

# After Rebalance

*Visions for the future of US foreign policy and  
global role beyond 2016*

Mika Aaltola & Anna Kronlund (eds.)





FIIA REPORT 46

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+358 9 432 7707

erja.kangas@fia.fi

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# Introduction

Mika Aaltola

This report examines possible future US foreign policy tendencies and is based on a collection of chapters most of which were first presented to the second Helsinki Summer Session, which was organized by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in September 2015.<sup>1</sup> There is a large and sophisticated body of scholarship regarding past, present, and future US foreign policy that this report aims to add to by identifying some observable trends that are likely to be relevant in the future as the US moves beyond the era of Barack Obama's presidency.

US foreign policy has often been seen as oscillating between a more withdrawn, isolationist perspective and more expanded, interventionist tendencies. This fluctuation between minimalism and maximalism allows future foreign policy to be evaluated, if one can correctly diagnose which phase of the supposed back-and-forth movement the US is currently in. This is not a straightforward task, however, and the detection of trends is made even more difficult by the fact that the oscillation itself has been subject to different expressions and underlying doctrines in different contexts. More withdrawn policy periods can be characterized by realist, liberalist, or even interventionist policies, while realism is combinable with a multilateralist cautious approach as much as more interventionist attitudes. Similarly, more maximalist phases have been accompanied by liberal internationalist foreign policies, while liberal attitudes can express themselves in multilateralist internationalism or be framed by more liberal interventionist practices. Understanding exactly what the

1 The Summer sessions organized by FIIA has been funded by Jane & Aatos Erkkö Foundation. The editors would like to express their gratitude to the Foundation for its support.

aforementioned ideologies and tendencies mean for the future of US foreign policy is the key to this report. It aims to locate the intellectual and domestic contexts of the debates and trace their likely trajectories in key regional settings to give a fuller and more developed picture of the Obama legacy, as well as likely deviations from the courses that have been set during the past eight years.

The approaching 2016 presidential elections have seen many of the candidates taking anti-free trade and anti-migration positions. In a marked shift, the Republican Party has changed its pro-free trade agenda, which has prevailed since the years of Ronald Reagan, and the Democratic Party seems to be moving to the left compared to the years of Bill Clinton, for example. Nationalist populist sentiments have been surging. This would indicate that the US is moving towards a more globally withdrawn phase, away from the realist internationalism of Obama, but it is clearly more aware of its global dependencies in an increasingly complex, globalized, and networked world. This would suggest a more globally engaged US foreign policy in the future. Furthermore, in this feverishly intertwined world, even isolationism could have different content, meanings, and consequences than it did in the past.

Since the election result is still unknown, any future foreign policy direction is still speculative. However, politics, especially foreign policy, tends to be an expression of traditions, institutions and structures more than personalities, and foreign policy prognostication can also be based on areas of relative constancy in US foreign policy. After long years of culture wars, political polarization and decision-making problems, US foreign policy stakeholders still share some areas of common ground, and these areas of strong national consensus can be used to shed further light on future US foreign policy tendencies. Furthermore, the solidity of the underlying foreign policy common sense can be used by the future administration, Congress, and the larger foreign policy establishment to drum up support, facilitate resource allocation, and accentuate the required support for any foreign policy that falls within its bounds. The existing areas of common sense are enablers or drivers, which can explain and predict US foreign policy, also in turbulent times when different actors cannot agree on the US's national interest in more definite terms. The areas of consensus also serve as an important yet complex external signalling role, sending intended messages to allies and potential spoilers too.

The national common sense articulates and justifies the prevailing foreign policies. There are at least three areas where a long-term

bipartisan consensus has existed and will probably continue to exist in the US:

- It is generally agreed that the US will play an important role in the world, but what are the specifics of this leadership – for instance, is the US a pragmatic arbiter of common problems, as Obama has been trying to present it, or it is a custodian of principle on a more moral mission, as it was during the George W. Bush presidency?
- It is generally seen to be important for the US to continue to be at least relatively engaged with the rest of the world, but what kind of value-basis, leadership mode and means – often articulated through military and other means of power – should this express?
- As almost everybody in Washington agrees on the importance of fulfilling existing responsibilities and commitments, what should the overall balance of priorities be when it comes to different regions, allies and partners?

These questions are also the key to this report, as varying answers to these points of agreement define the options that are available regarding future foreign policy.

The report contains chapters that map out key elements of any future US foreign policy.

The first part deals with the more conceptual, doctrinal, and domestic side of US foreign policy tendencies, while the second part approaches more specific regional manifestations of the contemporary and likely future US foreign policy.

The first four articles present an overview of the changing domestic landscape of US global policies. Adam Quinn and Kari Möttölä examine the current conceptual trends in the US regarding its grand strategy and foreign policy, while Anna Kronlund's examination of the US Congress's role in US wars highlights the domestic modality of US foreign policy and charts the impact of the changing nature of wars and foreign military interventions. Leo Michel's article examines the changing role of the hard power component of the US foreign policy toolbox and examines various regional contexts. As situational scenarios become more complex, the key question is whether US foreign policy is driven by (often regional) events or holistic strategic thinking. Michel's chapter also considers the US relationship with

Europe, and Toms Rostoks complements this with his case study of US–Latvia relations. Eoin McNamara and Ville Sinkkonen examine changing US foreign policy in North Africa and Middle East while Heather Conley and Matthew Melino review US Arctic policies and examine how large structural challenges such as climate change are becoming integrated into US foreign policy.

Adam Quinn’s chapter charts a key aspect of the domestic constraints on US Foreign policy, namely the way that the US foreign policy establishment sets limits on what are considered “serious” foreign policy options. This establishment is composed of past and present officials and policy-makers, public intellectuals, think tankers, and other experts. Foreign policy elites in Washington DC develop the prevailing mainstream or consensus US foreign policy model, but how do the various key groups within the elite change and jostle for power positions? If the mainstream views have converged with the mainstream vision of liberal internationalism with realist characteristics, what are these realist characteristics? And how and in what policy fields have these realist tendencies played a role? How is this realism different from a pragmatic approach, in terms of strategy and/or tactics, for example?

The Establishment evaluate, comment and prognosticate in Washington’s market of ideas. The mainstream of the Establishment view is not constant; it shifts for both internal and external reasons and is always recalibrating what it regards as necessity, hubris and timidity with regards to foreign policy. Quinn weighs up the present-day balance between the key strands – minimalist/isolationist, realist, liberal internationalist, and maximalist/neoconservative – and concludes that there is a swing away from the maximalist camp. Afghanistan (2002), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and current events in Syria provide a trajectory of key interventions that clearly indicate how interventions have moved away from large-scale stability operations towards smaller, lighter versions (Libya) and non-intervention (Syria).

Quinn’s conclusion is that the liberal internationalist school of thought still prevails among the hurly-burly of today’s foreign policy Establishment, but the future trajectory is still uncertain. The current regional focus on the Middle East and responding to NATO allies’ worries over Russia can be a distraction from the liberal internationalists’ main concern, which is the need to peacefully integrate China into the existing rule-based international order, although this will not sit well with the maximalist thinking that argues for a strong US pushback on China’s regional aspirations. A more likely

outcome is that realist/minimalist concerns will be more prominent in combination with liberal internationalist policies. This future outlook seems to suggest that after Obama the foreign-policy establishment will continue to exert pressure towards continuity.

If the future US foreign policy is going to be characterized by minimalist internationalism, the question of US global agency becomes central. Kari Möttölä's chapter maps out Obama's foreign policy legacy and its likely impact on the future of US grand strategy. In the US it has been a traditional tendency to contrast the new administration's foreign policy with the previous one, and in a similar vein many administrations find a historical reference point in a previous presidency. What are the likely contrasts and reference points of the 2016 elections? How can Obama's foreign policy vision be described and what are its key characteristics? How has this vision evolved? What are the different scenarios for foreign policy sustainability? In other words, what are the alternative visions for the US regarding its role and engagement with the rest of the world, and to what extent will they sustain all or some of the Obama doctrine's key elements? Engagement and retrenchment can be seen as separate alternatives, yet more often they are characteristics of the same overall scenario. How will these two opposing attitudes play out, for example with regards to geographical concerns? Will we see more engagement with Asia, less with Europe, and retrenchment from the Middle East?

Möttölä examines the long cycles between limitative and expansive US external strategies and concludes by pointing out the important balance the US maintains in its global role: how can the US keep its strategic path in its own hands and continue to shoulder an appropriate share of global responsibilities? He highlights the question of sustaining US foreign policy agency in complex global geopolitical, asymmetrical and structural challenges. The US's vision of its own role has usually been based on a strong sense of control over key events, but its self-perception is moving increasingly in the direction of influencing complex global events instead of being in control. Voters might still be attracted to the older version of strong or great US agency, however, and vote in presidents that support more straightforward ways of dealing with foreign policy.

Anna Kronlund examines the decision-making nexus between the US Congress and the Presidency concerning large-scale military interventions. What is Congress's role in granting or limiting presidential powers? The answers to this question have to be seen as functions of the changing nature of war. It is clear that presidents

have often used force without clear authorization from Congress, but Congress has nevertheless showed its ability to influence the resources that a president can use and make the policies accountable and subject to closer scrutiny. The leeway that presidents have traditionally enjoyed has been accentuated by technological developments, and the edge that the US enjoys with regards to hard power has been based on technological advances regarding smarter, more mobile war-fighting capabilities across different domains, including cyberspace. These have given military operations a more nimble and less war-like appearance. Overall, the developments have stressed the executive prerogative for swift and decisive action over the Congressional authorization of power. However, Kronlund's case study on the Middle East shows that this contention between the different roles played by Congress and the Presidency remain unsettled and specific to various political contexts, although the overall change in the nature of war is likely to be a key driver in the future too.

Leo Michel approaches the question of how sustainable the current US military and technological advantage is, and how it will be exploited in US foreign policy. The key functions of US hard power have been based on deterring challengers and reassuring allies and partners. Michel's chapter examines conflicting interpretations of the hard power component in the US's global role. Foreign military interventions have a mixed record when it comes to their popularity and results, and large-scale operations have often been followed by a downwards trend, irrespective of their perceived success or failure, but on the other hand there seems to be a widespread sense among the presidential candidates that US investment in hard power should remain at least at current levels. Many candidates are arguing for increased spending, and Republican candidates are proponents of a less timid and more intense use of force in ongoing operations. The alternatives to the deter-and-assure posture are currently difficult to convincingly advance, and Michel argues that the consequence of any unilateral withdrawal from its current commitments would be a less stable world as the key security architecture would crumble and give way to regional conventional and nuclear arms races.

Leo Michel ends his chapter by highlighting NATO as an instrument for wider global and European stability that can bring stability through deterrence and assurance. However, if US policies are perceived as over-reaching and needlessly adventurous, the situation can be the reverse: "... if the U.S. military is engaged in ways that many Europeans judge unnecessary or reckless, the broader transatlantic relationship

could suffer from the blowback”. It is clear that NATO allies have a vital interest in influencing the transatlantic relationship in ways that consolidate more productive results. Toms Rostoks’ chapter on US power and Latvia addresses this issue by conducting a case study on how the US influenced Latvia and how Latvia’s views are promoted in Washington, highlighting the reciprocity of the relationship. The US has provided deterrence and assurances while Latvia has participated globally in US-led operations and regionally by supporting democratic reforms in Eastern Europe. As the security situation has changed in the Baltic region, so the relationship is undergoing a new transformation.

Demands for a larger US military presence test the position of Latvia and the other Baltic states as part of the wider list of US priorities. There are fears among the newer members of NATO that they are of secondary importance to the US, but in Rostoks’ opinion the US approach to date has been consistent, long-term and principled rather than situational and pragmatic. How long this will endure, however, depends on the overall US global approach and regional priorities. Baltic support for US involvement is likely to remain high among the elites as there are no apparent alternatives to US-provided security – although in Latvia’s case popular support for the US presence in the country is relatively low. The Baltic states are also seen as front-line states, both in the region and in Washington, and although NATO is careful not to provoke Russia, the negative consequences of not adequately facing up to the challenge of a revisionist, geopolitically-motivated Russia with regards to NATO coherence and any possible future challenge from China are clearly recognized. Rostoks concludes that Latvia and other Baltic states are going to remain high on the list of US priorities, although pressure on them to do more is likely to increase.

Despite their respective “isms”, one of the constant criticisms of any administration is that their foreign policy is inconsistent. Ville Sinkkonen’s chapter examines the inconsistent reactions that the US has expressed towards the Arab Spring. What are the future scenarios for US foreign policy in the MENA region as it seeks to balance authoritarian stability with support for democracy to reform or overthrow repressive regimes? Has the balance always been the same and how might it change in future policies? How consistent is US foreign policy likely to be in relation to different countries in the region and different situational requirements or confluences of circumstances? US policies are aimed at resetting the region, which has been overwhelmed by the intense confluence of events. Sinkkonen argues that this has resulted in inconsistent policies as well

as strong criticism from the foreign policy Establishment and beyond, but he makes the perhaps counter-intuitive point that, in order to be adaptive and flexible, US policy has to provide leeway for some inconsistencies: "... Exercising long-term influence in the MENA area demands an appreciation of evolving local dynamics on a case-by-case basis, a willingness to live with fluctuating levels of uncertainty and, most importantly, a healthy dose of humility". In the complex and dynamically developing reality, inconsistencies can turn out to be virtues. They also express US priorities between and within regions.

Moreover, inconsistencies can be an expression of contemporary balance between two global roles: A pragmatic security arbiter – trying to balance the interests of various players – and a custodian of principle, attempting to implement a more determined moral guidance in the region. These same roles are often used in research literature to define the basic types of political leadership in the US. Sinkkonen sees an opening for the US to shift its role in the MENA region from pragmatic arbitration towards a more principled leadership, arguing that it should facilitate the search for regional common sense and then act as a guardian of these values instead of imposing political order in the region, which requires more a constructive and cooptive approach.

Whereas Sinkkonen evaluates how coherent the wider regional foreign policy is, the next chapter focuses on possible alternative futures and the regional implications of the US alliance with Saudi Arabia. This allows for the evaluation of different minimalist foreign policy stances and their effectiveness in respect to US regional priorities. Eoin McNamara's chapter charts the challenge that the US faces to find the right policy mixture in the Middle East as it rebalances its overall global force distribution. This rebalancing effort has strived to update foreign and defence policy tools to fit a world where East Asia has become the focal point of economic activity and China is viewed by many in Washington as the only possible geopolitical peer competitor. Although Syria's vortex of violence and the rise of Daesh has complicated the issue, the US under Obama has tried to decrease the Middle East's role in the hierarchy of foreign policy priorities. During the most intense operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, US involvement in the region was already at its peak; the political and economic costs of sustaining this level of activity were high, which resulted in a demand for new, less intensive policies, and the shale oil and gas boom, together with emissions restrictions on hydrocarbons, have decreased the US's traditional dependency on the Middle East's natural resources and allowed it to downshift some of its strong

commitments to the region. The pivot to Asia, together with lessening US dependency on the Middle East's resources, leads to the question of how the US is going to handle its own security interests and those of its allies in the area.

As upheavals have plagued the region and it has sunk into deep disorder, the US has struggled to find stabilizing policies. McNamara examines the key challenges facing the US in the region and offers possible options to manage these challenges, with an emphasis on how the US's long-standing but periodically problematic relationship with Saudi Arabia reflects, on one hand, the relative shift in US Foreign policy from the Bush presidency's more maximalist approach to Obama's more minimalist preferences and, on the other hand, the wider regional focus on anti-proliferation. One important argument that is gaining popularity in Washington highlights the problems caused by allies who cause trouble for the US, for example Saudi Arabia, which is sometimes accused of supplying weapons to Syria's Sunni rebels, thereby helping Daesh gain power amidst the chaos. The argument for a more minimalist foreign policy in the Middle East is that if bad allies are dragging the US into new crises the relationship with these allies needs to be recalibrated, but at the same time the US is worried about potential nuclear proliferation in the region if Saudi Arabia feels increasingly vulnerable. Saudi Arabia is also alarmed by the Iranian nuclear agreement, which it feels could revive Iran's economy and indirectly aid Iranian regional ambitions. McNamara concludes that instead of minimalism based on offshore balancing, the US should focus on a more on-site presence in the region to safeguard its interests (e.g. anti-proliferation) and more actively force its allies to pay heed to US priorities in the region: "... US difficulties with Saudi Arabia spell out the strategic necessity to retain a substantial "on-site" military presence in the Middle East with the aim of guarding against wider nuclear proliferation, among other threats".

The report concludes with Heather Conley and Matthew Melino's concluding chapter on the Arctic region, which examines the different modes of US power and leadership as they manifest in the Arctic context. The US's present and projected Arctic policies support the use of smart power. In the Arctic context, the US is likely to prioritise institutional policies, low politics and climate issues over geopolitical tensions and military means, and its Arctic policies perhaps best exemplify new combinations of foreign policy where older military security tools mix and are sometimes overridden by policies intended to influence and stabilize a much more interdependent world. As such,

the Arctic provides a looking glass that shows how these kinds of newer policies – climate policies – work in tandem with multilateralism and military deterrence. In the authors’ opinion the overall reliance on hard power is decreasing, although this trend does not mean that geopolitical challenges that require the US to exercise an element of hard power have disappeared. The case of the Arctic is fascinating because global climate change is influencing the region more than many other regions, and at the same time Russia’s geopolitical challenge is threatening to militarize it. The US response so far has been to stick to the low political message of climate change instead of emphasizing the militarization of the Arctic, which means that factors such as infrastructure, science, and technology will become part of the US Arctic toolbox. Environmental and climate-related policies have been highlighted in recent years, and this approach to the Arctic, where it is seen as a shared space with the US taking the lead through its knowledge-production capacity, is likely to continue, irrespective of Russian challenges and claims. Conley and Melino state that “adaption, resilience and effective response to an ever-changing and increasingly competitive region” will continue to be the hallmark of the US’s approach and leadership. Guarding the rule-based order and having a proactive focus based on low-political and smarter power tools is likely to become such an insurmountable geopolitical challenge that the US will have to contain it with investments in harder means.

# Part I



**1**



# 1. The domestic foreign policy debate and its limits

Adam Quinn

Otto von Bismarck described politics as the art of the possible. We might usefully add that a national polity's sense of what is possible is not constant over time. What seems an admirably bold move today may seem in retrospect like hubris and overreach, while one year's sensible caution may be lamented as costly timidity the next. While it is true that America's domestic debates on foreign policy take place in the context of parameters that demarcate what is considered 'serious' in the judgement of the foreign policy establishment, i.e. the nexus of present and former officials, think-tankers and scholars who make the formulation and evaluation of policies, proposals and programmes their business, the balance of opinion can and does shift within these parameters in ways that reflect the nation's fiscal circumstances, external challenges and political temper at any given time.

This chapter will contend that while the spectrum of positions considered 'serious' in American debates on foreign policy today is much like it was in 2003, the centre of gravity of opinion has shifted. As a first step it will survey the spectrum of acceptable mainstream opinion, within which, it argues, four schools of thought exist: minimalist/isolationist; realist; liberal internationalist; maximalist/neoconservative. It will then discuss where the balancing point presently lies and how it has shifted during the past decade, placing the present moment in the context of the legacy of the events of the George W. Bush administration. Finally, it will look ahead to the near future and sketch a tentative forecast. In doing so it will highlight a consideration of potentially great significance for those seeking to anticipate the course of policy: even if the present balance of opinion in domestic debates is tilted against maximalist/neoconservative

interventionism, it is still possible for actors favouring such an approach to strategize deliberately to work around prevailing political sentiment to get where they would like to be. In addition, we cannot discount the possibility that an unforeseen security shock could disrupt the balance of possibilities.

#### DOMESTIC DEBATES: SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Before proceeding to survey the main schools of thought that feature in domestic debates over US foreign policy, two caveats are worthwhile. First, the United States is a highly diverse polity which, at the level of the general population, contains a vast multitude of views on foreign affairs. We might therefore make a useful distinction between ideas that have been granted a place within the spectrum of what the establishment considers legitimate debate, and those so eccentric or distasteful to mainstream sensibilities that they are only the preserve of fringe groups. Every kind of political position, no matter how outlandish, can be found being advocated by *someone* within the United States: communism, white nationalism, radical Islam, black separatism – all these and more have their constituency on the periphery of American political life.<sup>1</sup> However, when our goal is to assess the plausible course of national policy, not every group with a platform and a microphone merits our attention. The *real* foreign policy debate – if our concern is to gauge how actual policy might take shape – occurs within parameters set by establishment opinion, which plays a gate-keeping role, thinning out the range of possibilities that may be considered seriously. This may have substantive implications for the national debate that follows, since there is a well-established distinction between elite and general public opinion on foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> The establishment cannot be heedless of public sentiment, but it does not mirror it.

- 1 Communist Party of the USA, <http://www.cpusa.org/>; Evan Osnos, 'The Fearful and the Frustrated', *New Yorker*, Aug 31, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/31/the-fearful-and-the-frustrated>; Nation of Islam, <http://www.noi.org/>
- 2 Joshua Busby, Jonathan Monten, Jordan Tama, Dina Smeltz, Craig Kafura, 'Measuring Up How Elites and the Public See U.S. Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, Jun 9, 2015 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-06-09/measuring>; Chicago Council on Global Affairs, '2014 Chicago Council Survey: Foreign Policy in the Age of Retrenchment', <http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/survey/2014/>; Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 'United in Goals, Divided on Means: Opinion Leaders Chicago Council Survey Results 2014' <http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/united-goals-divided-means>

Secondly, there is more to US power than simply military capabilities, and there is more to US foreign policy than the use or threat of force, but it is in this sphere that the greatest controversies have arisen in recent years. Understandably so, given the visibility of the actions that follow a decision to use force, and the scale of the consequences when misjudgements are made. For this reason, although what follows makes reference to other types of American power and policy, its central focus is on debates over the extent of US global military presence, activism and intervention. These are the issues over which rival schools disagree most in their visions for America's world role.

With these qualifications stipulated, let us now map out the four schools of establishment thought regarding US strategy. I have labelled them as follows: minimalist/'isolationist'; realist; liberal internationalist; maximalist/'neoconservative'. We will consider each in turn.

#### *Minimalist/'isolationist'*

The term 'isolationist' is pejorative within US foreign policy debates, and one that no policy advocate with ambitions for success would voluntarily self-apply. Its origins lie in post-First World War debates between President Woodrow Wilson and his domestic opponents over US membership of the League of Nations. The word itself is designed to facilitate criticism of the position it purports to represent: after all, how could the United States ever truly be 'isolated' in the modern world? And even if such a thing were possible, how could isolation ever be an appropriate aspiration for such a powerful state? Framed in this way, the battle for persuasion is already lost.

Nomenclature aside, there is a real and significantly-sized minority within the foreign policy debate that calls for the United States to substantially reduce the size of its standing military establishment, disband much of its extensive network of military commitments around the globe, and disavow any ambition to serve as the global security guarantor or system-manager. This tendency is not merely disinclined to see the US intervene in any particular current conflict, but wishes to see America reduce its very *capacity* to intervene across the board. Doing so, the argument goes, would relieve the United States of the too-frequent temptation to insert itself militarily into scenarios where its involvement is costly, often unwelcome and rarely successful. As a further benefit, a radical scaling-back of US interventionism and global presence might also shrink America's profile in the world, the height

of which presently attracts violent hostility. To avoid the pejorative connotations of 'isolationism', this school of thought is here called 'minimalist'. This label fits because, of all the perspectives discussed in this chapter, minimalism has the most limited conception of what the US needs to do in order to take care of its core interests, and also of the role it should aspire to in the global security system.

Proponents of this view can be found in libertarian think tanks such as the Cato Institute.<sup>3</sup> They can occasionally be found in elected national office too: Ron Paul, the Texas Congressman, used presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012 as a platform for the minimalist programme. His son Rand Paul, now Senator for Kentucky and a member of the wide Republican field during the 2016 contest, proposed a somewhat milder but fundamentally similar platform. It could be argued that the minimalist school also has a left-wing variant in the form of figures such as Senator Bernie Sanders, who challenged Hillary Clinton from the left in the Democratic primaries. Notably, however, Sanders was less eager to make foreign policy a major plank of his platform than either Ron or Rand Paul, and he was less consistently anti-interventionist, even if his eagerness to redirect attention to domestic priorities might be read as a tacit endorsement of a more restrained foreign policy.

Despite being represented both in Congress and the think-tank establishment, the minimalist school is the most marginal of those permitted within the umbrella of the mainstream conversation. Indeed, it may be the wider establishment's confidence that it can see off minimalists from any serious prospect of capturing control of national policy that makes them comfortable with occasionally admitting minimalists to the debate, whereupon they can be assailed as 'isolationists' and defeated.

### *Realist*

Realism is much more likely to be willingly self-applied as a label of choice, since it connotes something more positive and feasible than 'isolation': commitment to sober and accurate reading of national circumstances, and an appropriately restrained policy. In the specific context of international relations, it refers to a worldview in which

3 Cato Institute, 'Foreign Policy and National Security' programme, <http://www.cato.org/research/foreign-policy-national-security>; See Christopher A. Preble, *The power problem: how American military dominance makes us less safe, less prosperous and less free*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Christopher A. Preble, 'Our Unrealistic Foreign Policy' <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/our-unrealistic-foreign-policy>.

protecting US interests abroad requires more action than minimalists accept, but which is simultaneously sceptical of the prospects for success of confrontational diplomacy of the kind favoured by maximalists (see below), and also of their faith in the transformative power of applied military force. They are also different from liberals: where common interests align between states, realists believe cooperation can be productive, and that international agreements and institutions can be useful in facilitating this, but they are clear that this should not be confused with resolving the antagonism between the interests of states that is intrinsic to international society: ultimately, they all want to become more powerful and more secure at one another's expense.

When it comes to the use of military force in distant places, realism is open to the idea in principle, but unsentimental in assessing whether it is wise in any given case. For realists, the overriding question is not whether US actions will benefit the citizens of countries in which it intervenes, though it is a bonus if they do, but whether and how the US national interest is served. This leads realists to be sceptical of so-called 'humanitarian' interventions such as Kosovo in 1999, as well as large-scale overseas operations premised on the ability of US power to transform foreign societies, such as Iraq from 2003. They have no objection in principle to the use of force when it serves narrowly-delineated objectives with a clear link to US interests, e.g. blocking Saddam Hussein's territorial expansionism in 1991. In such instances cover from international law is welcome but not indispensable.

When advocating on behalf of their preferred course, realists do not counsel liquidating American overseas commitments on the scale that minimalists propose. Many do, however, advocate significant 'retrenchment', preserving many present US capabilities but basing them offshore from potential flashpoints and reserving US intervention exclusively for those occasions when it is absolutely necessary to avert major harm to its strategic interests. They advise that, in light of pressure on US resources and the rise of new powers, the extent of US global presence and its commitments to defend others should be revisited. 'Restraint' should be the new guiding principle of US action.<sup>4</sup>

4 For examples of realist writing about 'offshore balancing' and 'restraint', see Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States', *International Security*, 31:2, 2006, pp. 7-41; Barry Posen, *Restraint: a new foundation for US grand strategy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

Realism has a more established track record within government as a guiding philosophy for officials in senior positions, including the tenures of George Kennan, the intellectual father of Cold War ‘containment’ in the 1940s, and Henry Kissinger in the 1960s and ‘70s.<sup>5</sup> In 2016 it is perhaps best and most vocally represented, however, by scholars based in the academy, such as Stephen Walt, John Mearsheimer and Barry Posen.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it does appear to exercise some sway over policy. A plausible case can be made, for example, that realism influenced the Obama administration’s approach to intervention: though realists have been sceptical of the prospects for success of interventions in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria, the reluctance with which the president has undertaken them and their carefully limited scale suggests that he has shared, at least in part, a nagging realist pessimism about what American force can truly be expected to ultimately accomplish.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Liberal internationalist*

Liberal internationalism is the attitude towards foreign affairs least likely to generate controversy in today’s polite establishment circles. Like realists, liberals are willing to embrace a substantial US military capability and overseas presence. Diverging from realists, however, they are committed to the idea that it may be appropriate – even necessary – for the United States to use force not only when its own key interests are threatened but also in the service of moral or humanitarian principles, even when there is no clear national interest at stake. American force might even be justified simply to display US commitment to firmly opposing ‘unacceptable’ international behaviour, such as aggression, even where no direct harm is suffered by the US.

Liberals are most attached to the idea that the present world order is based on rules, norms and institutions that are broadly liberal in character, and it is the core interest of the US to uphold that order. Liberals accord greater weight than maximalists to international law and the rules of international institutions as binding constraints

- 5 George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, Expanded Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995).
- 6 Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); see also Walt’s *Foreign Policy* blog for contemporary policy commentary: <http://foreignpolicy.com/author/stephen-m-walt/>; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 2001); Posen, op.cit.
- 7 On Obama’s reluctance see: Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); Ryan Lizza, ‘The Consequentialist’, *New Yorker*, May 2, 2011.

on America's freedom of action. Liberals are of the opinion that, except in exceptional circumstances, American policymakers should carefully abide by them, and refrain from bellicose diplomacy that risks drawing the United States into armed conflict outside the framework of international law. While regarding military force as a legitimate tool in some circumstances, liberals usually accord the economic dimension of foreign policy an equivalently prominent role in solidifying the American order, generally favouring pushes for free trade and economic liberalisation at the national and international levels. The 'soft power' of the United States, i.e. its ideological, cultural and political appeal to the peoples of other states, is considered very important in the liberal framework.<sup>8</sup>

Liberal internationalists are well represented in policy circles and in government. Hillary Clinton is a prominent example, as is former President Bill Clinton. Her successor as Secretary of State, John Kerry, likewise fits the category, as do many of those operating on the lower rungs of the State Department. The liberal perspective also runs through much that emerges from establishment-brand think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment.<sup>9</sup> Even though, as noted above, President Obama's foreign policy has been inflected by realism in its cautious approach to intervention, he has frequently invoked the main themes of liberal internationalism regarding core values, international norms and institutions.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Maximalist/neoconservative*

Like the minimalist, i.e. 'isolationist', school, the maximalist school has another name that is perhaps more readily recognisable in the popular discourse around foreign policy: 'neoconservative'. That label, however, attained a high public profile in debates over foreign policy during the George W. Bush administration, and as a result became inseparable in most people's minds from the concerted push for war in Iraq in 2002 and 2003. For this reason, it is a label that fewer seek

8 On 'soft power', see Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. For a representative sample of the liberal internationalist perspective presented in scholarly form, see: G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

9 Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/foreign-policy>; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/>

10 See for example: Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the president to parliament in London, United Kingdom', May 25, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/25/remarks-president-parliament-london-united-kingdom>.

for themselves in today's debates, accompanied as it is by cumbersome baggage. Nevertheless, substantively it remains alive and well in the public sphere as an approach to foreign policy issues.

