup> they criticized the expansion of U.S. aims to include nation-building and political reconstruction. These realist thinkers, therefore, have long called for an end to the military intervention, even if it means unconditional U.S. withdrawal.<sup>5</sup> Depending on how conditions develop after a U.S. withdrawal, advocates of restraint might support continuing small-scale counterterrorism missions in Afghanistan or initiating them in the future.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of current U.S. objectives, see White House, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> In 2001, for example, Posen argued that the United States “must be prepared to wage war against such states to destroy terrorist groups themselves, to prevent their reconstitution by eliminating the regimes that support them, and to deter other nation-states from supporting terrorism” (Barry R. Posen, “The Struggle Against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Winter 2001–2002, p. 44). He noted that it was necessary to destroy the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

<sup>5</sup> John Glaser and John Mueller, “Overcoming Inertia: Why It’s Time to End the War in Afghanistan,” Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 878, August 13, 2019; and Barry R. Posen, “It’s Time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else’s Problem,” *The Atlantic*, Vol. 18, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Pape, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan,” *Boston Globe*, January 30, 2019; and Posen, 2014. Other advocates of restraint have argued that these conditions are unlikely to develop. Afghanistan, they contend, will not become a terrorist sanctuary again, even under Taliban rule (see Cato Institute, “America’s War in Afghanistan,” December 4, 2019a; Glaser

Advocates of restraint have long accepted that the Taliban will play an important role in the future of Afghanistan. Therefore, these realist thinkers generally support the Trump administration's willingness to negotiate and sign an interim peace agreement with the Taliban.<sup>7</sup> This agreement includes an immediate partial drawdown and a full withdrawal of U.S. and allied personnel within 14 months. Some advocates of restraint have been critical of the fact that the interim peace agreement makes full U.S. withdrawal conditional on the Taliban taking measures against foreign terrorist groups, successful negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S.-backed regime in Kabul, and a prisoner exchange. John Glaser argues, for example, that the United States should go through with a full withdrawal even if the Taliban and Kabul cannot reach an agreement.<sup>8</sup> On the whole, however, advocates of restraint view the interim peace agreement as an imperfect but reasonable pathway for the United States to extricate itself from Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup>

Advocates of restraint have not yet specified how the United States should engage with Afghanistan once U.S. forces have been removed. For instance, advocates of restraint have not said whether the United States should provide any postwithdrawal economic and political assistance as part of a postwithdrawal counterterrorism strategy. Nor have they considered how to respond if Afghanistan were to become a failed state and a potential battleground for conflict between India and Pakistan. Moreover, they have not specified any agreements that the United States might want to make to support continued counterterrorism ini-

---

and Mueller, 2019; and Brad Stapleton, "The Problem with the Light Footprint: Shifting Tactics in Lieu of Strategy," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 792, June 7, 2016a).

<sup>7</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> John Glaser, "Ending the War in Afghanistan vs Exiting It," *Cato at Liberty*, March 2, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> John Glaser and John Mueller, "The Taliban Agreement Isn't Ideal, but the U.S. Military Has to Get Out of Afghanistan," Cato Institute, March 17, 2020; and Christopher Preble and Jonathan Ellis Allen, "Staying the Course: The War in Afghanistan Must End," *The Hill*, March 12, 2020.

tiatives. Table 5.1 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policy postwithdrawal toward Afghanistan.

**U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and State Collapse**

Advocates of restraint believe that the United States must remain alert to the threat from terrorism. More specifically, as with the Middle East, advocates of restraint would be concerned if terrorist groups with the ability to attack the U.S. homeland were to again find unrestricted sanctuary in the region.<sup>10</sup> Where those conditions exist, advocates of restraint would support continuing or initiating small-scale U.S. counterterrorism operations and activities, but they do not support a large-scale U.S. military intervention to counter this or any other threat in the region. It is not clear exactly what form these interventions would take, but they might differ to some extent from the current U.S. approach.<sup>11</sup> For example, advocates of restraint believe that targeting killings in Pakistan create backlash against the United States and, therefore, should be scaled back and used only in limited circumstanc-

**Table 5.1**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan**

Policy Questions to Answer	Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What conditions, if any, should the United States place on its withdrawal from Afghanistan?</li><li>• How should the United States engage with or assist Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal?</li><li>• What agreements should the United States seek in order to support continued counterterrorism initiatives?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analyze the options for the timeline of U.S. withdrawal.</li></ul>

<sup>10</sup> Extraregional groups, including ISIS and al Qaeda, currently enjoy limited forms of sanctuary in Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan, but they do not have the ability to operate openly or on the scale they did before the September 11 terrorist attacks.

<sup>11</sup> Many of the policy questions about transnational terrorist groups that we raised in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 also apply for South Asia.

es.<sup>12</sup> Advocates of restraint also would emphasize security assistance and intelligence-sharing over the use of force whenever possible.<sup>13</sup>

Advocates of restraint likely would not support the use of force in another situation that has long troubled U.S. policymakers: state collapse in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> Because Pakistan has a population of 215 million, a capable military, deep linkages to global terrorist groups, and nuclear weapons, U.S. leaders have seen state failure as a particularly dangerous possibility. Most advocates of restraint have not stated their position on whether the United States would intervene to stabilize the country. However, advocates of restraint have been clear that the United States should not take on the challenge of stabilizing or remaking any society, let alone in Pakistan, which has a population three times the size of Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

However, the position of advocates of restraint on a more limited U.S. response to secure Pakistan's nuclear weapons in the event of state failure is less clear, because they would likely prioritize two countervailing considerations. On the one hand, advocates of restraint have concerns about Pakistan's nuclear security and the possibility that terrorists could take hold of such weapons.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, advocates of restraint are very reluctant to consider large-scale ground operations in this region. In the context of a state collapse, elements of Pakistan's

---

<sup>12</sup> John Mueller, "Embracing Threatlessness: US Military Spending, Newt Gingrich, and the Costa Rica Option," in A. Trevor Thrall and Benjamin H. Friedman, eds., *US Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: The Case for Restraint*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 207; and Posen, 2014, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin H. Friedman, "Countering Terrorism with Targeted Killings," *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017; Posen, 2014, p. 128; and Stapleton, 2016a.

<sup>14</sup> This scenario was, for example, on the most recent publicly available list of defense planning scenarios from 2010; Larson, 2019, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter and Charles V. Peña, "Rethinking Non-Proliferation," *National Interest*, June 1, 2005; Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case of a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January–February 2013; and Preble, 2014, p. 80. Adams and Leatherman argued in 2011 that the United States likely would use airpower and special operations forces rather than a massive influx of ground forces to secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. It is unclear whether this vision for how the United States would intervene still applies (Adams and Leatherman, 2011, p. 145).

military might still control these weapons. Pakistan has prioritized safeguarding its arsenal from seizure by its traditional rival India,<sup>16</sup> which means that the United States could face stiff resistance. An intervention with U.S. airpower and only a small U.S. force on the ground might not succeed. Therefore, whether advocates of restraint would support this type of intervention likely would depend on analysis of the military requirements for such a mission. Advocates of restraint also prefer when other states bear some of the costs, so they might be more inclined to support such a mission in a coalition context. Table 5.2 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policy toward terrorism and state collapse in South Asia.

**Table 5.2**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Terrorism and State Collapse**

Policy Questions to Answer	Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What counterterrorism operations should the United States be willing to undertake in South Asia, and what tools would the United States employ?</li><li>• Should the United States be willing to intervene militarily to secure Pakistan’s nuclear weapons? Should the United States do so alone, or in a coalition?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess which terrorist groups in the region have the capability and inclination to attack the United States.</li><li>• Assess the extent to which economic and military aid are effective at combating transnational terrorism.</li><li>• Determine what type of U.S. military intervention would be necessary to secure Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal in the event of state collapse.</li><li>• Examine the capabilities of regional powers to bear the costs of securing nuclear weapons in Pakistan.</li></ul>

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Clary, *Thinking About Pakistan’s Nuclear Security in Peacetime, Crisis and War*, New Delhi, India: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, IDSA Occasional Paper No. 12, 2010.

## Partnerships

Advocates of restraint do not support the formation of formal alliances in South Asia. However, they still see opportunities to promote U.S. interests through cooperation with both Pakistan and India.<sup>17</sup>

### Pakistan

U.S. engagement with Pakistan has been declining in recent years. Under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States would place even less emphasis on relations with Pakistan, in part because the United States would be ending operations in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> Advocates of restraint also call for lower levels of engagement because they are pessimistic about the extent to which the United States can influence politics and combat militancy within Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> They point out that, generally, U.S. involvement in Pakistan historically has led to backlash. Posen notes, for example, that Pakistanis blame the U.S. war in Afghanistan for radicalizing militants in Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

Advocates of restraint agree that nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorist or militant groups would be a threat to the United States, but they disagree on the current level of risk of diversion of nuclear weapons in Pakistan. Some advocates of restraint see a significant threat of diversion of nuclear weapons and materials in Pakistan. Therefore, they recommend that the United States should provide techni-

---

<sup>17</sup> Advocates of restraint do not prioritize U.S. relations with other countries in the region and, therefore, have not yet offered guidance on relations with other countries. However, it still might be useful to offer some explicit policy prescriptions, at least in general terms, since current U.S. strategy documents point with concern to China's growing interest in the region (see DoD, 2019, p. 21). On the broader directive to expand U.S. relationships in the region to compete with China, see Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *New York Times*, June 25, 2018; and DoD, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Preble, 2014, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Sahar Khan, "Double Game: Why Pakistan Supports Militants and Resists U.S. Pressure to Stop," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 849, September 20, 2018; Sahar Khan and A. Trevor Thrall, "Why America Can't Afford to Continue Waging a War in Afghanistan," Cato Institute, November 14, 2017; and Posen, 2014, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 128.

cal assistance to improve Pakistan's nuclear security.<sup>21</sup> However, other advocates of restraint believe that only state failure, which they see as an unlikely outcome, would create the conditions in which Pakistan's nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorist or militant groups. For these advocates of restraint, planning for such an eventuality likely should remain a low priority.<sup>22</sup>

As we detail later, advocates of restraint have not yet developed a holistic set of recommendations for how the United States should navigate the complex relations between India and Pakistan. Beyond that, the next step for developing the implications of a grand strategy of restraint for the U.S. relationship with Pakistan would be to consider how, if at all, the United States should respond to increases in China's influence in the country. One advocate of restraint has noted that a strong China-Pakistan relationship is not new and that China, like the United States, seeks stability in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> However, it would be helpful to clarify whether there are any developments in the relationship that would represent a threat to U.S. interests or that would contribute to a substantially increased threat from China.

