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# Obama's New Global Posture

## *The Logic of U.S. Foreign Deployments*

MICHÈLE FLOURNOY AND JANINE DAVIDSON

**Learning Outcomes***After reading this article, you will be able to:*

- Explain the logic of sustained foreign engagement deployments as a strategy.
- Describe where a policy of sustained foreign engagement is needed most.
- Contrast Obama's policy with that of the Bush administration.

**T**ough economic times have often been met in the United States by calls for a more modest foreign policy. But despite the global economic downturn, in today's interdependent world, retrenchment would be misguided. The United States' ability to lead the international community is still invaluable and unmatched. Its economy is still by far the largest, most developed, and most dynamic in the world. Its military remains much more capable than any other. The United States' network of alliances and partnerships ensures that the country rarely has to act alone. And its soft power reflects the sustained appeal of American values. The United States should not reduce its overseas engagement when it is in a position to actively shape the global environment to secure its interests.

Preserving the United States' unique standing and leadership will require revitalizing the American economy, the foundation of the nation's power. It will also require smart engagement with the rest of the world to create the conditions that are essential to economic recovery and growth, namely, stability and uninterrupted trade. For decades, those have been underwritten by the forward engagement of U.S. forces and by robust networks of alliances. For example, a sustained U.S. military presence in Europe and Asia, along with healthy diplomatic and economic ties to allies there, has reaped decades of peace and prosperity for the United States and the world. Bringing most of those forces home would be detrimental to U.S. national security and economic recovery.

Nevertheless, fundamental changes in the international strategic environment have brought the United States to a strategic

inflection point, requiring a recalibration of the United States' global military posture. The rise of China and India is shifting the power dynamics in Asia and the world at large. Transnational threats, such as terrorism and proliferation, pose new collective challenges. The global commons—the maritime, air, space, and cyberspace domains—are increasingly congested and contested. And with the end of the Iraq war and the planned 2014 transition in Afghanistan, the United States is nearing the end of a decade of ground wars in the Middle East and South Asia.

In response to these changes, in 2009 the Obama administration launched a major review of the U.S. global military posture to determine how to make it more strategically sound, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable. The review is ongoing but has already yielded a number of new initiatives, such as a shift away from the Cold War orientation of U.S. forces in Europe and a reinvigoration of the United States' partnerships in Asia. These moves reflect the fact that with the war in Iraq over and the transition in Afghanistan under way, the United States must focus American leadership on addressing emerging threats and preventing conflict and on securing a better future through partnership and engagement.

**The Logic of Sustained Forward Engagement**

During the Pentagon's last global posture review in 2004, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's guiding principle was closing overseas bases and bringing home U.S. troops stationed abroad. In contrast, the Obama administration has emphasized making the country's forward posture more efficient and effective. American forces stationed abroad should be aiming to prevent conflict, build the capacity of key partners, maintain core alliances, and ensure the U.S. military's ability to secure American interests in critical regions. Forward engagement, as this approach is called, does not mean policing the world or letting other countries free-ride on U.S. security guarantees. And partnership does not mean relinquishing American sovereignty to regional and international institutions. Rather,

forward engagement means leveraging the United States' biggest strength, the ability to lead, while encouraging others to share the burden.

The cornerstone of forward engagement will be positioning U.S. troops in vital regions to help deter major conflicts and promote stability, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. As the long-term U.S. deployments in Europe and Asia have demonstrated, the physical presence of military forces sends a powerful message to potential adversaries. Some believe that troops garrisoned at home are just as effective a deterrent, given the global reach and technological superiority of the U.S. armed forces. But that argument, which was the cornerstone of Rumsfeld's posture vision, ignores the realities of time, distance, logistics, and politics. As the United States' experience in the two Iraq wars demonstrated, it takes weeks, if not months, to deploy a force of the size and strength required for some of the most likely and most dangerous scenarios the United States could face around the world. Furthermore, moving troops from the United States to a conflict zone just as tensions begin to rise can exacerbate or escalate a crisis.