This chapter proposes 'maximalism' as an appropriate alternative label because of two of the school's features. First, it advocates that the state apparatus of security and defence, at home and overseas, are of maximum size and ambition. For those who subscribe to maximalism, it is axiomatic that the United States should spend at least as much as it presently does on defence – ideally more – and should maintain the strongest possible military presence in all theatres. It regards America's status as the world's hegemonic power as an unalloyed good, and considers it an overriding priority to maintain US dominance in the future, deterring or containing the emergence of any rival concentration of power. It is enthusiastic about overseas military interventions, frequently and on a large scale. Indeed it regards the level of public support for the 'muscular' exercise of US power abroad as an indicator of social health.<sup>11</sup>

Second, it is maximalist in the sense that it almost uniformly opposes any compromise in American dealings with hostile powers, refusing to settle for less than obtaining the full list of US demands or countenance meaningful concessions. Even dialogue itself is often constructed as a concession on the part of the United States by those of this disposition: in dealing with powers such as Iran, Russia, or North Korea, maximalists accuse realists and liberal internationalists of weakness simply by virtue of their having advocated or engaged in negotiation. The recommended course for maximalists is often to vociferously state and reiterate US demands, while applying the threat of military force, anticipating that opponents will ultimately buckle and make major concessions unilaterally under pressure. Because of this, maximalists are often criticised by realists on one hand for unrealistic expectations regarding what can be achieved by uncompromising confrontation or the use of force, and liberal internationalists on the other hand for showing reckless disregard for international law and the norms of cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

11 An example of robust presentation of the maximalist programme for foreign policy is David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End To Evil*, New York: Random House, 2003.

12 For a survey of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran negotiated by the Obama administration and the opposition to it in the United States, see James Fallows, 'The Real Test of the Iran Deal', *Atlantic*, July 28, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/the-iran-debate-moves-on/399713/>

Maximalists are mainly to be found among the ranks of conservative think tanks, media, and elected officials; rarely in universities. The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is the school's primary intellectual base in the think tank world. Its thinking is also disseminated within the conservative movement through publications such as the *Weekly Standard*, and amplified via populist outlets such as Fox News and conservative talk-radio. Some high-profile elected figures within the Republican Party are clearly identifiable as members of the maximalist school, such as unsuccessful presidential candidate Senator Marco Rubio.<sup>13</sup> Subscribers to this school have been caustically critical of President Obama throughout his terms of office for what they characterise as weak and vacillating leadership in the face of foreign threats.

#### THE POST-BUSH CONTEXT

Wariness of embracing the label 'neoconservative' has not been the only legacy of the George W. Bush administration's time in office.<sup>14</sup> Those years also shifted the distribution of influence within the domestic foreign policy debate away from support for major overseas ground operations. There are two primary reasons for this.<sup>15</sup>

Firstly, the Bush years undermined confidence in the utility of American military power to deliver results, especially in cases where the desired goal is to substantially remake foreign societies to bring them more into line with American preferences. Bush's foreign policy legacy was defined by two major overseas ground operations. One was the invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003, which aimed to reconstruct that state so as to render it more liberal and more pro-American. The other was the somewhat smaller and less intensive, but still by historical standards very substantial, effort to install and

13 Marco Rubio, 'Restoring America's Strength', *Foreign Affairs*, April 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-08-04/restoring-america-s-strength>

14 Some high-profile individuals explicitly renounced the label as a result of the associations it acquired during the Bush years. See Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, (London: Profile Books, 2006).

15 The analysis in this section draws on that presented at greater length in Adam Quinn, 'Restraint and Constraint: a cautious president in a time of limits' in Michelle Bentley and Jack Holland, *The Obama Doctrine: Legacy and Continuity in US Foreign Policy*, (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming 2016).

maintain a friendly government in Afghanistan and pacify Taliban resistance in the country.

In the case of Iraq, literally trillions of dollars of costs were incurred, but ultimately the Iraqi state remained afflicted with weak institutions, violently divided, and no closer to the United States diplomatically than to US enemies such as Iran. Afghanistan received a smaller investment of US resources than Iraq, but still a substantial one, and results were mixed at best. The Taliban remained out of power, but insurgency in the country steadily gathered rather than lost strength, corruption and electoral manipulation undermined the US-backed government's claims to supreme legitimacy, and throughout the period Afghan leaders were publicly ambivalent about American security operations such as drone strikes. After eight years, therefore, the lesson of Bush's major overseas missions seemed clear: expect scant positive results from regime change and nation-building, even when pursued as a high priority.

The second reason the legacy of the Bush administration pushed the United States away from major overseas ground operations was that resource constraints became a far greater factor in intra-American political debates after 2008. The Bush administration displayed little if any concern during its tenure for the financial cost of its security strategy or the consequences for the nation's fiscal position. With the onset of the Financial Crisis of 2007-08, however, and increased focus within the political system on the federal deficit from 2010 onwards, concern over the affordability of simultaneously maintaining the defence establishment and undertaking new overseas commitments became a more pressing issue. The Republicans – the more deficit-hawkish of the two parties – proved keener than Democrats during budgetary debates to accord security spending priority over domestic programmes. Nevertheless, the question of how to pay for any costly new military mission hung more heavily in the air on all sides during this period.

President Obama was elected in 2008 on the back of sustained criticism of the Bush administration's foreign policy record. Bush, the critique went, had expended too many resources and achieved too little, and had in the process damaged the United States' reputation in the world. The foreign policy dimension of the Obama presidency can and should therefore be interpreted as a reaction against the failure of the policies of the preceding eight years. The debates surrounding it, likewise, should be viewed in the context of the shadow cast upon not just the president but also his opponents by Bush's legacy.

It is important to register that there have been some areas of continuity between the administrations. In particular we might note Obama's continuation and expansion of targeted killing using unmanned aerial vehicles, and the vast surveillance programme revealed by Edward Snowden's leaks. Such continuities notwithstanding, however, this administration has been notable for its steadfast refusal to contemplate any reprise of the Iraq model of military expedition. Obama authorised a temporary troop-number increase in Afghanistan not long after taking office, and subsequently demonstrated willingness to undertake interventions through the limited use of air power and special forces in Libya, Iraq and Syria, but during the course of his presidency the US ground presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has been drastically reduced, while no remotely comparable new operations have been undertaken. Indeed, the president explicitly stated when announcing deployment decisions that there would be no repeat of Bush-era adventures under his leadership.<sup>16</sup> He has also signalled his desire to move past American entanglement in the conflicts of the Middle East and rather prioritise managing the rise of China in Asia, (although events in both Europe and the Middle East have made this rebalancing difficult to realise in practice).<sup>17</sup>

#### THE BALANCE OF OPINION TODAY

The simple characterisation of the debate within the establishment tent of the United States in 2016 would be this: the same four schools remain in play, but the maximalist school faces tighter political constraints than it did in 2002-03, inhibiting it from making a full and direct pitch for the sort of expansive military interventionism that is its default policy preference.

In the presidential nomination contests, the Republican Rand Paul played a unique role in American politics by making the case for the

16 Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya', Mar 28, 2011 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-address-nation-libya>; Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan', Jun 22, 2011 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-afghanistan>.

17 Kenneth Lieberthal, 'The American Pivot to Asia', *Foreign Policy*, Dec 21, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/21/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>

minimalist course central to his pitch.<sup>18</sup> In the political centre Hillary Clinton has sought to position herself as a marginally more hawkish liberal interventionist than President Obama.<sup>19</sup> The Republican field (other than Paul) cleaved in all cases towards some mixture of realism and maximalism, though the latter was less overwhelmingly dominant than it has been in recent presidential cycles. Marco Rubio, long the favoured candidate of neoconservative intellectuals attached to the party, presented the purist maximalist programme in the field in terms of combining military spending, global interventionism and a hard line with unfriendly powers. This manifested also in frequent, harsh criticism of President Obama's policies (and Clinton's) for timidity and lack of resolve.<sup>20</sup> Rubio was outrun in the contest, however, by Texas Senator Ted Cruz and reality-TV star Donald Trump, who in their respective ways combined a realism-inflected scepticism about Iraq-style intervention and nation-building overseas with very extreme statements about the level of force that would be justified against groups such as ISIS.<sup>21</sup> Maximalist positions on which all three could agree, however, included the proposition that the nuclear deal with Iran should never have been negotiated and should be torn up, and that the aggression of Vladimir Putin's Russia was a response to

- 18 Katie Glueck, 'Insiders: Rand Paul's foreign policy views are a serious liability', *Politico*, 29 May 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/rand-paul-2016-foreign-policy-liability-118400#ixzz3telzBCHH>.
- 19 Hillary Clinton, 'Transcript: Read Hillary Clinton's Speech on Fighting ISIS', *Time*, Nov 19, 2015, <http://time.com/4120295/hillary-clinton-foreign-policy-isis/>; Eric Levitz, 'Hillary Clinton Unveils Her Hawkish Alternative to Obama's ISIS Strategy', *New York Magazine*, Nov 19, 2015.
- 20 Noah Bierman, 'Scott Walker and Marco Rubio attack Obama – and Clinton – on foreign policy', *LA Times*, Aug 28, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/la-na-walker-rubio-foreign-policy-20150828-story.html>.
- 21 On scepticism about intervention, see: Sahil Kapur, 'Cruz Excoriates Rubio on Foreign Policy, Links Him to Clinton' Bloomberg Politics, Dec 1, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-12-01/ted-cruz-excoriates-marco-rubio-on-foreign-policy-and-links-him-to-hillary-clinton>; Amanda Terkel, Sam Stein, 'Donald Trump Accuses George W. Bush Of Lying To Invade Iraq', *Huffington Post*, Feb 13, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-george-bush-iraq-invasion\\_us\\_56bfe8cbe4bob40245c6f94b](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-george-bush-iraq-invasion_us_56bfe8cbe4bob40245c6f94b). On use of force against ISIS, see: Philip Rucker, 'Ted Cruz vows to 'utterly destroy ISIS' and 'carpet bomb' terrorists', *Washington Post*, Dec 5, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/05/ted-cruz-vows-to-utterly-destroy-isis-and-carpet-bomb-terrorists/?tid=a\\_inl](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/05/ted-cruz-vows-to-utterly-destroy-isis-and-carpet-bomb-terrorists/?tid=a_inl); Ashley Ross, 'Donald Trump Says He'd 'Take Out' Terrorists' Families', Dec 2, 2015. *Time*, <http://time.com/4132368/donald-trump-isis-bombing/>

perceived weakness on Obama's part and should have been confronted more sharply.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of post-Bush, post-Iraq, post-Financial-Crisis American politics, the maximalist critique of Obama is most vulnerable to the charge that the alternative course it prescribes would lead the United States into new military engagements of unknowably high cost and uncertain outcome. One can certainly profit politically in the American right's intramural debates through bold talk about the need for 'strong' leadership and a 'tough' approach to America's enemies and rivals, but among the population in general, the market for any explicitly presented proposal for a new ground war in the Middle East or elsewhere is greatly diminished from what it was 12 years ago. No such plan would be capable of rousing majority popular support, and consequently no candidate with a prospect of success avowed openly as their intention. Robust though many of the Republican presidential contenders' pronouncements on foreign policy have been, awareness of this unspoken constraint is a significant feature of the context in which the next president of either party will be elected and will govern. Hence, on closer scrutiny, even as they talk big about the need to project the image of the 'strongest' possible leadership, even the more rhetorically bellicose candidates hedged when it comes to what they would actually commit the United States to do.<sup>23</sup>

There are a couple of important cautionary notes to place on this portrayal of maximalism at bay, however. The first is that while even ambitious maximalists will refrain – if they are wise – from openly advocating a major new ground war, it might not be necessary for them to win such an argument openly for the nation to become embroiled in one. The wise tactical path for a maximalist who supports war with, for example, Iran, or escalated confrontation with Russia, would be to advocate provocative steps on the part of the United States while expressing serene confidence that such steps would lead the other side to proffer major concessions without the need for the United States to follow through.

- 22 See Fallows, *op. cit.*; Jack Martinez, 'Republicans Criticize Obama for Talking to Putin', *Newsweek*, Sep 28, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/obama-putin-meeting-criticism-377689> ; Neal Earley, 'McCain Slams Obama On Syrian Strategy' *Daily Caller*, 30 Sep 2015, <http://dailycaller.com/2015/09/30/mccain-slams-obama-on-syrian-strategy/>
- 23 Daniel W. Drezner, 'Just how savvy is Marco Rubio about foreign policy?', *Washington Post*, Sep 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/09/21/just-how-savvy-is-marco-rubio-about-foreign-policy/>

## CONCLUSIONS

History has shown – the Kennedy administration’s abortive support for the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba is a prime example – that government or military officials who desire to enlist the nation in an overseas conflict may seek to engineer it by gaining presidential or popular consent for a lesser engagement which they unspokenly anticipate will escalate once begun, at that point forcing a difficult choice between expanding US military commitment or very publicly abandoning US allies and objectives. Those who argue for limited military strikes against Iran, or for the US to ‘stand up to’ Russia in Eastern Europe through means usually unspecified, may simply be blustering, but it may also be that their words form part of a calmer calculation, and they knowingly advocate the first steps that they anticipate would initiate a chain of escalation that would end at an unknown point. Their professed confidence that decisive US action would deliver US objectives while obviating the need for any further costly commitment may reflect sincere hopes, or it may conceal a willingness to escalate later in a way that would not win favour with the wider foreign policy establishment or public if it were articulated explicitly as a prospectus from the outset. Through this route it might be possible for maximalists to translate their rhetoric into major actions while getting around the initial reluctance of the public and elite.

An important caveat is that shock events can cause a sudden change in the shape of the national debate and compel a recalibration of what is considered plausible or desirable. The attacks of 11 September 2001 had a marked effect in shifting elite and public views; it is difficult to imagine the invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq having had remotely sufficient political support without 9/11 having occurred. James Lindsay has argued persuasively that the intrusion of a security shock and an escalated atmosphere of threat can create circumstances in which the executive has more latitude to direct policy as it sees fit.<sup>24</sup> If the next president is inclined towards maximalist ideas and if a major shock on the scale of the Paris attacks of November 2015 were to occur on US soil, then it could open up possibilities for action that do not at this moment seem plausible. The San Bernardino shootings of December 2015 illustrate the latent potential for such an event and such a reaction. Fortunately, the fact that the link between that

24 James M. Lindsay, ‘Deference and Defiance: The Shifting Rhythms of Executive–Legislative Relations in Foreign Policy’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 333/3, 2003: 530–546.

particular attack and jihadism was initially unclear, combined with President Obama's determination to stay his chosen course in the fight against ISIS, meant that it did not rise to the level of a catalysing event capable of redefining the terms of the national security debate.<sup>25</sup>

In the absence of such a shock, however, if the White House remains in Democratic hands after the 2016 election, it seems likely that US policy will continue along liberal internationalist lines. There will likely be a rolling internal debate with realists over the wisdom of particular US interventions and the attainability of some of the desired objectives in places like Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. The United States will continue to advocate the importance of liberal 'rules of the game' and use economic and political pressure to try and moderate the behaviour of aggressive actors such as Russia. It will also probably continue to pursue an economic agenda that is supportive of trade and global integration, albeit having to navigate the concerns of some Democratic constituencies in the process. If the White House were to go to a Republican on the other hand, whether an ideologically pure maximalist or one – like Donald Trump – who brings together elements of maximalism and realism cemented together by vociferous nationalism, then even though it will markedly change the tone with which the United States engages the world, the new president will still remain hemmed in by the Bush legacy in the ways outlined above.

To the extent that it is possible to refocus attention from Middle East interventionism towards what many believe to be the greater and more important long-run challenge of managing the rise of China as a global superpower, the liberal aspiration to make China a responsible stakeholder in the current global order is likely to play a prominent role in US policy. As in other areas, those of a maximalist disposition will advocate a more confrontational policy to push back against expanding Chinese regional ambitions, while playing down the risks that such a policy might itself provoke serious conflict. Those of realist and minimalist dispositions will respond by warning against reckless belligerence. Whichever party holds the presidency, any reprise of Bush-era maximalism will be tempered by the justifiably heightened concern that exists today regarding the deliverability of results and whether the necessary costs can be borne.

25 Zack Beauchamp, 'Obama's rare Oval Office address to the nation: what he said and what he meant', *Vox*, Dec 7, 2015, <http://www.vox.com/2015/12/6/9859976/obama-oval-office-san-bernardino-isis>.



2



## 2. Obama's grand strategy as legacy

Kari Möttölä

President Barack Obama's foreign policy has been constructed and conducted under exceptional pressures for external and domestic change. While the strategic turn in the leadership of the United States in world affairs has arguably been the result of the pragmatic accommodation of a turbulent global power shift and the complexity of global governance, all through his presidency it has been challenged by a truculent political opposition and the puzzlement expressed in expert critique.

Collating the two levels of analysis, and studying evidence on recurring cycles between past administrations' limitative and expansive strategies, the article aims to assess the sustainability of Obama's choices beyond 2016. Ascertaining how Obama has used lessons learnt and what foresight analysis tells about the trajectory of US position is also used in the analysis.

### IDENTIFYING CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN FOREIGN POLICY

The Obama administration's foreign policy will leave a trail of acts and events, coloured by executive steps and policy arguments, that will be investigated by analysts with the aim of finding a pattern in the form of a doctrine or – a most ambitious term – *grand strategy*. A case-study approach is not the only way of finding the *substance* of a presidential legacy: identifying theories and policies of order change, searching for philosophical roots, or constructing an operational code of the leader offers additional methods for policy analysis.

For a president who entered the White House by promising to end the two lingering and frustrating wars that were launched by his predecessor, who has supplanted the war on terror with a more complex and conclusive approach, and who has consistently shunned military interventions in the wider Middle East and the broader geo-political arch of conflict, it is ironic that Barack Obama is winding down his two-term administration in a situation where the judgement on his legacy is being critically focused on (so far) incremental redeployment in Iraq and Afghanistan and on military strikes that are aimed at pacifying a cauldron in Syria that has been exacerbated by rampant transnational terrorism, even though his actions are conducted within the framework of multi-party diplomacy.

On the other hand, in a historically rare surge, Obama is lining up a series of diplomatic breakthroughs and successes in the form of the multi-power agreement on curtailing, containing and controlling Iran's nuclear capability; re-opening diplomatic relations with Cuba; and enhancing the policy of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region by concluding a comprehensive mega-regional trade agreement. He is at the same time looking to reach a bilateral understanding with China regarding economic governance and greenhouse emissions despite rising tensions over geo-political disputes in the region, and he is supporting a forward-leaning US profile in multilateral efforts to mitigate global warming.

Consequently, an interim audit would show that, while the realist forces of traditional power politics will not leave Obama's image as a liberal reformer intact, he has managed to grasp opportunities which bear out his original agenda of change and adaptation in the US global profile, irrespective of whether the overall outcome of his presidency is deemed to reflect idealism or pragmatism. Moreover, for a president that most analysts, and arguably himself, tend to categorize as an inherent nation-builder at home, Obama's foreign policy leadership needs to be linked to his transformational domestic programmes such as Obamacare, financial regulation, spearhead projects in environmental protection, and the legalization of same-sex marriage.

#### FULFILLING THE CRITERIA OF GRAND STRATEGY

High up in the hierarchy of social concepts, when it comes to dealing with normative and survivalist themes, strategy is an operationally diffuse term, although it is determined by, and expressive of, such key

aspirations in foreign policy and international relations as power and security. While *grand strategy* as a term fits great powers that are capable of shaping the international order, military strategy is a key element for their global position, embracing not only war as an instrument of politics but covering operations other than war – reconstruction and stability operations and other forms of civil–military interventions – which have become a key element of international security in the post–Cold War era.<sup>1</sup>

When dealing with the ideationally and politically–calculated relationship between means and large ends, including the prioritization of instrumental goals in–between, strategy entails the most efficient use of the tools available in the internal and external environment. Accordingly, some analysts see strategy predominantly as the practice of *statecraft*; rather than focusing on the end–state, the success of a given strategy should be seen in terms of the art of getting more out of the intermediate situation than the starting balance of power would suggest was possible.<sup>2</sup> Another definition makes strategy a state’s theory about how to produce security for itself, which suits the great powers as they perceive the sufficiency of military responses to military threats as the key to preserving and achieving the fundamental goals of a state or society.<sup>3</sup>

In the search for generic and specific strategic features in the Obama foreign policy, it would be an understatement to call his presidency controversial, considering the executive–congressional gridlock and extreme partisan hostility, not to mention the feelings of puzzlement or disappointment among sympathetic domestic and foreign audiences. In addition to actor–level factors, milieu–level factors such as turbulence in international relations and the complexity of global change have produced a complicated pattern of behaviour, which observers have labelled random or reactive and difficult to discern as strategy or to identify with historical precedents.

For those who argue that there is no (grand) strategy to be found in Obama’s track record, there will be little substantive legacy to be followed or respected. At the same time, it is said that the best indicator of whether Obama merits his own doctrine is whether successors

1 B. Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

2 L. Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013.

3 B. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2014.

endorse his record, which is difficult to forecast.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, there are conflicting views of Obama as a member in ‘a relay team’ of presidencies, where the criterion of legacy is whether the president leaves the United States and the world in better shape than ‘the set of cards’ he received on arrival at the White House.<sup>5</sup>

In a Republican narrative, the incoherence and complacency of Obama’s line of action will be disclosed by its suppression and rejection and, subsequently, replacement by a successor who will introduce a more expansive strategy as an alternative drawn from the pantheon of American foreign policy thinking.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, those in a more sympathetic camp who foresee no durable comprehensive Obama doctrine and lament the gap between expectations or aspirations and outcomes or accomplishments, discern a serious approach to managing foreign policy, especially with regards to the prudent prioritization of issues, leaving the country in a stronger position with a foreign policy that is by no means in the systemic crisis that critics claim.<sup>7</sup>

The argument in this article is that there is a genuine grand strategy to be found and established as a requisite *for a substantive Obama legacy* even if it follows a unique mix of definitions. The intention below is to focus on ideational and doctrinal aspects of strategy to provide conclusions on Obama’s place in the historical continuum and the political context of US foreign policy, as well as its future beyond 2016.

#### OBAMA AND THE HISTORY OF GRAND STRATEGY IN FLUX AND CYCLES

In providing terminology for the conceptual and practical underpinnings of foreign policy, Martel links grand strategy to *why?*, strategy to *what?*, and foreign policy as a course of action to *how?*. Grand strategy sets the broad and fundamental objectives that a state follows by employing particular strategic priorities and policies, while foreign

4 E. Luce, ‘The Pivot to America’, *Financial Times*, 16/17 May 2015.

5 G. Rose, ‘What Obama Gets Right. Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On’, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 94, no. 5, Sept/Oct 2015, pp. 2–12; B. Stephens, ‘What Obama Gets Wrong. No Retreat, No Surrender’, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 94, no. 5, Sept/Oct 2015, pp. 13–16.

6 C. Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine. American Grand Strategy Today*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2015.

7 M. O’Hanlon, ‘Obama the Carpenter. The President’s National Security Legacy’. *Brookings Research Report*, Washington, DC, 2015.

policy embraces all of the actions undertaken in relationships with other states and actors.<sup>8</sup>

There is a tradition in politics and scholarship of seeing the grand strategy of the United States as a variable which draws on a recurring cycle of *retrenchment* and *engagement* between and among presidencies as principal strategies guiding foreign policy action. This kind of limitative-expansive dualism as a determining factor in the substantive profile of presidential leadership is applied by Sestanovich, who sees US post-war foreign policy as alternating between strategies of *maximalism* and *retrenchment* in the generation and deployment of US aggregate power.<sup>9</sup>

Applying *the domestic-external complex* as a key explanatory factor, Sestanovich notes that more-or-less every presidency has been driven to recalibrate foreign policy and distinguish it from their predecessor's model or legacy. The turn is executed by rebalancing means with ends to correct an unworkable strategy. Typical compelling reasons include a crisis created by a transformation in regional or global milieus, a policy failure in the form of politico-military over-reach in overseas engagement, a breakdown of domestic consensus, or a loss of vital public support.

Obama is classified by Sestanovich as representing retrenchment (using 'less' power than his predecessor) together with Eisenhower, Johnson (pre-Vietnam), Nixon, Ford and Carter; whereas Truman, Kennedy, Johnson (post-1965), Reagan and Bush 43 (post-911) are maximalists (using 'more' power); and Bush 41 (change from 'more' to 'less') and Clinton ('less' to 'more') represent hybrid models with a mid-course turn.

For Sestanovich, Obama's retrenchment has been caused by the practical necessity of domestic nation-building after the financial crisis and the need for a prudent downsizing of the US military footprint as part of method and resource reassessment in the wake of overextension. Obama's aspiration to seek diplomatic solutions in problems and conflicts testifies to his recognition of the limitations of US power and also his aim to improve the US image globally. Obama might view leadership by retrenchment as a way to repair a broken strategy in order to avoid further relative decline, but it has been

8 Martel, W. C., *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015, 4.

9 S. Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2014.

difficult to make it work with regards to domestic public opinion and polity at large. As for the possibility of an Obama surge from 'less' into 'more' mode, it is demanding and historically rare simply because it relies on a shrunken material base.<sup>10</sup>

Retrenchment as a concept of relative change should be distinguished from retrenchment or *restraint* as an absolute category for a sustained strategy, as promoted by academic critics of a pattern of reckless liberal interventionism. In this academic-driven debate, *deep engagement* was presented as the alternative strategy, following the principles and values of the mainstream post-war grand strategy.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, a driver for a hybrid Obama strategy could be strategic patience, with fruitful foreign policy initiatives that were designed at the beginning of the presidency, as discerned in the 2015 *National Security Strategy* narrative. A lame duck administration envisages an improvement in relative strength to adopt an invigorated agenda of global governance and international security. A renewed liberal concept of power is commensurate with overcoming domestic constraints on presidential authority.<sup>12</sup>

Focusing on the art of *implementing policy*, Brands sees grand strategy as the highest form of statecraft. It calls for logics, coherence and consistency to balance interests and resources and apportion US power to address foreign policy tasks. Using lessons learnt as an analytical method, Brands rejects the avoidance of constructing grand strategy as 'strategic nihilism' – preparing a National Security Strategy early should be a priority for each administration. At the same time, history

10 S. Sestanovich, 'The Price of Pulling Back From the World', *International New York Times*, February 9, 2014a.

11 R. Betts, *American Force: Dangers, Delusions, and Dilemmas in National Security*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2012; S. Brooks, G. Ikenberry, & W. Wohlworth 'Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment', *International Security* vol. 37, no. 3, 2012/2013, p. 7–51; S. Brooks, G. Ikenberry & W. Wohlworth, 'Lean Forward', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1, 2013 p. 130–142; C. Layne, 'This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 56, 2012, p. 203–213; K. Möttölä, 'Grand Strategy as a Syndrome: The United States' Review of Liberal Institutionalism', in C. Günay and J. Pospisil (eds.) *ADD – ON 13/14. Yearbook oiiip*. Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 2014, pp. 29–44; B. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2014.

12 G. Grevi, 'Patient, prudent, strategic? The 2015 United States National Security Strategy', *Policy brief* no. 194. FRIDE, Madrid, 2015; *National Security Strategy*, The White House, Washington, DC, Feb. 2015.

tells us that the process of implementing grand strategy requires space for flexibility and recalibration.<sup>13</sup>

For Brands, Obama does pursue a grand strategy with the purpose of maintaining US global leadership at a lower cost (the core of the Nixon-Kissinger geo-politics of retrenchment) by exerting power in smarter and more prudent ways in a changing geo-political and geo-economical order. However, against a backdrop of fiscal austerity, his strategy lacks rhetorical appeal and contains the political risk of creating an image of ‘under-reach’ in the eyes of both allies and adversaries, and producing a power vacuum.<sup>14</sup>

While Sestanovich and Brands’ studies categorize strategies applied in foreign policy, they do not necessarily differentiate between the guiding values or leading principles which shape grand strategy in each case. Consequently, retrenchment and engagement may represent different ways of pursuing largely similar grand strategies.

Stressing *the structural aspect* of international order in the trajectory of post-Cold War and post-containment foreign policy, Martel sees the United States as struggling to produce a coherent long-term grand strategy. Conditioned historically and culturally, each administration has put its distinctive imprimatur on the implementation of what Martel sees as the three guiding principles for the American grand strategy: (i) rebuilding and sustaining domestic foundations of power and prosperity; (ii) exercising leadership and using power to address and restrain sources of disorder which constitute direct threats to US vital national interests; and (iii) forging alliances and partnerships to manage stability in the (liberal) international order.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-Cold War period, change in certain long-term framework conditions during the Obama era regarding grand strategy have culminated in simultaneously opening and constraining space for action. The absence of a peer competitor has made policy appear episodic and random; at the same time, the transformation of the geo-political and geo-economic environment, with the rise of authoritarian competitors in parallel with capable non-state actors, is shaking the elite and public confidence in US leadership. The emergence of new risks and threats which demand new tools has made US behaviour reactive in promoting and protecting national interests, and issues

13 H. Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2014.

14 H. Brands, ‘Breaking Down Obama’s Grand Strategy’, *The National Interest*, July 23, 2014a.

15 Martel, *op.cit.*, 355–361.

concerning the domestic foundation of power, including values and identities, have gained more influence on foreign policy.

Martel's model identifies values, power and governance as platforms for grand strategy. Obama's grand strategy constitutes an ingenuous reprioritization and rebalancing among the enshrined leading principles. Starting with domestic rebuilding as his first priority, Obama has emphasized burden-sharing within alliances and partnerships as well as engaging with adversaries. As for rebutting direct threats, he has withdrawn US troops from two wars but followed prior administrations in the use of special operations and drones against terrorism. Somewhat paradoxically, Martel views Obama as being most successful in using power against forces of disorder, conditionally successful in domestic rebuilding and least successful in what would arguably be his main foreign policy objective, namely strengthening multilateralism and sharing the burden of US responsibility for global (security) governance in what is becoming a post-hegemonic order.

#### PROFILING OBAMA'S THE STRATEGIST

Although it is used by pundits and academics alike, a limitative-expansive dichotomy is much too rude a framework to analyse Obama's strategic track and legacy. Notwithstanding that the battle over future presidential politics tends to cleave into two starkly opposing alternatives, explaining what lies behind Obama's grand strategy calls for more than one dimension. Moreover, his presidential trajectory contains no verifiable turning point to strategic reconceptualization – something which his predecessor resorted to. The internal and external complexity inherent in Obama's strategic profile has endured throughout his presidency.

Diverse drivers to Obama's leadership strategy appear when they are applied within the framework of *Mead's* identification of the traditions of American schools of thought in grand strategy as being measured and defined in two dimensions: conservatism-liberalism in political identification and internationalism-nationalism in external orientation. *Hamiltonian* conservative internationalism stresses prudence in power, great-power centrality and economic gains; *Wilsonian* liberal internationalism believes in rules-based multilateralism and the spread of democratic values within domestic orders of states; *Jeffersonian* conservative nationalism is isolationist in its focus on perfecting domestic democracy; and *Jacksonian* liberal

nationalism is ready to use force unilaterally to protect the nation and drive regime change for security purposes.<sup>16</sup>

In the framework of Mead's taxonomy, Obama appears as an adaptive liberal internationalist driven by the American philosophical tradition of critical pragmatism and, regarding power, the Niebuhrian strain of prudent realism. While (Wilsonian) liberal internationalism arguably remains the core of Obama's strategy, he is not a dogmatic proponent of multilateralism, identifying himself with the Truman and Kennedy type of realist liberalism and praising the management style of the (Hamiltonian) conservative internationalism of the Bush 41 and Reagan leaderships. In addition, by taking out Osama bin Laden and using drones against menacing targets, Obama seems to follow (Jacksonian) unilateralism in the use of military force. Moreover, in prioritizing domestic and social rebuilding, Obama reflects (Jeffersonian) nationalism. Altogether, the complexity verified in Obama's case shows the relevance of flexibility in the implementation as well as analysis of foreign policy strategy.