In addition, when crafting policy toward Pakistan, advocates of restraint might wish to consider that U.S. policymakers historically have felt that their relations with Islamabad have shifted out of necessity instead of choice. Two of the periods of intense engagement with Pakistan began virtually overnight as the result of external actors—in 1979, by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and in 2001, by the September 11 terrorist attacks. Therefore, advocates of restraint might wish to offer more-detailed guidance on considerations for U.S. relations with Pakistan that could shape a U.S. response to future shocks in the region.

## India

Like earlier administrations, the Trump administration has called for a closer U.S. relationship with India. The United States has hoped that

---

<sup>21</sup> Carpenter and Peña, 2005; Posen, 2013; Preble, 2014, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> Khan and Thrall, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Khan, 2018.

the relationship would help the two countries balance more effectively against China, although this has not been the only consideration.<sup>24</sup> Advocates of restraint support this goal, but they note that India has frequently resisted U.S. attempts to develop deeper security cooperation.<sup>25</sup> Still, advocates of restraint expect that India will balance against China even without direct encouragement from or a closer relationship with the United States.

As we detail later, advocates of restraint have focused primarily on sustaining security cooperation activities with rather than making new security commitments to India. The next steps for advocates of restraint to further develop policy implications for the U.S.-India relationship would be to articulate a holistic vision and distinguish it, if necessary, from the status quo. Would advocates of restraint hold the U.S.-India relationship up as an example of what they wish most U.S. relationships looked like—cooperation without a security guarantee? If not, what would they change about it? Would they favor continuing the Obama and Trump administrations' support for India receiving a permanent seat on the UN Security Council?<sup>26</sup> In general, advocates of restraint should clarify the level of resources, including senior leader attention, that the United States should devote to strengthening ties, as well as when overtures should cease if they do not succeed.

Given India's deep and enduring rivalry with Pakistan, advocates of restraint will have to decide how to handle the delicate balance between these two adversaries. One contentious issue is the disputed territory of Kashmir—which has been addressed with an approach of restraint by U.S. leaders for decades. The formulation adopted by U.S.

---

<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, "The India Dividend: New Delhi Remains Washington's Best Hope in Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 5, September–October 2019; White House, 2017, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Posen, 2014, pp. 96–98. See also Ted Galen Carpenter, "Persistent Suitor: Washington Wants India as an Ally to Contain China," Cato Institute, April 29, 2016a.

<sup>26</sup> At least one advocate of restraint has supported this policy (see Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "America Needs to Reorient Its South Asia Policy," RealClearDefense, February 22, 2018a).

presidents of both parties has been “facilitate, but not mediate.”<sup>27</sup> If the United States seeks to maintain good relations with both India and Pakistan, advocates of restraint will need to consider the question of how the U.S. goal of deepening its relationship with New Delhi will affect other U.S. goals, such as nuclear security, in Pakistan, and whether India would be satisfied with a policy of equidistance.

In addition, given the nuclear status of both states, advocates of restraint should specify whether and how to respond to conflicts between the two nations.<sup>28</sup> The United States could choose to stay out of such a conflict and allow India and Pakistan to settle their disagreements on their own. However, U.S. leaders might be tempted to intervene, knowing that a nuclear exchange could produce radiation that would have global effects. Therefore, advocates of restraint should be explicit about the logic that U.S. policymakers should apply in future crises between India and Pakistan.

Advocates of restraint also should consider possible tensions between the goals of building a more cooperative relationship with China and building closer military ties with India. These questions are all the more pressing in light of the June 2020 high-altitude skirmish between India and China at Galwan—the first fatal encounter since 1975. If tensions between India and China continue to increase, India might become more open to closer ties with the United States. With less reluctance from India, advocates of restraint might need to think more deeply about how far they would be prepared to go to develop the relationship. For example, if there were a larger conflict between India and China over disputed territory, should the United States provide any form of military support to India? Advocates of restraint also

---

<sup>27</sup> In July 2019, President Trump claimed, during a meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited him to mediate the dispute: “If I could mediate in the Kashmir issue, I would love to help” (“India Denies PM Modi Asked Trump to Mediate in Kashmir Conflict,” BBC News, July 23, 2019). India quickly denied that any such invitation had been issued, and the matter was dropped.

<sup>28</sup> Posen argues that the United States should use diplomacy to limit the risk of war between the two nations, because a nuclear war, although not a direct threat to U.S. interests, would set a dangerous precedent. It is not clear, however, what other steps advocates of restraint would advise (Posen, 2014, p. 120).

should indicate whether the United States should continue to engage in consultations with India, Japan, and Australia through the Quad-rilateral Security Dialogue, which may be seen as a threat by China.<sup>29</sup> Table 5.3 describes the next steps for developing U.S. policies toward prospective partners in South Asia.

## Posture

As we have noted, advocates of restraint support the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. There has not yet been detailed analysis of the posture requirements of a grand strategy of restraint for South Asia, although the general contours have been explored.

Going forward, advocates of restraint support only a very limited footprint in South Asia for counterterrorism operations. In addition, advocates of restraint recommend that the United States should maintain basing and port access, as well as overflight rights, in case the United States needs to redeploy troops to South Asia in the future.<sup>30</sup> As with other regions, advocates of restraint seek to maintain command

**Table 5.3**  
**Developing U.S. Policy Toward Political Relationships in South Asia**

Policy Questions to Answer	Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, and in what ways, should the United States develop a stronger relationship with India?</li> <li>• What kind of support, if any, should the United States provide to India in the event of a future conflict with China?</li> <li>• What threats do Chinese investment in the region and the possibility that China will gain greater military access pose to U.S. interests?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine what U.S. policies, if any, have been effective in countering militancy and improving nuclear security in Pakistan.</li> <li>• Identify the types of cooperation with India that would be most threatening to China and Pakistan.</li> <li>• Determine whether Chinese military access in the region could substantially degrade U.S. superiority in the maritime commons (as defined by advocates of restraint).</li> </ul>

<sup>29</sup> White House, 2017, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Preble, 2014, pp. 71–80.

of the maritime commons. They have not detailed the requirements for this mission beyond sustaining U.S. access to Diego Garcia.<sup>31</sup> More analysis is needed to determine what other aspects of U.S. posture must be sustained to enable the counterterrorism, intelligence, and naval operations that advocates of restraint support. Table 5.4 describes the next steps for operationalizing U.S. posture changes in South Asia.

**Security Cooperation and Assistance**

Advocates of restraint have offered some examples of security cooperation and assistance activities with India and Pakistan. However, they have not yet developed a comprehensive or detailed vision for this aspect of either relationship. Table 5.5 describes the next steps for designing U.S. security cooperation and assistance policies toward South Asia.

**Pakistan**

U.S. security assistance to Pakistan has recently been suspended, and its status remains uncertain. Prior to this change, advocates of restraint debated whether the United States should discontinue aid or maintain some assistance with additional conditions. Posen argued that the United States should provide military aid that prioritizes activities

**Table 5.4**  
**Operationalizing U.S. Posture Changes in South Asia**

Policy Questions to Answer	Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What air and ground forces should remain in theater for counterterrorism and intelligence missions? Where should these forces be based?</li><li>• Which areas constitute the maritime commons around South Asia? What naval forces should remain in theater to maintain command of the commons?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop options for posture to support counterterrorism operations, maintain command of the commons, and enable future redeployment of U.S. troops to the region (in cases that advocates of restraint would support).</li></ul>

<sup>31</sup> Glaser, 2017b; Posen, 2014, p. 161; Preble, 2014, pp. 70–71.

**Table 5.5**  
**Designing U.S. Security Cooperation and Assistance Policies Toward South Asia**

Policy Questions to Answer	Analysis to Conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of security cooperation and assistance should the United States pursue with India and other countries in the region?</li> <li>• Should the United States continue military exercises and assistance with other states in the region?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine what types of defense cooperation and technology sharing between the United States and India would enable India to serve as a more effective counterweight to China.</li> <li>• Assess which forms of defense cooperation would be both effective at promoting U.S.-India ties and acceptable given India's politics.</li> <li>• Analyze what forms of U.S. assistance have been effective at helping states combat the rise of transnational terrorist groups.</li> </ul>

aimed at reducing militancy in the region, while noting that the provision of further assistance to the Pakistani Army and internal security forces should be conditioned on evidence that Pakistan is actively working to suppress militant groups within its borders. Posen has also argued that the United States should provide limited aid to Pakistani civil society in an attempt to improve relations between the two countries.<sup>32</sup>

Some advocates of restraint, however, questioned whether U.S. assistance can be effective in combating militant groups in the country or rehabilitating the role of the United States. Khan notes that the United States has tried repeatedly to condition assistance on Pakistan discontinuing support for militant groups and has not succeeded.<sup>33</sup> Preble argues that, because Pakistan continues to thwart U.S. efforts in the region despite this aid, the United States would be best served by terminating this aid entirely to facilitate a stronger relationship with India.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> Khan, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Preble, 2014, pp. 70, 78.

To determine the appropriate policy that the United States should enact toward assistance in Pakistan, advocates of restraint would require a deeper examination of when U.S. assistance helps partners, particularly Pakistan, combat the rise of transnational terrorist groups and when this assistance fails.

## India

Advocates of restraint have argued in favor of continuing some current security cooperation activities with India.<sup>35</sup> For example, advocates of restraint advise continuing sales of advanced weapons and conducting combined exercises with India alongside other U.S. partners, such as Japan.<sup>36</sup> Advocates of restraint have not yet commented on whether they would continue other current administration priorities. The current U.S. administration, like its predecessors, has sought to improve interoperability and the exchange of technology and secure information with India as part of the Major Defense Partnership between the two nations.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear whether these initiatives are priorities for advocates of restraint. In addition, advocates of restraint will need to outline how much cooperation they envision in areas including intelligence-sharing, particularly of satellite imagery on the disputed Line of Actual Control between India and China, and the rapidly evolving domain of space operations. Clarifying goals for the U.S. relationship with India, as we have noted, would be a first step toward generating options for security cooperation. As with the U.S. political relationship with India, any analysis of U.S. relationships with China and Pakistan in regard to security cooperation activities should include possible trade-offs for U.S. goals.

---

<sup>35</sup> Layne, 2007, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Pillalamarri, 2018a; Layne, 2007, p. 190. Posen, although pessimistic about U.S.-India cooperation, also suggests continuing weapon sales (Posen, 2014, p. 98). On including other U.S. partners, see Carpenter and Gomez, 2016; Walt, 2018a, p. 269.

<sup>37</sup> DoD, 2019, p. 34.

## **Summary of Next Steps to Develop Prescriptions for U.S. Policy Toward South Asia**

Although advocates of restraint disagree with the ongoing intervention in Afghanistan, which they seek to terminate immediately, there are many other policies that they support in the region. Current U.S. policies in South Asia reflect a more restrained approach than in many other regions.