Forward-postured forces also reassure allies of the United States' commitment to their security. On the Korean Peninsula, for example, the presence of some 28,000 U.S. personnel reminds Seoul that the United States stands ready to defend South Korea against North Korean aggression. Further south, U.S. naval and air forces engaged in Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand give allies in Southeast Asia greater confidence that the United States will not abandon the region at a time of great change and uncertainty.

Should deterrence fail, forward-stationed military forces are well placed to facilitate a collective response. As the recent NATO operation in Libya showed, responding to threats requires guaranteed access to supply routes and bases, diplomatic support, and, ideally, the help of allies in the field. Quickly assembling a posse to get the bad guys might have worked in old Westerns, but it does not work in complex, high-tech military operations. For those, common-command-and-control protocols, interoperable technologies, doctrines, and planning processes should be developed well in advance. And more than any other forces, forward-stationed forces can spearhead those preparations. They can conduct regular training exercises with allies to identify and correct shortfalls, build trust among U.S. and allied service members, and develop the shared practices that make the militaries work together more effectively in the field.

Another good reason for forces to remain engaged abroad, even in peacetime, is to serve as an investment in burden sharing. Training and conducting real-world missions with allies and partners, such as the United States' multilateral antipiracy operations off the Horn of Africa and its freedom-of-navigation exercises in the Persian Gulf, helps build up their capacities. Such engagement also promotes a shared vision of the world, in which the rule of law dominates, disputes can be resolved without the use of force, and commerce flows freely. In turn, such partners are more able to address problems at home without the need for U.S. forces. Such relatively small investments in peacetime activities can mean not having to put American men and women in harm's way later.

Forward engagement is not only an effective way to safeguard U.S. national security interests; it is also a responsible and efficient way to position U.S. forces in a time of economic constraint. The political scientists Joseph Parent and Paul MacDonald argued in these pages ("The Wisdom of Retrenchment," November/December 2011) that closing U.S. overseas bases and bringing U.S. personnel home would save billions of dollars. Such an argument misunderstands how U.S. armed forces are sustained abroad and underestimates the expense of relocating them. The United States has 1.4 million men and women in uniform. All of them, and their families, must be housed and trained somewhere. It is not necessarily cheaper to do that in the United States, especially since some countries, including Germany, Japan, and South Korea, help foot the bill for U.S. facilities stationed there. Furthermore, it would be a colossal misallocation of resources to abandon significant capital investments—for example, the world-class U.S. Army training center in Hohenfels, Germany—only to build duplicate facilities at home.

The United States should position its forces to provide national security in the most efficient and responsible way possible. In the coming years, the U.S. military will likely be operating in a tight budget environment, but Washington can get more for less by positioning a larger percentage of its forces in key regions. Take, for example, the rotation cycles of U.S. naval ships. For every ship out securing sea-lanes or deterring aggression, there are three others in various stages of maintenance or in transit. Porting ships closer to their areas of operation in Europe or Asia would save each vessel three to four weeks in transit time and would require keeping one-third fewer ships in U.S. inventories. That alone would save billions of dollars in acquisition, operations, and maintenance costs. Similarly, the strategic forward stationing of U.S. forces, combined with periodic rotations by U.S. forces to train with allies, makes the best use of American resources, enhances cooperation and burden sharing, and ensures that the military is positioned and ready to respond to emerging threats and crises.

## Strategic Rebalancing

An optimal U.S. military posture must reflect the reality that resources will be limited in the coming years and that the United States simply cannot be present everywhere. With that in mind, the Obama administration's defense posture realignment will customize deployments based on the exigencies of each region and U.S. priorities.

The most significant shift will be toward the Asia-Pacific region. President Barack Obama has made clear that the United States is "a Pacific nation" and that it will "play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future." His emphasis is reflected in the Defense Department's January 2012 "strategic guidance" document, which states that "U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia."

Accordingly, as U.S. responsibilities in Afghanistan wind down, the country's attention and resources, both diplomatic

and military, will begin to concentrate more on the Asia-Pacific region. The American presence in Japan and South Korea will remain a cornerstone of this strategy, even as the United States builds up its relationships with other Asian nations, especially those in and around Southeast Asia. Already, last November, Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced plans for enhanced U.S.-Australian military cooperation, including sending up to 2,500 U.S. marines to Australia for joint training and exercises, increasing visits by U.S. aircraft to northern Australian airfields, and conducting more calls by U.S. ships to various Australian ports.