Notwithstanding the conceptual complexity, it is argued, and not only by Ikenberry as a leading protagonist, that *liberal internationalism* (albeit not of the Wilsonian prototype) has been the default US grand strategy throughout the post-Second World War period,<sup>17</sup> even though the primary tools of foreign policy and leadership worldviews have varied. Since its creation by the US hegemonic power, the liberal international order as an open system of common normative rules, multilateral institutions and networks of alliances and partnerships has served American values and protected US national security interests and also sustained the US position of leadership at the core of the international power structure.

As an aberration from liberal – and also conservative – internationalism, the unilateralism of the Bush 43 presidency, with its botched wars, together with the unprecedented financial crisis, laid the ground for a discourse on the serious crisis in the hegemonic order when Barack Obama, who it was presumed would rejuvenate liberalism even though he was untested in foreign policy, took over the US presidency. Since the turn into the second Obama administration,

16 W. Mead, *Special Providence. American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2001; K. Möttölä, 'Between Kennan and Ikenberry: the critical pragmatism of Obama's grand strategy', Paper presented at the International Studies Association 56th Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, Feb.18–21, 2015.

17 G. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2011.

with the ongoing discourse on US relative decline nourished by foresight reports on a power shift at the core of long-term global change<sup>18</sup>, the sustainability and rationality of liberal internationalism has been questioned and challenged from all angles.

It is intriguing that all three sets of the basic principles of grand strategy – ensuring domestic foundation, rebutting vital threats and sustaining stability in global governance – seem to be subjects of contentious debate as the Obama presidency is approaching its conclusion.

While the policy on the use of politico-military force against threats to national security remains the centre of gravity, Obama has been downsizing and the social, economic and cultural guidelines of the president's domestic policy, including the concept of an active federal government, which would be needed for an active foreign policy, have been rejected by the political opposition.

On the other hand, the idea of concentrating on nation-building at the expense of resources devoted to external affairs ('frugal foreign policy'; 'foreign policy starts at home') has not become a winning strategy for guiding an operational foreign policy, nor is it supported by any significant shift in public opinion.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the military side of foreign policy, especially the cavalier and counter-productive use of military intervention in US grand strategy, the academic critique targets a misguided feature which Obama has vowed to correct and has in fact discarded to the extent that it has become a main issue in the "weakness" critique directed against him by an increasingly hawkish opposition and a growing segment of the debating class of pundits and think tankers. While Republican advocates of an assertive use of power were joined by liberal internationalists among the Democrats in the case of the Iraq war and beyond (although it was later admitted to be a mistake), political pressures are again driving leading Democrats with their eye on the post-Obama era (Hillary Clinton) to advocate a more active – albeit ambiguously defined – approach to intervention in the Middle East conundrum and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

18 National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, Washington, DC, 2012.

19 R. N. Haass, 'U.S. Foreign Policy: In Troubling Disarray', *The American Interest* 11(5), 2014; M. Mandelbaum, *The Frugal Superpower. America's Global Leadership in a Cash-Strapped Era*, Public Affairs, New York, 2010.

20 R. Burt, and D. Simes 'Foreign Policy by Bumper Sticker', *The National Interest*, Sept-Oct, 2015; K. vanden Heuvel, 'The danger of 'Foreign Policy by Bumper Sticker'', *The Washington Post*, Aug 25, 2015.

Being likewise opposed to reckless liberal interventionism, proponents of sustained liberal internationalism consider that the most serious flaw within the realist advocates of restraint is their suggestion that the US would withdraw from security commitments and other alignments. Such a turn would lead to the loss of crucial channels for promoting the liberal economic order and global governance and cause the neglect of networks for spreading liberal values by soft power. At the same time, an entrenched congressional rejection of enlarged international commitments, and in particular legally binding treaties, narrows Obama's selection of foreign policy tools.

The case for acceptance or rejection and the follow-up on the agreement negotiated by the Obama administration with its great-power partners on Iran's nuclear programme (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) has the ingredients to more broadly test and verify the course of US foreign policy beyond the presidential transition. Bringing out divides in ideology, policy and strategy, the outcome will indicate the shape and durability of adaptation to global change in the American polity. As an issue of strategic significance, placed on the agenda from the outset of Obama's presidency and managed by diplomatic outreach to adversaries, a successful implementation of the Iran deal would be a vindication of a perceptive Obama strategy and constitute a cornerstone of his foreign policy legacy.

On the issue of the use of force in a strategic mode, the Iran case will test the relative weight of two 'mindsets', in Obama's words, between those who build on the 'tradition of strong, principled diplomacy' and those whose approach is characterized by 'a preference for military action' with 'a premium on unilateral U.S. action'.<sup>21</sup> A supplementary ingredient of the solution is the maintenance of the military option – and superior US military might as the backbone of its credibility – in the wake of the deal, as vowed by Obama and practically the whole political spectrum by various degrees of intensity.

#### A TOUR OF FORESIGHT ANALYSIS

In the application of *foresight analysis*, Bremmer presents three competing visions of the path the United States could take in the changing world. For Bremmer, Obama will leave behind a record of

21 B. Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal. American University', Washington, DC, August 5, 2015.

a foreign policy without a strategy, having refused to choose a clear mission, as would be fitting for a superpower.

The scenarios are described as: (i) “Independent America” urging the US to go further in retrenchment by declaring independence from solving other peoples’ problems, reversing the course of unfounded military spending and involvement in recurring conflicts, and by focusing on perfecting democracy and nation-building at home, all the while leading the world by example; (ii) “Moneyball America” pursuing an interest in leading the world in a selective pattern by performing necessary tasks such as leading coalitions of the willing on non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and global growth while, in a rational, rigorous and cold-blooded manner, maximizing the return on the investment of resources with a view to promoting US national interests; (iii) “Indispensable America” continuing to work for the spread of freedom in an interconnecting world order, reflecting lasting American values as the only full guarantee for US security and prosperity, bearing in mind that only exceptional America can perform a value-driven leadership role.<sup>22</sup>

Remarkable for a high-profile member of a global consultancy, Bremmer ends up *in favour of “Independent America”* as the organizing principle for US foreign policy strategy, the main reason being that the American public would not support the alternatives. While denying that investing in domestic social and physical infrastructure would represent isolationist values, albeit the choice has been interpreted as bordering on a ‘new isolationism’,<sup>23</sup> Bremmer notes that the newly revived America would be open to the technology, energy, food and global labour markets, and it would continue to offer global currency. While raising the threshold for military intervention, the US would give allies and partners the necessary time to adapt to the US strategy of withdrawal.

22 I. Bremmer, *Superpower. Three Choices for America’s Role in the World*, Penguin, New York, 2015.

23 E. Luce, *op.cit.*

OBAMA'S LEGACY – A HARBINGER OF  
CYCLICAL OR EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE?

In view of policy and scholarly narratives, discerning and verifying Barack Obama's legacy as a bridging and sustaining pattern of grand strategy over past and future foreign policies of the United States is exceptionally challenging for several reasons. A composite reason based on public awareness as well as expert judgement may be that Obama's policy does not easily look like an ideal grand strategy with clear choices on a fundamental mission – something which the American polity has been used to throughout the hegemonic post-war era, albeit less unambiguously during the post-Cold War period, with new challenges and threats to security caused by expansive globalization and accelerating and deepening power shifts.

Notwithstanding the image of Obama's foreign policy, the key question is how he is changing the substance or the order of priority among the established guiding principles of grand strategy in the US context, or whether he is adopting genuinely different strategic methods of pursuing those fundamental goals, reflecting US history and position. Three aspects or angles noticeable in the above analysis of Obama's grand strategy stand out to provide a test of its significance as an original legacy. The answer to the core question in the article is whether those systemic trends will be reversible or sustainable, and to what extent Obama's adaptation to them in his policy will be followed by his successors.

*Firstly*, as a measure of American self-image, what makes the task of legacy definition special and arguably unique in the case of the Obama experience is *the growing weight of the systemic dimension in constraining US power* as a core driver of grand strategy. While it has been typical of the trajectory of the US foreign policy that *agency* has been in the driving seat based on, and driven by, military and economic dominance and thus political hegemony, there is growing evidence that the country will increasingly have to adapt to the influence of structural transformation that is underway in the international order.

Whether decline in relative power is caused by a strategic policy of voluntary accommodation and curtailment of the US role ('retrenchment') or constitutes a deterministic consequence of milieu change is a contentious issue which has fallen on the American polity during Obama's era of responsibility as president.

While agency is a key factor in US presidential foreign policy, and while opposition presidential hopefuls rhetorically swear to overturn

their would-be predecessor's executive decisions or the line of action as a whole, structural and systemic factors shape the policies of even the most powerful country. How such dynamics or 'laws' of transformation in the international order are viewed by the agency is an essential ingredient of grand strategy.

Consequently, whether the pattern of accommodation in relative decline can or will be reversed by sheer ideological determination and/or by the re-investment of material resources as aggregate US power, or whether Obama's choice of strategy turns out to be the opening of a long path for the US role, will determine the substantive content and historic extent of his legacy.

*Secondly*, in terms of the ability to use coercion or other means of force to shape the regional or global environment and prevent threats, the answer to the Obama enigma may come down to a *political reappraisal of the conception of power* as a factor, which, by being ubiquitous in all social relations, will be increasingly relevant in international relations. In the post-war world, and largely in the post-Cold War period, the US has been in the position to shape and sustain the strategic milieu according to its national preference as a hegemonic power, a condition which no longer exists on the level that it once did now that the extent of the effect of global change on US power is being recognized.

What is critical in the case of Obama is not only how he perceives the world order but how he understands and recognizes, in the context of lessons learnt and strategic reappraisal, the emergent possibilities and constraints of US power to shape and transform that order, by all different means: ideationally while building a domestic foundation to be used for leadership as an example in soft power; institutionally or structurally in shaping global governance; politically as a leading actor in international politics; or compulsorily as a politico-military superpower to address threats.<sup>24</sup>

A new understanding is needed of how agency and structure combine in the preferred and aspired direction of events and in the shaping of policy outcomes. In the practice of strategic policy, it boils down to understanding the character of US power as an order-shaping instrument that can be sustained without a peer competitor or to

24 M. Finnemore, and J. Goldstein 'Puzzles about Power', in M. Finnemore and J. Goldstein (eds.) *Back to Basics: State Power in a Contemporary World*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, pp. 3-27; M. Barnett and R. Duvall 'Power in International Politics', *International Organization* vol. 59, no. 1, 2005, pp. 39-75.

recognizing how and to what extent China is viewed not only as a rising power but an equal actor in shaping the future of the international order, which is open for transformation. If the United States and China are seen as twin powers capable of driving grand strategies based on their domestic 'exceptionalism' in the process of shaping the world order, particularly in the longer term, the trajectory of evolution will depend on the combination of shifts in geo-economic, and later increasingly also in geo-political, power.<sup>25</sup>

*Thirdly*, regarding the future shape and dynamics of international order, whether the pattern of Obama's grand strategy will speak to and follow a *cyclical or evolutionary theory of change* of international order will determine the substance and sustainability of his legacy.

In the cyclical theory, the aggregate power of major actors provides them with the choice to dominate the regional and global order, most often with power transition as a driving force of the dynamic. In creating structural realities, they also impose cultural and political conditions with a combination of hard and soft power. In the evolutionary theory, power is a ubiquitous and embedded factor among other drivers in such historical and sociological processes of order transformation as economic modernization, creating sustained liberal ascendancy. In addition, authority and legitimacy are indispensable elements of power to underpin global governance.<sup>26</sup>

Obama's profile and policy testifies that he sees himself leading a United States which is at the centre of and contributing to an evolutionary change in the international order. Through a rebalanced US grand strategy he is intent on protecting and consolidating, as well as extending, the liberal international order that has served American values and US interests flexibly and durably for an exceptionally long period of history. In a choice of priorities, Obama has focused on the core of the liberal order with the renewed domestic strength of the United States in order to regain lost liberal democratic space globally in the long term, even as the need for strategic reprioritization has led to a policy of selective engagement in the periphery.<sup>27</sup>

25 G. Ikenberry, 'Introduction: The United States, China, and Global Order', in G. Ikenberry, W. Jisi, Z. Feng (eds.) *America, China, and the Struggle for World Order*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015, pp. 1–18.

26 G. Ikenberry, 'The logic of order Westphalia, liberalism, and the evolution of international order in the modern era', in G. Ikenberry (ed.) *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 83–106.

27 Commenting on the Iran deal, Obama noted: "The doctrine is we will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities." *New York Times*, April 5, 2015.

While Obama's liberal internationalism works for evolutionary change through an adapted concept of power, responding to the growing effect of a 'return' of arbitrary geo-politics and a 'rise' of precarious geo-economics in great-power relations, global change as a whole has the potential to turn his grand strategy towards a hybrid model by applying both geo-political and geo-economical sources of power.<sup>28</sup> Such a megatrend may result in combining cyclical and evolutionary models of change in the future.

As for the shorter run, the US grand strategy as designed by Obama will follow the strategic guidelines for implementing a foreign policy of adapted liberal internationalism through the large-scale trade initiatives (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP, and Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP). These serve the purpose of regrouping the core liberal democracies as drivers of global change under the pressure of global shifts in power and development. Strategic patience, underlying the reappraised prioritization of challenges, guides relations with great and rising powers, with the rebalancing (pivot) to the Asia-Pacific indicating the primary position of China, while the moderate response to Russia's transgressions in and around Ukraine reflect its reduced weight in the US threat perception, albeit that the reassurance of commitments within NATO follows the logic of keeping the core intact.

The weakest point (and a lingering test of the use of hard power) in Obama's record of strategic reprioritization is the instability and chaos in the post-'Arab spring' Wider Middle East, where through commission or omission the US has largely failed in the management of a series of conflicts: post-intervention Libya, post-war Iraq, post-stability Yemen and post-'redline' Syria, with regional and transnational jihadism on the rise and refugee flows spiralling out of control. The brittleness of post-withdrawal Afghanistan can be included in the list too.

28 R. Kagan, 'The Crisis of World Order', *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov 20, 2015; R. Zoellick, *The Currency of Power: Economics and Security in U.S. Foreign Policy*, E-Notes, Foreign Policy research Institute, Philadelphia, PA, 2015.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, the most critical and symptomatic aspect of Obama's legacy that will be identified with his person is how and to what extent the United States will have recognized the limitation and transformation of its power in global affairs and adapted its grand strategy accordingly in order to keep the strategic path in its own hands and retain the appropriate share of global leadership. The Obama episode may become a driver of a longer period of US foreign policy aimed at bending history<sup>29</sup> instead of having to choose between recasting or replacing liberal internationalism.

29 Indyk, M. S. & Lieberthal, K. G. & O'Hanlon, M. E., *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2012.



3



### 3. The proliferation of war and war powers in the United States

Anna Kronlund

The decision to commit armed forces to hostilities is a core political dilemma. In democratic societies it is generally assumed that these types of decisions require debate and deliberation – both in public and in legislatures. Parliaments in particular are in a key institutional position to secure leadership accountability, not only by authorizing but also monitoring the decision-making and its implementation<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, different kinds of crises require swift and decisive action by the executive branch, and in liberal democracies they usually claim that the right of security policy-making is their prerogative.<sup>2</sup>

This is especially pertinent in the context of the US. The Founding Fathers, when drafting the Constitution, divided war powers between Congress and the president. Military and war powers in the United States are also under congressional control, but the balance of power in this field has often benefited the executive for two main reasons: the power of the executive in this area of foreign policy has grown since the Second World War, while at the same time the realm and nature of conflicts has widened. To what extent can we even expect the constitutional separation of powers in war-making to actualize within a complex setting of institutional dispositions and transforming technology that is complemented with an increasing tempo of world politics and the changing conception of power itself?<sup>3</sup>

1 S. Dieterich, H. Hummel & S. Marschall, 'Bringing democracy back in: The democratic peace, parliamentary war power and European participation in the 2003 Iraq War', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2015, pp. 87–106.

2 Ibid.

3 See K. Schonberg, 'Global Security and Legal Restraint: Reconsidering War Powers after September 11', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2004, p. 115.

While the Constitution establishes the war powers of the president and Congress, the political contexts matter.<sup>4</sup> This raises an interesting question regarding whether and how the different branches of government can utilize their distinguished capabilities and powers during specific crises.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter investigates the transforming nature of war and war powers in the US and asks: what does it mean to treat war or war powers as a political – as opposed to a purely legal – question?<sup>6</sup>

What does the fact that there is a debate on “war” and “war powers” by political actors indicate with regards to committing armed forces in different operations? And how are party politics and power relations between different branches of government related to this. To analyze this problematic, the chapter first investigates the transforming parameters of contemporary warfare before going on to discuss the role of Congress with regards to foreign policy and war powers. The latter part of the chapter then provides a related case study: the Congressional debate on the resolution requiring the withdrawal of US armed forces from Iraq and Syria within a certain timeline. The focus will not be on the relationship between the executive and legislative as such; differing views within Congress are also taken into consideration (Members of Congress have been uneasy with regards to granting or limiting presidential powers). The chapter also shortly introduces other domestic drivers of US foreign policy.

4 There is a wide-range of literature on war powers of Congress and the president and their division. Some references are selectively made to these discussions, when considered it would be helpful for understanding the war powers. It should be also noted that the focus of this chapter is not in the judicial definitions related to war and war powers.

5 While this often leads to conflicts of interpretation in the legitimacy of respective powers, democratic societies may nevertheless be seen to benefit from interpretative conflicts between the branches of government. M. Zeisberg, ‘*War Powers. The Politics of Constitutional Authority*’, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010.

6 See the political aspect on debate on how to interpret the concept of war, e.g. in M. Zeisberg, ‘Interpretation is a Political Power’, *Boston University Law Review*, vol. 95, 2015, pp. 1261–1273.

[M]odern warfare is evolving rapidly, leading to an increasingly contested battlespace in the air, sea, and space domains – as well as cyberspace [...]<sup>7</sup>

The methods as well as the means of warfare have changed, and the notion of war nowadays indicates very different actions and operations. Counter-insurgency operations, hybrid war, so-called cyber war and the use of drones etc. implicate the wide range of operations related to the use of armed forces, but do not necessarily implicate war in the traditional sense as a declared conflict between two or more nation states.<sup>8</sup> In the War Powers Resolution that Congress passed in 1973 to reassert its power in this field, the language of the resolution referred to committing US armed forces into hostilities. It did not specify hostilities in any more detail though, apart from implicating the powers of the president and Congress, and the collective judgment of both branches, when committing US armed forces into hostilities.<sup>9</sup>

The traditional distinction between offensive and defensive war has become inadequate for current conflicts, not only because of concepts such as humanitarian intervention or pre-emptive war but also because of the widening realm of the use of armed force in different kinds of operations. The common grounds for war-making, such as the questions of boots on the ground and the relevance of military operations to the United States' national security, seems to be somehow challenged because current conflicts contain a temporal and spatial problematic. The US Congress's last declaration of war was issued in 1942, and furthermore the substance of the War Powers Resolution seems to make it incompatible with the current armed conflicts and technologies<sup>10</sup>. Despite the categories being in a state of flux, these "bedrock" war powers categorizations are still relevant and are often discussed and referred to in the debates.

7 Department of Defense. 2014. *Quadrennial defense review*. [http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_Quadrennial\\_Defense\\_Review.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf)

8 See e.g. R. Väyrynen (ed.), *The Waning of Major War. Theories and Debates*. Routledge, London & New York, 2006, on different aspects and debates in regard to changing of war and warfare.

9 See the language of the resolution at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/warpower.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/warpower.asp).

10 See more about the discussion in E.T. Jensen, 'Future War and the War Powers Resolution', *Emory International Law Review*, vol. 29, 2015, pp. 501–555.

In the same vein the notion of “war powers” seems to require, if not a new definition, clarification in a contemporary context. Traditionally, war powers have included not only the ability to declare war but also an aspect of dominance or a concentration of powers: “In war, the government may conscript soldiers, commandeer property, control prices, ration food, raise taxes, and freeze wages”<sup>11</sup>. Due to novel ways of warfare – the use of cyber weapons and unmanned assets – the traditional definition of “war powers” seems to be somewhat inadequate, too.

There has been an interest in examining differences between military and war powers<sup>12</sup> with different parameters of circumstance (in relation to operations authorized by the UN or NATO). One aspect worth mentioning is the role of the US Congress in international operations that are conducted by multiple actors and authorized under a NATO or UN mandate. One way of looking at the issue concerns defining the role of Congress, as when declaring war is not considered the same as committing US armed forces into peace support operations, for instance<sup>13</sup>. Another view is to examine how international operations may be beneficial from the administration’s point of view by reducing possibilities for Congressional opposition in the means of burden sharing<sup>14</sup>. Parliamentary war powers have also been a recent focus of studies<sup>15</sup>. The conception of “parliamentary war powers” has been considered to have wider meaning than the mere authorization of measures through legislation or budgetary functions, and it should cover all kind of actions in respect to the use of force, not merely the deployment of national forces. It should also include the aspect of “control” in the meaning of the capability to limit the “leeway” of the executive.<sup>16</sup>

11 G. Stone, *Perilous Times. Free Speech in Wartime. From The Sedition Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2005, p. 4.

12 See e.g. S. Prakash, ‘The Separation and Overlap of War and Military Powers’, *Texas Law Review*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2008, pp. 299–386.

13 H. Born & H. Hänggi, *The Use of Force under International Auspices: Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability*, Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Policy Paper No. 7, Geneva, August 2005.

14 S. Recchia, ‘Why seek IO approval under unipolarity? Averting issue linkage vs. appeasing Congress’, *International Relations*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2016, pp. 78–101.

15 E.g. S. Dieterich et al. 2015.

16 See more in S. Dieterich et al. 2015, 19.

As the Commander-in-Chief, the president is the head of foreign policy, but the field includes various actors, including US Congress. While there is a certain amount of room in foreign affairs for executive actions, some aspects and issues assume that there will be cooperation between the branches, one example being Congress passing negotiated free trade agreements, such as the TPP-agreement, in the future.<sup>17</sup> Another instance of Congress's influence on foreign policy issues that could also be mentioned is the role of the US Senate<sup>18</sup> in the NATO enlargement process, which is topical right now because of Montenegro's forthcoming possible NATO membership.

David Jolly (R-FL) has spoken about the relationship between Congressional and presidential authority in the House of Representatives and topical issues in US foreign policy:

We have seen the President's negotiations with Cuba, the President's negotiations with Iran, and it begs the question: What is the role of Congress in all of these matters, in these matters of foreign policy and foreign affairs. [...] This body is a coequal branch. We are established under Article I of the Constitution just as the administration is established under article II. We are coequal branches. This body, most every American knows, has the authority to declare war. This body does, this Congress does. We fund our diplomatic activities. We fund our military activities. We authorize the use of military force, as was affirmed by the President today in sending such a request to this body

17 See more in I.F. Ferguson, M. A. McMinimy & B. R. Williams, '*The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): In Brief*', CRS Report for Congress, February 9, 2016. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44278.pdf>.

18 See M. Garcia, '*NATO Enlargement: Senate Advice and Consent*', CRS Report for Congress, January 16, 2009. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL31915.pdf>.

to ask for the constitutional affirmation of this body, of this Congress. And we do so routinely.<sup>19</sup>

Representative Jolly continued to give examples of why Congressional actions matter in the realm of national security and foreign policy by referring, for instance, to how the Senate rejected the treaty of Versailles in 1919. He also brought up the investigative duties of Congress by referring to the Iran–Contra affair in 1986–1987 during Ronald Reagan’s Presidency, 9/11–related intelligence activities, and appropriations and foreign aid. The Representative’s argument also included topical issues in which Congress exerts its role, such as the enactment of the new Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), the future of Guantanamo, and conducting foreign affairs more broadly, such as invitations for foreign leaders, in this case Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to address Congress.<sup>20</sup>

In the Armed Service committee hearing in December 2015 the Defense Secretary Ashton Carter also raised some issues in which congressional action is needed, such as funding (“Syria equipping program” submitted to the four defense committees in Congress) and Pentagon nominations waiting approval by Congress<sup>21</sup>. To extend the focus – the role of the US Congress in foreign policy matters – further, in December 2015 Congress passed the “2016 Appropriations bill” that Obama signed, including a provision to reform the IMF.<sup>22</sup> As a result, China’s voting share is supposed to be doubling and overall funding for

19 Congressional Record February 11, 2015, H972. Congressional Record available at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=CREC>. On some issues, the US Congress has sometimes sought tougher US policies than the administration that seems the case in regard to China on its currency policies. See N. Nymalm, The End of the “Liberal Theory of History”? Dissecting the U.S. Congress’ Discourse on China’s Currency Policy. GIGA Working Papers, no. 170, June 2011. [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2012/3696/pdf/http\\_www.giga\\_hamburg.de\\_dl\\_download.php\\_d\\_content\\_publicationen\\_pdf\\_wp170\\_nymalm.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2012/3696/pdf/http_www.giga_hamburg.de_dl_download.php_d_content_publicationen_pdf_wp170_nymalm.pdf).

20 Congressional Record February 11, 2015, H972–H975.

21 See the statement of Carter, A. B. ‘Opening Statement on Counter–ISIL Senate Armed Service Committee Wednesday’, December 9, 2015. [http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Carter\\_12-09-15.pdf](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Carter_12-09-15.pdf).

22 See <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/minority/summary-consolidated-appropriations-act-of-2016>.

the IMF is increasing<sup>23</sup>. Another topical issue to be raised is sanctions and the role of Congress in their enactment<sup>24</sup>.

Congress wields considerable power through its power to legislate. In the aftermath of 9/11 it passed a bill that led to the establishment of the Homeland Security Department (2002), which is considered the biggest governmental reorganization since Congress passed the *National Security Act* in 1947 that resulted in the establishment of the Defense Department. By passing the Patriot Act in 2001 and the Patriot Reauthorization Act in 2005, Congress also granted law enforcement new tools to deal with terrorism. The situation after 9/11 was considered somewhat complicated to interpret and define, which was also implicated in the set of measures adopted in the aftermath of 9/11. While Congress's record has to a certain extent been considered a failure after 9/11 in terms of oversight, this view is not unproblematic. Congress monitored the government's actions at times and more prominently when the Democrats gained the majority in Congress in 2006. It established a commission to investigate 9/11 and the related intelligence failures, and held several hearings that had an impact on the public debate. Furthermore, it passed a wide range of legislation in addition to those already mentioned: Congress authorized the use of military force a few days after the attacks, and it used legislation to appropriate large financial sums for law enforcement, intelligence and the military.<sup>25</sup> While Congress plays an important role through its legislative capabilities, the process is often not only time-consuming but also volatile, making quick responses difficult. In particular, because of filibustering in the Senate, proposed measures take time and do not necessarily proceed.<sup>26</sup>

When examining the role of Congress in committing US armed forces into hostilities, we can distinguish two levels of argument: the question regarding declaring war (the legitimacy of Congressional involvement in decision-making) and the role of Congress concerning military operations (authorizing/limiting). To declare war power seems

23 See <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-18/congress-approves-imf-changes-giving-emerging-markets-more-sway>.

24 See more in detail in J. Tama, '*Bipartisanship in a Polarized Age: The U.S. Congress and Foreign Policy Sanctions*'. School of International Service, American University. Working Paper Series, January 21, 2015.

25 B. Wittes, '*Law and the Long War. The Future of Justice in the Age of Terrorism*', Penguin Press, New York, 2008, p. 135.

26 Ibid.

to implicate an offensive war<sup>27</sup>, but the declaration of war clause in the Constitution does not implicate it in any more detail. Generally accepted doctrine indicates that the US president can respond to sudden attacks, and this also seems plausible, as recognized in the War Powers Resolution of 1973<sup>28</sup>. It has been also stated that Congress has some domestic war powers. While the US Constitution does not include any specific emergency powers, it includes provisions that refer to these situations.<sup>29</sup> It also yields considerable power through its legislative functions<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, Congress has certain ways of limiting or terminating extant conflicts<sup>31</sup>. Congressional opposition can be particularly effective when conflicts mature and the funding aspect becomes more important<sup>32</sup>.

The question of committing US armed forces into hostilities is closely related to timing – whether or not there should be prior approval. Congressional influence on the decision-making process regarding committing armed forces can be examined from the perspectives of Congress’ supporting & dissenting views (before and after), and possible reasons for that (e.g. the view of the constituencies). Broader questions concern how Congress influences the decision-making process, when it is most influential and successful, and how is this

27 L. Fisher, ‘Statement appearing before the Senate Committee on Judiciary’, January 30, 2007. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/usconlaw/pdf/Feingold2007rev.pdf>.

28 E.g. K.K. Schonberg ‘Global Security and Legal Restraint: Reconsidering War Powers after September 11’, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2004, pp. 115–142.

29 Such as the power to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus (see more about these discussions in Prakash 2015).

30 On domestic war powers of US Congress, see S. Prakash, ‘The Sweeping Domestic War Powers of Congress’, *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 113, June 2015, pp. 1337–1396.

31 e.g. J. Elsea & J. Michael & T. Nicola, *Congressional Authority to Limit Military Operations*, CRS Report for Congress, February 19, 2013. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41989.pdf>. See also A. Belasco & L.L. Cunningham & H. Fischer & L.A. Niksch, *Congressional Restrictions on U.S. Military Operations in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Somalia, and Kosovo: Funding and Non-Funding Approaches*, CRS Report for Congress, January 16, 2007. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33803.pdf>.

32 Recchia, op. cit. p. 79. The question of declaring war raises also a question of terminating the war, which is not, however, examined in this paper in more detail. See more about the discussion e.g. M. Paulsen, ‘The War Power’, *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, Winter 2010, pp. 113–137.

influence gained in the first place.<sup>33</sup> Some congressional measures, such as funding, are used *ex post facto* rather than *ex ante*.