Although the United States has sought closer security ties with India, India has placed clear limits on the nature and depth of its cooperation. Because of India's democratic values and lack of any geostrategic or ideological source of conflict with the United States, the world's second-largest nation might seem to be a natural ally, but a Cold War attachment to nonalignment remains deeply ingrained in New Delhi's political establishment. At times, the United States has responded by tilting toward India's rival Pakistan, but, because of a mismatch between U.S. interests and Pakistan's political and military goals, chief among them Islamabad's support for proxy forces that have attacked both Indian and U.S. citizens, there has never been a stable alignment between the United States and Pakistan. Thus, a strategy of restraint has already begun to develop in South Asia.

One example of such restraint has been the U.S. policy toward the volatile issue of Kashmir. Pakistan consistently has attempted to draw the United States closer into this dispute, while India has tried to induce the United States to accept New Delhi's contention that the matter is effectively settled. The United States has declined to adopt either position. This is a restrained approach—and one that has already been accepted by establishment consensus as the most reasonable.

Another example is the U.S. decision, from 2001 onward, to effectively jettison its previous demand that both India and Pakistan renounce their nuclear weapons as a condition for closer ties with the United States. This choice arose from the need to cooperate with Pakistan for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and was accelerated by the Bush and Obama administrations' championing of a civil nuclear deal with India. By accepting both India and Pakistan as nuclear weap-

ons states—in one case, overtly; in the other, tacitly—Washington was adopting a policy that was supported by advocates of restraint.

On the whole, policy prescriptions toward South Asia are less developed than for other regions, reflecting the lower priority that advocates of restraint place on the region. The most important next step for developing these prescriptions is to more clearly articulate how the United States should approach its relationship with India. This choice could affect U.S. relations with China, which are a core priority for advocates of restraint, and could cause insecurity in Pakistan that might make the region less stable and less amenable to U.S. interests.

## Next Steps for Operationalizing a Grand Strategy of Restraint

---

The previous chapters detailed the policy prescriptions put forward by advocates of restraint and identified next steps for operationalizing restraint in each region. This chapter summarizes our key findings and recommendations. Because we did not assess the advisability of a grand strategy of restraint, we do not offer policy recommendations. Instead, we offer recommendations for advocates of restraint and other grand strategy analysts on how to further develop the policy implications of a grand strategy of restraint. We suggest that advocates of restraint move from broad prescriptions for U.S. foreign policy, which they have wielded as they have made the case that it is time for the United States to consider a new approach, to more-specific recommendations that offer solutions for more of the problems that are on the minds of policymakers.

### Findings

#### **Advocates of Restraint Have Threat Assessments and Assumptions That Differ from Those of Policymakers Who Have Shaped U.S. Grand Strategy Since the End of the Cold War**

Across regions, advocates of restraint differ from current U.S. policymakers in their assessments of the level of threat to U.S. interests. Current policymakers contend that, to be secure, the United States must prevent Russia, China, and Iran from gaining influence in key regions. Advocates of restraint disagree, arguing that U.S. geography and eco-

nomic dynamism mean that there are few international developments that can undermine U.S. security. Moreover, these realist thinkers assess that Russia and Iran are relatively weak states that will be unable to dominate their regions. Although advocates of restraint believe that China is more capable, they remain more optimistic about the ability of local powers to limit China's domination of East Asia. Moreover, advocates of restraint anticipate that China will be ambitious as it continues to rise, but not inalterably aggressive or impossible to deter. In addition to having lower threat assessments, advocates of restraint believe that the confrontational policies that the United States currently pursues unnecessarily provoke Russia's, China's, and Iran's insecurities and aggression. Advocates of restraint do not worry, as many current policymakers do, that a more conciliatory approach would embolden other great powers to become more aggressive and demanding.

**Generally, Advocates of Restraint Would Rely More on Diplomacy, Encourage Other States to Lead, and Preserve Military Power to Defend Vital U.S. Interests**

Advocates of restraint argue that the United States relies too much on military engagement in the form of security commitments, forward troop presence, and use of force. Therefore, these realist thinkers would end many ongoing military interventions (e.g., in Afghanistan and Syria) and have a higher bar for the use of military force going forward.

Advocates of restraint would shape the defense of vital U.S. interests around three central tenets. First, advocates of restraint call on the United States to be more open to negotiations to settle conflicts of interest with other powers. Second, while traditional post-Cold War grand strategy has emphasized U.S. leadership, a grand strategy of restraint would encourage U.S. partners to lead in their own regions. Lastly, the United States also would prepare for the possibility that cooperative overtures and local balancing would fail to prevent the rise of a threat that could dominate the region. A key goal of these policies would be to preserve U.S. military power for the defense of vital U.S. interests should this occur.

### **Regional Policy Under a Grand Strategy of Restraint Varies Based on the Level of U.S. Interests and the Risk That a Single Power Could Dominate the Region**

Advocates of restraint have a clear logic that motivates their proposals for the U.S. approach to each region. However, as with any grand strategy, the policy prescriptions vary depending on the conditions in each region and over time. Advocates of restraint see vital interests at stake in Europe, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf and see the main threat to those interests as the rise of a single powerful country that can dominate any of these regions. Therefore, whether local powers have the capabilities to balance against any potential hegemon determines the broad approach that advocates of restraint propose. Advocates of restraint believe that local powers can balance effectively against both Russia and Iran. However, there are more questions about the capability and willingness of states in East Asia to balance effectively against China. As a result, advocates of restraint have been more open to U.S. military engagement in that region.

### **The Primary Area of Disagreement Among Advocates of Restraint Is U.S. Strategy in the Asia-Pacific**

Although advocates of restraint share many of the same beliefs about how the world works and the effects of U.S. policy, their views differ on two key points: the extent of China's ambitions and whether countries in Asia have the capability and willingness to work together to balance effectively against China. Disagreements about these two issues have led to divergent prescriptions for U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific that range from substantial military retrenchment in the region to an increase in U.S. military engagement in the region. This is an important difference among advocates of restraint on U.S. policy toward China, the power that all advocates of restraint agree poses the greatest potential threat to U.S. interests.

## **Recommendations for Developing the Policy Implications of a Grand Strategy of Restraint**

In the preceding chapters, we offered detailed recommendations for next steps to refine policy prescriptions of restraint by region. In this section, we summarize the most-important cross-cutting recommendations for how analysts of U.S. grand strategy and, in particular, advocates of restraint, can further develop their thinking. Each of these recommendations focuses on an area of concern for current U.S. policymakers and explains how advocates of restraint could develop their prescriptions to speak to those concerns.

### **Evaluate the Core Claims Underlying a Grand Strategy of Restraint to Validate and Refine its Policy Prescriptions**

In this report, we have taken advocates of restraint on their own terms, accepting the arguments they make for the purpose of identifying the policy implications of their proposed approach to the world. However, the claims that both advocates of restraint and defenders of current grand strategy put forward have not been fully tested empirically. Evaluating these core claims is important not only for deciding which grand strategy the United States should adopt but also for designing more-effective policies within a given grand strategy.<sup>1</sup> Consider, for example, if empirical research were to reveal that advocates of restraint are correct that states tend to balance against, rather than submit to being dominated by, threats but that there are conditions in which this relationship does not hold. Advocates of restraint could make adjustments to their prescriptions to account for this more nuanced relationship and ultimately offer policymakers better solutions.

---

<sup>1</sup> The RAND Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy currently is undertaking research on what the existing empirical literature reveals about these claims. However, more work will be needed to bring new evidence to bear in evaluating these core claims.

### **Develop Risk-Mitigation Strategies to Hedge Against the Possibility that One of the Strategy's Core Assumptions Is Fully or Partially Incorrect**

As we have discussed, current U.S. grand strategy and a grand strategy of restraint rely on different assumptions about the effects of U.S. foreign policy choices that must be evaluated further. In addition, the international system is complex, so past reactions to U.S. policy might not be a definitive guide to future effects. As a result, policymakers might wish to have options for how to hedge against the possibility that a core assumption of a grand strategy of restraint is partially or entirely incorrect before adopting major policy changes (e.g., ending an alliance commitment, withdrawing all forces from a partner country). In addition, it would be helpful to offer policymakers indicators that they can monitor to know whether recommendations from advocates of restraint are working as expected.

### **Specify the Conditions Under Which the United States Should Stop Military Retrenchment or Even Increase Military Engagement Within a Region**

The policy prescriptions of any grand strategy, including restraint, are not static. Rather, they evolve as global and regional conditions change. Advocates of restraint could clarify their logic by identifying conditions that would alter their core policy prescriptions for military retrenchment in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. For example, are there any changes in allied or Russian behavior or capabilities that would change the recommendation to withdraw most U.S. forces from Europe? Once withdrawal is underway, is there anything that policymakers should monitor to determine whether to slow or stop the policy? Are there types of Chinese behavior, military acquisitions, or other indicators that would suggest that the United States needs to increase its forces in the region or change its policies toward China more generally? For another example, advocates of restraint place much emphasis on the security gains of being located far from other great powers. It would be helpful to explain whether there are any changes in military technology that would change this assessment and the recommendations on forward posture that advocates of restraint would then offer.

### **Clarify What Changes in Great-Power Capabilities and Behavior Would Constitute a Serious Threat to Vital U.S. Interests**

Advocates of restraint argue that the rise of a single power that could dominate East Asia, Europe, or the Persian Gulf would imperil U.S. vital interests. Current U.S. policymakers focus on the same regions but are concerned about China's, Russia's, and Iran's influence short of regional domination. Although advocates of restraint seem to have a higher threshold for identifying threats to vital U.S. interests, it is unclear exactly where that threshold is. By developing criteria for what changes in another great power's capabilities and behavior would pose a serious threat to U.S. vital interests, advocates of restraint could clarify how they assess threats and establish the basis for developing indicators that policymakers should monitor to know whether a country is becoming capable of imperiling vital U.S. interests.

### **Provide Guidance on Whether and How to Respond to Gray Zone Activities**

Currently, U.S. policymakers are deeply concerned about Russian, Chinese, and Iranian gray zone activities, which are coercive nonmilitary activities short of conventional war that aim to achieve a state's objectives. These include election interference, unconventional warfare, and cyber activities.<sup>2</sup> Gray zone activities are a central concern for U.S. policymakers that advocates of restraint do not directly address. This might be because they see such activities as an unremarkable feature of international politics, especially in the nuclear age, when conventional war carries greater risks. Still, if advocates of restraint want to meet policymakers where they are and speak to current concerns, it would be helpful to be more explicit. How threatening are these activities? When and how should the United States respond to these activities? In what ways should the United States respond? In particular, what types of cyber and information operations should DoD pursue outside wartime? Advocates of restraint could offer additional insights into whether and how the United States should engage in competition below the threshold of armed conflict.

---

<sup>2</sup> DoD, 2018.