The United States is also planning to deploy two new Littoral Combat Ships, small vessels designed to operate close to shore, from Singapore and is exploring enhanced military cooperation with the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The details are still under discussion, but this cooperation will likely include more joint exercises, troop rotations, and ship visits. Throughout the region, new bilateral and multilateral training programs, especially those geared toward humanitarian relief, disaster preparedness, interoperability, and capacity building, will help the region better counter transnational threats, prevent conflict, and respond to crises.

In the Indian Ocean region, through which 70 percent of the world's petroleum products and 25 percent of global commerce sail, the United States is also deepening its partnerships. The Indian military now conducts more exercises with the U.S. military than with any other. The United States has also enhanced its security cooperation with India by selling New Delhi advanced military systems, such as c-130, p-81, and c-17 aircraft.

Finally, Obama has made clear that after the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2014, the United States does not intend to keep any permanent U.S. bases there. However, the strategic partnership agreement that Washington and Kabul concluded in May laid the groundwork for a long-term security relationship between the two countries. Making good on that commitment will almost certainly involve deploying a smaller number of U.S. forces to Afghanistan on a rotational basis. Those troops will support joint counterterrorism efforts and continue to help build the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces. Meanwhile, the United States will no longer depend as heavily on the Northern Distribution Network, which runs across the Baltic states and through Central Asia and which NATO set up to keep its troops in Afghanistan supplied. Even so, the United States should seek to maintain cooperative relationships with as many of the network's states as possible, given the strategic flexibility these relationships provide in a region that lies at the crossroads between Europe and Asia.

## New Middle East

For the past ten years, the United States' military posture in South Asia and the Middle East has been shaped by large, protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the future, the U.S. presence in the region should be lighter but easy to quickly scale up. It should focus on underwriting the United States' security commitments to its partners, ensuring the free flow of

commerce, countering violent extremism, deterring Iran, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The United States' commitment to the security of Israel is unbreakable. In addition to helping ensure Israel's qualitative military edge, the U.S. military should continue to work closely with Israeli forces to make sure that their defenses keep pace with emerging threats. In recent years, this has involved the joint development of missile defense systems. In the future, it will involve sharing the United States' most sophisticated systems, such as the Joint Strike Fighter, with the Israeli military.

The United States' strategic posture in the Middle East must be credible enough to deter threats to stability, such as Iran, without overstepping the bounds of host nations' tolerance for the presence of foreign forces. The United States will thus continue to deploy its troops on a rotational basis. Instead of maintaining permanent installations, U.S. air and naval forces will likely spend stints in Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and, potentially, Iraq. These deployments will demonstrate the United States' sustained commitment to its Arab partners and will help them address shared threats.

The United States can and should play a central role in fostering regional cooperation to address other common challenges, as well. For example, given the proliferation of ballistic missiles in the region, the United States should continue to place particular emphasis on working with partners, or groups of partners, to develop and deploy missile defense systems. Ideally, the United States could build on the robust bilateral missile defense cooperation it has with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to create a more effective regional missile defense architecture.

The United States should also continue to coordinate regional efforts to counter piracy, combat terrorism, and protect freedom of navigation in and around the Persian Gulf. For example, the U.S. Navy in Bahrain currently provides the physical infrastructure and leadership for a 25-member combined maritime task force, which is focused on ensuring safe passage for commercial ships through the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Such activities help ensure the free flow of trade and oil and promote burden sharing by building up the skills of regional partners.

Looking to the future, the United States would be wise to consider how the political changes sweeping the region may alter its security relationships there. Military-to-military engagements with the region's rising democracies should promote the development of civilian-led security forces committed to upholding human rights and the rule of law. Strong U.S. security cooperation with the militaries of countries going through democratic transitions, most notably Egypt, can provide both a degree of stability in the bilateral relationships and some leverage to influence those governments at a time of profound change. Nevertheless, the United States must be prepared to adapt and adjust its military engagement with these countries as new governments emerge, based on assessments of both the nature and the actions of those governments, the degree to which U.S. interests and strategies in the region overlap with theirs, and their willingness to partner with the United States.