The timing of the debate is also relevant. The discussion seems to change when the troops have already been committed and the powers of Congress also seem to vary with regards to the timing of action (concerning “initiating” or “escalating” for instance). The “obvious” congressional actions can be examined from three perspectives: hearings, debate and votes. These can concern initiation or providing guidelines for presidential actions in the form of passed resolutions, appropriations, or hearings after the armed forces have been committed.<sup>34</sup>

#### POLITICAL CONTEXTS AND ACTORS IN WAR-MAKING

If this Congress is serious about winning this war, and wants to send a message to our troops and the world, authorize the use of military force against ISIL. Take a vote. Take a vote. But the American people should know that with or without congressional action, ISIL will learn the same lessons as terrorists before them.  
(Barack Obama, 2016)<sup>35</sup>

Foreign policy rhetoric has its own characteristic and it also plays a certain role in domestic politics: “Full understanding of the rhetoric of American foreign policy must take into account: (1) the ceremonial nature of that rhetoric; (2) its function in domestic politics; and (3) its relations to facts and events beyond the language employed, matters on which the lives of tens of millions, if not the whole humanity, now

33 See more about these themes in W. Howell & J. Pevehouse 2007. The members of Congress actions in the public sphere can be distinguished as follows to emphasize the wider perspective than the mere legislative context: to “make a speech, denounce the president, release a report, offer an amendment, usher a bill through a committee, issue subpoena or interrogate witness.” (D.R. Mayhew, ‘*America’s Congress. Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison Through New Gingrich*’, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2000, p. 19.)

34 W. Howell & J. Pevehouse, *While Danger Gather. Congressional checks on presidential war powers*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, p. xix.

35 B. Obama, *State of the Union Address*. 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/12/remarks-president-barack-obama-%E2%80%93-prepared-delivery-state-union-address>. See CRS report for Congress (M.C. Weed, January 15, 2016) about the current proposals circulating on a new Authorization for Use of Military Force Against the Islamic State.

depend.”<sup>36</sup> The link between foreign policy and domestic policy is firmly established: actors in domestic politics are also actors in foreign politics, and vice versa.

Howell & Pevehouse have claimed that “Congress continues to play an important role in shaping the domestic politics that precede military action”<sup>37</sup>. The problematic nature of congressional action relates to the unilateral actions of the president. The quick and necessary requirements of actions do not necessarily leave room to find broad political consensus or majorities, but also afterwards, when the troops have been already committed, it can be difficult to find a collective to dissolve (or authorize) an on-going operation. However, Congress can make its opposition clear through *appropriations & legislation* or through *dissent & public appeals* to rely on Howell & Pevehouse’s categorizations.<sup>38</sup> The example of congressional action considered in this paper is not a mere act of opposition to the president’s policy, it is also against the leadership in Congress that has failed to make it possible to consider new AUMF. It also is an example of defining action taken after the commitment of US armed forces.

So what kind of domestic politics factors have an effect? Three obvious ones are elections, constituencies and party politics. One central issue regarding military interventions and operations is public support. It has been argued that the executive branch’s concerns about congressional opposition have an impact on actual decision-making about US military interventions. According to a recent study, international organization operations can be helpful with regards to avoiding congressional opposition (and continuing support in the long run), not only because of the burden-sharing and resource costs but also because domestic politics can provide the reason to seek the support at the first place. Members of Congress have different reasons for opposing military operations that could be “parochial or “ideological”, or they might consider some economic interests that do not benefit from long-term military operations. However, publicly-quoted reasons often refer to the resource and material costs to avoid the question of partisan issues.<sup>39</sup>

Foreign policy or national security issues are therefore not completely separate from power relations or domestic and party

36 P. Wander, ‘The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy’, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 70, no. 4, 1984, p. 340.

37 Howell & Pevehouse, op. cit., 6.

38 Howell & Pevehouse, op. cit.

39 Recchia op. cit, 6.

politics<sup>40</sup>. Congressional support for a president's action in regard to initiating and conducting war is generally considered helpful because it ensures that there is a "broad political consensus" behind it, but the "first" approval does not necessarily secure long-term support for continued conflicts<sup>41</sup>. While it seems that conflicts unite, an element of partisanship also exists in the national security realm, and the national security issue has always been related to domestic struggles<sup>42</sup>. The Korean War provides a useful historical reference: President Harry S. Truman did not seek congressional authorization during the war, even though some members of the Republican Party suggested that he "follow the constitutional procedures" (whereas others opposed). The possibility to have an open debate at the time was considered risky because it would have given the McCarthy wing of the party a chance "to air their charges of incompetence and treason", and therefore giving a signal of disunity rather than unity. Indeed, congressional debates can be perceived to highlight national disunity rather than national unity. Debate can be beneficial not only in bringing dissenting views together, but also in defining what is meant by "war".<sup>43</sup>

The problematic relationship between Congress and the president has been one feature of President Obama's terms. While partisan polarization is not a completely new phenomenon, it has become a dominant feature of US politics in recent years. While there is a difference in "reasoning" and "priorities" among democrats and republicans with regards to foreign policy issues, there is also a bipartisanship element in foreign policy and foreign affairs that is related to international treaties and organizations, for example<sup>44</sup>.

40 Debate on how to conduct war is a central. However, a public debate can be seen also to benefit enemy as it may be considered unpatriotic or to indicate the differences in opinion (on free speech in wartime, see Stone 2005).

41 See D. Kriner, 'The contemporary Presidency. Obama's Authorization Paradox: Syria and Congress' Continued Relevance in Military Affairs', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2014, p. 309–327.

42 On the interaction between foreign relations and domestic politics from the historical perspective, see e.g. J. Zelizer, '*Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security – From World War II to the War on Terrorism*', Basic Books, New York, 2010. See also Howell & Pevehouse op. cit. 2007.

43 G. Epps, 'Congress Needs to Debate the War on ISIS', *The Atlantic*, November 19, 2015, pp. 4–6.

44 See J. Busby et al., 'Congress Is Already Post-Partisan', *Foreign Affairs*, January 28, 2013. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138791/joshua-w-busby-jonathan-monten-jordan-tama-and-william-inboden/congress-is-already-post-partisan>.

In June 2015, the House of Representatives considered the resolution (H.Con.Res. 55) “Removal of United States Armed forces from Iraq and Syria”, pursuant to the War Powers Resolution (section 5 c).<sup>45</sup> The resolution would have given a timeline for the withdrawal in order to have Congress vote on the issue (new AUMF). The resolution, sponsored by Representative James P. McGovern (D-MA), gained some bipartisan support (and opposition), but it failed by 139 votes to 288.<sup>46</sup> Walter Jones (R-NC) described the effort to define the agenda of Congress with the following words: “The frustration that we have felt goes back to August of 2014 when Jim McGovern and Barbara Lee and Walter Jones wrote asking the Speaker of the House to allow us to have debate. That is why Mr. McGovern, Barbara Lee (D-CA) and I have put this resolution in today, to force a debate. We wouldn’t be talking about the Middle East if it weren’t for this resolution.”<sup>47</sup> The resolution, although considered only by the House, provides an insightful example of parliamentary maneuver related to the consideration of authorizing the use of powers but also an aspect of party politics to some extent.

The parliamentary maneuver to “force the debate on AUMF” raised procedural questions among members in the House: “[O]nly in Congress do you have a resolution presented to de-authorize the use of force because you want to authorize the use of force”. The measure brought up the question of who sets the agenda, and the sponsor of the resolution, Representative McGovern, described the aim of the resolution to set a deadline for the House leadership and take responsibility “for this war”. He also referred to the other powers of the US Congress with regards to enabling military operations: “It

45 The War Powers Resolution that Congress passed in 1973 relied concurrent resolutions as a method to halt the executive action: “5(c) Notwithstanding subsection (b), at any time that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities outside the territory of the United States, its possessions and territories without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs by concurrent resolution.”. (See P.L.93-148). Afterwards (and at the time the measure was passed), the concurrent resolutions has been considered problematic, not only because of the *INS. v. Chadha*, a Supreme Court decision from 1983. (See more e.g. Grimmet 2004) In 2010, the measure H.Con.Res. 248 “Directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove the United States Armed Forces from Afghanistan” (that failed) was introduced in the House by Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-OH). (See details at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/248>).

46 See <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2015/roll370.xml>.

47 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4459.

appears to have no problem spending billions of dollars for the arms, equipment, and air power to carry out these wars, but it just can't bring itself to step up to the plate and take responsibility for these wars". While the aim was to enforce congressional action on the issue to have a vote on the new AUMF, Ms. Lee also emphasized in her argument that introducing the resolution was "not to make a political point".<sup>48</sup>

During the House debate on the concurrent resolution on the removal of United States Armed Force from Iraq and Syria, the critic was directed to the congressional inaction: "I heard some of my colleagues complain that they don't like the President's policy in Iraq and Syria; yet rather than trying to bring an AUMF to the floor to define that policy better, they are simply content to sit back and criticize from the sidelines".<sup>49</sup> Representative Thomas Massie (R-KY) also appeared to criticize the focus of the debate by referring to the timing: "I don't think anybody in this body seeks to weaken our powers or give them to the president. What we are debating here is when to have the Authorization for Use of Military Force or a declaration of war". Representative's argument continued emphasizing the role of Congress in creating the parameters for action: "To the people who are against this resolution, I say you could be right. You might be right. If this Resolution fails, I hope you are right, that his resolution wasn't necessary, and we do assert our constitutional responsibility, and have that debate and therefore *instruct the President on the reasons for his engagement and what his directives are*" (emphasis added).<sup>50</sup> The arguments highlight the plurality of views and also refer to the legitimacy part of the actions.

The reason why Congress has not been willing to vote on the new AUMF is that the sides are too far apart.<sup>51</sup> Democrats have described the submitted AUMF as "too harsh", while for the Republicans it was "too light". In the House, Representative Brendan F. Boyle (PA) chose different words to describe the differences: "[T]hat AUMF (submitted by President Obama), somewhat predictably, got attacked by some on the right, as insufficient in some areas; and frankly, got attacked by

48 Congressional Record, June 17, 2015, H4461, H4458, H4475.

49 Congressional Record (Mr. McGovern) June 17, 2015, H4469.

50 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4461.

51 M. Fuller, 'Why Won't Congress Declare War on Isis', *Huffpost Politics*, December 15, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/congress-isis-war\\_us\\_566f47cae4b0fccee16f938b](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/congress-isis-war_us_566f47cae4b0fccee16f938b).

some on the left as insufficient in other areas. Both sides had legitimate discussions and concerns.”<sup>52</sup>

According to the view that Representative Jolly expressed during his floor remarks on “Congressional Authority versus Presidential Authority”, the questions that need to be resolved on the new AUMF are the following: 1) “Are we a nation at war? And if so, are we willing to incur the sacrifice necessary to win the war? [...] 2) “Are we really going to pass a resolution that restricts the tools of our own warfare when it comes to providing for the national security of the United States?” [...] 3) “We need to have a debate whether or not we believe that an air campaign is sufficient” and “Are we going to put boots on the ground?” and finally 4) “[I]f we are going to engage, as a nation, with our partners to defeat a threat to the United States, we need to have honest debate about how we do that and not by starting the debate by restricting how we intend to do that.”<sup>53</sup> A similar view was shared by Representative Brad Sherman (D-CA) during the house debate on H.Con.Res. 55, although he added the question of how to deal with the current Syrian government<sup>54</sup>.

The need to have new authorization has been opposed (and also supported) because of the existing AUMFs: “The President has short-circuited this debate by claiming complete authority under prior statutes to use our armed forces against ISIS”. Representative Edward Royce (R-CA) went further, explicating the problematic of granting new authorization for the president as follows: “No AUMF we could draft could give the president more operational authority than he already claims. Indeed, the draft text he sent asks us to constrain the authority that he already has and complicating, by the way, the effort to reach consensus.”<sup>55</sup>

There have been proposals to terminate the existing AUMF from 2001: as Representative Lee noted, she has “introduced legislation every Congress to repeal this blank check for endless war”. The need for the new AUMF has been also raised questions because of the “lack” of threat to US national security: “I have no clue as to why people believe these people, who have been fighting each other for thousands of years, are a threat to my Nation’s national security.”<sup>56</sup>

52 See Congressional Record June 17, H4469, H4460.

53 Congressional Record February 15, 2015, H793.

54 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4464, H4464.

55 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4464, H4458.

56 Charles Rangel (D-NY), Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4465, H4460.

In his argument, Representative Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA) maps out the current inaction on behalf of Congress but sees it as a continuing trend rather than an exception:

Proponents of the measure want Congress to debate and vote on the use of military force in Iraq and Syria [...] Proponents of this measure believe that Congress has failed to perform its constitutional duty by not taking up the Authorization for use of military force against the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant [...] In fact, I believe the failure to debate an AUMF against ISIL is a continuation of a sad but 60-year pattern of Congress' abrogating one of its most fundamental constitutional roles and responsibilities. For an institution that constantly laments its subjugation at the hands of the executive branch, the retreat from its constitutional responsibility on this matter, frankly, is jaw-dropping.<sup>57</sup>

The inaction of the US Congress was also contrasted with other parliaments in the argument by Representative Brendan F. Boyle (D-PA). He referred to the British parliamentary debate on the war resolution and claimed to be “deeply disappointed” [...] “that the United States Congress did not do exactly the same thing; to come here and outline and debate the parameters by which we would authorize the president to wage the war against this evil and barbaric threat.” The argument is particularly interesting because it gives the impression that Congress could decide on the guidelines through debate and finally issue an authorization. Similarly, David Cicilline (D-RI) argued that the question is: “What is the best strategy to defeat them and what authorization is required to accomplish this objective? This is exactly the purpose of a full, thoughtful debate on the use of military force.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite differences in opinion (concerning the substance or the way to schedule the vote), the proponents encouraged Congress to take affirmative action: “Regardless of whether you support the war or oppose the war, I believe we should escalate our involvement or place restrictions on it, the bottom line is that Congress needs to debate an AUMF and vote on it.” Representative Sherman also noted

57 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4459.

58 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4462.

that Congress should take an active stand on issues rather than only opposing the administrations' actions: "[W]e need a new resolution that does Congress's best job to deal with the current circumstances. What we don't need is the idea that blaming Obama for everything constitutes a foreign policy strategy."<sup>59</sup>

There was a difference in opinion as to whether H.Con.Res. 55 would be the right move, but the resolution was praised by referring to the bipartisan support behind it or by pointing out that the debate (and thus Congress's role in the decision-making process) should be on the agenda of both parties: "Mr. Speaker, for all these different reasons, we need to stop and pause, not necessarily to bring troops home but, as has been suggested by others, to force a debate on Congress's role. This is something Republicans and Democrats ought to equally care about: Do we or don't we have proper lanes in the channel? Is the executive exceeding its authority or not?"<sup>60</sup>

Representative Lee also noted that, at the committee-level, representatives of both parties supported a measure to reassert the role of Congress with regards to authorizing the use of military force: "During the full committee markup last week of the Defense appropriations bill, I offered a sense of Congress amendment that simply reaffirmed that Congress has a constitutional duty to debate and determine whether or not to authorize the use of military force against ISIS. This amendment was adopted with the support of six Republicans in the committee."<sup>61</sup> The argument implicates the idea of collective judgment, which was established in the language of the War Powers Resolution, when committing US armed forces into hostilities.

The concurrent resolution that was debated in the House over withdrawing US troops from Iraq and Syria within certain timelines raised the themes of Congressional participation in making war. Views varied among the members of the House with regards to the proposed resolution: on one hand it was seen as a procedural way to enhance the possibilities of having a vote on the new AUMF in Congress, while on the other hand it was felt that it was a "wrong" way to approach the issue and a new AUMF should be under consideration instead. While the substance of the new AUMF was not really discussed as such (because of the nature of the measure), the need for debate and a vote on the issue in the first place was topical and the purpose of

59 Congressional Record (Mr. McGovern) June 17, 2015, H4468, H4464.

60 Mark Sanford (R-SC), Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4467.

61 Congressional Record June 17, 2015, H4465.

the resolution. It was opposed because it was considered a unilateral withdrawal of US forces.

While there appeared to be some disagreement about the procedure of addressing the issue, the spirit of bipartisanship was invoked in order to emphasize the relevancy and perhaps also legitimacy of the issue. Criticism referred to congressional inaction in particular: the leadership of the House for not putting the measure up for consideration but also because of a willingness to sit on the sidelines. Operations that use military force were also labeled and discussed as “war” in the Congress debates, seemingly as a way of legitimatizing congressional consideration through its power to declare war, but also to raise the question of limits on the power of the president to unilaterally commit US armed forces. If there is an enemy and a conflict, what are the parameters for action?

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS: CURRENT DYNAMICS AND FUTURE TRAJECTORIES

This chapter aimed to argue that the changing nature of war requires the reappraisal of war powers. The principle of the separation of powers establishes branches of government which are run by a certain number of elected representatives, but it is important that the representative institutions, such as Congress, include a popular voice as well. The role of Congress can be implemented in rather different forms. In addition to the passage of the War Powers Resolution, Congress’s role has evolved in other ways too. The way that it has declared wars and enacted authorizations<sup>62</sup> for the use of military force indicates that it has already adjusted to the changing environment of war and war powers. As discussed in the paper, war powers are not detached from the political realm but rather affected by it. When considering the congressional powers the nature of “conflict”, the power relations, balancing interests etc. are relevant factors to take into account. Measures adopted or considered by Congress, such as those dealt with in this chapter, are not necessarily highly consequential (when at least not passed), but they provide an opportunity to air different opinions and provide a platform for a discussion on the concept of war and war powers – their definitions, scope, limitations, accountability and legitimacy.

62 Although these are not novel as such, compare e.g. to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964).

It is likely that in the election year of 2016 the focus of the US Congress will be on domestic politics rather than defining or developing war powers further. Any future developments regarding war powers, especially depending on their substance, are likely to occur in the next Congress, as an element of party interest seems to extend to debates on authorizations for the use of military force.<sup>63</sup> Further, voters are usually considered to vote on the basis of issues relevant for domestic politics such as on economical or societal issues rather than foreign policy<sup>64</sup>. However, the foreign policy and national security themes have also been appearing in the pre-election processes in particular from GOP's part<sup>65</sup>. And both Senate and House majority leaders have referred in early 2016, however, to the possibility to consider a new AUMF.<sup>66</sup>

Gaining a filibuster proof-majority in the Senate would be helpful for the majority party to pass measures. The question in the United States is, of course, how coherently parties and members act. Foreign policy and foreign affairs are also rather issue-based; and therefore the cross-cutting themes for president and Congress to find a common ground do not necessarily follow the party-lines.

63 The time aspect of these resolutions are, however, rather wide. Compare to the still existing AUMF's passed in 2001 and 2002. President Obama's proposal "To authorize the limited use of the United States Armed Forces against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" had a time-scope of three years. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/aumf\\_02112015.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/aumf_02112015.pdf).

64 E. N. Saunders, Will foreign policy be a major issue in the 2016 election? Here's what we know, Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2016.

65 See J. Carney, GOP seeks security edge in '16 races, *The Hill*, January 26, 2016.

66 The New York Times, Jan. 21, 2016. McConnell Clear Path for Debate on Giving Obama Broad Powers To Combat ISIS. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/world/middleeast/mcconnell-clears-path-for-debate-on-giving-obama-broad-powers-to-combat-isis.html>. The New York Times, Jan. 7, 2016. Paul Ryan Orders Closer Look at authorizing War Against ISIS. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/08/us/politics/paul-ryan-orders-closer-look-at-authorizing-war-against-isis.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/08/us/politics/paul-ryan-orders-closer-look-at-authorizing-war-against-isis.html?_r=0).

4



## 4. America's hard power: An enduring foundation or “wasting asset” for US foreign policy?

Leo Michel

Americans have long felt conflicted about the military's role in defending and promoting their nation's foreign policy interests. Since World War II, few US military operations have produced clear-cut strategic success or remained popular long after the initial interventions. In retrospect, however, neither the large-scale but inconclusive war in Korea nor the more protracted, unpopular, and ultimately unsuccessful war in Vietnam produced an extended period of US global retrenchment. In fact, the United States strengthened its alliances and military capabilities in Europe and parts of Asia in the wake of those conflicts. Conversely, the 1991 Gulf War experience – a “stunningly quick, cheap, and sweeping victory,” according to one American analyst – did not stop Washington hesitating to intervene militarily in Bosnia and Kosovo against foes that were less challenging than Saddam Hussein's army.<sup>1</sup> If the years immediately following the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf wars (the latter coinciding roughly with the end of the Cold War) have one thing in common, it is this: in each case, US defence spending dropped significantly.<sup>2</sup>

As the writer Mark Twain is said to have observed: “History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” Indeed, America's shifting attitudes toward investing in and employing hard power during the last decades of the 20th century appear to “rhyme” with its experience in the early 21st century.

1 Richard K. Betts, “Pick Your Battles: Ending America's Era of Permanent War,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014, p. 15.

2 See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/01/07/everything-chuck-hagel-needs-to-know-about-the-defense-budget-in-charts/>

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 triggered an overwhelming national consensus in favour of military intervention in Afghanistan. In early 2003, congressional and public support for the invasion of Iraq was still nearly as high, yet in 2008 and 2012 Americans elected a president, Barack Obama, whose clear intent was to sharply reduce the breadth and scale of US military involvement overseas, especially in those two countries. (Together, the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts have resulted in some 6,800 American military deaths and 52,000 wounded, and cost an estimated \$1.6 trillion in direct military appropriations.<sup>3</sup>) In addition, during his first administration, President Obama announced plans to “reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons” in the US national security strategy and slow the pace of defence spending he had inherited from the George W. Bush administration.<sup>4</sup>

However, as new security challenges emerged – including violent turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East following the “Arab spring,” Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military involvement in Eastern Ukraine, a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and China’s push to extend its reach in the Asia-Pacific region – the President reacted by refocusing US alliances, military structures and operational commitments. While self-consciously avoiding the rhetorical excesses of the previous administration, the Obama administration has nevertheless become more outspoken in acknowledging the role of hard power. Thus, while the White House’s most recent *National Security Strategy* states that “our first line of action is principled and clear-eyed diplomacy,” it also reaffirms that a strong military “is the bedrock of our national security” and “must remain dominant in every domain.”<sup>5</sup> Reflecting its new assessment of strategic threats, the administration’s proposed fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget included a real increase in defence spending, reversing the downward trend it has been subject to since FY 2010.<sup>6</sup> And its proposed defence budget for FY 2017 contains an additional increase.

3 Joseph Collins and Richard Hooker, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, NDU Press, Washington, 2015, p. 430. See: [http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/lessons-encountered/lessons-encountered\\_AnnexA.pdf](http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/lessons-encountered/lessons-encountered_AnnexA.pdf)

4 See: [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010\\_Nuclear\\_Posture\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf).

5 See: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

6 The US Government’s fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following year.

As political rhetoric intensifies ahead of the November 2016 elections, Americans are again debating the kind of military they want, how they are willing to use it, and how much they want to pay for it. Candidates for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination broadly support the administration's defence strategy and budget, but Republican Party hopefuls charge that the administration has underestimated or intentionally neglected defence needs. They also allege that the President has been dangerously timid when it comes to using hard power, especially in Iraq and Syria.

Whatever the outcome of the elections, the hard power component of US foreign policy will have profound implications for European and global security.<sup>7</sup> Hence, this chapter addresses four basic questions:

- What are the key components of US military power today?
- What challenges will the United States face in sustaining its military advantages?
- Will military tools retain their current relevance in the formulation and execution of US foreign policy or will they become a "wasting asset?"
- What are the implications for Europe?

#### US MILITARY CAPABILITIES TODAY: A SNAPSHOT

The US military has undergone reductions in both size and budget since 2011. Nevertheless, its current capabilities, readiness, and posture should not be underestimated, and there is little evidence to suggest that US forces are on the cusp of a major failure to meet the key "pillars" of US defence strategy, as described in the Pentagon's *Quadrennial Defence Review* (QDR) of 2014:

- "Protect the homeland, to deter and defeat attacks on the United States and to support civil authorities in mitigating the effects of potential attacks and natural disasters.

7 For this chapter, the terms "military power" and "hard power" are interchangeable, and they are understood to include weapons systems (e.g., missiles, aircraft, tanks), force structures (land, air, and naval formations), and "enablers" (e.g., intelligence and logistics.)

- Build security globally, in order to preserve regional stability, deter adversaries, support allies and partners, and cooperate with others to address common security challenges.
- Project power and win decisively, to defeat aggression, disrupt and destroy terrorist networks, and provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.”<sup>8</sup>

The **active duty Army** totals about 490,000 soldiers, down from the Iraq–Afghanistan wartime high of 570,000 in 2012. Current plans call for reaching an end-strength of 450,000 soldiers in FY 2018. In parallel with these reductions, the active Army will eliminate several Brigade Combat Teams, its basic deployable unit of manoeuvre.

Army leaders warn against additional cuts, since their existing force is actively engaged in many parts of the globe. More than 180,000 soldiers are either currently deployed in operations or forward stationed in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. In addition, thousands of US-based soldiers participate regularly in training exercises with foreign partners and in humanitarian assistance missions. The Army has also begun to receive upgraded equipment, ranging from combat and support vehicles to attack and transport helicopters.

The **active duty Air Force** has around 308,000 airmen, down from 330,000 in 2011. This is the lowest number of personnel since the Air Force became a separate military service in 1947. It is also the “oldest” Air Force in history: the average age of its aircraft inventory is 27, and some fleets (such as the B-52H strategic bombers and KC-135 air-to-air refuelling aircraft) are over 50 years old. As the Secretary of the Air Force has acknowledged: “Half of our combat Air Force is not sufficiently ready for a high-end fight – a fight against an enemy with complex integrated air defences, surface-to-surface air missiles, and the capability to shoot us down.”<sup>9</sup>

Still, the Air Force can respond rapidly and pack a powerful punch. In March 2014 it took only 18 hours “from go to show” after Washington decided to send additional F-15 combat aircraft to the Baltic Air Policing mission in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Since September 2014, the Air Force has flown the lion’s share of nearly

8 See: [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/2014\\_Quadrennial\\_Defense\\_Review.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf).

9 See: <http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/opinion/2015/07/15/basic-fairness-dont-change-bah-eligibility/30193847/>

11,000 coalition strikes against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, it is buying a new fifth generation multi-role fighter, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, as well as new tanker, transport, and patrol aircraft.

Unlike the Army and Air Force, the **Navy's active duty force**, which now stands at 328,000 personnel, has remained relatively constant in recent years, and the number of ships in the active fleet – 273 – is just ten less than a decade ago. On average, about one third of the fleet is deployed on current operations, including 3 of the Navy's ten aircraft carriers, one of its 10 amphibious assault ships, and a number of its 56 attack submarines. Like the Air Force, the Navy's modernization and re-capitalization programmes are impressive: some 16 attack submarines are under construction or under contract; two more aircraft carriers are under construction (one will become operational in 2016); and the Navy version of the F-35 is expected to be operational by 2018.

The **Marine Corps** is equipped and positioned to serve as the US expeditionary force-in-readiness, able to “immediately respond to crises... (and) assure access and enable heavier forces to deploy from the United States in response to a major contingency.”<sup>11</sup> Currently standing at 184,000 (down from 202,000 in FY 2012), the Marine Corps' end strength will drop to 182,000 in FY 2017. Although their major role in Afghanistan operations ended in 2014, the Marines maintain a very high operational tempo.

Finally, the United States maintains a strong **nuclear deterrent**. The strategic “triad” is comprised of: 449 Minuteman III land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, each carrying one warhead; 14 Trident submarines, each able to carry up to 24 ballistic missiles with multiple warheads; and a total of 88 heavy bombers, including the B-52H (able to carry nuclear-armed advanced cruise missiles) and B-2A (able to carry B61 nuclear bombs.)<sup>12</sup> The United States also maintains B61 nuclear bombs and dual-capable combat aircraft based in Europe under arrangements with NATO.

10 See: [http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814\\_Inherent-Resolve](http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve)

11 See: [http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/USMC%20FY16%20Written%20Posture%20Statement\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/USMC%20FY16%20Written%20Posture%20Statement_FINAL.pdf).

12 See: <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/240062.htm>.

Pentagon planners face a perennial dilemma: they want to ensure forces can meet the demands of today's operations, but they must also anticipate longer-term threats. Planning and budgeting for new capabilities that might be needed – some of which could require a decade or more to bring to fruition – involves much more than weapons and associated support systems; these activities also require the recruitment, training, retention, readiness, and global posture of over 1.2 million active duty military personnel.

Achieving a judicious balance between short-term and longer-term requirements is a difficult job, and the costs of a mismatch can be high. For example, the American forces that crushed Iraq's army in 1991 and 2003 proved ill-suited to contain the post-2003 insurgency. In 2007, the high number of American casualties attributed to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) convinced the Pentagon to launch a massive program to produce 10,000 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) for the Iraqi theatre, but large-scale deliveries of MRAPs were not executed until 2008, nearly five years after a top US general responsible for the Iraqi operation identified IEDs as his “number one threat.”<sup>13</sup>

#### *Changing strategic priorities*

With the resources available for national defence necessarily constrained, planners must work within the framework of *priorities* and *margins of acceptable risk* established by the US political leadership. Those priorities and margins of acceptable risk are not immutable within the span of a single administration, much less when the administration changes, especially when the presidency shifts from one political party to the other. Moreover, they are subject to outside forces and shocks that can change current estimates. (As military leaders often remind their political masters: “The enemy has a vote.”) Such factors help to explain why US hard power capabilities might often appear mismatched with the “crisis of the day.”

Take, for example, the famous US “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific region that was first announced by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

13 “MRAPs, Irregular Warfare, and Pentagon Reform,” by Christopher Lamb, Matthew Schmidt, and Berit Fitzsimmons, INSS, Occasional Paper 6, Washington, June 2009, p.1. See: <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/sams/media/MRAPs.pdf> MRAPs also were sent to Afghanistan.

in late 2011 and rebranded as the “rebalance” a few months later.<sup>14</sup> The “rebalance,” as Clinton pointed out, was a “task for American statecraft over the next decade,” and one that relied on “substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise.” In other words, “rebalance” was not limited to military realignment. Moreover, the opportunity to “rebalance” was based on two important assumptions: that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were winding down, and that European security faced no serious challenge.

One can debate the wisdom of employing politically fraught terminology such as “pivot” and “rebalance,” which suggested diminished US interest in, and commitment to, Europe and the Middle East, but it is hard to challenge the premise that growing Chinese power and regional assertiveness could pose serious threats to the security of US allies and partners. In particular, China’s emerging anti-access and area-denial (A2AD) strategies put pressure on the Pentagon to improve capabilities to project power over extended distances, penetrate increasingly sophisticated air defences, and better defend US forward operating bases. In addition to maintaining and/or modernizing existing US assets (such as aircraft carriers, multi-role combat aircraft, attack submarines, and air-missile defence systems), countering Chinese A2AD might require new stand-off and penetrating systems, such as long-range land-based cruise missiles and directed-energy and cyber weapons.

China is not the only long-term concern in the Asia-Pacific region: North Korea continues to invest in its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile capabilities, and in the event of a military confrontation on the Korean peninsula the United States would need to quickly deploy sizeable land, air, and naval forces to help defend its South Korean ally and/or secure North Korea’s nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and facilities.

Faced with this situation, decisions regarding strategic priorities and margins of acceptable risk are as difficult as they are unavoidable. On one hand, the requirement for further investment in counter-A2AD systems in the Asia-Pacific region is widely accepted in the US strategic community, especially as they are highly relevant to counter Russia’s and, to a lesser degree, Iran’s growing A2AD capabilities. On the other hand, the force projection capabilities needed for plausible Korean

14 See: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

contingencies are substantially different from those appropriate for contingencies involving China, Russia, or even Iran.