### **Identify the Maritime Areas Where the United States Should Retain Superiority**

Advocates of restraint believe that the United States should continue to maintain command of the commons, particularly the maritime commons. It is not clear, however, which geographic areas this covers or what level of superiority advocates of restraint believe the United States needs to maintain. Providing such clarity is important for designing U.S. posture in key regions and determining what spheres of influence the United States should be willing to concede to other great powers. For example, clarifying the scope and extent of superiority that the United States needs to maintain in the Asia-Pacific would guide U.S. policy on China's island disputes and island-building activities. Given the divergent views on the overall U.S. approach and U.S. naval posture in the Asia-Pacific, there also might be differences among advocates of restraint about how to define the commons and the level of U.S. superiority required in the region. Similarly, clarifying which areas constitute the commons in the Mediterranean would help determine whether U.S. policymakers are right to be concerned about Russian activities in the region. Clarifying where and to what extent the United States needs to have command of the commons in the Arctic also is important for guiding U.S. posture and policy positions on global governance in the region.

### **Offer Prescriptions on How the United States Should Evaluate Threats and Operate in the Space and Cyber Domains**

Advocates of restraint also should provide guidance on how to think about growing adversary capabilities in space and cyberspace. Advocates of restraint argue that U.S. security comes, in part, from the geographic distance of the United States from its adversaries. As U.S. adversaries further develop their capabilities in space and cyberspace, they might be able to use these capabilities to attack the U.S. homeland and U.S. global interests. Advocates of restraint should clarify how policymakers should think about and respond to these threats. Importantly, advocates of restraint also should comment on how to navigate potential tensions between U.S. activities in these domains

and the broader goal of building a more conciliatory relationship with such countries as Russia and China.

### **Develop Scenarios to Guide U.S. Department of Defense Planning**

Advocates of restraint have offered the broad outlines of U.S. posture by region. However, they have not yet conducted detailed analysis to identify how significantly the United States would change its posture under a grand strategy of restraint. One critical piece of information to inform such analysis consists of warfighting scenarios.<sup>3</sup> Advocates for restraint clearly articulate the types of war that the United States should avoid (e.g., promoting democracy, protecting human rights) and offer specific examples of past interventions that they believe the United States should not have undertaken (e.g., the 2003 invasion of Iraq). However, they have not yet articulated scenarios in which the United States should be prepared to use force.

DoD uses defense planning scenarios, precise situations, and threats against which DoD judges the capabilities and capacity of U.S. forces to inform many aspects of planning, such as posture and force structure.<sup>4</sup> Current defense planning scenarios are not publicly available, but the 2010 QDR offers some insights. This planning document includes such scenarios as continued stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, a U.S. response to regime collapse in North Korea, a major conflict with China over Taiwan, Russian coercion of the Baltic states, a nuclear-armed Iran, loss of control of nuclear weapons in Paki-

---

<sup>3</sup> Peacetime military activities, which we discuss in subsequent sections, also affect these assessments. For more on the factors that affect posture choices and options, see Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Jennifer Kavanagh, *Access Granted: Political Challenges to the U.S. Overseas Military Presence, 1945–2014*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1339-AF, 2016; and Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Alan J. Vick, *The Posture Triangle: A New Framework for U.S. Air Force Global Presence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-402-AF, 2013. For an in-depth discussion of the historical changes in U.S. global defense posture, see Stacie L. Pettyjohn, *U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783–2011*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, Katharina Ley Best, Burgess Laird, Eric V. Larson, Michael E. Linick, and Dan Madden, *The U.S. Department of Defense's Planning Process: Components and Challenges*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2173/2-A, 2019, p. 28.

stan, and homeland defense and cyberattacks on the United States.<sup>5</sup> As we discussed earlier, advocates of restraint likely would not support a U.S. intervention in all of these scenarios. The next step, therefore, is to offer more detail on the conditions under which the United States should be prepared to use force under a grand strategy of restraint.

### **Provide Priorities for U.S. Military Peacetime Activities**

The NDS prioritizes steady-state security cooperation and assistance activities and sees them as central to deterring adversaries, reassuring partners, and preparing for possible contingencies. To engage on these terms, advocates of restraint could explain how the type, number, and goals of steady-state activities would change under a grand strategy of restraint. For example, what types of activities should continue, and which should be avoided? What signals should these activities aim to send, and to what audience?

Policy prescriptions in this area also should specify how the United States should navigate trade-offs associated with these activities. For example, under a grand strategy of restraint, the United States still would want to be able to fight alongside partners and allies in the event that a single state became powerful enough to dominate the region. This suggests that advocates of restraint would see a benefit in some large-scale military exercises with partners. At the same time, such exercises can threaten China, Russia, and Iran, something that a grand strategy of restraint seeks to avoid. Such trade-offs are at the heart of many aspects of U.S. regional policies. Therefore, advocates of restraint could further clarify their decision calculus by explaining how they would design steady-state activities for the U.S. military.

### **Develop Policies Toward Africa, the Americas, and the Arctic**

Although Africa, the Americas, and the Arctic have not been priorities for advocates of restraint, developing policy prescriptions for these regions would be useful to policymakers who are weighing the full spectrum of implications and trade-offs associated with a grand strategy of restraint. U.S. military engagement with Africa is already a lower

---

<sup>5</sup> Larson, 2019, p. 238.

priority than engagement in most other regions.<sup>6</sup> However, advocates of restraint have argued that the U.S. military should do even less in the region. For example, advocates of restraint have suggested that the threat to the U.S. homeland from Africa-based terrorist groups is low and that U.S. interventions and assistance strengthen local militaries that often use their power to engage in human rights abuses against civilians and raise the risk of state failure. Advocates of restraint also have suggested that U.S. embassies are a better place to engage with African governments than U.S. military installations.<sup>7</sup>

There are, however, some important unanswered questions. Does the United States need to sustain any access or presence in the region, such as at the naval base in Djibouti, to maintain command of the commons?<sup>8</sup> Does the United States need to retain access and overflight rights for air mobility operations? Advocates of restraint also should comment on whether U.S. policymakers are right to be concerned about China's and Russia's growing influence in Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Explicit recommendations about U.S. policy in the Americas might be particularly helpful for clarifying the logic of restraint. Part of the reason that advocates of restraint argue that the United States

---

<sup>6</sup> Alice Hunt Friend and Jamie D. Wise, *The Evolution of U.S. Defense Posture in North and West Africa*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2018; and Jim Garamone, "Defense Leaders Detail How Middle East, Africa Fit in U.S. Strategy," U.S. Department of Defense, March 10, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Lissner Friedman, "Military Intervention and the Future of American Grand Strategy," in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2019; Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "Is the New US Drone Base in Niger Worth the Cost?" *Defense News*, October 16, 2018b; A. Trevor Thrall and Jordan Cohen, "U.S. Security Aid Enables Torture in Cameroon," *UPI*, August 14, 2018; and Marian L. Tupy, "U.S. Policy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa," in *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> The United States currently has approximately 6,000 troops in Africa, mostly at the naval base in Djibouti (see Dan Lamothe and Danielle Paquette, "Pressure Builds Against the Pentagon as It Weighs Reducing Troop Numbers in Africa," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> DoD, 2019, p. 9; Stephen J. Townsend, "A Secure and Stable Africa Is an Enduring American Interest," statement presented before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 30, 2020; and White House, 2017, p. 52.

should not intervene in other regions to ensure stability is because, in many parts of the world, U.S. distance from those regions insulates the United States from instability. The applicability of such an argument is less clear when it comes to instability in nearby states, such as Mexico, where the power of criminal organizations can undermine political institutions. Instability closer to the United States affects such outcomes as migration and cross-border violence. Are there any conditions under which the United States should use force closer to home?

Advocates of restraint have spoken out against the possibility of military intervention in Venezuela against the regime of President Nicolás Maduro, preferring to leave any intervention to states in the region.<sup>10</sup> Even if the United States eschews military intervention in the Americas in response to instability or humanitarian crises, are there any institutions or other tools that the United States should consider using? Carpenter suggests that the United States should take a firm policy against Russian activities in Latin America but does not specify what that entails.<sup>11</sup> The United States shares an alliance with many states in Latin America under the Rio Pact. Should the United States rethink its alliance commitments to these countries? Advocates of restraint should make explicit their prescriptions for the Americas, even in the absence of a great power.

Given the importance that advocates of restraint place on U.S. homeland security, they also should comment on how changes to NATO would affect U.S.-Canada relations. If the United States were to leave NATO, how should it pursue future security cooperation with Canada?

Finally, advocates of restraint should offer recommendations for U.S. policy toward the Arctic. Current U.S. strategy documents outline concerns about how Russia's and China's activities in the region might affect the defense of the U.S. homeland and access to strategic transit routes for naval operations and commerce.<sup>12</sup> Advocates

---

<sup>10</sup> Badow, 2019a.

<sup>11</sup> Carpenter, 2019a.

<sup>12</sup> DoD, 2019, p. 10; and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, June 2019.

of restraint also are concerned about both of these interests, so they should weigh in on whether current Chinese and Russian activities and capabilities constitute a threat in this region and, if so, how the United States should respond. If the Arctic is a priority for advocates of restraint, how should the United States change its air and naval posture to enable U.S. operations in the region?<sup>13</sup> Advocates of restraint should advise, for example, whether the United States should conduct freedom of navigation exercises in the area, as some Trump administration officials have proposed.

### **Develop Policies on Trade and Other International Economic Issues**

Advocates of restraint have not yet fully engaged on trade and other international economic policies. In general terms, advocates of restraint have argued for maintaining free trade and investment relations with other nations.<sup>14</sup> Some advocates of restraint have suggested that trade would not be dramatically affected by a U.S. grand strategy of restraint.<sup>15</sup> However, advocates of restraint have not yet fully explicated how U.S. economic policy would shift to support their broader policy prescriptions. How, if at all, should the United States use economic agreements and incentives as part of its broader effort to improve ties with Russia, China, and Iran? Or, if these countries become more powerful or aggressive, should the United States be willing to employ sanctions or other measures to limit their growth or change their behavior?

### **Assess the Cost Savings Associated with Core Policy Prescriptions**

Advocates of restraint argue that doing less can often promote U.S. interests more effectively than a more interventionist approach. But their policy prescriptions are also motivated by a desire to make U.S.

---

<sup>13</sup> David Auerswald, "Now Is Not the Time for a FONOP in the Arctic," *War on the Rocks*, October 11, 2019; Matthew Melino and Heather A. Conley, "The Ice Curtain: Russia's Arctic Military Presence," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; and Stephanie Pezard, "How Not to Compete in the Arctic: The Blurry Lines Between Friend and Foe," *War on the Rocks*, February 27, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> For an early example, see Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Gholz and Press, 2001; Glaser, Preble, and Thrall, 2019, p. 33.

grand strategy more fiscally sustainable in the long term. Advocates of restraint have offered initial estimates of the budgetary savings of applying their prescriptions.<sup>16</sup> Once advocates of restraint have offered more details on their policy prescriptions, analysts will be able to fully assess the scale of savings that these prescriptions could produce.