## A Forward-Looking Forward Posture

As the United States recalibrates its global military posture, it must continue to work closely with its NATO allies. At a time when most of Europe is slashing its defense budgets, the United States must remain deeply engaged to make sure its partners there still shoulder their share of the collective defense burden. A decade of military operations in Afghanistan strengthened NATO's fighting skills and enhanced its ability to cooperate at the political level, which was absolutely critical to its timely and unified response in Libya. But, as Ivo Daalder, the U.S. permanent representative to NATO, and James Stavridis, NATO's supreme allied commander for Europe, recently observed in these pages ("NATO's Victory in Libya," March/April 2012), the Libya mission also revealed the need to improve high-end interoperability. To keep the alliance healthy, the United States will need to make an effort to improve NATO's coordinated targeting and planning. Members of the alliance will need to invest in updated capabilities and commit to sustained integrated training.

The security and stability of Europe no longer require the number of U.S. ground forces currently stationed there. The Obama administration's new defense posture will address this imbalance. Two heavy brigades, formations of about 3,500 soldiers each, will be taken out of the region, leaving a Stryker and an airborne brigade, both of which are lighter and more agile, to train with allied ground forces. The reduction will be offset by a greater U.S. contribution to the NATO Response Force, a multinational land, air, maritime, and special operations force that is ready for swift deployment.

The United States will also allocate an additional U.S.-based army battalion for regular training rotations from the United States to Europe. Meanwhile, the United States will leverage its comparative advantage in high-end capabilities, for example, by applying the president's phased and adaptive approach to European ballistic missile defense and providing command-and-control infrastructure, technology for training, and airlift and air-refueling capabilities.

Finally, in other regions, where few U.S. forces are permanently stationed, the United States' day-to-day military posture will be tailored to address high-priority missions, such as countering violent extremism and halting illicit trafficking. As the Defense Department's new strategic guidance made clear, in these regions, "whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities."

In Africa, for example, the military can expect to routinely deploy small Special Forces teams to work with partners on

counterterrorism. In the Americas, U.S. forces will continue to train with their counterparts in Mexico and Colombia and throughout Central America to stanch the drug trade. Elsewhere, small contingents of U.S. military personnel should continue supporting local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to enhance the rule of law. And in dozens of countries, the United States will maintain the State Partnership Program, through which a given U.S. state's National Guard develops a long-term relationship with the military of a foreign country to help build the military's capacity through joint activities. The United States' global posture will be backed by ready and capable forces at home, which will be available for routine foreign deployments, from the Arctic to the Horn of Africa.

Obama's strategic realignment rightly recognizes the role that the U.S. military plays in promoting stability and securing U.S. national interests around the world. A sustained U.S. military presence in key regions has ensured global stability and strengthened the armed forces of many partner countries. Protecting U.S. interests now and in the future will also require long-term, strategic forward engagement. At this inflection point, the president must resist calls for retrenchment and continue to champion the United States' unique leadership role in the world.

## Critical Thinking

1. What is the global commons and why is it an increasingly contested arena in world politics?
2. What are the key principles of a policy of sustained forward engagement?
3. What does it mean that the United States is today a "Pacific nation"?

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## Article

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# America's Outmoded Security Strategy

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## Learning Outcomes

*After reading this article, you will be able to:*

- Analyze the argument that the U.S. has an outmoded security strategy.
- Explain the concept of "post-exceptionalism."
- Identify the key questions that must be asked in constructing a new security strategy.

More than two decades have passed since the end of the cold war, yet the United States still has not fashioned national security structures and policies appropriate to the changes that the world has seen in its patterns of power, trade, technology, and belief systems. Observers frequently engage in discussions about America's decline as a world power, but US political leaders have been unwilling to accept reality, instead persisting with useless rhetoric about America as the indispensable leader, the city on the hill, or the world's democratic champion.