The “rebalance” case also illustrates the challenge of sustaining strategic priorities over time. Since 2011, the United States has strengthened its hard power capacity in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure it can successfully deter conflict and, if need be, respond decisively to aggression. This has involved forward deploying some of the most advanced US air and maritime capabilities and distributing these more widely across the region. Yet the “rebalance” did not produce a wholesale shift in US hard power assets or attention, as some in Europe and elsewhere feared. Less than three years after Clinton’s article, the United States was engaged in an array of (mostly) land-centric reassurance and conventional deterrence operations in Europe and major air operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, in October 2015 President Obama reacted to a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan by halting the planned withdrawal of US forces.

Further complicating the tasks of US defence planners, non-state actors use increasingly sophisticated munitions and communications systems to improve their “asymmetric” warfare capabilities, posing more diverse and lethal threats to military forces and civilian populations. By embedding themselves in urban areas, non-state groups are becoming harder to target due to US doctrine and legal restrictions aimed at minimizing civilian casualties.

In addition, conventional force requirements must be balanced with those that are relevant for nuclear forces. Russia, China, Pakistan, and North Korea are modernizing and/or expanding (albeit in different areas and at different speeds) their nuclear weapons arsenals and delivery systems, and despite the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of July 2015, doubts remain over the credibility of Iran’s pledge that “under no circumstances will (it) ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, the United States will maintain, as a matter of policy, its commitment to sustaining a safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear deterrent.

Put simply, US hard power cannot risk becoming fixated on a single region or type of adversary, since our ability to predict where, when, and how new threats will appear is demonstrably somewhat limited.

15 See: <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/full-text-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal/1651/>

### *Keeping the US technological “edge”*

During the Cold War, the United States sought to harness its technological “edge” to counter, or “offset,” the Soviet Union’s very substantial quantitative advantages in conventional forces without risking US economic health. In the early 1950s, the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration launched a “New Look” strategy (later known as the “first offset strategy”), under which the United States developed numerous types of long-range and tactical nuclear systems and deployed thousands of the latter in Europe to strengthen deterrence against Soviet conventional aggression.

Similarly, in the mid-1970s, when the Soviets finally achieved a rough nuclear parity with the United States, the Jimmy Carter administration adopted a “second offset strategy,” investing heavily in digital microelectronics and information technologies. These advanced technologies allowed the United States to develop precision-guided conventional weapons, satellites, “stealth” aircraft, and associated sensors and targeting networks – all of which were primarily aimed at countering the quantitatively superior Soviet conventional forces while avoiding a rapid escalation to nuclear conflict. The end of the Cold War made those systems less relevant in Europe, but the “second offset strategy” helped to produce decisive US operational advantages in the 1991 Gulf War and in subsequent conflicts.

Today, however, the US defence establishment is concerned that its conventional dominance might be eroding. The A2AD capabilities pursued by Russia, China, and potentially other state and non-state actors seem designed to weaken traditional US advantages – especially its ability to project power in any region across the globe with surging air, naval, and land forces and their associated support structures.<sup>16</sup>

These developments led US defence officials to launch a “third offset strategy” in 2014, which is designed to restore American global power projection capabilities. Like its predecessors, the strategy contains a strong technological component, and the Pentagon is making a concerted effort to engage California’s Silicon Valley in exploring how commercially-driven technologies – such as robotics, autonomous operating guidance and control systems, visualization, biotechnology, miniaturization, advanced computing, and three-dimensional printing – can be applied to improve military systems. If successful, this

16 See also “Toward a New Offset Strategy: Exploiting U.S. Long-term Advantages to Restore U.S. Global Power Projection Capability,” by Robert Martinage, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, (Washington, DC), 2014.

could result in more capable and stealthy unmanned aerial vehicles (commonly referred to as “drones”); more versatile submarines, able to counter an adversary’s A2AD sensors and platforms; faster and better-integrated battle-management systems; and more secure cyber networks, able to connect this “system of systems” with military commanders and political decision-makers.

The “third offset strategy” also involves new operational concepts, which are mainly focused on deterring or, if necessary, confronting conventional aggression by China and Russia. Such concepts might include, for example, the US placing less emphasis on the ability to restore the *status quo ante* following an act of aggression, and more emphasis on “deterrence by denial” and “asymmetric punishment attacks.” The latter concepts imply an ability and willingness to use force more rapidly against the aggressor’s high value targets, with less risk to US personnel.<sup>17</sup> To minimize the inherent danger that such a shift could lead to an unintended escalation of the conflict, the United States would require new approaches to strengthen command and control systems and procedures, safeguard communications among allies and partners, and effectively signal US and allied determination to the adversary.

#### *Budgetary considerations*

US defence spending nearly doubled during the nine years following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, but it has declined every year since – from a high of 4.7 percent of GDP in 2010 to an estimated 3.5 percent (or \$560 billion) in 2015. The steepest drop occurred in 2013 (approximately 8 percent compared with the previous year) as a result of a 2011 law that aimed to cut total federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion over a ten-year period. In early 2015, President Obama proposed to reverse the downward trend in defence spending and Congress later approved \$580 billion for the Pentagon during FY 2016.<sup>18</sup>

That said, the overall level of US defence spending, which represents more than one-third of worldwide military spending, has come under increasing scrutiny by a range of prominent non-government experts. Advocates of a larger defence budget argue that existing spending levels have already created significant investment shortfalls in readiness and both current and future capabilities, prompting current and potential

17 Ibid.

18 [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf).

allies and adversaries to question US commitment and resolve. Based on their analysis of emerging challenges, such as Chinese and Russian A2AD capabilities and the growing reach of non-state actors, many of these experts believe that a minimum appropriate level of US defence spending would be close to the four percent of GDP mark. However, given the current political polarization in the United States, the prospects for returning to the four percent mark seem unrealistic in the absence of a strategic shock.

The allocation of Pentagon spending has also come under fire. Personnel costs for the all-volunteer force represent nearly half of defence spending; health care alone is estimated at \$60 billion in 2015. If those costs continue to grow – and Congress has refused meaningful reforms in these areas – they could crowd out investments in future military readiness.

In fact, key US capabilities will need replacement or modernization during the next decade. In FY 2016, \$178 billion (one-third of total defence spending) will be allocated to acquisition, research and development, including procurement programs for 57 F-35s (\$11 billion), two attack submarines (\$5.7 billion), two multi-role destroyers (\$3.5 billion), 16 maritime patrol aircraft (\$3.4 billion), 12 new air-to-air refuelling aircraft (\$3 billion), and a twelfth aircraft carrier (\$2.8 billion).<sup>19</sup>

Sustaining the nuclear deterrent force will remain a very high priority. The Pentagon today spends around three percent of its budget (approximately \$15 billion) on nuclear forces, but this will rise to between five and six percent during the next decade as modernization programs come on line for the ballistic missile submarine force, the life-extension program for the Trident II missile, new long-range strike bombers, and new stand-off, air-launched cruise missiles.<sup>20</sup> According to the Congressional Budget Office, US spending on nuclear forces would cost an estimated \$299–\$348 billion over the 2015–2024 period.<sup>21</sup>

Is this the right allocation of resources? Some experts question why the Army's total funding will actually go down in FY 2016, while the sum apportioned to the Air Force and Navy will substantially increase;

19 See: [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY2016\\_Weapons.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY2016_Weapons.pdf).

20 Hearing on National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2016, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, House of Representatives, April 15, 2015, p. 6.

21 See: <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/49870-NuclearForces.pdf>.

for those experts, the large disparity between the Army's procurement and research, development, testing, and evaluation funding and that of the Air Force and Navy (the latter Services will receive 2.5 times more) is particularly upsetting, given the Army's prominent wartime role (and casualties) over the past decade. Others question whether certain priorities have been neglected. For example, the Air Force acquisition chief has voiced concern that, despite Congressional moves in 2015 to reduce US reliance on Russian-made engines to launch American satellites, the Pentagon will be unable to do so for at least four years.<sup>22</sup> Still others worry that the entire Pentagon acquisition process remains excessively biased toward building "platforms" – such as ships, aircraft, and missiles – and is slow to redirect investment toward the advanced technologies and operational research encouraged by the "third offset strategy."

Meanwhile, the management of the Pentagon's colossal expenditures on complex projects needs reform. This would be a difficult task in the best of circumstances, but top Pentagon officials lack the necessary authorities – many of which require approval by Congress – to revamp their inefficient acquisition processes. Moreover, fearing job losses in their local constituencies, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have rejected the Pentagon's pleas to authorize a new round of military base closures and realignments, which would free up substantial defence resources for higher priority investment accounts. Unhelpfully, many of those same congressional representatives continue to look for savings by closing or downsizing US military installations overseas, especially in Europe.

#### QUESTIONING THE RELEVANCE OF US MILITARY POWER

In broad terms, American strategy has not dramatically changed during the past few decades: the United States has used its military to defend and advance its global interests by deterring adversaries and reassuring its allies and partners. There is little reason to doubt that the United States will continue to see its military as *one* essential tool of its foreign policy, but a more difficult question is whether the United States will be willing and able to use its military power in the coming years as

22 "In Goodbye, Air Force Acquisition Chief Voices Concern on Space Access," Defense News, November 24, 2015.

it has in the recent past. To put it bluntly, is American hard power a “wasting asset” for its foreign policy?

Assessments of future American attitudes and actions cannot rely upon linear projections of current attitudes. For example, a public opinion survey in mid-2015 indicated that a slim majority of Americans would support the use of military force to defend a NATO ally attacked by Russia, while other polling data indicated sharp divisions over the nature and size of US military involvement in Syria and Iraq.<sup>23</sup> However, public attitudes can change relatively quickly, as demonstrated by the reaction to the beheading of Western hostages by Daesh in 2014 or its sponsorship of the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. American history is replete with presidential decisions to use military power without clear public and/or congressional support.

Faced with military aggression against a NATO ally, any US president would feel overwhelming pressure from both inside and outside his administration to engage American military forces either in advance of, or coinciding with, the invocation of Article 5 (the collective defence provision) of the 1949 NATO treaty. The geo-strategic costs of inaction would be grave: the likely breakup of the Alliance; the eruption of fissures within Europe (including the likely renationalization of its defence structures and the probable implosion of the EU); and a collapse of US credibility in the eyes of its Asia-Pacific allies. The latter would increase the risk of Chinese military adventurism and possible attempts by some US allies in the region to acquire a nuclear deterrent of their own.

The good news is that such scenarios, while not impossible to imagine, are highly unlikely to occur – thanks to America’s overarching commitment to European security and stability. However, where the direct threat to US vital interests might be less immediate and/or clear-cut, American officials and non-government experts are now more inclined to question the *sufficiency* of military power to achieve US foreign policy objectives – albeit without jettisoning its *relevance*. In this regard, the US military’s experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have played a crucial role in changing its appreciation of its core competencies and limitations.

In Afghanistan, despite the quick US military successes in 2001, the Taliban was able to reconstitute itself as a serious threat within a few years. Several more years passed, however, before the United States and

23 See: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine/>

its allies and partners shifted their approach from conventional warfare, with its heavy emphasis on seeking out and destroying Taliban forces, towards counter-insurgency operations, with the greater emphasis on protecting the population and improving governance.

Despite a surge in NATO combat forces beginning in 2009, implementing that counter-insurgency strategy proved very difficult. The United States, its allies and partners did not have, or could not effectively use, military assets to build up the Afghanistan government's capacity to provide services, reconcile ethnic rivalries, protect the rights of women, and begin to tackle corruption. Moreover, as recent studies make clear, the US military was slow to understand the unique ethnic, religious, and cultural differences that shaped the insurgency in Afghanistan and hindered efforts to combat it. The American military's dearth of language skills proved to be a particularly vexing problem. Indeed, retired Army General Stanley McChrystal, who led the development of NATO's counterinsurgency strategy in 2009, told an interviewer later: "I think (the Afghanistan operation) should have been done differently from the beginning... People ask me what we should have done, and I say: 'On September 12, 2001, we should have sent 10,000 people to language school.'"<sup>24</sup>

In Iraq, US forces also were ill-prepared for the type of stabilization and counter-insurgency missions that few in leadership positions had anticipated when the war began in March 2003. In 2015, Army General Martin Dempsey recalled that, upon his arrival in Baghdad three months after the invasion, he was instructed to tailor an armoured division, which had just fought its way across the desert from Kuwait, to provide safety and security for the Iraqi capital – a city covering 75 square miles and inhabited by seven million people harbouring deep ethnic and religious animosities. Worse, US civilian authorities had just ordered the disbandment of the Iraqi army and the de-Baathification of the bureaucracy – decisions, Dempsey acknowledges, that fuelled the insurgency. Underscoring America's lack of understanding of the operational environment in mid-2003, Dempsey points out that some US officials were predicting then that most of their forces could be withdrawn by the year's end -- although he acknowledges thinking that the occupation might last until 2006.<sup>25</sup>

24 See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/q-and-a-with-gen-stanley-mcchrystal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/q-and-a-with-gen-stanley-mcchrystal.html?_r=0).

25 See: <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/NewsArticleView/tabid/7849/Article/607296/jfq-78-from-the-chairman-an-interview-with-martin-e-dempsey.aspx>.

Instead, Iraq descended into a spiral of violence that US military forces struggled, at very high cost, to contain. Over time, the military adapted its doctrine, training, equipment, and operational practices to confront the insurgents' asymmetric warfare. Nevertheless, it eventually required a "surge" of thousands of additional US soldiers in 2007 and a shift toward a counter-insurgency strategy to bring a modicum of stability. After US forces were withdrawn in December 2011, the country began to slide back into chaos, making it a fertile ground for the rise of Daesh less than four years later. As Dempsey sums up the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences: "Conflict against non-state actors does not lend itself to industrial-strength solutions."<sup>26</sup>

"Lessons learned" from Iraq and Afghanistan help explain the US approach to the anti-Gaddafi rebellion in Libya in early 2011. Determined to avoid an open-ended military commitment with "boots on the ground", the Obama administration opted to use hard power – air and naval strikes with precision guided munitions and enablers (air-to-air refuelling aircraft, intelligence assets, and targeting specialists) – as part of a NATO-led operation. The administration apparently hoped to avoid any major involvement in post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. This minimalist approach has come at a cost, however: today Libya is a failed state used by violent extremists to expand their influence across the Sahel.

Given these precedents, the Obama administration's cautious approach to the civil war in Syria and the rise of Daesh there and in Iraq should not surprise anyone. Yet, in different ways, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya all demonstrate that US military power is not, in fact, a "wasting asset." In support of its foreign policy objectives, the United States can still deploy considerable military power in the form of precision airstrikes, weapons deliveries and training for local forces, along with highly capable Special Forces to assist those forces and conduct targeted raids. However, the complexity of conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Libya also have served to warn Americans that their military power alone, whether used unilaterally or in coalitions, cannot guarantee a strategic success for US foreign policy.

26 Ibid.

In his November 2009 speech to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, President Obama seemed to address Europeans in particular when he stated:

“In many countries there is a deep ambivalence about military action today, no matter what the cause... at times this is joined by a reflexive suspicion of America, the world’s sole military superpower. But the world must remember that it was not simply international institutions – not just treaties and declarations – that brought stability to a post-World War II world. Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: the United States has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms.”<sup>27</sup>

The President’s words still ring true today. Europe has a vital stake in the preservation of a strong US military that can deter and defeat threats to the US and European homelands, global commons, and other parts of the world where Americans and Europeans share important economic, political, and security interests. Conversely, if the US military is engaged in ways that many Europeans judge unnecessary or reckless, the broader transatlantic relationship could suffer from the blowback.

Hence, Europeans have an interest in actively influencing how Americans view and use hard power. The following outlines four areas where Europeans can – and should – do just that:

- *Strategic assessments:*

The complexity, diversity and rapid transformation of threats in the international security environment make a compelling case for intensifying current patterns of transatlantic consultations on strategic assessments. Such consultations must extend beyond sharing intelligence to include policy officials, military officers, and non-government experts. For example, each side would benefit from the other’s assessments of Russian military objectives, strategy, capabilities, and decision-making, since such factors help shape US and European defence planning and

27 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.

investment. Sharing assessments also reduces the risk of transatlantic policy disputes that sometimes arise from fundamentally different appreciations of an adversary's assets, intent, and political will.

- *Operational concepts:*

As the United States develops its “third offset strategy,” the European allies and partners need to better understand, and contribute to, the new operational concepts that might flow from it. If countering Russian A2AD capabilities were to imply, as some American analysts have suggested, a shift to “deterrence by denial” and “asymmetric punishment attacks” using advanced high-technology systems that are employed very rapidly against Russian high-value assets, this would put a premium on ensuring that transatlantic allies and partners, who might have legitimate concerns about the risk of unintentional conflict escalation, understand the possible ramifications for their respective countries and NATO as a whole. As the United States investigates new operational concepts, European allies and partners would benefit from participation in simulation exercises to test and refine such concepts before they are incorporated into US or NATO contingency plans.

- *Responsibility and risk sharing:*

Over the past decade, official US defence strategy documents have emphasized the importance of working with European allies and partners across a range of military missions. There are practical reasons for this: European militaries often bring specialized capabilities that their US counterparts might not have. There are political reasons too: European participation alongside US forces can help legitimize an operation in the eyes of the broader international community – as well as Congress and the American public. No European ally or partner can be expected to join the United States in every military mission, but America's determination to maintain its deterrence and defence posture in Europe, and take European interests in other

regions into account, could waver if Europe appears unwilling to equitably share the responsibilities and risks of military missions. This means that Europeans must devote adequate resources to their defence forces – a tough but necessary task even in the midst of a slow economic recovery and competing demands from non-military programs.

- *Comprehensive approach:* As the US military learned at a high cost in places like Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, a whole-of-government – or comprehensive – approach will be an absolute necessity in many parts of the world to prevent conflict, mitigate its effects when conflict occurs, and stabilize fragile countries in post-conflict situations. Such an approach is also required in Europe, whether it involves dealing with Russia’s use of “hybrid warfare,” better managing the recent surge of refugees and migrants from the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa, or dealing with cyber threats to European societies and economies. The US government has made important strides during the past decade in developing its mechanisms for civil-military cooperation, but the EU and several of its member states have distinct advantages in combining developmental, governance, and security capacity-building assistance to vulnerable states. Through improved applications and better resourcing of its comprehensive approach, Europe can prevent conflicts and deal with their consequences in ways that appreciably lessen the burdens placed upon the US and European militaries.

# Part II



5



## 5. United States' power and Latvia

Toms Rostoks

Despite the geographical distance, the United States has exerted a disproportionate influence on Latvia over the years. The US non-recognition policy regarding the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union eventually paved the way for Latvia's re-emergence on the world stage after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the principled position that the US took on the withdrawal of Russia troops from the Baltic states in the early 1990s strengthened Latvia's statehood. US support for the Baltic States' NATO membership was crucial in securing their accession to the Alliance in 2004, while conditionality requirements for NATO membership contributed greatly to domestic reform. Latvia, in turn, reciprocated by supporting the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and by committing to support democratic reforms in countries that neighbour Europe's eastern border: Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Although those outside Latvia's defence establishment became less interested in US power after 2004, that trend has reversed and US power made a strong comeback in 2014. The key reason for this is a resurgent and, arguably, less predictable Russia. Today, US power plays a vital role in Latvia's security, and policy-makers in Latvia would like to see a stronger US military presence in the Baltic states. Also, the current US presence in Latvia, both military and otherwise, raises a broader question about Latvia's place in the structure of US alliances and security commitments.

This chapter aims to look at the presence of US power in Latvia and the Baltic states in general. Thus, the chapter focuses on the US security commitment towards Latvia, and Latvia's preferences regarding the level of US engagement in the Baltic states. The first section looks at the history of Latvia's relations with the US. The second section

looks at the impact of the military conflict in Ukraine on US policy regarding the Baltic states. This section also looks at the US response to the changing security environment in Europe and tries to assess whether it has been principled or pragmatic. The third section assesses whether a stronger US security presence in Latvia is sustainable and considers domestic responses to a stronger US presence in Latvia. The concluding part claims that even a limited US military presence would make a significant contribution to the security of the Baltic states. However, such an effort should be undertaken by NATO member-states collectively rather than by the US individually because the US commitment to Baltic security is dependent upon a Baltic and, more generally, European contribution to collective security.

#### THE HISTORY OF US-LATVIA RELATIONS

US-Latvia relations began to form in the interwar period and diplomatic relations were established in 1922. Latvia had proclaimed its independence four years earlier in 1918, but it took a few more years to defeat the German and Russian troops that were still on Latvian soil before it emerged as a fully sovereign country, recognized by all the major European powers, including Russia. Although a US embassy in Riga was opened soon after diplomatic relations between Latvia and US were established, relations remained tepid, and the US mainly used the embassy in Riga as a listening post for the USSR, a country which it did not recognize at the time and thus did not have any diplomatic relations with. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt ended the American non-recognition policy of the USSR in 1933. Despite an apparent lack of interest in Latvia, some of the embassy staff managed to produce fairly accurate descriptions of Latvian politics and society. Aldis Purs writes that one of the reports produced by the US embassy in Riga in 1929 notes that Latvia only managed to establish its sovereignty because of Russia's weakness and turmoil in other European states.<sup>1</sup>

The general lack of interest was mutual, as Latvia (partially due to financial constraints) only managed to open a legation in Washington in 1935. The diplomatic head of the mission, Alfrēds Bilmanis, made a

1 A. Purs. '“Weak and Half-Starved Peoples” meet “Vodka, Champagne, Gypsies and Drozhki”: Relations between the Republic of Latvia and the USA from 1918 to 1940'. *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D.Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. P. 26.

concerted effort to raise Latvia's profile in the US, but his efforts did not affect the overall character of US-Latvia relations. That changed, however, with the Soviet occupation of Latvia in the summer of 1940 and the subsequent US Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles' statement on 23 July 1940, which laid the foundation for the US policy of non-recognition of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. Pauls Raudseps writes that "it was quite astonishing that the United States held to this policy so firmly and for such a long time, from Latvia's occupation in 1940 until its restoration of independence in 1991".<sup>2</sup> This was indeed surprising considering that not only did the US did not have any vital interests at stake in Latvia at the time, but also, as Aldis Purs claims, Latvia was an "authoritarian regime in a peasant garb with tinges of anti-Semitism and national chauvinism".<sup>3</sup> This negative image of Latvia was transformed into a more positive one, however, thanks to the efforts of the Latvian legation in the US and the readiness of the US political leadership to embrace a different (and one must add – at least partly fictional) image of Latvia as a democracy and a staunch defender of private property. Later, after World War II, this largely fictional image of Latvia and the injustices that it had suffered at the hands of the USSR fitted in very well with the emerging Cold War narrative.

Due to the US policy of non-recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union, Latvia's diplomatic representation in Washington continued to exist throughout the Cold War years. Since it was tucked away from the diplomatic mainstream in Washington, its work mainly focused on "responding to misrepresentations of Latvia in the American media",<sup>4</sup> of which there were many because it was too tempting for American writers to refer to the three Baltic states as former countries which had become part of the USSR. The US thus played an important role in preserving the idea of Latvia as a sovereign state. This role, however, became more pronounced after the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union. After the failed

- 2 P. Raudseps. The Long Vigil: US-Latvia Relations, 1940-1991. *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. P. 33.
- 3 A. Purs. "Weak and Half-Starved Peoples' meet 'Vodka, Champagne, Gypsies and Drozhki': Relations between the Republic of Latvia and the USA from 1918 to 1940'. *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. P. 31.
- 4 D. Auers. Salmon, Rissoles and Smoked Eel: The Latvian Legation in the Cold War. *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. P. 58.

putsch in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1991, the US recognized Latvia's independence and later played a crucial role in negotiating the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Latvia's former ambassador to the United States in the early 1990s, Mr. Ojārs Kalniņš, recalls that the Baltic states' leaders did not initially agree with the proposed time frame of the troop withdrawal. In the face of Latvia's reluctance to accept a longer time frame, a Latvian official delegation was invited to Washington for talks on the subject at the end of January 1994. Mr. Kalniņš recalls that "the Clinton Administration pulled out all the stops" during the visit, as Latvians were not only briefed by high ranking American officials, but also had a short meeting with President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore.<sup>5</sup> The result of this effort was that Latvia agreed with the time frame for troop withdrawal which had already been agreed between the US and Russia. Later that year, in July, President Clinton visited Riga where he met with presidents of the Baltic states. Although NATO membership for the Baltic states was not yet on the cards, it was a clear signal to Russia that the US had taken an interest in the Baltic states and that any potential Russian provocation against the Baltic states would meet with US indignation and resistance.

Although the US has not become a major economic partner for Latvia since 1991,<sup>6</sup> it has played an outstanding role with regards to Latvia's NATO membership. Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott recalls that Russia's President Boris Yeltsin wanted to extract assurances from US President Clinton that the Baltic states would never be admitted to NATO. However, Clinton was adamantly against providing such assurances, and in a private meeting with Yeltsin he argued persuasively that NATO and Russia should not create new dividing lines in Europe and that it would be unfair to strike a deal with Russia over the heads of the Baltic states which would preclude their membership in the Alliance. Talbott writes that, at the end of the conversation, Yeltsin gave up on his efforts.<sup>7</sup>

5 O. Kalniņš. *Latvians and Americans. Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. P. 144.

6 Data provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia demonstrate that in January–June 2015 Latvia's exports to the US were 1.65% of the total, and Latvia's imports from the US were 0.87% of the total. *Latvia–US relations: economic cooperation*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2015. <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/divpusejas-attiecibas/latvijas-un-asv-attiecibas?id=39871#ekonomika>. Accessed 16 November 2015.

7 S. Talbott. *The Jūrmala Opening. Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. pp. 135–136.

US assistance in the 1990s and also later has been of great significance, not only with regards to Latvia joining NATO but also in completing the transition to democracy and a market economy: Airis Rikveilis writes that post-1991 US-Latvia military cooperation has been a “success story”<sup>8</sup>; Ieva Morica has documented the American contribution to civil society in Latvia<sup>9</sup>; and Laila Kundziņa-Zvejniece has emphasized the importance of US assistance to higher education in Latvia.<sup>10</sup> All in all, there is evidence that the US-Latvia partnership extends well beyond foreign and security policy. Important as they are, US security guarantees to Latvia’s security through NATO are just one aspect of the US-Latvia relationship.

When it comes to Latvia, and the Baltic states more broadly, the United States has played the role of a principled actor. With their NATO membership completed in 2004, the Baltic states became a symbol of what emerging democracies can achieve with determination and external support. The visit of US president George W. Bush to Latvia on 7 May 2005 and the speech that he gave in Riga<sup>11</sup> is the most vivid proof of a “mission accomplished” with regards to security and stability in northern Europe within US policy-making circles. With America being involved in two wars in the Middle East, China beginning to challenge the regional security architecture in East Asia and a looming economic crisis at home, interest in the Baltic states waned, but this all changed when Russia annexed Crimea in the spring of 2014 and waged a not-so-covert war in eastern Ukraine.

- 8 A.Rikveilis. Twenty Years of Latvia–American Defense Cooperation: From Cautious Beginning to Strategic Partnership and Beyond. *Latvia and the United States: A New Chapter in the Partnership*. I.Indāns (ed.). Centre for East European Policy Studies, 2012. pp 71–92.
- 9 I. Morica. The Latvian–American Partnership in Building Civil Society in Latvia. *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. pp. 97–108.
- 10 L. Kundziņa-Zvejniece. The University of Latvia and Its Historical and Current Links with the United States. *Latvia and the United States: A New Chapter in the Partnership*. I.Indāns (ed.). Centre for East European Policy Studies, 2012. pp. 133–144.
- 11 G.W. Bush. Freedom and Democracy: Address in Latvia. May 7, 2005. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/05.07.05.html>. Accessed 26 November 2015.

US RESPONSE TO BALTIC STATES' SECURITY CONCERNS  
AFTER RUSSIA'S ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a fundamental challenge to the post-Cold War security order in Europe. First and foremost, the war was bad news for Ukraine and its EU and NATO aspirations, but there were also far-reaching implications for some of Russia's other neighbours. Initially, when it seemed that Russia's policies towards Ukraine were supported by a large part of Ukraine's Russian-speaking population, questions were also asked about which of Russia's other neighbours had similar vulnerabilities, and the Baltic states were quickly singled out. Among the Baltic states, Latvia has the largest Russophone population: according to the 2011 population census data, approximately 37% of Latvian households use Russian as a language of communication.<sup>12</sup> This proportion is somewhat lower in Estonia (approximately 27%) and considerably lower in Lithuania (7%). Thus, concerns about the security and stability of the Baltic states were not unfounded.

Apart from the ethnic composition of the Baltic States, three factors explain why the Baltic states and their western allies have reacted with a heightened sense of urgency in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea. First, the balance of military power in Europe has changed. NATO has become militarily weaker, while Russia's military has grown stronger, and the US military presence in Europe over the past 15 years has been considerably reduced. Symbolically, the last US Army's tanks were transported out of Europe in spring 2013, but this was just one indicator of a smaller US military footprint in Europe.<sup>13</sup> With few exceptions, defence spending, which was already low because of the economic downturn, decreased even further in the European part of NATO.<sup>14</sup> Russia, in turn, has considerably increased military expenditure in recent years. Russia's military has recovered from the low point it reached in the 1990s, and since 2011 Russia has

12 2011. gada tautas skaitīšanas rezultāti īsumā [Population Census 2011 results in short]. Central Statistical Bureau, 2012. [http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/nr\\_13\\_2011gada\\_tautas\\_skaitisanas\\_rezultati\\_isuma\\_12\\_00\\_lv.pdf](http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/nr_13_2011gada_tautas_skaitisanas_rezultati_isuma_12_00_lv.pdf). Accessed 26 November 2015.

13 J. Vandiver. US Army's last tanks depart from Germany. Stars and Stripes, April 4, 2013. <http://www.stripes.com/news/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977>. Accessed 28 November 2015.

14 Financial and economic data relating to NATO defence. NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2015. [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2015\\_06/20150622\\_PR\\_CP\\_2015\\_093-v2.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_06/20150622_PR_CP_2015_093-v2.pdf). Accessed on 25 November 2015.

undertaken a major effort to modernize its military. According to the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Russia ranked 3rd in 2014 (after the US and China) with 84.5 billion USD spent on the military.<sup>15</sup> There is little indication that Russia would substantially curb its military expenditure as the result of economic recession, and its ongoing military operation in Syria provides further proof of that.

Secondly, Latvia and Lithuania have largely neglected their military in the wake of the economic crisis (2008–2010). The Baltic states (Estonia being the only exception) have never reached their target of spending 2% of GDP on defence. Lithuania's defence spending hovered precariously above 1% in the aftermath of its accession to NATO, but the economic crisis pushed this figure down below this critical threshold. Latvia's defence spending increased to 1.6% of GDP in 2006 and 2008, but then decreased to just 1% in 2010.<sup>16</sup> It is only recently that this figure has somewhat recovered.