## Final Thoughts

For decades, discussions about a grand strategy of restraint were confined largely to the academic security studies community and the margins of the policy discourse. In mainstream foreign policy circles, restraint was caricatured as isolationism or dismissed as wildly out of touch with accepted views on U.S. foreign policy. Now, however, there is growing interest in the approach in both political parties.

When implementation of their prescriptions was a remote possibility, advocates of restraint rightly focused on making broad arguments. However, now that there is greater interest in their ideas, advocates of restraint have an opportunity to explain their logic in more detail and show how their prescriptions would offer solutions to the nation's problems. In this report, we have attempted to extend the logic of restraint to identify their policy prescriptions on key issues and have found that doing so is not always straightforward. In some cases, the logic did not lead to a clear prescription. In others, it produced competing prescriptions. Importantly, it is not yet clear how advocates of restraint would advise navigating difficult trade-offs between their broad prescriptions.

By going through the exercise of applying the broad logic of restraint to more-detailed questions of concern to U.S. policymakers, advocates of restraint could refine their own logic and offer solutions at a time when decisionmakers are more open to a new U.S. approach to the world.

---

<sup>16</sup> Adams and Leatherman, 2011; Friedman and Preble, 2010.



## References

---

- Abi-Habib, Maria, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *New York Times*, June 25, 2018.
- Adams, Gordon, and Matthew Leatherman, "A Leaner and Meaner Defense: How to Cut the Pentagon's Budget While Improving Its Performance," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1, January–February 2011, pp. 139–152.
- Albright, Madeleine K., "Statement to the North Atlantic Council," Brussels, Belgium, December 8, 1998.
- Allison, Graham, "The New Spheres of Influence," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020.
- "A Look at Foreign Military Bases Across the Persian Gulf," Associated Press, September 3, 2019. As of April 10, 2020:  
<https://apnews.com/e676e805b77347108068afc160313e2d>
- Archick, Kristin, Paul Belkin, Shayerah Ilias Akhtar, and Derek E. Mix, *Transatlantic Relations: U.S. Interests and Key Issues*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R45745, last updated April 27, 2020. As of December 1, 2020:  
<https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=837978>
- Art, Robert J., "Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1998, pp. 79–113.
- , *A Grand Strategy for America*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- , "Selective Engagement in the Era of Austerity," in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America's Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012, pp. 13–28.
- Ashford, Emma, "Dealing with ISIS in Iraq and Syria," *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017, pp. 85–91.
- , "Unbalanced: Rethinking America's Commitment to the Middle East," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2018a, pp. 127–148.

———, “How Reflexive Hostility to Russia Harms U.S. Interests: Washington Needs a More Realistic Approach,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2018b.

———, “Power and Pragmatism: Reforming American Foreign Policy for the 21st Century,” in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2019, pp. 3–12.

Ashford, Emma, and John Glaser, “Unforced Error: The Risks of Confrontation with Iran,” Cato Institute, October 9, 2017.

Ashford, Emma, and Matthew Kroenig, “What Would North Korea’s Collapse Mean for U.S. Security?” *Foreign Policy*, May 1, 2020.

Auerswald, David, “Now Is Not the Time for a FONOP in the Arctic,” *War on the Rocks*, October 11, 2019.

Avey, Paul C., Jonathan N. Markowitz, and Robert J. Reardon, “Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, November 2018, pp. 28–51.

Bacevich, Andrew J., “John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2008, pp. 787–795.

———, “Time for the United States to Leave NATO,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2013.

———, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*, New York: Random House, 2016a.

———, “Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 5, September–October 2016b, pp. 36–44.

Bandow, Doug, “Why Are American Troops Still Stationed in Europe?” *Forbes*, October 29, 2012.

———, “U.S. Should Stop Subsidizing Bad Israeli Economic and Occupation Policies,” *Forbes*, February 16, 2016a.

———, “What Should the U.S. Do in Okinawa? Bring America’s Troops Home from Japan,” *Forbes*, June 8, 2016b.

———, “The U.S. Doesn’t Need the Philippines,” *New York Times*, last updated October 18, 2016c.

———, “It’s Time for America to Cut South Korea Loose,” *Foreign Policy*, April 13, 2017a.

———, “Interfering in Democratic Elections: Russia Against the U.S., but U.S. Against the World,” *Forbes*, August 1, 2017b.

———, “Time to Let Japan Be a Regular Military Power,” *National Interest*, October 29, 2017c.

———, “Would You Send Your Son or Daughter to Die for Montenegro?” Cato Institute, August 1, 2018a.

———, “Ukraine Should Not Be a Member of NATO,” *National Interest*, November 27, 2018b.

———, “Military Force Will Not Achieve U.S. Objectives in Venezuela,” Cato Institute, May 8, 2019a.

———, “How to Solve the North Korea Crisis Once and for All,” *National Interest*, September 22, 2019b.

———, “Time to Extricate from Ukraine,” *American Conservative*, October 17, 2019c.

———, “Trump Must Understand a War with Iran Would Be Hell,” *National Interest*, November 21, 2019d.

———, “How Donald Trump Can Jumpstart Diplomacy with North Korea,” Cato Institute, February 18, 2020a.

———, “On Iraq, Is Donald J. Trump Morphing into George W. Bush?” Cato Institute, March 19, 2020b.

———, “Withdraw US Support from Saudi Arabia,” Cato Institute, April 23, 2020c.

———, “What Comes Next for North Korea,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2020d.

———, “If North Korea Goes Down, the U.S. Should Stay Out,” *American Conservative*, May 8, 2020e.

———, “A Modest Proposal: Open Ties with North Korea,” *Foreign Policy*, June 4, 2020f.

Barndollar, Gil, “Dealing with the Remnants of ISIS,” Defense Priorities, February 2020. As of November 24, 2020:

<https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/dealing-with-the-remnants-of-isis>

Barrow, Bill, “Biden Promises to End ‘Forever Wars’ as President,” MilitaryTimes.com, July 11, 2019. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/07/11/biden-promises-to-end-forever-wars-as-president/>

Bennett, Bruce W., *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-331-SRF, 2013. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR331.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR331.html)

Berger, Miriam, “Where U.S. Troops Are in the Middle East and Afghanistan, Visualized,” *Washington Post*, January 4, 2020.

Betts, Richard K., "American Strategy: Grand vs. Grandiose," in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America's Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012, pp. 29–42.

Bickford, Thomas J., *Haiyang Qiangguo: China as a Maritime Power*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, March 15, 2016. As of November 24, 2020: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1014584.pdf>

Biden, Joseph R., Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020, pp. 64–76.

Blackwill, Robert D., and Ashley J. Tellis, "The India Dividend: New Delhi Remains Washington's Best Hope in Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 5, September–October 2019, pp. 173–183.

Borger, Julian, and Spencer Ackerman, "Russian Planes Dropped Bombs That Destroyed UN Aid Convoy, US Officials Say," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2016.

Boustany, Charles W., and Aaron L. Friedberg, *Partial Disengagement: A New US Strategy for Economic Competition with China*, Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report No. 82, November 4, 2019. As of November 24, 2020: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/partial-disengagement-a-new-u-s-strategy-for-economic-competition-with-china/>

Bowers, Samantha, "Where Could the US Put Its Post-INF Missiles?" *Defense One*, February 11, 2020.

Brands, Hal, and Peter Feaver, "Should America Retrench? The Battle over Offshore Balancing: The Risks of Retreat," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 6, November–December 2016, pp. 164–169.

Braumoeller, Bear F., "The Myth of American Isolationism," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2010, pp. 349–371.

Brooks, Stephen G., G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case Against Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2012, pp. 7–51.

Brooks, Stephen G., and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2015, pp. 7–53.

———, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and George W. Downs, "Intervention and Democracy," *International Organization*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2006, pp. 627–649.

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, November 3, 2019.

Burns, Nicholas, "Trump Violates Diplomacy's Golden Rule," *The Atlantic*, December 4, 2019.

Carpenter, Ted Galen, "Persistent Suitor: Washington Wants India as an Ally to Contain China," Cato Institute, April 29, 2016a. As of December 7, 2020: <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/persistent-suitor-washington-wants-india-ally-contain-china>

———, "NATO Is an Institutional Dinosaur," *War on the Rocks*, August 25, 2016b.

———, "It's Time to Suspend America's Alliance with the Philippines," *National Interest*, October 1, 2016c.

———, "Incentivizing China on N. Korea Requires Creative U.S. Diplomacy," Cato Institute, March 24, 2017a.

———, "How Kosovo Poisoned America's Relationship with Russia," Cato Institute, May 19, 2017b.

———, "Washington Quietly Increases Lethal Weapons to Ukraine," *American Conservative*, September 10, 2018a.

———, "Ukraine Doesn't Deserve America's Blind Support," Cato Institute, November 29, 2018b.

———, "Enforce the Monroe Doctrine on Russian Moves in Latin America," Cato Institute, January 7, 2019a.

———, "Russia Sure Behaves Strangely for a Country Bent on Conquest," Cato Institute, January 15, 2019b.

———, "What the Evolution of NATO's Missions Means for the Future," Cato Institute, January 27, 2019c.

———, "Establishing an Acceptable Relationship with a Nuclear North Korea," Cato Institute, February 1, 2019d.

———, "Washington Needs to Jettison Its Commitment to Defend the Senkakus," Cato Institute, January 9, 2020a.

———, "The Democratic Obsession with Russia, Explained," *National Interest*, January 28, 2020b.

Carpenter, Ted Galen, and Eric Gomez, "East Asia and a Strategy of Restraint," *War on the Rocks*, August 10, 2016.

Carpenter, Ted Galen, and Charles V. Peña, "Rethinking Non-Proliferation," *National Interest*, June 1, 2005.

Carter, Ashton B., and William J. Perry, "If Necessary, Strike and Destroy: North Korea Cannot Be Allowed to Test This Missile," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2006.

Castillo, Jasen J., "Passing the Torch: Criteria for Implementing a Grand Strategy of Offshore Balancing," in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Center for a New American Security, 2019, pp. 23–37.

Castillo, Jasen J., and Alexander B. Downes, "Loyalty, Hedging, or Exit: How Weaker Alliance Partners Respond to the Rise of New Threats," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2020, pp. 1–42.

Cato Institute, "America's War in Afghanistan," December 4, 2019a. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.cato.org/publications/publications/americas-war-afghanistan>

———, "U.S.-Iran Policy," December 4, 2019b. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.cato.org/publications/publications/us-iran-policy>

Charap, Samuel, and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018.

Charap, Samuel, Jeremy Shapiro, and Alyssa Demus, *Rethinking the Regional Order for Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-297-CC/SFDFA, 2018. As of November 24, 2020:

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE297.html>

Chivvis, Christopher S., Andrew Radin, Dara Massicot, and Clint Reach, *Strengthening Strategic Stability with Russia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-234-OSD, 2017. As of November 24, 2020:

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE234.html>

Christensen, Thomas J., "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Spring 1999, pp. 49–80.