Meanwhile, both the liberal and realist priesthoods protect tattered paradigms at the cusp of demise. The historian and philosopher Thomas Kuhn observed the mind's propensity to cling to what it knows, that with which it is comfortable—a propensity as prevalent in the national security sphere as it is in science. "What a man sees," he noted, "depends both upon what he looks at and upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see."

This is why the United States must now engage in a difficult dialogue—so that it can begin crafting a useful approach to a world that it can no longer dominate.

## Post-Exceptional

As a declining power, the United States faces a shrinking margin for error. It is worth remembering how great this margin once was.

Americans like to think of themselves as exceptional, and the term certainly fits the way America came to be a world power. For more than a century after independence the United States benefited from a unique confluence of uninterrupted access to cheap labor (slave and immigrant), vast amounts of under

populated land (especially once the natives were expelled or killed), and the Ohio-Mississippi-Missouri waterway system.

Insulating oceans permitted Americans to trade goods and ideas with an industrializing Europe while, after 1815, having virtually no fear that any European power or group of powers would threaten the republic's survival. By the end of the nineteenth century a very low military and defense burden (with the Civil War as a huge anomaly), accommodative political and legal structures, and an ideology of innovation enabled the development of the most extensive and intensive economic engine the world had ever seen.

This evolution of American power was built on a philosophical foundation that linked Protestantism, capitalism, and individualism as a sort of new trinity of American virtue. The so-called Protestant work ethic became the driving force behind a civic religion that justified and sanctified the expansion of US power—a "manifest destiny" first extended across the North American continent and then into the rest of the world. With the exception perhaps of the period immediately after World War I, isolationism has never been a working principle of US engagement with foreign countries.

The lore surrounding America's opportunities and wealth enhanced the country's power and pulled millions of immigrants to the United States. The idea of "America," with its freedom and seemingly limitless prospects, and with its other soft-power attributes (such as a "Wild West"-based entertainment industry) created a global and largely positive fascination with this Land of Oz. That with a few exceptions the country lacked a competent elite of professional national security practitioners simply did not matter.

Then, in the past century, all conceivable competitors for global power twice destroyed themselves in wars that left the US homeland untouched, its economy roaring, and its military enormous (or capable of becoming enormous again—quickly). In 1919 and 1945, everyone owed more than they could imagine to the United States, either directly or through reparations that went from the losers to America via the indebted winners.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union proved a robust military rival, but it was never a serious economic competitor. Amid squabbles and threats the two superpowers shared the construction of global security networks, but neither Moscow nor anyone else could challenge Washington's domination of postwar material or cultural developments. The cold

war ended without the nuclear horrors that everyone feared and some had predicted with mathematical certainty.

In short, the conditions underlying US global preeminence were indeed exceptional. Most of them are gone now and will never reappear. Even if catastrophes such as the two world wars were to recur, this time they would not produce a clean global slate that the United States could inscribe according to its will.

## Living in the Past

One implication of all this is that the United States cannot sustainably afford the financial costs of engaging the world as it has in the past. The amounts that the United States has spent on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are so enormous, and have been handled so poorly, that it is difficult to calculate the exact expenditures. In 2010 the economists Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes estimated that the cost of American involvement in Iraq ultimately will exceed \$3 trillion. Pentagon officials, according to USA Today, say the war in Afghanistan has been costing about \$10 billion a month.

Meanwhile, the US sovereign debt is around \$14 trillion and growing. Americans hold the majority of this debt, but foreign entities hold a significant amount of it, including more than \$1 trillion held by China. Although the corrosive effects of this debt are well known theoretically and intellectually, no serious effort is being made to come to grips with it. Since the end of the cold war, US administrations have remained engaged in the hubristic extension of American power with little consideration for the devastating financial costs of the effort.

A second implication of US decline is that Washington now lacks the power to dictate how others must act. When scholars argue that there is no alternative to US hegemony, they ignore an essential fact: that the emergence of economic and military rivals already has removed—permanently—America's ability to dictate global economic and security structures and norms.