It would be unfair though to claim that Latvia and Lithuania have only started to contemplate substantial increases in military expenditure since Russia's annexation of Crimea. Facing increasing criticism from other NATO allies (most importantly the US), Latvia and Lithuania laid out plans to increase their defence expenditure well before the Ukraine crisis.<sup>17</sup> The military conflict in Ukraine, however, has added a sense of urgency to this process, and it is therefore likely that both countries will aim to achieve the 2% milestone sooner than they originally planned. Too little defence spending has been just one (albeit important) part of the problem, however: not only was Latvia not spending enough on defence, it also focused too much on participation in expeditionary military operations, thus neglecting the development of self-defence capabilities. A recent study aimed at assessing the potential impact of Russia's military modernization on Latvia has concluded that Latvia has a military force that is too small

15 Military Spending in Europe in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis. A media backgrounder. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 13, 2015. <http://www.sipri.org/media/website-photos/milex-media-backgrounder-2015>. Accessed on 25 November 2015.

16 K. Rudzite-Stejskala. Financing Defence. *Apprenticeship, Partnership, Membership: Twenty Years of Defence Development in the Baltic States*. T. Lawrence, T. Jermalavičius (eds.). International Centre for Defence Studies, 2013. pp. 168–201.

17 T. Rostoks. Baltic States and NATO: Looking Beyond the Article V. Working paper no. 44. National Defence University of Finland, 2013. [http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/88687/BalticStatesAndNATO\\_netti.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/88687/BalticStatesAndNATO_netti.pdf?sequence=1). Accessed on 28 November, 2015.

in terms of personnel.<sup>18</sup> It also lacks some of the crucial capabilities that would be needed in the event of Russian aggression against Latvia. The current force is too small to hold off Russian troops even for a very limited time, potentially presenting Latvia's NATO allies with a *fait accompli* and preventing other NATO member states from providing assistance.

Thirdly, NATO and especially US military presence in the Baltics has been negligible until recently. The most visible NATO presence in the Baltic states since 2004 has been the air-policing mission which was carried out on a rotational basis by NATO member states with the necessary military capability. Apart from that, NATO presence in the Baltic states has been limited. At the time when the Baltic states joined NATO, Russia was a partner, not an adversary. Thus, it was deemed that positioning military infrastructure and capabilities in the Baltic states would be too provocative and unnecessarily irritate Russia. In fact, this idea was so unrealistic and potentially harmful that it was not even discussed. Even the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 did not fundamentally alter the perception of Russia as a partner, although it did change the nature of discussions about the security of the Baltic states within NATO. The number of NATO military exercises increased as a result of the Russia-Georgia War in 2008, and there was also some progress with regards to NATO contingency plans for the Baltic states. Progress was piecemeal, however, and the potential effects of Russia's military modernization on the security of the Baltic states were not fully understood at the time.

The war in Ukraine changed perceptions of Latvia's allies regarding the security of the Baltic states. The Baltic air policing mission was reinforced, it was decided at the NATO Wales summit to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, troops from a number of NATO member states were dispatched to the Baltic states, and the pre-positioning of military equipment in the Baltic states was discussed. The Baltic states themselves – especially, Lithuania and Latvia – pledged to increase military spending and announced the procurement of a number of weapons systems which would increase their military self-defence capabilities. Although NATO as an alliance made a collective effort to strengthen the security of the Baltic states,

18 U. Romanovs, M. Vērdiņš, A. Sprūds. Krievijas drošības politika iepretim kaimiņvalstīm līdz 2020. gadam: draudi un iespējas Latvijai [Russia's security policy and its impact on neighbours until 2020: threats and opportunities for Latvia]. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2015. P. 46.

the changing security environment in Northern Europe reinforced the role of the US as a security provider in Eastern and Central Europe, largely because of the dangerous capability gap in Eastern Europe. This gap could be somewhat decreased by the efforts of the Baltic states themselves in the long run, but in the meantime it has to be filled by their more militarily powerful NATO allies. There is little doubt that NATO's military presence in the Baltic states should be strengthened, and this is likely to reassure the Baltic public, but without a sizeable US participation these efforts are not likely to produce much in terms of deterrence.

Over the past few years, relations between NATO and Russia have transformed from a partnership into a more adversarial state of affairs. As relations between actors in international politics shift from cooperation to conflict, the autonomy of the actors involved is less focused on internalized deterrence (when states abide by international norms and do not violate the established 'rules of the game') and relies more on military deterrence (when potential adversarial hostility is prevented with the help of a credible threat of denial or punishment). The deployment of military capabilities among friends is provocative and should therefore be avoided. Among adversaries, weakness is provocative because military weakness can result in crises and be too tempting not to exploit. In other words, the military logic of stability becomes more pronounced as relations between countries deteriorate, and not following this logic may have a destabilizing effect. As relations between NATO and Russia have become more adversarial, the importance of military logic has become more pronounced. Any imbalance in military capabilities between Russia and its smaller Baltic neighbours was of little concern when Russia was considered a partner, but it became a potential source of instability when NATO's relationship with Russia became more adversarial. Thus, US power may have a stabilizing role in the Baltic in the long run, but its short-term role is even more important because of years of neglect and under-investment in the military in Latvia and Lithuania. It seems that only the US can provide the necessary military capabilities to deter Russia in the short term.

SUSTAINABILITY OF A STRONGER  
US MILITARY PRESENCE IN LATVIA

The previous section demonstrated that Latvia, due to its military weakness and Russia's military modernization, needs its US military presence in order to deter Russia. This section discusses the potential domestic and international limitations on the presence of US military power in Latvia. This discussion has two primary aspects: if the American military presence is perceived to be too large it could be considered harmful if it provokes a political, economic or military response from Russia; a large US military presence in Latvia might backfire domestically if there are sizeable opposition groups that would oppose the presence of a foreign military power in Latvia. It is worth examining each of these possibilities separately.

Firstly, there is a possibility that an excessive US military presence in Latvia would be undesirable because of the potential political, military and economic countermeasures that Russia might respond with, but is there evidence to support this claim? It is a valid concern, but it should also be placed in context. The US military presence in the Baltics in terms of troop numbers is currently limited to a company-size unit in each of the Baltic states. There are indications that Latvia's officials would prefer to have a battalion-size unit in Latvia (and a similar deployment in each of the Baltic states) on a permanent basis. Although Russia has criticized the deployment of American troops to the Baltic states, there have been few, if any, practical consequences for Latvia's security and economic relations with Russia.

It is debatable whether a larger American military presence in Latvia would provoke a stronger reaction from Russia, but it seems that in purely military terms such a limited deployment would not decisively address the existing military imbalances between Latvia and Russia. To that end, a much larger US military presence would be needed, but it is unlikely to materialize any time soon. The same logic applies to the pre-positioning of military equipment in Latvia. Although some military equipment is likely to be pre-positioned in Latvia in the coming years, it is unlikely that the amount of such equipment would give Russia any serious security concerns. All in all, there is little evidence that the level of US military presence in Latvia would exceed the expectations of Latvia's policy-makers, and an overly muscular US response to the growing security risks posed by Russia is extremely unlikely.

Secondly, there is a possibility that an increased US military presence in Latvia would lack domestic public support.<sup>19</sup> There is indeed some evidence to support this argument, and Latvia's society has been split on the issue. A public opinion survey conducted in spring 2015 indicates that 48% of respondents regard Russia's policies as a threat to Latvia, while 33% regard the presence of NATO and US troops in Latvia as a threat. As expected, there are considerable differences in how Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers perceive Russia, with 64% of Latvian-speakers and only 19% of Russian-speakers regarding Russia's policies as a threat.<sup>20</sup> Until recently, the Latvian public has consistently viewed Russia more favourably than the US and the EU. Longitudinal data from public opinion surveys conducted in Latvia from 2008 until 2015 provides evidence that Russia was consistently viewed more positively than the US and the EU until 2013 (see table number 1), but Russian military aggression in Ukraine tarnished its image, and in 2014 and 2015 Russia was viewed less favourably than the EU. Interestingly, however, the Ukrainian crisis also resulted in a less favourable image of the US. This is largely because Russia's media and Russian-speaking media in Latvia have consistently claimed that the crisis in Ukraine was the result of overly aggressive American policies. Although this view is largely incorrect, and, if anything, the Ukrainian crisis was caused by the EU's zealous implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy, public opinion surveys do not reflect this, and the EU's image has improved considerably in 2014 and 2015, while the US has come to be viewed slightly less favourably.

19 The exploratory essay on anti-Americanism written by Nils Muižnieks and Pēteris Viņķelis published in 2008 claims that such sentiments are more pronounced among Russian-speakers. According to Muižnieks and Viņķelis, "anti-Americanism is not very deeply rooted or well-articulated in Latvia". Although they concluded that favourable views of the US were held in Latvia by 39% in 2008, Latvia did not seem to be radically different from a number of European and other countries where anti-American sentiments were stronger than in Latvia. N. Muižnieks, P. Viņķelis *Anti-Americanism in Latvia: An Exploratory Essay. Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*. D. Auers (ed.) Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008. pp. 119–126.

20 I. Bērziņa et al. *Possibilities for Social Destabilization in Latvia: Strategic Implications for National Security*. Executive summary. Centre for Security and Strategic Research, 2016.

	European Union		United States		Russia	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
2008	42	38	39	37	47	33
2009	50	37	50	35	60	28
2010	49	40	57	29	64	25
2011	52	37	50	34	63	24
2012	55	31	47	34	56	28
2013	55	33	47	37	57	30
2014	63	26	42	42	44	43
2015	63	27	44	43	41	46

Table number 1. Latvia's residents' views on the European Union, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, 2008–2015 (Latvian-speakers and Russian speakers combined). Source: SKDS public opinion surveys, 2008–2015.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the US has staunchly supported the Baltic states, and this support has been embraced by the Baltic political elites. Although the public view on the US is split, it is unlikely to affect government policies as no serious Latvian politician would jeopardize the strategic relationship with the US.<sup>21</sup> The only exception has been the politically influential mayor of Ventspils, Mr. Aivars Lembergs, who even wrote a letter to the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in spring 2014 after some visiting NATO troops that were taking part in the NATO military exercise “Open Spirit 2014” were caught disturbing public order. One of the troops was seriously injured and ended up in hospital after a street brawl with local residents. Mr. Lembergs complained that the visiting NATO troops were behaving like an occupying force and demanded an apology from

21 Recently published Foreign minister's report on Latvia's foreign policy and EU affairs describes the US contribution to Latvia's security in the wake of the military conflict in Ukraine in the following way: “The US are Latvia's strategic partner and a reliable ally” and “The greater the US involvement in Europe and the stronger the transatlantic structures, the greater the security that Latvia can enjoy”. Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos [Foreign minister's report on Latvia's foreign policy and EU affairs]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2016. pp. 3–4.

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, but he was quickly rebuffed by major political figures such as Defence minister Mr. Raimonds Vējonis and Foreign minister Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs. Despite minor incidents, Latvia's membership of NATO enjoys widespread support so it is unlikely that an increased US and NATO military presence in Latvia would be seen as problematic by a majority of the public.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The US has had a major impact on Latvia's security post-1991. With respect to Latvia, it has played the role of a principled actor and has supported Latvia's transition to democracy, the rule of law and a market economy, which resulted in Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO. Latvia, in turn, supported the US war on terror and its freedom agenda in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Economic interaction has been sluggish, but Latvia and the US share similar values. Although it can be argued that Latvia supported a more muscular US foreign policy in the first decade of 21st century because of its reliance on US security guarantees, this relationship is also to an equally important extent based on shared values. Evidence of public support for a stronger presence of US power in Latvia is mixed: NATO membership enjoys public support, but the US is viewed less favourably than one might expect, considering the US is Latvia's key ally. This, however, can be explained by three factors: a sizeable presence of Russian-speakers in Latvia who mostly get their news from Russia; a close economic relationship between Latvia and Russia which both policy-makers and the general public are unwilling to jeopardize; and the perception that the US has either ignored Russia's interests in the aftermath of the Cold War or has actively tried to reduce Russia's influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, it has become clear that there has been too little US power in Latvia. To be fair, Latvia's decision-makers themselves have not invested sufficiently in military self-defence capabilities, but Latvia's allies are also partly responsible for not paying enough attention to Russia's military modernization in

22 60% of all respondents agree that joining NATO was the right decision, while 28% disagree. Support for Latvia's NATO membership is higher among Latvian-speakers (73%) than among Russian-speakers (41%). FACTUM survey data, 2015. The public opinion survey was commissioned by the Centre for Security and Strategic Research, National Defence Academy of Latvia.

recent years. The current imbalances in military power in the Baltics between NATO and Russia cannot be quickly remedied by the Baltic states themselves, so a more substantial US military presence is needed in the short term.

In the long run, however, there is an even more important question about where Latvia, and the Baltic states more broadly, fit in to the global system of US alliances. US power and greater US military presence is certainly seen in a positive light by the ruling elites of the Baltic states, so US presence in the Baltic region largely depends on its willingness to commit to the security of Latvia and its Baltic neighbours. Although this commitment has been questioned because of the US military withdrawal from Europe and rebalancing with respect to Asia, there is little evidence that the US would not be fully committed to the security of the Baltic states. US military withdrawal from Western Europe was a necessary step because its presence in Western Europe was no longer needed, but relocating the US military presence to Eastern Europe was not possible because it would unnecessarily provoke Russia. The war in Ukraine, however, has changed the US perception of Russia: as Russia has become more of an adversary than a partner, US military presence in the Baltic has become a necessity, not merely a distant possibility. The Baltic states are increasingly seen as frontline states bordering a revisionist great power that needs to be deterred. Thus, unless Russia fundamentally alters its behaviour, the importance of the Baltic states within the US system of alliances is likely to increase in coming years.

6



## 6. The US, the Arab spring and the future of American power

Ville Sinkkonen

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which stretches from the North African Atlantic coast across the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, remains an area of paramount importance for American foreign policy in the early 21st century.<sup>1</sup> The misnamed Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 that began with the toppling of Tunisia's strongman Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and swiftly spread across the region unleashed a complex process which has made it increasingly difficult for the United States to project power in the Middle East. The upheavals overwhelmed President Barack Obama's envisaged reset with the Muslim world, and the presidential administration has pursued an allegedly inconsistent foreign policy towards the area, sparking vehement criticism from both academic and policymaking circles in the process.

In order to build a future policy vision for the region, the present exposition moves beyond these critiques. The United States should learn from past mistakes, and doing so necessitates the adoption of some key insights from Obama's approach. In particular, exercising long-term influence in the MENA area demands an appreciation of evolving local dynamics on a case-by-case basis, a willingness to live with fluctuating levels of uncertainty and, most importantly, a healthy dose of humility. To pursue this argument, the exposition begins with a short review of America's historical dealings with the Middle East, followed by selective reflections on Obama's reaction to the Arab Spring and its aftermath. The chapter then proceeds to formulate a future vision for US foreign policy in the MENA region, building upon – but also moving beyond – the foundations that were laid during the Obama presidency.

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, the terms MENA region and Middle East will be used synonymously.

BACKGROUND: THE UNITED STATES, OBAMA  
AND THE POST-ARAB SPRING MIDDLE EAST

America's fall from grace in the Middle East can be dated back to the Cold War power struggle with the Soviet Union. With the adoption of containment as the guiding light of American foreign policy during the presidency of Harry S. Truman, the United States propped up repressive autocratic allies to thwart the rise of Communism and Arab nationalism.<sup>2</sup> The stifling of local political dynamics was mixed with American support for Israel – forged in the midst of the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars – and a resolve to keep Middle Eastern oil flowing into the global market.<sup>3</sup> This policy of *authoritarian stability* did much to discredit American standing in the eyes of Middle Eastern peoples.<sup>4</sup> The US came to be regarded, much like its colonialist predecessors France and Great Britain, as a hostile imperial power, and the end of the Cold War merely exacerbated this impression.<sup>5</sup> The First Gulf War brought an enhanced American military presence to the Arab Peninsula and by the turn of the millennium the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) had hit the skids.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the region's pro-Western rulers clung to their security states.<sup>7</sup> Pent-up disillusionment found an outlet in *jihadi* extremism and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 brought these grievances to the global stage.

The Bush administration swiftly came to the conclusion that democracy was the tonic to stem the tide of hatred against America and pacify the MENA region. Alongside the much-clamoured War on Terror, the so-called Freedom Agenda was set up to promote democratic governance.<sup>8</sup> The virtues of freedom would be spread by all means necessary. As a result, Bush's confrontational drive for

2 F.A. Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2013, pp. 35–36.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 48–54. See also L.B. Miller, 'The us and the Middle East in Theory and Practice Since 9/11' in I. Parmar, L.B. Miller & M. Ledwidge eds. *New Directions in us Foreign Policy*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2009, pp. 200–209.

4 S.A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 249–252.

5 F.A. Gerges, *op.cit.*, pp. 29–31.

6 *ibid.*, pp. 62–64.

7 *ibid.*

8 *ibid.*, 74.

democracy garnered little support in either the eyes of local autocrats or the oppressed populaces it was supposed to empower.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, the Freedom Agenda faltered under its own internal contradictions. Regional strongmen proved useful proxies to execute the covert tactics used in the War on Terror, which was a baleful example of American double standards in action.<sup>10</sup> The fall of Saddam Hussein was followed by a botched occupation of Iraq, so the desired democratic contagion effect in the region failed to materialise.<sup>11</sup> When elections were finally held in places like Gaza and Egypt, widespread support for Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood was registered, much to the chagrin of the Americans.<sup>12</sup> President Bush thus toned down his democratisation policies in his second term, and by the time Barack Obama assumed office regional autocracies appeared to have stemmed the tide of American democracy promotion.<sup>13</sup>

In an effort to distance himself from Bush's excesses, Obama travelled to Cairo in June 2009 to announce 'a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world'.<sup>14</sup> For the new incumbent, 'renewing American leadership' necessitated fostering credibility and goodwill in the eyes of regional allies and the people of the Muslim world.<sup>15</sup> To this end, Obama announced a phased withdrawal from Iraq, a reinvigorated MEPP, and the toning down of American excesses with regards to democracy promotion and counter-terrorism.<sup>16</sup> Such humility for past mistakes would not, however, temper America's resolve to defend its core liberal democratic values.<sup>17</sup> The administration chose to discuss human rights and democratisation

9 Y. Halabi, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: From Crises to Change*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, pp. 127–128; S.A. Cook, op.cit., pp. 256–258.

10 L.C. Gardner, *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak*, The New Press, London, 2011, pp. 167–169.

11 See Y. Halabi, op.cit., pp. 115–132.

12 S.A. Cook, op. cit., pp. 189–190; A. Bâli & A. Rana, 'American Overreach: Strategic Interests and Millennial Ambitions in the Middle East', in *Geopolitics*, vol. 15, 2010, pp. 217–224.

13 Y. Halabi, op.cit., pp. 135–137; F. A. Gerges, op.cit., pp. 65–68.

14 B. Obama, 'Remarks by the President at Cairo University', *White House* [Website], 4 June 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>, accessed 3 Sep. 2015.

15 See White House, 'National Security Strategy', White House [Website], 2010, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf); T. Nakayama, 'Strategic Patience in a Turbulent World: The Obama Doctrine and its Approach to the World', in *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1–15; B. Obama, 'Renewing American Leadership', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 4, 2007, pp. 2–16.

16 F. Gerges, op.cit., pp. 98–102; B. Obama, 'Remarks by the President at Cairo University', loc. cit.; White House, loc. cit.

17 B. Obama, 'Remarks by the President at Cairo University.'

in bilateral fora and did not pursue the kind of vocal campaign that was reminiscent of the Bush era.<sup>18</sup> In the 18 months between the Cairo Speech and the 2011 uprisings Obama, much like his predecessors, largely reverted to tacit support for local autocrats.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Arab Spring and beyond*

The Arab Spring protest wave of 2011 came to underline the internal contradictions of Obama's Cairo vision. The US was faced with an old intractable dilemma: whether to side with the potentially volatile forces of change in support of the rights the President had himself endorsed in Cairo, or defend the regional *status quo* that had served US interests well for half a century.<sup>20</sup> This tension explains Obama's preference for grappling with each revolution on its own terms, balancing interests and ideals in the process.<sup>21</sup>

A comparison between Egypt and Bahrain provides a telling example. Egypt is not only the most populous Arab state, but also a lynchpin of the security dynamics in the region. This role is based on the country's 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel, and close military-to-military cooperation with Washington.<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, as the Tahrir Revolution began on 25 January 2011, the Obama team scrambled to position itself on the 'right side of history' with value-based rhetoric favouring the protesters, but it also took an ambiguous stance on President Hosni Mubarak's future by pressing for an orderly transition.<sup>23</sup> When Mubarak finally fell, Obama placed his bets on the military (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, SCAF), which was hardly a poster child for human rights and democracy.<sup>24</sup> In stark contrast, when protests erupted in the small island state of Bahrain in mid-February, the Americans

18 H.R. Clinton, 'Press Availability in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates', *State Department* [Website], 9 June 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/06/165351.htm>, accessed 30 Oct. 2014.; F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 103–104.

19 F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 107–114; S.A. Cook, op. cit., pp. 253–271; A. Bâli & A. Rana, 'American Overreach', op. cit., pp. 217–224.

20 D. Huber, 'A Pragmatic Actor — The us Response to the Arab Uprisings', in *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2014, pp. 57–75.

21 Gerges, op. cit., pp. 107–114.

22 On recent us–Egypt cooperation see L.C. Gardner, op. cit., pp. 149–178. On regional security dynamics see B. Buzan & O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 195–197.

23 D. Huber, op. cit., p. 63; L.C. Gardner, op. cit., pp. 186–192. On American rhetoric and values invoked in the context of the Tahrir Revolution see V. Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power: The European Union, the United States and the January 25th, 2011 Revolution in Egypt*, Brill, Leiden, 2015, pp. 152–161, 201–206.

24 F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 171–176.

remained veritably silent on the human rights violations perpetrated by the government.<sup>25</sup> The need to placate Saudi Arabian concerns and maintain stability on the island, which houses the US 5th Fleet, ruled out a clear stand in favour of the protesters.

Even in the two countries where the US came out swiftly in favour of anti-regime forces, the American reaction diverged.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Libya, President Obama was moved by fears of impending genocide, and made a last-minute decision to back the British and French proposal for a no-fly zone in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011.<sup>27</sup> Concurrently, in Syria, demonstrations against dictator Bashar al-Assad quickly escalated into a murderous civil war, but the imposition of economic sanctions was not followed by military action.<sup>28</sup> This was partly due to Russian and Chinese resolve to thwart concerted action in the Security Council, their reticence no doubt affected by the West overreaching its civilian protection mandate in Libya.<sup>29</sup> Even the use of chemical weapons by al-Assad's forces in March 2013, a professed 'red line' for President Obama, was insufficient to prompt a military strike.<sup>30</sup> Vacillation ultimately forced the United States to accept a face-saving gesture in the form of a Russian proposal for the disposal of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.<sup>31</sup>

Predictably, instability in the Arab world also did few favours for Obama's pledges to re-energize the MEPP. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was resolutely unwilling to compromise on the issue of settlement construction in occupied Palestine, an insurmountable impediment to negotiations.<sup>32</sup> President Obama, in turn, was forced to pander to the pro-Israeli mood prevalent

25 A. Bâli & A. Rana, 'Pax Arabica?: Provisional Sovereignty and Intervention in the Arab Uprisings', in *California Western International Law Journal*, vol. 42, 2012, pp. 114–116; F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 108–109.

26 T.J. Lynch, 'Obama, Liberalism and us Foreign Policy' in I.Parmar, L.B. Miller & M. Ledwidge eds., *Obama and the World: New Directions in us Foreign Policy*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2014, pp. 46–48.

27 C.S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 48–68.

28 S.L. Myers & A. Shahid, 'Obama Administration Sanctions Syria President and Six Aides', *New York Times* [Website], 19 May 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/world/middleeast/19syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/world/middleeast/19syria.html?_r=0), accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

29 J. Morris, 'Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum', in *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no.5, 2013, pp. 1274–1277.

30 S. Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York, 2014, pp. 318–319.

31 *ibid.*

32 F.A. Gerges, op.cit., pp. 119–127.

in Congress. After failed attempts to stare down the Israeli premier, Obama rebuffed Palestine's statehood bid at the UN in September 2011 – a clear-cut demonstration of continued American support for Israel.<sup>33</sup>

Fast forward to early 2016, and it becomes apparent that the march to freedom in the MENA region has been indefinitely interrupted. Egypt is in the throes of a military dictatorship far more oppressive than Mubarak's regime ever was. A brief period of rule by the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, the country's first freely elected president, ended in a military coup in June 2013.<sup>34</sup> The military-backed incumbent Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has instituted a reign of terror marked by a crackdown on political opponents, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>35</sup> Libya is in a state of disarray following a long power struggle between two competing governments, one in Tobruk and the other in Tripoli.<sup>36</sup> Syria, in turn, has become a battleground where regime troops, Kurds and other Western-backed rebels, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also variously called ISIL, IS and Daesh) vie for ascendancy.<sup>37</sup> External actors with a stake in the process include the US-led anti-ISIS/anti-Assad coalition, along with Russia and Iran, who support the Syrian regime.<sup>38</sup>

- 33 F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 130–132, 135; B. Obama, 'Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly', *White House* [Website], 21 September 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/21/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015.
- 34 S. Fabbrini & A. Yossef, 'Obama's Wavering: US Foreign Policy on the Egyptian Crisis, 2011–13', in *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2015, pp. 70–72.
- 35 D. Huber, op. cit., pp. 64–65; J. Stacher, 'Can a Myth Rule a Nation?', *Foreign Affairs* [Website], 31 January 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/egypt/2014-01-31/can-myth-rule-nation>, accessed 14 Oct. 2015; J. Stacher, 'Deeper Militarism in Egypt', *Middle East Institute* [Website], 16 September 2013, [http://www.mei.edu/content/deeper-militarism-egypt#\\_ftn1](http://www.mei.edu/content/deeper-militarism-egypt#_ftn1), accessed 14 Oct. 2015.
- 36 A.J. Kuperman, 'Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2015, pp. 66–77. A tenuous power-sharing deal between the competing factions was reached on 17 December 2015, see A. El Yaakoubi, 'Libyan Factions Sign U.N. Deal to Form Unity Government', *Reuters* [Website], 17 December 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0U00WP20151217>, accessed 13 Jan. 2016.
- 37 K. Bird & S. Goldmark, 'Obama Got It Right on the Islamic State', in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 19 November 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/19/obama-got-it-right-on-the-islamic-state/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015. F. Irshaid, 'Isis, Isil, IS or Daesh? One Group, Many Names', *BBC* [Website], 2 December 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27994277>, accessed 13 Jan. 2016.
- 38 A. Barker, N. Bozorgmehr & G. Dyer, 'Iran Agrees to Join Vienna Summit on Syria Crisis', *Financial Times* [Website], 28 October 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/79208a08-7d79-11e5-af1e-567b37f80b64.html#axzz3psvL2LUK>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015.

Renewed attempts to rejuvenate the MEPP after Obama's re-election have also hit a wall. Israel pulled away from negotiations in objection to rapprochement between Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas, and tensions ultimately erupted in a seven-week war in Gaza in the summer of 2014.<sup>39</sup> The Obama administration, though critical of Israel's rough conduct of the campaign, continues to pledge its unwavering commitment to the Jewish state's security.<sup>40</sup>

### *Critiques that don't stick*

In light of the present disarray, the reaction of the Obama administration to the Arab Spring and its aftermath has been veritably easy to criticise. Some liberal internationalists lament that the United States failed to back the anti-establishment protesters forcibly enough. Such appraisals point either to initial hesitancy in passing judgment on the autocrats in power, or the provision of insufficient resources to aid democratic transition.<sup>41</sup> In sharp contrast, traditional allies in the region have derided Obama for his failure to bet on the *status quo ante* in the name of regional peace, stability and core American interests,<sup>42</sup> although similar voices were also heard from within the administration in the cases of Egypt and even Libya.<sup>43</sup> Another mode of criticism, hailing predominantly from the conservative right, lambasts Obama

- 39 D. Roberts, 'Further Headache for Obama after Collapse of Middle East Peace Talks', in *Guardian* [Website], 25 April 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/25/obama-downbeat-collapse-middle-east-peace-talks>, accessed 23 November 2015; I. Black, P. Beaumont & D. Roberts, 'Israel Suspends Peace Talks with Palestinians after Fatah-Hamas Deal', in *Guardian* [Website], 24 April 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/middle-east-israel-halts-peace-talks-palestinians>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015; P. Beaumont, '2014 in Review: Return to Conflict in Gaza Claimed 2,000 Lives', in *Guardian* [Website], 31 December 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2014/dec/31/conflict-gaza-claimed-2000-lives>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015.
- 40 E. Labott, R. Roth & J. Levs, 'New Low for U.S.-Israel Relationship?', *CNN* [Website], 5 August 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/05/politics/israel-us-relationship/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015.
- 41 See e.g. A. Hawthorne & M. Dunne, 'Remember That Historic Arab Spring Speech?', in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 21 May 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/21/remember-that-historic-arab-spring-speech/>, accessed 30 Oct. 2015]. For a more critical view see Bâli and Rana, 'Pax Arabica', pp. 101-132.
- 42 B. Eligür, 'The "Arab Spring": Implications for us-Israeli relations', in *Israel Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2014, pp. 285-286.
- 43 J. Traub, 'The Hillary Clinton Doctrine', in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 6 November 2015, [http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/06/hillary-clinton-doctrine-obama-interventionist-tough-minded-president/?utm\\_source=Social&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=NewCampaign&utm\\_term=%2AEditors%20Picks](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/06/hillary-clinton-doctrine-obama-interventionist-tough-minded-president/?utm_source=Social&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewCampaign&utm_term=%2AEditors%20Picks), accessed 8 Nov. 2015; C.S. Chivvis, op.cit., pp. 44-53.

for his failure to utilise sufficient military power to pacify the MENA region, particularly when it comes to the rise of ISIS and the debacle in Libya.<sup>44</sup> All these appraisals of the Obama administration's Middle East policies are of course indicative of the broader sweep of American foreign policy debates, mirroring not only the traditional realist/liberal divide, but also ensuing contestation over the virtues of 'retrenchment' or 'offshore balancing', as opposed to an assertive foreign policy.<sup>45</sup>

In hindsight it is true that the economic support package unveiled in May 2011 by the US in the aftermath of the revolutions was meagre when set against the magnitude of challenges faced by the region.<sup>46</sup> However, the White House does not control the purse strings – domestic political wrangling and the reverberations of the financial crisis are the true culprits here.<sup>47</sup> More difficult to sustain is the claim that more forceful American backing of protesters in places like Tunisia and Egypt would have steered the unfolding revolutions on a different bearing. Of course, positioning the US on the side of the anti-establishment forces from the onset could have increased American legitimacy in the eyes of the Arab populaces, but it is just as feasible that this would have fuelled conspiracy theories about American meddling.<sup>48</sup> It is likewise debatable that the reverse course, betting on old allies, would have sustained the *status quo* because the opposition against local autocrats was simply too broad-based to suppress without resorting to unacceptable levels of violence. During the Egyptian

44 R Kagan, 'Superpowers Don't Get to Retire', in *New Republic* [Website], 27 May 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/117859/allure-normalcy-what-america-still-owes-world>, accessed 24 Nov. 2015; J. Horowitz, 'Robert Kagan Strikes a Nerve with Article on Obama Policy', in *New York Times* [Website], 16 June 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/us/politics/historians-critique-of-obama-foreign-policy-is-brought-alive-by-events-in-iraq.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/us/politics/historians-critique-of-obama-foreign-policy-is-brought-alive-by-events-in-iraq.html?_r=0), accessed 23 Nov. 2015; C. Krauthammer, 'The Obama Doctrine: Leading from behind', in *Washington Post* [Website] 28 April 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E_story.html), accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

45 See e.g. S. Sestanovich, op. cit.; S.M. Walt, 'U.S. Middle East Strategy: Back to Balancing', in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 21 November 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/21/us-middle-east-strategy-back-to-balancing/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015; S.G. Brooks, G.J. Ikenberry & W.C. Wohlforth, 'Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment', in *International Security*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2012, pp. 7–51; T.J. Lynch, op. cit. pp. 41–52; A. Quinn, 'Realism and us Foreign Policy' in I Parmar, L.B. Miller & M Ledwidge eds., *Obama and the World: New Directions in us Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London, 2014.