Christou, Will, and Mohammad Abdulssattar Ibrahim, "The Caesar Act: The Beginning or End of US Syria Policy?" Syria Direct, January 5, 2020. As of November 24, 2020:

<https://syriadirect.org/news/the-caesar-act-beginning-or-end-of-us-syria-policy/>

Clary, Christopher, *Thinking About Pakistan's Nuclear Security in Peacetime, Crisis and War*, New Delhi, India: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, ISDA Occasional Paper No. 12, 2010. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://www.futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/OP\\_PakistansNuclearSecurity.pdf](https://www.futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/OP_PakistansNuclearSecurity.pdf)

Coats, Daniel R., “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” testimony presented before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019. As of November 24, 2020:  
<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>

Colby, Elbridge A., “Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Implementation of the National Defense Strategy,” January 29, 2019a. As of November 24, 2020:  
[https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Colby\\_01-29-19.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Colby_01-29-19.pdf)

———, “Don’t Let Iran Distract from China,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2019b.

Cooper, Helene, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, and Eric Schmitt, “Army Special Forces Secretly Help Saudis Combat Threat from Yemen Rebels,” *New York Times*, May 3, 2018.

Cordesman, Anthony H., *The Gulf and the Challenge of Missile Defense: Net Assessment Indicators*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 26, 2019. As of August 14, 2020:  
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/gulf-and-challenge-missile-defense-net-assessment-indicators>

Cullis, Tyler, and Trita Parsi, “In Tortured Logic, Trump Begs for a Do-Over on the Iran Nuclear Deal,” *Responsible Statecraft*, May 1, 2020.

Defense Intelligence Agency, *Challenges to Security in Space*, Washington, D.C., January 2019. As of November 24, 2020:  
<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Feb/11/2002088710/-1/-1/1/SPACE-SECURITY-CHALLENGES.PDF>

Department of Defense Instruction 3000.12, *Management of U.S. Global Defense Posture (GDP)*, U.S. Department of Defense, May 6, 2016, Change 1, May 8, 2017. As of October 30, 2020:  
<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/300012p.pdf>

DePetrìs, Daniel R., “The US and Iran Could Bring Down Tensions If They’re Willing to Talk About One Issue,” *Business Insider*, April 2, 2020.

DoD—See U.S. Department of Defense.

DoDI—See Department of Defense Instruction.

Drezner, Daniel W., Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, “The End of Grand Strategy: America Must Think Small,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 3, May–June 2020, pp. 107–117.

Dueck, Colin, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Dziedzic, Stephen, and Catherine Graue, "Donald Trump's Top Security Advisers Visit the Pacific, Signifying Growing US Focus in the Region," ABC News, last updated March 10, 2019. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-11/](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-11/two-of-donald-trumps-top-security-advisers-visit-pacific/10887678)

[two-of-donald-trumps-top-security-advisers-visit-pacific/10887678](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-11/two-of-donald-trumps-top-security-advisers-visit-pacific/10887678)

Einhorn, Robert, and Vann H. Van Diepen, *Constraining Iran's Missile Capabilities*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 2019. As of October 30, 2020:

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/constraining-irans-missile-capabilities/>

Elbagir, Nima, Salma Abdelaziz, Mohamed Abo El Gheit, and Laura Smith-Spark, "Sold to An Ally, Lost to An Enemy," CNN, 2019.

Erickson, Andrew S., *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 2017*, Arlington, Va.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.andrewerickson.com/2018/05/military-and-security-developments-involving-the-democratic-peoples-republic-of-korea-2017/>

Erickson, Andrew S., and Joel Wuthnow, "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific 'Island Chains,'" *China Quarterly*, Vol. 225, March 2016, pp. 1–22.

Feigenbaum, Evan A., "Why the United States and China Forgot How to Cooperate," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 28, 2020. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/28/](https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/28/why-united-states-and-china-forgot-how-to-cooperate-pub-81673)

[why-united-states-and-china-forgot-how-to-cooperate-pub-81673](https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/28/why-united-states-and-china-forgot-how-to-cooperate-pub-81673)

Fettweis, Christopher J., "Threatlessness and US Grand Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 5, 2014, pp. 43–68.

Finer, Jon, and Robert Malley, "Trump Is Right to Seek an End to America's Wars," *New York Times*, January 8, 2019.

Ford, Christopher A., *Arms Control in Outer Space: History and Prospects*, Washington D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Vol. I, No. 12, July 24, 2020. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/>

[T-Paper-Series-Space-Norms-Formatted-T-w-Raymond-quote-2543.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/)

Ford, Robert S., "Trump's Syria Decision Was Essentially Correct. Here's How He Can Make the Most of It," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2018.

Friedman, Benjamin H., "Countering Terrorism with Targeted Killings," *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017, pp. 651–657.

Friedman, Benjamin H., and Justin Logan, "Why the U.S. Military Budget Is 'Foolish and Sustainable,'" *Orbis*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Spring 2012, pp. 177–191.

- Friedman, Benjamin H., and Christopher A. Preble, "Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 667, September 21, 2010.
- Friedman, Rebecca Lissner, "Military Intervention and the Future of American Grand Strategy," in Richard Fontaine and Loren DeJonge Schulman, eds., *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2019, pp. 50–59.
- Friedman, Uri, "The Sanders Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, February 11, 2020.
- Friend, Alice Hunt, and Jamie D. Wise, *The Evolution of U.S. Defense Posture in North and West Africa*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2018. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-us-defense-posture-north-and-west-africa>
- Fuchs, Michael H., "America Doesn't Need a Grand Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 2019.
- Garamone, Jim, "Defense Leaders Detail How Middle East, Africa Fit in U.S. Strategy," U.S. Department of Defense, March 10, 2020. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2107974/defense-leaders-detail-how-middle-east-africa-fit-in-us-strategy/>
- Gause, F. Gregory, III, "Should We Stay or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East," *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 5, October–November 2019, pp. 7–24.
- Gentile, Gian, Yvonne K. Crane, Dan Madden, Timothy M. Bonds, Bruce W. Bennett, Michael J. Mazarr, and Andrew Scobell, *Four Problems on the Korean Peninsula: North Korea's Expanding Nuclear Capabilities Drive a Complex Set of Problems*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TL-271-A, 2019. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL271.html>
- Gewirtz, Julian, "The Chinese Reassessment of Interdependence," *China Leadership Monitor*, June 1, 2020.
- Gholz, Eugene, Benjamin Friedman, and Enea Gjoza, "Defensive Defense: A Better Way to Protect US Allies in Asia," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter 2020, pp. 171–189.
- Gholz, Eugene, and Daryl G. Press, "The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn't Pay to Preserve the Peace," *Security Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Summer 2001, pp. 1–57.
- Gholz, Eugene, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Spring 1997, pp. 5–48.
- Gilpin, Robert, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Gjoza, Enea, and Benjamin H. Friedman, "End US Military Support for the Saudi-Led War in Yemen," *Defense Priorities*, January 2019.

Glaser, Charles L., and Rosemary A. Kelanic, "Getting Out of the Gulf: Oil and U.S. Military Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 1, January–February 2017, pp. 122–131.

Glaser, John, "On North Korea, Diplomacy Is the Sensible Option," *Cato at Liberty*, July 7, 2017a.

———, "Withdrawing from Overseas Bases: Why a Forward-Deployed Military Posture Is Unnecessary, Outdated, and Dangerous," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 816, July 18, 2017b.

———, "Let's Face It: US Policy in the Middle East Has Failed," *Cato at Liberty*, October 19, 2018.

———, "The Trump Administration's Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field," testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2019. As of November 24, 2020: <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/Glaser.102319.Testimony.pdf>

———, "Ending the War in Afghanistan vs Exiting It," *Cato at Liberty*, March 2, 2020.

Glaser, John, and John Mueller, "Overcoming Inertia: Why It's Time to End the War in Afghanistan," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 878, August 13, 2019.

———, "The Taliban Agreement Isn't Ideal, but the U.S. Military Has to Get Out of Afghanistan," Cato Institute, March 17, 2020.

Glaser, John, Christopher A. Preble, and A. Trevor Thrall, "Towards a More Prudent American Grand Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 5, 2019, pp. 25–42.

Goldberg, Richard, "Trump Has an Iran Strategy. This Is It," *New York Times*, January 24, 2020.

Goldstein, Lyle J., *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015.

Gomez, Eric, "A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 800, September 28, 2016.

Gordon, Michael R., "U.S. Lays Out Demands for New Iran Deal," *Wall Street Journal*, last updated May 21, 2018.

Gould, Joe, "With INF Treaty Dead, Esper Seeks New Missiles in the Pacific. Is Capitol Hill on Board?" *Defense News*, August 7, 2019. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2019/08/06/new-pentagon-chief-reveals-plans-for-pacific-based-missiles-is-capitol-hill-on-board/>

Grabow, Colin, "Responsible Stakeholders: Why the United States Should Welcome China's Economic Leadership," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 821, October 3, 2017.

Grossman, Derek, Michael S. Chase, Gerard Finin, Wallace Gregson, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Logan Ma, Jordan R. Reimer, and Alice Shih, *America's Pacific Island Allies: The Freely Associated States and Chinese Influence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2973-OSD, 2019. As of August 7, 2020: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2973.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2973.html)

Hanania, Richard, "Ineffective, Immoral, Politically Convenient: America's Overreliance on Economic Sanctions and What to Do About It," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 884, February 18, 2020.

Harrell, Peter, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, *China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, June 2018. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/chinas-use-of-coercive-economic-measures>

Heginbotham, Eric, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, Jacob L. Heim, Jeff Hagen, Sheng Li, Jeffrey Engstrom, Martin C. Libicki, Paul DeLuca, David A. Shlapak, David R. Frelinger, Burgess Laird, Kyle Brady, and Lyle J. Morris, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-392-AF, 2015. As of December 1, 2020: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR392.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html)

Ikenberry, G. John, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 71–87.

———, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Vol. 128, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Ikenberry, G. John, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, September 27, 2006. As of November 24, 2020: <https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/373430078.pdf>

"India Denies PM Modi Asked Trump to Mediate in Kashmir Conflict," BBC News, July 23, 2019. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49079716>

Indyk, Martin, "The Middle East Isn't Worth It Anymore," *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2020.

International Crisis Group, *The Urgent Need for a U.S.-Iran Hotline*, Crisis Group Middle East Briefing No. 77, April 23, 2020. As of August 7, 2020: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/b77-urgent-need-us-iran-hotline>

Jackson, Van, "Toward a Progressive Theory of Security," *War on the Rocks*, December 6, 2018.

"Japan Protests After Swarm of 230 Chinese Vessels Enters Waters Near Senkakus," *Japan Times*, August 6, 2016.