There will be no more Dumbarton Oaks diktats; no more US-led global security forums. Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 turned Britain's behavior on a dime when he threatened the pound during the Suez crisis, but American presidents have lost this ability forever. NATO is an anachronism, a hollowed-out relic of the cold war. It survives not on account of legitimate security needs but rather as what Otto von Bismarck called a "sentimental alliance."

The "unipolar moment" celebrated by the commentator Charles Krauthammer was in fact not much more than that—a moment. Some of America's subsequent decline can be understood in relative terms, as other global actors have gained wealth, power, and influence. China, India, and Brazil are most frequently cited as the next great economic (and perhaps political and military) powers, but the rapid development of other countries, regions, businesses, terrorist groups, and proliferating nonstate entities adds significantly to the relative loss of US power and influence.

Certainly, the United States retains some global fascination because of its "otherness," but this too is a wasting asset. People know Americans better now. Some nations have suffered American bombings, others have witnessed US mistakes first hand,

and even many of America's friends shake their heads in disbelief at successive administrations' nonstrategic and oscillating approaches to frustrating or dangerous trends. China's Hu Jintao, Russia's Vladimir Putin, and assorted radical Islamists—worlds away in culture and outlook—are not intimidated by US power.

The decline of American power and influence is not merely relative. It is also absolute, in part because of the debilitating fiscal mess that the country has created for itself. Gone forever are the heady days when the United States could afford to rebuild a damaged continent or fund a military budget as large as the rest of the world's combined.

Never again, moreover, can America use its geographic position as a shield against hostile military powers or intrusion from outside economic forces. The current state of technology and the interdependence of the global economy simply will not allow this. The presence of more than 11 million illegal aliens in the United States testifies to America's vulnerability to forces beyond its control.

The combination of relative and absolute decline has led to a growing propensity among others to push back, or simply to ignore US demands and "leadership." This reaction is palpable, for example, in Pakistan's reluctance to heed US insistence that it do more to fight the Taliban.

## Wilson, R.I.P.

A third implication of declining US power is that the ideology underlying nation building, democracy promotion, and counterinsurgency is unsustainable. In a shrill echo of Woodrow Wilson, President George W. Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy proclaimed that there was only one model of success—and this model would be determined by Washington. Despite promises of change, the Barack Obama administration essentially has adopted the mantle of its predecessors. The impulse to refashion the world seems cemented into the national elite's psyche, regardless of whether the Republican right or the Democratic left controls the White House.

In fact, there is no blueprint that the United States or the West in general can use to guide others toward modern democracy. The rhetoric of democratic teleology obscures the complexity of specific local social conditions, economic networks (informal networks are as legitimate as formal ones—even if the former are notionally "illegal"), and identity politics. The United States occasionally has imposed democratic forms by force (for example, in the Philippines), but has at best a mixed record when attempting to use diplomats, civic experts, and persuasion to do the job.

Examples often cited to prove the universal applicability of US-imposed rules for politics in fact present no pattern. Post-World War II Germany and Japan developed in the context of total destruction and the overwhelming power of the victors' occupation. Eventually, their political systems evolved as they did because these societies had highly educated labor forces and low costs of entry.

By 1989, Eastern Europeans languishing under repressive, inefficient communist regimes desired the freedom and prosperity to their west and thus eagerly embraced the democratic template. But societies that share with the West geography,

history, and religion, as do countries in Eastern Europe, provide no model for peoples elsewhere.

The Asian tigers ignored Western ideology and instruction, adopting local variants of authoritarian politics and protectionism. The durability of subsequent democratic turns in South Korea and Taiwan may depend on the outcome of an ongoing contest between Western and Chinese political and economic models.

Since the Peloponnesian War, democracy has been fashionable only when imposed by outside powers or perceived to "work." Its durability depends on whether people believe it provides prosperity and security, and whether they mobilize to develop liberal institutions. The ephemeral notion of freedom, by itself, does not do the trick. Meanwhile, the dithering that is evident in Western capitals today in the face of recurrent fiscal mismanagement resembles the ineffective face that democracy showed in the 1930s. Just because no apparently vibrant fascist or communist alternatives now exist does not mean that democracy is immune from ideological challenge.