46 U. Dadush & M. Dunne, 'American and European Responses to the Arab Spring: What's the Big Idea?', in *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2011, pp. 131–145.

47 See discussion in R. Mason, *The International Politics of the Arab Spring: Popular Unrest and Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, pp. 44–48.

48 Cf. L.C. Gardner, op. cit., pp. 186–187.

revolution the US actually remained undecided over Mubarak's future for nearly two weeks before it faced reality and sided with his dismissal. Finally, recent military forays in the Middle East provide little support for a more robust use of military power. In fact, regardless of whether the US has occupied (Iraq), intervened chiefly with airpower (Libya) or avoided military intervention (Syria pre-2014), the result has been a 'costly disaster'.<sup>49</sup>

It is therefore difficult to fathom how American action, no matter how principled or robust, could have stopped the unfolding local dynamics. Critics of Obama's policies utilise a counter-factual leap of faith by assuming that the United States could have influenced the long-term trajectory of revolutionary processes in its preferred direction, but it should be remembered that the Arab Spring did not merely pit local forces against their autocratic rulers, it also challenged an unpopular regional order that the US had supported for decades.<sup>50</sup> More fundamentally, the criticisms share a belief in the sustainability of American hegemony and, by implication, America's ability to solve all the world's pressing problems.<sup>51</sup> The Arab Spring and the preceding quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan testify that this is no longer feasible, and the American reaction to the developments unleashed in 2011 should be assessed against this sobering evaluation. Accepting the limits of American power can, moreover, serve as a foundation for a post-2016 American foreign policy vision in the MENA region.

#### A FUTURE VISION FOR THE MENA REGION

Foreign policy is a 'site of contestation': various actors on the domestic and international scene wrangle over the correct mix of values and interests that should inform US conduct in particular settings.<sup>52</sup> The above review of the American reaction to the Arab revolutions and

49 P. Gordon, 'The Middle East Is Falling Apart. America Isn't to Blame. There's No Easy Fix.' *Politico* [Website], 4 June 2015, [http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/america-not-to-blame-for-middle-east-falling-apart-118611\\_Page3.html#ixzz3sQJF29hR](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/america-not-to-blame-for-middle-east-falling-apart-118611_Page3.html#ixzz3sQJF29hR), accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

50 A. Bâli and A. Rana, 'Pax Arabica', op. cit., p. 107.

51 S.A. Cook, op. cit., p. 304; L.C. Gardner, op. cit., pp. 197-200; S. Reich & R.N. Lebow, *Good-Bye Hegemony!: Power and Influence in the Global System*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014, pp. 16-27.

52 R. Jackson & M. McDonald, 'Constructivism, US Foreign Policy and Counterterrorism' in I. Parmar, L.B. Miller & M. Ledwidge eds., *Obama and the World: New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London, 2014, p.22.

their troubled aftermaths shows that the *actors* and *factors* influencing American policy in the region are diverse, and their constellations change based on the issues at stake.<sup>53</sup> Future American presidential administrations need to come to terms with this complexity. Moreover, judging by the Obama administration's forays in the Middle East, a future American policy vision must strike a balance between short-term stability and the maintenance of long-term influence. In short, given the awakening of local political consciousness, a novel strategy geared towards fostering legitimacy is necessary. Balancing these objectives requires attention to both the foreign policy *role* America should assume in the MENA region and the *modes of power* projection through which this role should be carried out.

#### *Key actors and factors*

First and foremost, it is vital to appreciate – as President Obama has by scaling down American commitments abroad – that the responsibilities of any future American administration remain two-fold. Catering to both the domestic and international arenas is paramount, and the manner in which the US manages to balance these commitments will have considerable bearing upon how America engages the MENA region in the coming years.<sup>54</sup> This is not merely a matter of acknowledging the public's distaste for long drawn-out military campaigns. The recent polarisation of the American political scene means that future administrations may face a vehemently partisan Congress, which makes any foreign policy decision a matter of intense political wrangling. Recent struggles between the White House and Capitol Hill over military strikes in Syria and the Iran

53 Cf. C. Reus-Smit, 'International Crises of Legitimacy', in *International Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2/3, 2007, p. 164.

54 M. Finnemore, 'Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity', in *World Politics*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2009, p. 65. For an enlightening philosophical discussion see C. Brown, 'Ethics, Interests and Foreign Policy' in K.E. Smith and M. Light eds., *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 15–32. On the ebb and flow of America's engagement with the international during the post-Second World War era see Sestanovich, op. cit.

nuclear deal, not to mention the infamous ‘Benghazi hearings’, could serve as harbingers for the future.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond the domestic scene, regional allies will continue to exert pressure on the US. In the immediate aftermath of Ben-Ali’s and Mubarak’s ouster, for instance, the Obama team faced vehement criticism from long-established allies, most notably Israel, Saudi-Arabia and Jordan.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, in an increasingly interconnected world, regional partners will not shirk from utilising the ‘domestic channel’ to influence American foreign policy. Recent examples include Benjamin Netanyahu’s much-publicised visit to Washington to lobby against the Iran nuclear deal, and Egyptian President al-Sisi’s calls in the US press for more robust American involvement in the struggle against extremist terrorism.<sup>57</sup>

The complex equation is further complicated by the festering grievances of the Middle Eastern peoples. One result of the Arab Spring is that governments in the region, even those that managed to subdue the tide of protests, have become more aware of public opinion.<sup>58</sup> For decades, authoritarian stability co-opted local elites to maintain the regional security balance with relatively little regard for the concerns of the masses.<sup>59</sup> A return to such a myopic vision for the MENA region no longer presents a viable option, so the United States needs to be increasingly wary of who it listens to. Recent developments in Egypt provide a telling example. The consolidation of military rule

55 A. Blake, ‘Where the Votes Stand on Syria’, in *Washington Post* [Website], 2 September 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/09/02/where-the-votes-stand-on-syria/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015; A. Davidson, ‘The Hillary Hearing’, in *The New Yorker* [Website], 2 November 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/02/hillarys-moment-at-the-benghazi-hearing>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015; C. Morello, ‘How AIPAC Lost the Iran Deal Fight’, in *Washington Post* [Website], 3 September 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2015/09/03/how-aipac-lost-the-iran-deal-fight/>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015.

56 F.A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 166–167; B. Eligür, op. cit., pp. 285–286.

57 B. Stephens, ‘The Weekend Interview: Islam’s Improbable Reformer’, *Wall Street Journal* [Website], 20 March 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-weekend-interview-islams-improbable-reformer-1426889862>, accessed 14 Oct. 2015; D. Bednarz & K. Brinkbäumer, ‘Islamic State: Egyptian President Sisi Calls for Help in IS Fight’, *Spiegel* [Website], 9 February 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-egyptian-president-sisi-calls-for-help-in-is-fight-a-1017434.html>, accessed 14 Oct. 2015; P. Baker, ‘In Congress, Netanyahu Faults “Bad Deal” on Iran Nuclear Program’, in *New York Times* [Website], 4 March 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/world/middleeast/netanyahu-congress-iran-israel-speech.html>, accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

58 S. Telhami, *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East*, Basic Books, New York, 2013, pp. 92–93.

59 See Y. Halabi, op. cit.

since 2013 has been foregrounded by historically unparalleled levels of violence and repression. The regime's durability has become a function of sustained fear rather than legitimisation through addressing socio-economic and political grievances.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, despite intransigence on the part of re-emergent local autocrats, the United States needs to pursue strengthened links with opposition groups and civil society organisations.<sup>61</sup> This is also relevant in terms of countering violent extremism. The flipside of al-Sisi's brutal crackdown of the Muslim Brotherhood has been the increased radicalisation of its moderate support base, which bodes ill in the global struggle against *jihadi* extremism.<sup>62</sup>

In the short term, the United States will most likely be preoccupied with putting out fires across the region. However, the most pressing immediate challenges, the Syrian imbroglio and the spectre of ISIS in particular, do not provide much space for unilateral American solutions. To 'chart a course out of hell', in the words of Secretary of State John Kerry, the United States needs to enlist the support of all the key players in the region.<sup>63</sup> This means engaging its core regional allies, most notably Saudi Arabia and Turkey, along with supporters of the Syrian establishment, especially Iran and Russia. Tehran's increased standing in the region after the Arab Spring and the Kremlin's desire for a role in deciding Bashar al-Assad's fate are facts of global politics that the United States needs to come to terms with.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the imperative to engage local actors and their international benefactors remains the common denominator when tackling all of the region's quasi-failed states, be it Syria, Libya, Iraq or Yemen.

Nevertheless, short-term challenges should not obscure longer-term objectives. As President Obama already acknowledged over six

60 Stacher, 'Can a Myth Rule a Nation?', op. cit.

61 Reuters, 'U.S. State Department Will Not Meet Brotherhood Group on Washington Visit', 9 June 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/09/us-egypt-usa-idUSKBN00P24B20150609>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015; State Department, 'Press Availability with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Hassan Shoukry', *State Department* [Website], 2 August 2015, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/08/245585.htm>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015. See also Hawthorne and Dunne, op. cit.

62 Financial Times, 'Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's Autocracy Is No Way forward for Egypt', in *Financial Times* [Website], 3 November 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/97059794-8223-11e5-8095-ed1a37d1e096.html?siteedition=intl#axzz3qcsbU8hA>, accessed 5 Nov. 2015; M. Lynch, 'Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 5, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/obama-and-middle-east>, accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

63 A. Barker, N. Bozorgmehr and G. Dyer, loc. cit.

64 A. Barker, N. Bozorgmehr & G. Dyer, loc. cit.

years ago in Cairo, a rejuvenation of talks on a two-state solution between the Israelis and Palestinians should remain a key aspiration of American foreign policy. The unresolved Palestinian question sustains the age-old mistrust of the Arab populations towards the United States, so the resolve for peace should not be compromised by the recent waves of violence between Israelis and Hamas or the re-election of Israel's uncompromising leadership.<sup>65</sup> Traditionally, support for Israel has been broad and bipartisan on the American domestic scene, especially in Congress.<sup>66</sup> However, the nuclear deal with Iran indicates that it is possible to circumvent such pressures, even on an issue that Prime Minister Netanyahu and the pro-Israel lobby viewed as paramount for Israeli security.<sup>67</sup>

*Future modes and roles of American power*

As Stephen M. Walt has recently remarked, for all intents and purposes the United States remains 'toxic' in the Middle East.<sup>68</sup> The limited ability of the United States to influence the unfolding post-revolutionary processes in the area has not been solely a function of Obama's lack of willpower, as some argue.<sup>69</sup> Instead, America's history-bounded unpopularity has played a big part. This is a key acknowledgment when considering the foreign policy roles and means of power projection that the United States should assume and pursue in the future.

Anti-Americanism in the Middle East constitutes a veritable Catch-22 for the US. Authoritarian stability was already questionable as a long-term policy prescription after 9/11, and the Arab Spring merely accentuated its unsustainability. America cannot consistently side with the region's strongmen, even if this might appear paramount for the maintenance of regional peace and security in the short term. However, when the US verbally supports liberal values, and then disrespects such declarations in the breach by channelling military aid to authoritarian regimes or tolerating human rights violations, it

65 S.A. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 231; S. Telhami, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–94, 109–110.

66 F.A. Gerges, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–143; J.J. Mearsheimer & S.M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007.

67 C. Morello, *op. cit.*

68 S.M. Walt, 'Could We Have Stopped This Tragedy?', *Foreign Policy* [Website], 21 September 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/21/could-we-have-stopped-this-tragedy-syria-intervention-realist/>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

69 R.J. Lieber, *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the United States Is Not Destined to Decline*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 166–169.

risks losing the support of like-minded local groups. Such ambivalence short-cuts any long-term vision for a more peaceful, pluralistic and egalitarian MENA region. In today's interconnected world, hypocrisy is extremely difficult to conceal, especially for the 'presumptive world leader'.<sup>70</sup> According to Shibley Telhami, a seasoned student of Arab public opinion, perceptions of the US in the Middle East are premised on policies, not slogans.<sup>71</sup> Recent opinion polls on America's standing in the region provide a sobering example of how the disconnect between declarations and actions renders the US unpopular.<sup>72</sup>

A long-term vision for American foreign policy in the Middle East, therefore, necessitates the fostering and maintenance of legitimacy in the eyes of the leaders and the populaces of the Middle East. If the United States wants to retain a modicum of influence in the MENA region, acknowledging this link between legitimation and the sustainable exercise of power will be instrumental. Despite its evident shortcomings, the beginnings of such an approach can already be found in President Obama's foreign policy. Faced with a severe economic crisis, an American public tired of war, and the diplomatic shortcomings of the Bush presidency, the new White House incumbent appreciated the limits of American power and the importance of cultivating working relationships with friend and foe alike.<sup>73</sup> In other words, Obama acknowledged that translating US preponderance in the military and economic spheres into influence necessitated an awareness of the interests and values of other actors in the international arena.<sup>74</sup> The logic is simple: when a powerful state and its power projection are regarded as 'desirable, proper and appropriate', it becomes veritably easier for the state to draw on 'voluntary compliance'.<sup>75</sup> The need for the exercise of military force and economic inducement decreases as other states – and their populaces – come to view their interests as intertwined with those of the powerful state.<sup>76</sup> Long-term peace,

70 S. Weber & B.W. Jentleson, *The End of Arrogance: America in the Global Competition of Ideas*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2011, p. 21.

71 S. Telhami, op. cit., p. 113.

72 Pew Research Center, 'Opinion of the United States – Indicators Database', *Pew Research Center* [Website], 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/group/6/>, accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

73 F. A. Gerges, op. cit., pp. 66–67, 89–90.

74 S. Reich & R.N. Lebow, op. cit., pp. 34–35; J. S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, PublicAffairs, New York, 2011, pp. 42–44, 75–76.

75 I. Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', in *International Organization*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1999, p. 387; Reus-Smit, op. cit., pp. 163–164.

76 C. Reus-Smit, op. cit., pp. 163, 170; S. Reich & R. N. Lebow, op. cit., pp. 32–36.

stability and just societies can hardly be achieved by sword, stick and carrot. These instruments are not only costly, but also emasculating for the subjects of power – coercion breeds resentment and erodes the social bases of power.<sup>77</sup>

Be that as it may, there remains a short-term need for the US to exercise force in the area, if only to curb the rise of ISIS and forge a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Syria. Large-scale military engagement can be futile, however, and it can harm America's future ability to exert influence in the region, as the prolonged imbroglio of Iraq plainly attests. Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow have recently discussed achieving policy outcomes through 'sponsorship' as opposed to 'hegemonic' strategies.<sup>78</sup> Sponsorship entails supporting, as opposed to leading, other states in defence of mutually agreed-upon values and objectives.<sup>79</sup>

A comparison of how the invasion of Iraq and the intervention in Libya were carried out is indicative. Unlike the unilateral drive to topple Saddam Hussein, the impetus for action against Muammar Gaddafi came from the UK and France, along with the Arab League.<sup>80</sup> In fact, the campaign to protect civilians from Gaddafi's murderous advance initially enjoyed unprecedented support amongst regional leaders, and also garnered initial acceptance from a veritable portion of ordinary Arabs and Muslims.<sup>81</sup> On top of this, the monetary and human cost of the intervention was a fraction of the billions of dollars spent and the number of lives lost in Iraq.<sup>82</sup> The fact that the US failed to capitalise on this goodwill in the long run is immaterial. The building of coalitions of international and regional actors behind a common cause, with the US bearing a considerable part of the burden but not shouldering the responsibility alone, has a massive symbolic relevance.<sup>83</sup> Future American leaders should keep this template in mind, especially now that Europe has been forced to turn its attention

77 See C. Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 57–61, 65–67.

78 S. Reich and R.N. Lebow, *op. cit.*, pp. 139–142.

79 S. Reich and R.N. Lebow, *op. cit.*, pp. 140–141.

80 C.S. Chivvis, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–56; P.D. Williams, 'The Road to Humanitarian War in Libya', in *Global Responsibility to Protect*, vol. 3, no.2, 2011, pp. 248–259.

81 S. Telhami, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–101.

82 Reich and Lebow, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–151.

83 *ibid.*, p. 152.

to Syria and the battle against ISIS in the face of a massive ‘refugee crisis’ and the spectre of terrorism.<sup>84</sup>

Similar questions need to be considered when planning the American use of economic power in the MENA region. The US spends over \$5 billion dollars each year supporting the militaries of its predominantly authoritarian Middle Eastern allies. The tip of the iceberg is Egypt’s military aid, a whopping \$1.3 billion *per annum*, while non-military economic support funds total a mere \$150 million.<sup>85</sup> The Obama team made the right choice when it froze military aid to Egypt in 2013, but the decision to resume it in 2015 appears shortsighted.<sup>86</sup> Massive discrepancies between support for economic development and institution building as opposed to military aid create the impression that the US helps to perpetuate the security state and the subjugation of the population. A shift, even a gradual one, from funding the military to aiding projects that benefit the wider populace would improve America’s standing in the region at a grassroots level and contribute to long-term peace and stability.<sup>87</sup> The present policy only allows local autocrats to keep a lid on the embittering grievances of the region’s masses, inviting a new eruption some years down the line.

The suggested legitimacy-enhancing measures require short-term changes to power projection strategies so that America’s attractiveness as a partner to the whole region, not just authoritarian allies, is enhanced in the long run. In the process, legitimation should boost American soft power, i.e. the ability to achieve outcomes through ‘co-optation’ as opposed to ‘coercion’.<sup>88</sup> Enhanced legitimacy would, therefore, allow the US to gradually shift from the use of military and economic power to soft power strategies. Soft power can be exercised actively by persuading others through reasoned argumentation, but it also has a passive manifestation when a state’s intrinsic qualities

84 Walt, ‘Could We Have Stopped This Tragedy?’, loc. cit.; A. D. Miller, ‘Why the Paris Attacks Won’t Be a Game-Changer for Obama’, in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 18 November 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/18/paris-attacks-wont-change-obama-policy-isis-terrorism/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

85 State Department, ‘Foreign Military Financing Account Summary’, *State Department* [Website], 2015, <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm>, accessed 24 Nov. 2015.

86 D. Huber, 57–75 (p. 64); S. Ackerman, ‘Obama Restores us Military Aid to Egypt over Islamic State Concerns’, *The Guardian* [Website], 31 March 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/31/obama-restores-us-military-aid-to-egypt>, accessed 19 Oct 2015.

87 For a similar argument see R. Mason, op. cit., p. 45.

88 J. S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, p. x; Nye, *The Future of Power*, op. cit., pp. 82–83.

or upright conduct on the international arena foster respect in and of themselves.<sup>89</sup>

The crux of the issue is that the use of soft power to achieve long-term American objectives, for instance improvements in human rights and nuclear non-proliferation, is far less costly than trying to bring about the same outcomes through credible military threats or economic bribes.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, soft power strategies grant ownership to other actors – the subject of power decides for itself if it wants to be persuaded by the better argument or attracted by the values and policies of the power wielder.<sup>91</sup> In the process, the United States can gradually shift its foreign policy role from that of a pragmatic security arbiter towards a more principled approach. However, the US needs to bear in mind that being principled should not mean presenting others with a set of American ideals to comply with. It should instead entail listening to the views of allies, even foes, and finding a reasoned consensus based on mutually-held values and objectives.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, a long-term vision based on enhancing legitimacy and downscaling America's military role in the Middle East through burden sharing would free up resources to be used in other regions of the world. This is especially pertinent since the rise of China has already prompted the United States to ramp up its military and economic activism in Asia.<sup>93</sup> As presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton argued in 2011, in the coming decades the sectarian and cultural conflicts raging in the Middle East will pale in significance compared with the dawn of the 'Pacific century'.<sup>94</sup> Power transition and the ensuing shift to a multipolar world looks to be the megatrend of international politics in the 21st century, though analysts disagree on the speed at which this systemic change will occur.<sup>95</sup> In the more distant future, an increasingly large share of American diplomatic, economic and military resources will be spent on ascertaining that China and (later) India rise peacefully

89 Nye, *The Future of Power*, op. cit., pp. 90–94.

90 S. Reich & R. N. Lebow, op. cit., p. 36.

91 J. S. Nye, 'Notes for A Soft Power Research Agenda' in F. Berenskoetter & M.J. Williams eds., *Power in World Politics*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007, pp. 169–170.

92 S. Reich & R.N. Lebow, op. cit., pp. 179–180.

93 O. Turner, 'The us "Pivot" to the Asia Pacific' in I.Parmar, L.B. Miller & M. Ledwidge eds., *Obama and the World: New Directions in us Foreign Policy*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2014, pp. 219–230.

94 H. R. Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', in *Foreign Policy* [Website], 11 October 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

95 Cf. F. Zakaria, *The Post-American World: Release 2.0*, W. W. Norton, New York, 2011; J. S. Nye Jr., *Is the American Century Over*, Polity, Cambridge, 2015.

and assume their role as leading powers that bear responsibilities for the functioning of international society.<sup>96</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Reading the inconsistencies in Barack Obama's foreign policy in the MENA region as signs of weakness or haphazard policymaking would be myopic. The administration's reaction to the Arab Spring shows that, given the complex forces unleashed in the region, the United States cannot assume a blanket approach. Moreover, in the vein of President Obama, future US administrations need to accept that America's ability to control events in the Middle East has become increasingly limited. A willingness to forge alliances with not only the region's rulers, but also the broader social movements that the Arab Spring unleashed, is paramount for the maintenance of a modicum of American influence in the coming decades.

The US reaction to the Arab Spring and its aftermath shows that foreign policy decisions – especially important ones – are invariably made 'within a dense web of normative claims that often conflict with one another'.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, the United States cannot immediately assume the ideal-typical role of either a security balancer or vanguard for liberal values in the Middle East. Conflicting forces pulling in disparate directions and distinctive local dynamics will not lend themselves to simple solutions. For the time being, the US will have to play both realist and idealist tunes, even if this means living with occasional accusations of policy inconsistency from domestic and international spheres.

Most important of all, the United States has to cultivate legitimacy. Fostering the perception that American conduct and involvement in the region is 'desirable, proper and appropriate' is the most feasible and cost-effective longer-term strategy towards the Middle East.<sup>98</sup> Of course, the sooner the US starts to alter the manner in which power is exercised, the sooner these changes will have an impact on how America and its power projection are perceived by the rulers and especially the populaces in the MENA region. Therefore, the forming

96 F. Zakaria, *op. cit.*, pp. 260–261.

97 M. Finnemore, 'Paradoxes in Humanitarian Intervention' in R.M. Price ed., *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 198.

98 C. Reus-Smit, 'International Crises', p. 158.

of broad coalitions in which the American military plays a supporting role should come to constitute the new *modus operandi* in the military realm, and economic resources should be shifted from the support of authoritarian allies' military establishments to economic support programmes that facilitate institution building and, ultimately, democratisation. Shaking off the negative trappings of anti-Americanism would allow the US to become a force for, as opposed to a break against, positive progress in the Middle East. In the longer term, the fostering of regional goodwill would enable the United States to shift economic and military power resources to other areas of the globe.



7



## 7. Promoting stability in the Middle East? The American alliance with Saudi Arabia after the “Rebalance”

Eoin Micheál McNamara

The Middle East represents a vital, yet problematic, region for the US as it seeks to promote a more stable international order. The effort to achieve greater political stability in the Middle East has largely occupied a priority position in US foreign policy as it has been formulated since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, over the past fifteen years, US security management efforts in the region have met with little success, while the Middle East’s security circumstances continue to deteriorate. Following the large-scale US military withdrawals that began in Iraq in 2009 and Afghanistan in 2014, this chapter will examine the place of the Middle East within the redesigned US foreign policy that is emerging under the “rebalance”. It will address two main research questions: what are the prime challenges facing US security management efforts in the Middle East, and what options exist for the US to promote greater stability in the region?

Analysis will specifically focus on the perpetually problematic American alliance with Saudi Arabia. In recent years this alliance has become a crucially important part of a US strategy that aims to manage security in the Middle East. The effort to prevent wider nuclear proliferation due to increased tensions in the region is outlined as a critical security challenge for the hegemonic US specifically and international security more generally. This chapter will be divided into four main sections: section one will examine the US foreign policy transition in the Middle East, from the “maximalist” approach attempted under George W. Bush to the more “minimalist” forms of engagement that are outlined under the “rebalance”; section two will analyze the often problematic underpinnings of the US-Saudi alliance; section three will examine the consequences for US foreign policy

that are born of the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia as it continues against the backdrop of the threat of wider nuclear proliferation; and section four analyses the options the US has at its disposal in its efforts to coax and coerce Saudi Arabia away from any possible nuclear aspirations it might harbor.

#### A “REBALANCED” US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

It is no surprise that the shift in US foreign policy focus that was signaled during Barack Obama’s two presidential terms has received a lot of international attention. The core of this change is the apparent initiative to fundamentally reorder US foreign policy preferences. During the Cold War, the US strategic calculus regarded Western Europe as being of the utmost importance, followed by the Middle East and East Asia respectively. As the Middle East is a key supplier of energy for the US economy, as well as a problematic source of international terrorism and the location of states that are willing to frustrate US interests, such as Iran and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, the region began to demand the majority of US strategic attention as the 1990s drifted into the 2000s, but the large-scale US military withdrawals from Iraq that began in 2009 and Afghanistan in 2014 appear to show that the pendulum of America’s foreign policy focus has again swung in the direction of changed regional focus. Under the Obama administration, industrialized East Asia has been strongly underlined as an emerging region that will be of foremost importance for future US security strategy. This has been spurred on by China’s potential to emerge as America’s chief geopolitical rival, together with significant economic progression in many other parts of the wider Far East.

Early in the Obama presidency, this change in US foreign policy focus was introduced as the “pivot to Asia”. The term “pivot” quickly became diplomatically cumbersome as it fostered the impression that this change would lead to core allies residing in other regions receiving a considerable reduction in US security provision. Some people, such as John Mearsheimer, have argued that the term “pivot” has accurately captured the change of direction that is underway in US foreign policy: for Mearsheimer, in order to “pivot to Asia” Washington would naturally have to “pivot away” from other regions that it perceives to be of comparatively less importance, namely the Middle East

and Europe.<sup>1</sup> Accurate or not, however, US foreign policy vocabulary sought to lessen such impressions and “pivot” was subsequently exchanged for the more diplomatically prudent term “rebalance”. Diplomatic masking aside, while East Asia now appears to be firmly in the ascendancy these changes still pose questions for the two regions in the awkward position of still being considered important but seeing their stock as a US priority go into decline. Questions concerning US security management in the Middle East are especially pertinent in this regard. As the Middle East is by far the most politically volatile among the three regions of core strategic importance for the US, how must Washington strive to improve security in a region that it will now probably devote less foreign policy resources and strategic attention to?

It has been the view of some analysts that a reduction in US foreign policy attention towards the Middle East might well constitute a positive development for the region’s security as well as the national security of the US itself. US foreign policy in the Middle East is now formulated against the downstream of the failed American efforts to stabilize and democratize the region between 2001 and 2008 that took place during the presidency of George W. Bush. This was an era in which the US pursued an extremely ambitious, “maximalist” foreign policy line. Long at the heart of the debate on America’s role in the world has been the issue of whether US interests can be best served through either a “maximalist” or “minimalist” foreign policy, and Jonathan Monten has provided a succinct overview of this “minimalist” – “maximalist” spectrum. Those who advocate isolationism can be positioned at the “minimalist” extreme. Isolationists stress that the only prudent way for the US to positively influence others in the international system is to lead by example, by demonstrating virtue in its domestic affairs while avoiding intervention. This logic frames “the little city on the hill” analogy. By contrast, those at the “maximalist” extreme argue that the US should intervene actively with an almost missionary zeal in order to spread American values, which are perceived as holding universal benefits. US-based liberal values are seen by those who subscribe to this position as promulgating peace, freedom and economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup>

1 Comments of J.J. Mearsheimer cited in S. Kay, ‘Indecision on Syria and Europe may undermine America’s Asia pivot’, *War on the Rocks*, 8 July 2013, <http://warontherocks.com/2013/07/indecision-on-syria-and-europe-may-undermine-americas-asia-pivot/>, accessed 15 January 2016.

2 J. Monten, ‘The roots of the Bush doctrine: power, nationalism, and democracy promotion in U.S. strategy’, *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 113–115.