Jeffrey, James F., "Briefing on Syria," transcript of special briefing to the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., November 14, 2018. As of December 3, 2020: <https://sy.usembassy.gov/briefing-on-syria/>

Johnson, Keith, and Robbie Gramer, "The Great Decoupling," *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2020.

Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 23, 2017. As of November 24, 2020: [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_20\\_20172305.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_20_20172305.pdf)

Jones, Bruce, "The Era of U.S.-China Cooperation Is Drawing to a Close—What Comes Next?" Brookings Institution, January 7, 2019.

Jones, James, "Strategic Theater Transformation," statement presented before the Senate Armed Services Committee, September 23, 2004.

Judson, Jen, "US Army's 'Defender Pacific' Drill to Focus on South China Sea Scenario," *Defense News*, March 27, 2019. As of November 25, 2020: <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2019/03/27/defender-pacific-to-focus-on-south-china-sea-scenario/>

Kamphausen, Roy, "Asia as a Warfighting Environment," in Thomas G. Mahnken and Dan Blumenthal, eds., *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and Future of Regional Security*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014, pp. 11–25.

Karem, Robert, "SFRC Hearing on Yemen," April 17, 2018. As of August 7, 2020: [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/041718\\_Karem\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/041718_Karem_Testimony.pdf)

Karlin, Mara, and Tamara Cofman Wittes, "America's Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 1, January–February 2019, pp. 88–100.

- Katzman, Kenneth, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R44017, last updated March 15, 2019. As of August 7, 2020:  
[https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20190315\\_R44017\\_8811b182dd7da51fe2ee4b38c2c9268517587b40.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20190315_R44017_8811b182dd7da51fe2ee4b38c2c9268517587b40.pdf)
- Kennedy, Paul M., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Khan, Sahar, "Double Game: Why Pakistan Supports Militants and Resists U.S. Pressure to Stop," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 849, September 20, 2018.
- Khan, Sahar, and A. Trevor Thrall, "Why America Can't Afford to Continue Waging a War in Afghanistan," Cato Institute, November 14, 2017.
- Kim Bo-gyung, "South Korea-China Trade Volume Rises to Pre-THAAD Levels," *Korea Herald*, December 19, 2018.
- Kim, Patricia, "Understanding China's Military Expansion," statement presented before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the U.S. House of Representatives during its hearing on "China's Worldwide Military Expansion," May 17, 2018.
- Kindleberger, Charles P., *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986.
- Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4, July–August 1996, pp. 18–32.
- Lamothe, Dan, "Trump Pledged to End Military Exercises with South Korea. But Will It Ever Happen?" *Washington Post*, June 12, 2018.
- Lamothe, Dan, and Danielle Paquette, "Pressure Builds Against the Pentagon as It Weighs Reducing Troop Numbers in Africa," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2020.
- Landis, Joshua, "Stay Out of Syria," *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2012.
- Larson, Eric V., *Force Planning Scenarios, 1945–2016: Their Origins and Use in Defense Strategic Planning*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2173/1-A, 2019. As of November 25, 2020:  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2173z1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2173z1.html)
- Layne, Christopher, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 5–49.
- , "Less Is More: Minimal Realism in East Asia," *National Interest*, March 1, 1996.
- , "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Summer 1997, pp. 86–124.
- , "Offshore Balancing Revisited," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2002, pp. 233–248.

———, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007.

———, “China’s Challenge to US Hegemony,” *Current History*, Vol. 107, No. 705, January 1, 2008, pp. 13–18.

———, “America’s Middle East Grand Strategy After Iraq: The Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, pp. 5–25.

———, “The US-Chinese Power Shift and the End of the Pax Americana,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1, January 1, 2018, pp. 89–111.

Liddell Hart, B. H., *Strategy*, New York: Meridian, 1991.

Lind, Jennifer, and Daryl G. Press, “Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020, pp. 41–48.

Maddux, Thomas, Diane Labrosse, and George Fujii, eds., “ISSF Roundtable on Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *H-Diplo*, Vol. VIII, No. 16, July 11, 2016. As of November 30, 2020: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/133960/issf-roundtable-restraint-new-foundation-us-grand-strategy>

Mazarr, Michael J., “Rethinking Restraint: Why It Fails in Practice,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020, pp. 7–32.

Mazarr, Michael J., Katharina Ley Best, Burgess Laird, Eric V. Larson, Michael E. Linick, and Dan Madden, *The U.S. Department of Defense’s Planning Process: Components and Challenges*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2173/2-A, 2019. As of November 25, 2020: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2173z2.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2173z2.html)

Mearsheimer, John J., “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994–1995, pp. 5–49.

———, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

———, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 381–396.

———, “Can China Rise Peacefully?” *National Interest*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2014a, pp. 1–40.

———, “Say Goodbye to Taiwan,” *National Interest*, February 25, 2014b.

———, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September–October 2014c, pp. 77–89.

———, “Don’t Arm Ukraine,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2015.

———, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018.

———, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Spring 2019a, pp. 7–50.

———, “Iran Is Rushing to Build a Nuclear Weapon—and Trump Can’t Stop It,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2019b.

Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Macmillan, 2007.

———, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4, July–August 2016, pp. 70–83.

Melino, Matthew, and Heather A. Conley, “The Ice Curtain: Russia’s Arctic Military Presence,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020. As of November 25, 2020:

<https://www.csis.org/features/ice-curtain-russias-arctic-military-presence>

Middle East Institute, “The Middle East in an Era of Great Power Competition: A Conversation with Barry Posen and Stephen Walt,” video and transcript of online event, April 16, 2020. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.mei.edu/events/middle-east-era-great-power-competition-conversation-barry-posen-and-stephen-walt>

Ministry of Defense of Japan, “National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program,” website, last updated 2018. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/national.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html)

———, *Defense of Japan 2019*, Tokyo, Japan, 2019. As of November 24, 2020:

[https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/wp\\_2019.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/wp_2019.html)

Moroney, Jennifer D. P., David E. Thaler, and Joe Hogler, *Review of Security Cooperation Mechanisms Combatant Commands Utilize to Build Partner Capacity*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-413-OSD, 2013. As of November 30, 2020:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR413.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR413.html)

Mount, Adam, “Principles for a Progressive Defense Policy,” in *Texas National Security Review, Policy Roundtable: The Future of Progressive Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2018.

Mueller, John, “Embracing Threatlessness: US Military Spending, Newt Gingrich, and the Costa Rica Option,” in A. Trevor Thrall and Benjamin H. Friedman, eds., *US Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: The Case for Restraint*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 198–219.

———, “Assessing International Threats During and After the Cold War,” Cato Institute, May 6, 2020.

NATO—See North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Navarro, Peter, “Crouching Tiger: John Mearsheimer on Strangling China and the Inevitability of War,” RealClearDefense, March 10, 2016. As of August 7, 2020: [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2016/03/10/crouching\\_tiger\\_john\\_mearsheimer\\_on\\_strangling\\_china\\_and\\_the\\_inevitability\\_of\\_war\\_109127.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2016/03/10/crouching_tiger_john_mearsheimer_on_strangling_china_and_the_inevitability_of_war_109127.html)

North Atlantic Treaty Organization, North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C., April 4, 1949.

Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2018*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 16, 2018.

———, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2, 2019.

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, June 2019. As of November 24, 2020: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>

O’Hanlon, Michael E., *Beyond NATO: A New Security Architecture for Eastern Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017.

O’Mahony, Angela, Ilana Blum, Gabriela Armenta, Nicholas Burger, Joshua Mendelsohn, Michael J. McNerney, Steven W. Popper, Jefferson P. Marquis, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Assessing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Army Security Cooperation: A Framework for Implementation*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2165-A, 2018. As of November 30, 2020: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2165.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2165.html)

Panda, Ankit, “Obama: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty,” *The Diplomat*, April 24, 2014.

———, “Mattis: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty,” *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2017a.

———, “China and South Korea: Examining the Resolution of the THAAD Impasse,” *The Diplomat*, November 13, 2017b.

Pape, Robert A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House, 2005.

———, “A New Strategy for Afghanistan,” *Boston Globe*, January 30, 2019.

Parent, Joseph M., and Paul K. MacDonald, “The Wisdom of Retrenchment: America Must Cut Back to Move Forward,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 6, November–December 2011, pp. 32–47.

Parsi, Trita, "If Trump Really Wants to Talk to Iran, Here's What He Should Do," *Middle East Eye*, May 27, 2019. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/>

trumps-says-he-wants-diplomacy-iran-not-war-heres-how-he-can-get-talks

———, "The Middle East Is More Stable When the United States Stays Away," *Foreign Policy*, January 6, 2020.

Pasandideh, Shahryar, "Under the Radar, Iran's Cruise Missile Capabilities Advance," *War on the Rocks*, September 25, 2019.

Paulson, Henry M., Jr., "Delusions of Decoupling," speech at New Economy Forum, Beijing, China, November 2019. As of August 7, 2020:

[https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/](https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Delusions-of-Decoupling.pdf)

Delusions-of-Decoupling.pdf

Pettyjohn, Stacie L., *U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783–2011*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1244-AF, 2012. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1244.html>

Pettyjohn, Stacie L., and Jennifer Kavanagh, *Access Granted: Political Challenges to the U.S. Overseas Military Presence, 1945–2014*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1339-AF, 2016. As of November 30, 2020:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1339.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1339.html)

Pettyjohn, Stacie L., and Alan J. Vick, *The Posture Triangle: A New Framework for U.S. Air Force Global Presence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-402-AF, 2013. As of November 30, 2020:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR402.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR402.html)

Pezard, Stephanie, "How Not to Compete in the Arctic: The Blurry Lines Between Friend and Foe," *War on the Rocks*, February 27, 2020.

Pillalamarri, Akhilesh, "America Needs to Reorient Its South Asia Policy," *RealClearDefense*, February 22, 2018a. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/02/22/>

america\_needs\_to\_reorient\_its\_south\_asia\_policy\_113091.html

———, "Is the New US Drone Base in Niger Worth the Cost?" *Defense News*, October 16, 2018b. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2018/10/16/>

is-the-new-us-drone-base-in-niger-worth-the-cost/

Pillar, Paul R., Andrew Bacevich, Annette Sheline, and Trita Parsi, *A New U.S. Paradigm for the Middle East: Ending America's Misguided Policy of Domination*, Washington, D.C.: Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, Quincy Paper No. 2, July 2020.

Poling, Gregory B., "The Conventional Wisdom on China's Island Bases Is Dangerously Wrong," *War on the Rocks*, January 10, 2020.