The failure of flagship US adventures could accelerate the search for such alternatives. Iraq, despite a significant decline in violence since 2006, remains a fragile, fractured place that will be plagued with at least episodic bloodshed for many years to come. The Iraqi economy is still mired in corruption, inefficiency, and depression, and the weak constitutional underpinnings of the state, as well as poor political consensus among ethnic groups, do not bode well for the future.

Prospects are even bleaker in Afghanistan, where clans, sub-clans, tribes, and families—not any central state—define politics and security. The drawdown of US forces, announced in June 2011, almost certainly will lead to a reversal of the fragile "gains" those forces have achieved. Neither US rhetoric nor the NGO industry will be able to force on Afghanistan the kind of central, civic authority it has never had.

America's hegemonic reflexes resurfaced early in 2011 when North Africa and parts of the Middle East exploded into insurrection. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other officials, no matter how often they were behind events, pontificated on what was and was not acceptable. Since then, despite continued US posturing, the Arab Spring has splintered into a range of political expressions determined by indigenous forces. Various flavors of Islam and local politics will compete to shape Arab and Muslim communities increasingly able to shrug off diminishing Western influence.

## New Rules

The United States has yet to come to terms with a transformed global order that has ripped in shreds the paradigm of exclusive state-centered sovereignty. The answer to what constitutes a legitimate political community can no longer be found exclusively in the Westphalian model.

Certainly, states for a very long time will continue to be critical players on the world stage, but increasingly they must share pride of place with nonstate actors, many of which themselves exhibit legitimacy, power, and authority. State and non-state structures and functions have grown ever more complex and entwined. Rather than thinking of the world in terms of Joseph Nye's mechanical, three-dimensional chessboard, with

the focus on security, economy, and soft power, think of it like a lava lamp, with political, security, economic, and social patterns forming, changing shape, dissolving, and reforming.

The fact that states continue to claim that only they possess the legitimate right to the use of force does not alter this emerging reality any more than the efforts of feudal lords to cling to power altered the evolution from medieval to modern societies. International law and the "rules of the game" will have to change to reflect new alignments of governance and sovereignty. And political communities that cannot or will not conform to the emerging reality will suffer. Contemporary US strategy already is showing the stresses of obsolescence.

Washington needs to recognize that globalization means there is more than one answer to the question of political community, and that many "states" likely will never attain the centralization, transparency, and Weberian structure on which the West insists. America will also need to accept the strength of political Islam in some parts of the world.

To their credit, the generation of leaders after World War II understood the nature of the world that was unfolding before them. The administrations of Harry Truman and Eisenhower did the intellectual and structural spadework to build a comprehensive peacetime national security structure. Now the era that this structure was built to manage has ended. Yet, so far, American politicians and intellectuals have shown no willingness to do the necessary work to replace it.

The legacy of George Kennan's iconic "X" article (about dealing with the Soviet Union) has spawned countless post-1989 imitators, none of which has enjoyed a half-life of more than a few days. Each US administration since the end of the cold war has trumpeted its own version of how to deal with the future. Each of these rested on a vision of US power tied to the past, and each collapsed on the shoals of the emerging global reality.

The United States today has a bloated military establishment that is almost impervious to change, a hidebound foreign policy establishment that acts as though the world has hardly evolved since 1989, and an intelligence community that struggles to be relevant and pursues reform by piling on levels of bureaucracy that do not make intelligence any more useful.

Going forward, the United States needs to abandon its inertial approach to the world, an approach that relies on the complacent assumption that Americans' clout will forever enable them to posture, bluster, bluff, or bully their way through or around every problem. Because of the country's unique history—at first separate from world power, then an overnight superpower—it has little experience of sharing power with others. Continued rhetoric that touts US leadership is really asserting a self-defined American authority; there is little indication that many in Washington understand the difference between these two concepts.

## Get to Work

Overcoming this inertia will require a process designed to replicate what came naturally to the security architects of the 1940s and 1950s. It is important to remember that they developed habits of thinking during World War II, when they had to make decisions that, at best, would cost thousands of American

lives and, at worst, could lead to existential defeat. Afterwards, facing their country's first peacetime global adversary capable of inflicting enormous damage on the homeland, the security architects studied communism. They built alliances to augment US power and global authority. They made midcourse corrections as the experience of the cold war honed their skills.

Their post-cold war successors—peacetime bureaucrats set in comfortable habits and relying on academic and think-tank orthodoxies—have not been able to replicate the genius of the World War II and cold war architects. Those thinking about international security should, instead of presuming to be the next great system definer (a common form of work avoidance), undertake the soup-to-nuts discipline of answering the following questions, in the order presented, with no shortcuts.

First, what developments, problems, opportunities, and needs will dominate the world's tectonic changes to come? States, and international and nonstate authorities, will continue to matter, but so will an array of transnational processes in the electronic/cyber environment. As the "American way of war" goes the way of eighteenth-century massed armies and line-of-battle frigates, new, so-called asymmetric, "military" options are becoming increasingly "symmetrical." Meanwhile, though a generation of scholars insisted that secularization was the inevitable wave of the future, religion is back and shows no signs of dissipating.

Second, what will America's roles and interests be in this new world? What is the proper relationship among US goals, norms, interests, and postulated priorities? The rest of the world is not prostrate as it was after the world wars; the United States will have to get used to others saying "no" when Americans attempt to "lead" them. Occasional calls for a "Marshall Plan" are precursors to weak arguments, as are most instances of drawing analogies with the 1938 Munich tale.

The inadequacy of such thinking is compounded by the fact that Americans like to tell a version of their own story that conflicts with what actually happened: Do as we say, not as we did. Americans insist that people conform to notional rather than actual democratic processes. They tell others that they cannot use force, conquer territory, establish and exploit colonies, impose slavery, or persecute minorities—all practices that were central to the development of the United States and of European powers as well.

Third, which international commitments are necessary—and which are not—to support America's new roles and protect its evolving interests? Builders of a new national security system might ask themselves to what, exactly, they are committed, beyond platitudes concerning democracy and free markets. It may be that the United States, China, Russia, and India share some interests regarding terrorism and Asian security issues, but agreement among them likely cannot include the ideological and institutional cement that NATO once provided for Europe.

Fourth, what missions must be performed to uphold the new commitments? How should the United States go about projecting power, wealth, and cultural reach while simultaneously protecting its citizens and homeland? Defending sea lanes, inserting and supplying military forces, and promoting

diplomatic relations will remain important, but it might be worthwhile to consider the spiritual and communications components of the concept of "mission" that are embedded in totems of "democracy" and "freedom."

In the wake of World War I, Wilson issued sermons and contradictory promises but Herbert Hoover fed the world. Hoover did not have to say anything; the sheer scope and competence of his mission—and of a similar mission following World War II—helped create for America the kind of reverence that no speechwriter can create. It may be time to consider a new flagship metaphor for the American brand.

Fifth, what mix of diplomatic, military, and intelligence capabilities is needed to carry out the missions? A cardinal error of many who engage in discussion of national security is to skip ahead to this question before dealing with the others. There is little point in making decisions about expensive weapons systems, deployments of troops and civilians, and intelligence activity until we have some idea of how these systems and people will be used. Partnerships, coalitions, and alliances in the emerging international arena will have to be different both in form and substance.

Finally, how should Americans organize themselves to do the work that is necessary? This is the question to answer last, not first. In any case, useful national security structures and policies are not possible unless the president is willing to take the risk of blasting through bureaucratic inertia and standard operating procedure by eliminating every segment of the national security system that no longer serves a purpose.

Given a choice between preserving existing chains of command and performing changing tasks, the latter should take precedence, no matter what rice bowls get broken. No one pretends this will be easy—even mild reform of hidebound bureaucracies has proved immensely difficult. But it is past time that the discussion begin.

## Critical Thinking

1. How would you measure a country's margin of error in security policy?
2. What is the major weakness in past U.S. security strategy?
3. Which of the new rules proposed by the authors do you find least convincing and why?

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[www.mhhe.com/createcentral](http://www.mhhe.com/createcentral)

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