Pollmann, Mina, "A Discussion on Grand Strategy and International Order with Barry Posen," interview transcript, Center for International Maritime Security, January 3, 2017. As of August 7, 2020: <http://cimsec.org/barry-posen-draft/30281>

Pompeo, Michael R., "Remarks with Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. at a Press Availability," remarks to the press, U.S. Department of State, March 1, 2019. As of November 30, 2020: <https://www.state.gov/remarks-with-philippine-foreign-secretary-teodoro-locsin-jr/>

———, "Communist China and the Free World's Future," speech, Yorba Linda, Calif.: U.S. Department of State, July 23, 2020. As of November 30, 2020: <https://www.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/>

Posen, Barry R., "The Struggle Against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Winter 2001–2002, pp. 39–55.

———, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Summer 2003, pp. 5–46.

———, "We Can Live with a Nuclear Iran," MIT Center for International Studies *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom*, 06-05, March 2006. As of November 30, 2020: <https://cis.mit.edu/publications/audits/we-can-live-nuclear-iran>

———, "Pull Back: The Case of a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January–February 2013, pp. 116–128.

———, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2014.

———, "Contain ISIS," *The Atlantic*, November 20, 2015.

———, "How to Think About Russia," *National Interest*, November 29, 2016.

———, "It's Time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else's Problem," *The Atlantic*, August 18, 2017.

———, "Starr Forum: US-Russian Relations: What's Next?" event, MIT Center for International Studies, 2018a.

———, "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 2, March–April 2018b, pp. 20–27.

———, "Trump Aside, What's the U.S. Role in NATO?" *New York Times*, March 10, 2019.

Posen, Barry R., and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996–1997, pp. 5–53.

Preble, Christopher A., *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011.

———, “Leaving Unipolarity Behind: A Strategic Framework for Advancing US Interests in the Indian Ocean Region,” in Peter Dombrowski and Andrew C. Winner, eds., *The Indian Ocean and US Grand Strategy: Ensuring Access and Promoting Security*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014, pp. 67–87.

———, “New Rules for U.S. Military Intervention,” *War on the Rocks*, September 20, 2016.

Preble, Christopher A., and Jonathan Ellis Allen, “Staying the Course: The War in Afghanistan Must End,” *The Hill*, March 12, 2020.

Preble, Christopher A., and Doug Bandow, “America’s Ill-Fated Syria Intervention: The Lessons Washington Must Learn,” *National Interest*, October 15, 2019.

Press, Daryl G., *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Press, Daryl G., and Eugene Gholz, “Footprints in the Sand,” *American Interest*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2010, pp. 59–67.

Radin, Andrew, and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017. As of November 30, 2020:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1826.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1826.html)

Reif, Kingston, and Shannon Bugos, “Building Post-INF Missiles Would Be a Waste, or Worse,” *Defense One*, January 10, 2020.

Rosato, Sebastian, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4, November 2003, pp. 585–602.

Rosato, Sebastian, and John Schuessler, “A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2011, pp. 803–819.

Rovner, Joshua, “After America: The Flow of Persian Gulf Oil in the Absence of US Military Force,” in Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic, eds., *Crude Strategy: Rethinking the US Military Commitment to Defend Persian Gulf Oil*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016, pp. 141–165.

Rovner, Joshua, and Caitlin Talmadge, “Less Is More: The Future of the U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3, Fall 2014, pp. 47–60.

Russett, Bruce, and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

Sanders, Bernie, “Ending America’s Endless War: We Must Stop Giving Terrorists Exactly What They Want,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 24, 2019.

Sanger, David E., and Edward Wong, “U.S. Ends Cold War Missile Treaty, with Aim of Countering China,” *New York Times*, August 1, 2019.

Schrivers, Randall G., "Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Schrivers Press Briefing on the 2019 Report on Military and Security Developments in China," transcript, U.S. Department of Defense, May 3, 2019. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1837011/assistant-secretary-of-defense-for-indo-pacific-security-affairs-schrivers-press/>

Segal, Adam, Cobus Van Staden, Elsa B. Kania, Samm Sacks, and Elliott Zaagman, "Is an Iron Curtain Falling Across Tech?" *Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2019.

Shiffrinson, Joshua, "Time to Consolidate NATO?" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Spring 2017, pp. 109–123.

———, "The Rise of China, Balance of Power Theory and US National Security: Reasons for Optimism?" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020, pp. 175–216.

Shugart, Thomas, "China's Artificial Islands Are Bigger (and a Bigger Deal) Than You Think," *War on the Rocks*, September 21, 2016.

Sitaraman, Ganesh, "The Emergence of Progressive Foreign Policy," *War on the Rocks*, April 15, 2019.

Stapleton, Brad, "The Problem with the Light Footprint: Shifting Tactics in Lieu of Strategy," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 792, June 7, 2016a.

———, "Trump and NATO—Redefining the U.S. Role," *Cato at Liberty*, November 11, 2016b.

Steinberg, James, and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Stent, Angela, "US–Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration," *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 6, December 1, 2012, pp. 123–138.

Swaine, Michael D., *America's Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011.

Swaine, Michael D., Wenyan Deng, and Aube Rey Lescure, *Creating a Stable Asia: An Agenda for a U.S.-China Balance of Power*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016. As of August 7, 2020:

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/26/creating-stable-asia-agenda-for-u.s.-china-balance-of-power-pub-64943>

Sweeney, Mike, "Considering the 'Zero Option': Cold War Lessons on U.S. Basing in the Middle East," Defense Priorities, March 2020. As of November 30, 2020: <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/considering-the-zero-option>

Talmadge, Caitlin, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Summer 2008, pp. 82–117.

Thrall, A. Trevor, and Jordan Cohen, "U.S. Security Aid Enables Torture in Cameroon," UPI, August 14, 2018. As of November 30, 2020:  
[https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Voices/2018/08/14/US-security-aid-enables-torture-in-Cameroon/7401534247511/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Voices/2018/08/14/US-security-aid-enables-torture-in-Cameroon/7401534247511/)

Thrall, A. Trevor, and Caroline Dorminey, "Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 836, March 13, 2018.

———, "American Weapons in Yemen: A Cautionary Tale," *Cato at Liberty*, February 5, 2019.

Thrall, A. Trevor, and Erik Goepner, "Step Back: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy from the Failed War on Terror," Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 814, June 26, 2017.

Tian, Yew Lun, "China Sanctions U.S. Lawmakers in Dispute over Uighur Muslims," Reuters, July 13, 2020.

Tobin, Daniel, *How Xi Jinping's "New Era" Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing's Ambitions*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 8, 2020. As of August 7, 2020:  
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-xi-jinpings-new-era-should-have-ended-us-debate-beijings-ambitions>

Townsend, Stephen J., "A Secure and Stable Africa Is an Enduring American Interest," statement presented before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 30, 2020. As of August 7, 2020:  
<https://www.africom.mil/document/32925/2020-posture-statement-to-congress>

Tupy, Marian L., "U.S. Policy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa," in *CATO Handbook for Policymakers*, 8th ed., Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2017, pp. 745–753.

United Nations, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Washington, D.C., July 1, 1968. As of December 2, 2020:  
<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/text/>

U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, Washington, D.C., November 2019. As of August 14, 2020:  
<https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2018. As of November 25, 2020:  
<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

———, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, Washington, D.C., June 1, 2019.

U.S. House of Representatives, Taiwan Relations Act, Bill 2479, April 10, 1979. As of November 30, 2020:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479/all-info>

“U.S. Postpones Military Exercises with South Korea in Nod Toward North Korea,” *Politico*, November 17, 2019.

Walsh, Declan, and Eric Schmitt, “Arms Sales to Saudis Leave American Fingerprints on Yemen’s Carnage,” *New York Times*, December 25, 2018.

Walt, Stephen M., *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987.

———, “Taming American Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5, September–October 2005, pp. 105–120.

———, “ISIS as Revolutionary State: New Twist on an Old Story,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 6, November–December 2015, pp. 42–51.

———, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018a.

———, “US Grand Strategy After the Cold War: Can Realism Explain It? Should Realism Guide It?” *International Relations*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 2018b, pp. 3–22.

———, “I Knew the Cold War. This Is No Cold War,” *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2018c.

———, “Never Call Kim Jong Un Crazy Again,” *Foreign Policy*, June 14, 2018d.

———, “NATO Isn’t What You Think It Is,” *Foreign Policy*, July 26, 2018e, pp. 24–33.

———, “Socialists and Libertarians Need an Alliance Against the Establishment,” *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2018f.

———, “The End of Hubris: And the New Age of American Restraint,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 3, May–June 2019a, pp. 26–35.

———, “Yesterday’s Cold War Shows How to Beat China Today,” *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2019b.

Waltz, Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1979.

Ward, Alex, “Read: Bernie Sanders’ Big Foreign Policy Speech,” *Vox*, September 21, 2017. As of August 6, 2020:

<https://www.vox.com/world/2017/9/21/16345600/bernie-sanders-full-text-transcript-foreign-policy-speech-westminster>

bernie-sanders-full-text-transcript-foreign-policy-speech-westminster

Warren, Elizabeth, “We Can End Our Endless Wars,” *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2020.

Wehrey, Frederic, David E. Thaler, Nora Bensahel, Kim Cragin, Jerrold D. Green, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Nadia Oweidat, and Jennifer Li, *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-781-AF, 2009. As of November 30, 2020:  
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG781.html>

Wertheim, Stephen, “The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn’t Dominate the World,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2, March–April 2020, pp. 19–29.

White, Hugh, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013.

White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., January 1987. As of November 30, 2020:  
<https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1987.pdf?ver=2014-06-25-121104-753>

———, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017. As of November 30, 2020:  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>

White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan,” Tokyo, Japan, April 24, 2014. As of November 30, 2020:  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/24/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan>

Yuhas, Alan, “China Warns U.S. Against Sending Missiles to Asia Amid Fears of an Arms Race,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2019.



**T**he United States is facing several national security challenges at the same time that the federal budget is under pressure because of public health and infrastructure crises. In response to these challenges, there has been growing public interest in rethinking the U.S. role in the world. Under one option, a realist grand strategy of restraint, the United States would adopt a more cooperative approach toward other powers, reduce the size of its military and forward military presence, and end or renegotiate some of its security commitments. To help U.S. policymakers and the public understand this option, the authors of this report explain how U.S. security policies toward key regions would change under a grand strategy of restraint, identify key unanswered questions, and propose next steps for developing the policy implications of this option.

The authors find that regional policy under a grand strategy of restraint varies depending on the level of U.S. interests and the risk that a single powerful state could dominate the region. Because of China's significant military capabilities, advocates of restraint call for a greater U.S. military role in East Asia than in other regions. The authors recommend that advocates of a grand strategy of restraint should continue to develop their policy recommendations. In particular, they should identify what changes in great-power capabilities and behavior would imperil U.S. vital interests, maritime areas where the United States should retain superiority, priorities for peacetime military activities, and war scenarios that should guide U.S. Department of Defense planning.

\$30.00

ISBN-10 1-9774-0630-0  
ISBN-13 978-1-9774-0630-9



[www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)