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, US foreign policy fell heavily under “maximalist” influences. Strategic direction was formulated predominantly by a group of influential neoconservative policy staff and intellectuals that sought to widen the scope of America’s national security interest.<sup>3</sup> This widening has been argued to have been inspired by “offensive liberalism”, a normative ideology that strongly justifies the use of military force in order to achieve what are perceived as morally desirable ends. This included the overthrow of regimes that were believed to be denying their populations basic human rights and other liberal freedoms.<sup>4</sup>

This guiding ideology behind George W. Bush’s foreign policy appeared to dovetail satisfactorily with the logic of liberal democratic peace and thus with wider US strategic desires, particularly in the case of the Middle East. The region is home to Israel, Washington’s most politically important ally, and also a source of the petroleum supplies that are crucial for the US economy. By forcefully promoting regime change in the Middle East, the Bush administration believed that US actions could ultimately reestablish the region’s political foundations to align with liberal democratic peace. The US would assist the political and economic recovery of the nations concerned in such a way that anti-American terrorist networks and “rogue states” would diminish, the US would be observed favorably within the region, Israel’s national security would be reinforced and the security of oil supplies would be enhanced.<sup>5</sup>

Observing regional security in the Middle East from a 2016 standpoint, it can be seen that this vision was not realized. Instead, American actions have led to a number of chronic setbacks both for the US itself and for the region’s security. As early as 2010, Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz calculated that the US-led war in Iraq after 2003 alone had created a \$3 trillion loss for the US treasury.<sup>6</sup> From a strategic perspective, instead of winning the democratic peace, an excessive US use of military force left a trail of anarchy and extreme political

- 3 For elaboration on this, see M.C. Williams, ‘What is the national interest? The neoconservative challenge in IR theory’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2005, pp. 307–337.
- 4 B. Miller, ‘Explaining changes in US grand strategy: 9/11, the rise of offensive liberalism, and the war in Iraq’, *Security Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2010, pp. 26–65.
- 5 For connections between George W. Bush’s foreign policy and democratic peace theory, see J. Snyder, ‘One world, many theories’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 145, 2004, p. 54.
- 6 J. E. Stiglitz and L. J. Bilmes, ‘The true cost of the Iraq War: \$3 trillion and beyond’, *The Washington Post*, 5 September 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/03/AR2010090302200.html>, accessed 15 January 2016.

violence in its wake. Ironically, this increases the risk of “blow-back” terrorism against US targets or those of its regional allies. Saddam’s overthrow in Iraq quickly led to a three-way civil war between Sunni and Shia Muslims and Kurdish separatists, and volatility in post-invasion Iraq facilitated a networking hub for foreign jihadists and Al-Qaeda affiliates. This allowed the dispersal of terror tactics among anti-American terrorist groups.<sup>7</sup> Finally, together with civil war in Syria, state fragility in Iraq played a central role in the rise of the Islamic State after 2011.

Following the often destructive consequences of its recent foreign policy in the Middle East, the US currently finds itself in a very challenging position concerning its future strategy in the region. The strategy that aimed to pacify the Middle East through a mix of military force and an aggressive promotion of liberal values is now obsolete, but at a time when its main foreign policy focus emphasizes East Asia, the Middle East continues to present a number of acute security problems of both regional and international significance. Hence, the US must retain a strong secondary focus on the region. As the failures of George W. Bush’s “maximalist” foreign policy design began to become clear as his second presidential term approached in 2004, many from both the realist and liberal sides of the foreign policy debate began to offer alternative approaches for US strategic engagement.

Falling into this category was the idea of “smart power”, a term first coined by liberal thinker Joseph Nye, which argued that America should wield lighter forms of a combination of both “hard” and “soft” power than neoconservatives were advocating. For Nye, while not retreating into isolation, the US could better achieve its national security goals and incur lower costs if it projected power through a mix of coercion and attraction.<sup>8</sup> On the realist side, both “offshore balancing” and “selective engagement” have been two of the most popular foreign policy alternatives that have been put forward for the US since the end of the Cold War. Seeing “offshore balancing” as a strategy that would help the US secure its core interests in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia while avoiding the folly associated with a “maximalist” foreign policy, Christopher Layne has advocated that the US should only station a light military presence in each region, but have larger

7 P. Bergen and A. Reynolds, ‘Blowback revisited: today’s insurgents in Iraq are tomorrow’s terrorists’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84 no.6, 2005, pp. 2–6.

8 J. S. Nye Jr., ‘Get smart: combining hard and soft power’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88 no. 4, 2009, pp. 160–163.

numbers of military units on stand-by elsewhere that can be mobilized should a US ally come under threat.<sup>9</sup> Layne argues that the heavier and more visible US military presence that has in the past been stationed in the Middle East has increased the risk of terrorism by fostering anti-American sentiment and also motivated Iran to seek a nuclear deterrent as a self-help defense measure.<sup>10</sup>

Agreeing with Layne on many virtues of “offshore balancing”, Robert Art nevertheless takes a contrasting view in proposing his “selective engagement” strategy to include the continuation of a considerable “on-site” US military presence in each region of core concern: East Asia, the Middle East and Europe.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Barry Posen has argued that previous US interventionist policies aiming to quell nationalist violence and engineer a liberal peace abroad have done more harm than good and have been counter-productive from a US national security perspective. Posen argues that a more cost-effective US security strategy would involve greater leverage of its “command of the global commons”<sup>12</sup>, making its military superiority over international airspace, the high seas and outer space count in order to coerce its enemies into line.<sup>13</sup>

While Nye’s concept of “smart power” and the various realist alternatives hold considerable merit, a number of blind spots can also be found concerning issues of critical current importance for US foreign policy decision-making. Firstly, while most realist alternatives underline the frequently made point that East Asia, the Middle East and Europe are the three general regions that the US should prioritize, they do not provide a precise answer as to exactly where the US should “selectively engage”. Secondly, they do not outline precisely which security issues are most pressing for the US, and thus which issues

9 C. Layne, ‘From preponderance to offshore balancing: America’s future grand strategy’, *International Security*, vol. 22, no.1, 2007, pp.86–124.

10 C. 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. 5–25.

11 R. J. Art, ‘Selective engagement in the era of austerity’, in R. Fontaine and K. M. Lord, Eds, *America’s path: grand strategy for the next administration*, Center for A New American Security, Washington D.C., 2012, pp. 15–27. And R. J. Art, ‘Geopolitics updated: the strategy of selective engagement’, *International Security*, vol. 23 no. 3, 1998–1999, pp. 79–113.

12 For analysis of US military supremacy in these areas see, B. R. Posen, ‘Command of the commons: the military foundation of U.S. hegemony’, *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2003, pp. 5–46.

13 B.R. Posen, ‘Stability and change in US grand strategy’, *Orbis*, vol. 51 no.4, 2007, pp. 565–566, see also B. R. Posen, *Restraint: a new foundation for US grand strategy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2014.

Washington should prioritize as part of any scaled-down “selective engagement” strategy.

On the first point, drawing on the case of the US-Saudi alliance, this chapter will illustrate that perseverance in US alliance management can benefit the wider regional security, even if managing problematic allies can be an arduously difficult responsibility for Washington. The contemporary alliance theory literature does not perhaps take this aspect sufficiently into account and focuses on how states subordinated to the US might align in a unipolar international system. For instance, Stephen Walt presents the conventional understanding that states subordinated to US power have three main options: to either balance against the US, to bandwagon with the US, or to stay neutral. Walt also argues that the end of the Cold War allowed the US “greater freedom of action” as the Soviet Union had disappeared as a strategic counter-weight.<sup>14</sup> While these observations are correct, the picture is incomplete regarding some other intricate challenges that are often encountered in formulating US alliance policy. Despite its hegemonic status, the US position regarding global security affairs is sometimes heavily dependent on the behavior of its subordinate allies.

It has been argued that Washington uses its peacetime alliance management options to both monitor and restrain the behavior of allies that have been problematic within the context of wider regional security circumstances.<sup>15</sup> As a past example, Turkish and Greek accession to NATO during the Cold War served to mute their otherwise tense regional rivalry as both knew that aggression against the other might risk the withdrawal of crucial security privileges they received through their alliance with the US. Reassurance provided from Washington can prevent a problematic ally seeking other security options that might otherwise upset the wider regional security order and thus risk regional instability. US efforts to provide stability through its alliances often reduces its “freedom of action”. Moreover, while “entrapment” is often conceived as a fear experienced by the subordinate states within an alliance, the US can also encounter “entrapment” in its relations with a problematic ally, should the regional balance be so delicate that retaining the alliance exists as one of the few options to stop the wider security situation deteriorating further.<sup>16</sup>

14 S. M. Walt, ‘Alliances in a unipolar world’, *World Politics*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2009, pp. 94–95.

15 For general elaboration, see P. A. Weitsman, ‘Intimate enemies: the politics of peacetime alliances’, *Security Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1997, pp. 156–193.

16 G. Snyder, ‘The security dilemma in alliance politics’, *World Politics*, vol. 36, no. 4, 1984, p. 466.

On the second point, the first-order threat of wider nuclear proliferation still lingers in the Middle East along with the second-order potential for greater regional volatility as the region's main rivals posture against the backdrop of a possible nuclear option. Even a utilitarian US approach to "selective engagement" in the Middle East would advocate the use of American strategic assets in the region as a means of curtailing these specific dangers. Discussion surrounding possible US efforts to prevent wider nuclear proliferation feeds into the debate on whether the spread of nuclear weapons can promote either stability or volatility. Through added deterrence, Kenneth Waltz has stressed that the wider acquisition of nuclear weapons can promote greater systemic stability. This claim is based on the logic that the emergence of nuclear-armed rivals will raise the stakes to a level of extreme caution where each side will refrain from attempting even a conventional attack.<sup>17</sup> It is under these assumptions that Waltz advocated Iranian nuclear weapons acquisition.<sup>18</sup>

However, this argument tends to forget what can occur during the time it takes for a state to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. The early stages of an arms race might foster the risk of armed conflict; the rival that possesses a nuclear weapon first may wish to retain its strategic advantage, and with its opponent's deterrent still under development there would be no restrictions on the opportunity to wage a preventative war.<sup>19</sup> This scenario is quite possible, so a reduction in regional tensions is unlikely. Moreover, arguing that nuclear proliferation is more likely to destabilize a region, Scott Sagan highlights a scenario where a nuclear-armed state may behave more aggressively by increasing its support for proxy wars in order to strategically weaken a regional rival. This is motivated by the idea that the possession of a nuclear deterrent reduces the possibility for nuclear, conventional or unconventional retaliation.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, contrary to the improbable threat assessment that an Iranian nuclear strike is likely should Tehran acquire the capability, more plausible Israeli security thinking echoes a similar perspective, wary that were Iran to possess

17 K. N. Waltz, 'Nuclear myths and political realities', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 84, no.3, 1990, pp. 730-745.

18 K. N. Waltz, 'Why Iran should get the bomb', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no.4, 2012, pp. 2-5.

19 C. L. Glaser, 'The causes and consequences of arms races', *The Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2000, p. 260.

20 See the three-way debate on the Iranian nuclear program: S. D. Sagan, K. N. Waltz, and R. K. Betts, 'A nuclear Iran: promoting stability or courting disaster?', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2007, pp. 135-150.

nuclear weapons it would become more zealous in its support for Hezbollah, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>21</sup> Hence, despite arguments to the contrary, this chapter will adhere to the assumption that attempts to change the existing regional nuclear status quo are often likely to have a destabilizing effect. Thus, with the US–Saudi alliance at its heart, this chapter will explain how a number of issues threatening the strategic nuclear balance in the Middle East stand to provide many intricate diplomatic challenges for the US as it applies its “rebalanced” foreign policy to the region.

#### SAUDI ARABIA: PROBLEMATIC BUT PIVOTAL?

As well as assisting other strategic objectives for the US in the Middle East, the security assurances that Washington has long provided to Saudi Arabia can be perceived as part of a foreign policy that is designed to limit the risks of further nuclear proliferation in the region. In contrast to US security management in both East Asia and Europe, where American security guarantees have largely worked well to support stability, Kathleen McInnis argues that US extended deterrence has long suffered from a “credibility gap” in the Middle East. This has emerged from the often politically irritable relations that the US has had with some of its main allies in the region. Should Turkey, Egypt or Saudi Arabia perceive US security assurances as unreliable to meet the possible threat of a nuclear Iran, these states may then decide to seek their own nuclear arsenals. Washington would thus encounter the threat of wider nuclear proliferation as well as a deep crisis in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

The US–Saudi alliance has not been formed on a cohesive basis of shared values or deep mutual trust but is rather, as Gawdat Bahgat highlights, a minimal and highly pragmatic bargain. Saudi Arabia has long maintained a stable supply of oil for the US economy. Riyadh has subsequently used the influence gained from this to ensure that petroleum prices remain at profitable levels on the world market, while Washington seeks to guarantee Saudi national

21 S. Pifer, R. C. Bush, V. Felbab–Brown, M. S. Indyk, M. O’Hanlon and K. M. Pollack, ‘US nuclear and extended deterrence: considerations and challenges’, *Brookings Institution Arms Control Series*, Paper 3, 2010, p. 40.

22 K. J. McInnis, ‘Extended deterrence: The U.S. credibility gap in the Middle East’, *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no.3, pp. 169–170.

security against external threats.<sup>23</sup> Although doubts concerning Saudi Arabia's nuclear intentions are occasionally voiced, Bahgat outlines that the Saudi leadership has long denied that it harbors any nuclear ambitions. Speculation on the nuclear option for Saudi Arabia can gain some anecdotal plausibility when one observes the country's arduous strategic circumstances combined with its regime's financial affluence. A Saudi nuclear program might not have to progress through the same lengthy research and development process that other past nuclear aspirants have had to establish, rather it might simply be able to purchase a nuclear weapons infrastructure at relatively short-notice. Conversely, a long-standing argument against the possibility of Saudi acquisition of nuclear weapons has been based on the logic that the reliable security guarantees it receives through its alliance with the US eliminates the incentive for Riyadh to develop a nuclear deterrent.<sup>24</sup>

In order to assess the strength of the latter prognosis, the durability of the pragmatic bargain forming the core of the security partnership between the US and Saudi Arabia needs to be reconsidered in light of the deteriorating security circumstances in the Middle East. The question of Saudi nuclear weapons acquisition tangibly emerged following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US. Many of the attackers possessed Saudi citizenship, and social inequality is a prominent trend in Saudi society. Large sections of the population who are not privileged with connections to the Saudi ruling regime are often denied social opportunities and can instead come under the influence of clerics preaching extreme Wahhabi ideologies.<sup>25</sup> Saudi society's emergence as a supplier of radicalized personnel for Islamic terrorist organizations caused considerable unease in US policy circles, and Riyadh feared that the crucial security assistance that it had traditionally received from the US was on the verge of diminishing as a consequence.

The strategic turmoil in the Middle East caused by the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003 did little to reduce Saudi fears. Saddam Hussein's Iraq – a strategic counter-weight serving to constrain Iran's regional power – had fallen. While its alleged nuclear arsenal is officially undeclared, many reputable sources refer to Israel holding

23 G. Bahgat, *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2007, p. 79.

24 *Ibid*, p.84–86.

25 For further explanation of social inequality in Saudi society, see I. Bremmer, 'The Saudi paradox', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2004, pp. 23–30.

nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup> Israel's nuclear preponderance among the Middle East's littoral states, coupled with Iran's newfound freedom of action, meant that Riyadh began to nervously contemplate the plausibility of two bitter regional rivals eventually posing a nuclear threat.<sup>27</sup> With the number of serious threats multiplying as the 2000s progressed, the Saudi leadership were further prompted to consider whether their ties with Washington were durable enough to indefinitely protect the country's security. Saudi thinking in this regard was suppressed temporarily as it became a crucial ally, both during the US "war on terror" after 2001 and during the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003, although the latter was not seen as wholly benefitting Riyadh's strategic position.

#### RIVALRIES, PROXY WARS, AND MIDDLE EAST TENSION

Doubts concerning the condition of the US-Saudi alliance have continued to fester under the surface. These have in part been heightened as an indirect result of US and Israeli actions or policy in the wider Middle East over the last fifteen years, since 2001. The response of Iran to US foreign policy in the region during this time has had many problematic repercussions for Saudi Arabia, among other countries. Often provoking arduous complications for US security management attempts, the densely entangled patterns of enmity that define the Middle East's security order often mean that efforts related to resolving one particular dispute can simultaneously have negative repercussions for conflicts elsewhere in the region. Riyadh has long looked on with anxiety at Iran's extremely hostile rivalry with Israel. Since the early 1990s, successive Israeli governments have sought to communicate to Washington their grave assessment of the threat that Iran's regional power strategy holds for the Middle East. Tel Aviv has repeatedly called for US support through harsh coercive sanctions and even possible pre-emptive military options to curtail Iran's nuclear program.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, Israel's alarmist approach has been argued

26 See Z. Maoz, 'The mixed blessing of Israel's nuclear policy', *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2003, pp. 44-77.

27 E. MacAskill and I. Traynor, 'Saudis consider nuclear bomb', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/18/nuclear.saudi-arabia>, accessed 11 January 2016.

28 F. Rezaei and R. A. Cohen, 'Iran's nuclear program and the Israeli-Iranian rivalry in the post revolutionary era', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2014, p. 449.

by some to have counter-productively strengthened Iran's zeal to realize its nuclear ambitions.<sup>29</sup> Together with Israeli policy, George W. Bush's US foreign policy in the Middle East was argued by some to have exacerbated regional difficulties. US actions in the region had the effect of unintentionally galvanizing hardliners within the Iranian regime.

Between the 11 September 2001 attacks and the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003, Washington widened its security policy focus beyond the threats of transnational terrorist organizations to include "rogue states". The Bush administration declared Iran part of the "axis of evil" together with Iraq, North Korea and Syria. These were the prime states outlined by the White House as posing a menacing threat to the US and its allies. Following the US military intervention which overthrew Iraq's ruling Ba'ath dictatorship in 2003, the Iranian government perceived itself firmly within the American and Israeli lines of fire. Iran was clearly signaled as a threatening state that ought to be tackled next by the US. Through its actions against Iraq, Washington had already displayed its intent to overthrow unfriendly regimes with overwhelming military force. In this context, perceiving the need to safeguard its sovereignty as imperative, Iran is argued to have accelerated its efforts to attain a nuclear deterrent.<sup>30</sup>

While receiving marginal attention as the tense stand-off between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other has escalated over the past decade, the questions surrounding Iran's nuclear program that have emerged from this dispute would nevertheless hold serious implications for Saudi Arabia's security policy. Throughout the Iranian nuclear crisis, Riyadh has called for the halting of Iran's nuclear program. Based on action-reaction security dilemma logic, Iran's post-2003 nuclear ambitions perhaps increased the risk of Saudi Arabia being lured into a dangerous nuclear arms race. Interestingly, the 2015 agreement negotiated to stop the possibility of Iranian nuclear acquisition does not appear to have allayed Saudi fears. After arduous negotiations, in return for the lifting of Western sanctions, Iran agreed with the world's major powers to eliminate any possibility of its nuclear energy industry producing weapons-grade uranium.

Ironically, this outcome has triggered renewed fears of Iran's regional resurgence in Saudi Arabia and cast doubts on the sustainability

29 L. Horowitz and R. Popp, 'A nuclear-free Middle East – just not in the cards', *The International Spectator*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2012, p.2.

30 R. Takeyh, 'Iran's nuclear calculations', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2003, pp. 23–24.

of the US–Saudi alliance. Armed conflict in the Middle East has long been fuelled by a bitter ideological divide between the Sunni and Shia Islamic sects. The fall of Saddam’s Iraq in 2003 left Saudi Arabia strategically weakened as a remaining Sunni power. Iran holds the region’s largest Shia society. With actions structured in line with religious affiliation, Saudi Arabia and Iran have previously vehemently supported opposing sides in many bitter civil conflicts around the Middle East. For both Riyadh and Tehran, these conflicts have emerged as strategic proxy wars where both have sought to inflict damage on the interests of other, and both have recently supplied weapons and financing to opposing belligerents fighting in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has pointed to recent unprecedented aggression from Iran and accused it of overstepping previous “red lines” by supporting political and militant opposition forces among the Shia minority concentrated in Saudi Arabia’s oil-rich eastern province and Shia opposition groups in neighboring Bahrain.<sup>31</sup>

While on the surface the Saudi leadership have demonstrated a reluctant acceptance of the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, the agreement provokes its two principal fears: firstly, one strand of Saudi thinking believes that relief from Western sanctions will rejuvenate Iran’s economy and thus present Tehran with greater financial resources to support its proxies battling Saudi-backed adversaries in the region<sup>32</sup>; and secondly as the agreement is binding for a ten-year period, suspicions exist that Iran might use this time to establish nuclear weapons technologies outwith its territory in a clandestine manner, possibly in partnership with North Korea.<sup>33</sup> The amplified sense of threat that arises from these perceptions could prompt the Saudi leadership to revisit the debate on whether their alliance with Washington provides enough security vis-à-vis the alternative of a nuclear deterrent.

31 M. Knights, ‘What would a Saudi–Iran war look like? Don’t look now, but it is already here’, *Foreign Policy*, 11 January 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/11/what-would-a-saudi-iran-war-look-like-dont-look-now-but-it-is-already-here/>, accessed 11 January 2015.

32 Y. Trofimov, ‘Saudi Arabia considers nuclear weapons to offset Iran’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 May 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-considers-nuclear-weapons-to-offset-iran-1430999409>, accessed 11 January 2015.

33 J. R. Haines, ‘Foreseeable, foreseen, ignored: Is Iran advancing its missile program at home while offshoring its nuclear program to North Korea?’, *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes*, January 2015, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2016/01/foreseeable-foreseen-ignored-iran-advancing-its-missile-program-home-while-offshoring-its-nuclear-program-north-korea>, accessed 18 January 2015.

CONTROLLING PROLIFERATION:  
LIMITED OPTIONS FOR THE US?

While doubts linger in Riyadh, many views have emerged from Washington that see Saudi Arabia as an increasingly problematic state within the US alliance network. Chief among the critics has been the foreign policy team at the CATO Institute, a prominent libertarian think-tank that advocates the virtues of a “minimalist” US foreign policy. Proposing that the US should disqualify Saudi Arabia as an ally, CATO analyst Ted Galen Carpenter has pointed to the behavior of Saudi Arabia’s ruling regime, which has committed many grievous human rights abuses and follows a reckless policy of financing Sunni-aligned transnational terrorist organizations, which in turn emerge to threaten US security interests. Saudi Arabia is alleged to have supported the Sunni rebel groups in Iraq and Syria that would later form the Islamic State.<sup>34</sup> Dissatisfaction towards Saudi behavior in the region has also been displayed by some high-level US politicians. October 2014 saw Vice-President Joe Biden chastise Riyadh by saying:

“Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria... ...the Saudis, the Emirates, etcetera. What were they doing? ... ...They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad – except that the people who were being supplied, [they] were al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda, and the extremist elements of jihadis who were coming from other parts of the world”.<sup>35</sup>

Realizing the acute difficulties such comments could create for US foreign policy in the Middle East, Biden later apologized. However, illustrative of the pragmatic US alliance management approach

34 T. Galen Carpenter, ‘With “friends” like Saudi Arabia, the United States doesn’t need enemies’, *CATO At Liberty*, 18 August 2015, <http://www.cato.org/blog/friends-saudi-arabia-united-states-doesnt-need-enemies>, 11 January 2015.

35 A. Taylor, ‘Behind Biden’s gaffe lie real concerns about allies’ role in rise of the Islamic State’ *The Washington Post*, 6 October 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/10/06/behind-bidens-gaffe-some-legitimate-concerns-about-americas-middle-east-allies/>, accessed 11 January 2015.

towards Saudi Arabia's often duplicitous Middle East policy, one US analyst described Biden's mistake as "political" rather than "factual".<sup>36</sup>

Preventing the Saudi attainment of nuclear weapons appears to be at the heart of this US pragmatism. Mirroring concerns that foresee that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon would strengthen Tehran's resolve to support Shia extremist groups, some have argued that a Saudi foreign policy bolstered by nuclear weapons capabilities would risk galvanizing Riyadh's efforts to support Sunni insurgents operating in conflict zones throughout the globe. This would further frustrate US counter-terrorism policy.<sup>37</sup> For reasons such as this, despite the acutely problematic contradictions in Saudi policy, it has been outlined that Washington must strive to retain Saudi Arabia firmly within its alliance network. To ensure this, Gene Gerzhoy advocates projecting US influence towards Riyadh through a mix of both coercion and reassurances. On one hand, Washington can threaten to lead embargos on conventional arms exports to Saudi Arabia. Replacing and maintaining Western-standard military equipment would be almost impossible were Washington's cooperation cut off. This would drastically weaken Saudi military potential, leaving it increasingly vulnerable to regional security threats. On the other hand, in return for greater Saudi discipline in curbing its support for extremist militias, consistent actions demonstrating its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, and acceptance of contemporary US policy on Iran, Washington is able to offer many territorial defense benefits, possibly including sanctioning sophisticated military technology and improving intelligence sharing.<sup>38</sup>

However, focusing on the latter, some evidence from past inconsistent US policy in dealing with delicate nuclear security situations perhaps weakens Washington's ability to provide credible reassurances. Firstly, among other security matters, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 raised questions about nuclear security order because Ukraine agreed at the 1994 Budapest

36 Cited in M. Lander, 'Saudis are next on Biden's Mideast apology list after Harvard remarks', *The New York Times*, 6 October 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/07/world/middleeast/saudis-are-next-on-bidens-mideast-apology-list-after-harvard-remarks.html>, accessed 11 January 2015.

37 J. M. Ndungu, 'Is nuclear balancing in the Middle East possible?', *International Policy Digest*, 15 April 2015, <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2015/04/15/is-nuclear-balancing-in-the-middle-east-possible/>, accessed 11 January 2015.

38 G. Gerzhoy, 'How to manage Saudi anger at the Iran nuclear deal', *The Washington Post*, 22 May 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/05/22/how-to-manage-saudi-anger-at-the-iran-deal/>, accessed 11 January 2015.

Memorandum, to transfer the portion of the Soviet nuclear arsenal on its territory to Russia in exchange for political assurances from a group of powers led by the US that guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity. The US, among others, was ultimately unable to enforce this guarantee. This perhaps damages Washington's credibility should it wish to offer or renew similar assurances in exchange for a de-escalation of nuclear tensions in the future.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, a general theme of George W. Bush's US foreign policy between 2000 and 2008 was the separation of states into "good" and "evil" categories. Paradoxically, while firmly emphasizing the grave dangers arising from the nuclear ambitions of US adversaries, the Bush administration was simultaneously lenient towards "good" states that either already possessed a nuclear arsenal or held nuclear aspirations, if these states were US allies or important strategic partners in the "war on terror". This category included nuclear weapon-states that were not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) such as India, Pakistan and Israel. Moreover, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were grouped as "good" potential aspirants.<sup>40</sup>

During the Cold War, Israel was able to conceal its development of nuclear weapons capabilities from the US through a clandestine program. Yet, due to Israel's important status in relation to both US domestic politics and US security strategy, Washington found itself having to accept Tel Aviv's nuclear acquisition rather than imposing sanctions. Saudi Arabia falls lower down the US alliance hierarchy compared to Israel, but this past American tendency indicates possible acceptance rather than coercion for allies of high strategic importance who ultimately achieve nuclear weapon-state status. From this perspective, experience perhaps demonstrates to Riyadh that the risks might be lower than expected for a hedging strategy that would include pursuing a clandestine nuclear program, possibly in partnership with Pakistan, while simultaneously seeking to salvage its alliance with the US.<sup>41</sup>

However, weighing up a contra perspective, Saudi Arabia might after all only have a marginal opportunity to undertake a clandestine nuclear program. The large US military presence located in the Persian

39 D. S. Yost, 'The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine', *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 3, p. 523.

40 M. E. Carranza, 'Can the NPT survive? The theory and practice of US nuclear non-proliferation policy after September 11', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2006, p. 501.

41 R. J. Russell, 'A Saudi nuclear option?', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2001, pp. 78-80.

Gulf, including US bases located in Saudi Arabia itself as well as neighboring Qatar and Kuwait, means that Washington holds both the regional intelligence and military coercion capacities to ensure that any Saudi effort to develop a clandestine nuclear program will be difficult to both conceal and implement. Pursuit of the nuclear option would carry a perilous degree of strategic risk for the Saudi regime.<sup>42</sup> While this on-site presence aids US containment of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, the possibility that Washington may have to rely on its military capabilities to coerce Saudi Arabia away from nuclear aspirations illustrates just how chronically problematic the US alliance with Saudi Arabia is. While strategic circumstances dictate that both will continue to be shackled with this unhappy alliance, it is difficult to foresee an improvement in US-Saudi relations.

These security policy problems coincide with a time of increased economic strain between the two states. The US “oil-shale revolution” has reduced both the US and global demand for Saudi Arabia’s petroleum products and thus triggered serious problems for the Saudi economy.<sup>43</sup> This has the potential to increase Saudi insecurity and thus foster animosity in its relations with the US, which is likely to create further difficulties for US alliance management efforts that seek to limit the possibilities of a Saudi nuclear program as well as curtail Saudi Arabia’s proxy support for extremist groups.

#### CONCLUSION

Considering the security problems of both regional and international significance that find their source in the Middle East, it would not be wise for Washington to substantially downgrade its strategic focus on the region as it formulates its “rebalanced” foreign policy. The US promotion of stability in the Middle East can still be conducted in a far more utilitarian manner compared to the overly “maximalist” approach attempted under George W. Bush. In this regard, much will hinge on the highly problematic US alliance with Saudi Arabia, and maintaining this alliance will prove a politically treacherous task for

42 A. Kadhim, ‘The future of nuclear weapons in the Middle East’, *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, p. 587.

43 A. Evans-Pritchard, ‘Saudi Arabia may go broke before the us oil industry buckles’, *The Telegraph*, 5 August 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/oilprices/11768136/Saudi-Arabia-may-go-broke-before-the-us-oil-industry-buckles.html>, accessed 13 January 2016.

American leaders on an almost perpetual basis. The Saudi regime's abysmal human rights record alone means that the preservation of the alliance will continue to attract criticism from many commentators in the US. Considered together with Riyadh's regular support for many extremist Sunni insurgencies that in turn threaten US security interests, this would indicate a grim outlook for the health of the US-Saudi alliance. Despite this, it appears that the "lesser evil" for the US will be to choose to continue to maintain its security ties with Riyadh, as a termination of this arrangement comes with the danger of pushing Saudi Arabia towards attaining a nuclear deterrent of its own, and this kind of development could well trigger a wider nuclear arms race in the Middle East. The Saudi acquisition of nuclear weapons would further inflame its bitter rivalry with Iran and thus increase the risk of chronic regional destabilization.

From Saudi Arabia's point of view, Riyadh is often dissatisfied with US actions. Having called for international action against Iran's nuclear program for more than a decade, the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and the world's major powers to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions ironically provoked renewed apprehension in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia fears that the reduction of sanctions on Iran will revitalize its economy and thus provide Tehran with greater resources to support Shia insurgencies against the Saudi-backed Sunni proxies that violently clash throughout many of the Middle East's conflict zones. The US initiative to facilitate the nuclear deal with Iran probably fostered further doubts in Riyadh concerning the value of the security assurances it receives from Washington, and a declining US reliance on Saudi-supplied oil as a consequence of the American "oil-shale revolution" will do little to ease these doubts. As a Saudi rejection of these assurances in favor of its own nuclear deterrent would mark an almost irreversible blow for the US security strategy in the Middle East, the US might eventually have no option but to dissuade its ally through coercive diplomacy. Thus, rather than an overly "minimalist" form of "offshore balancing", US difficulties with Saudi Arabia spell out the strategic necessity to retain a substantial "on-site" military presence in the Middle East with the aim of guarding against wider nuclear proliferation, among other threats.

8



## 8. Arctic power in the 21st century

Heather A. Conley and Matthew Melino

What are the characteristics of leadership in the Arctic today? In the 20th century we understood that power in this region was defined as hard power in a Cold War context; strategic bombers that flew over the polar ice cap and nuclear submarines that lurked below. In the 21st century however, Arctic power will be defined less by traditional hard power (although its relevance is unfortunately returning as evidenced by Russia's build-up of military presence in the Russian Arctic) and more by "smart power."<sup>1</sup> As the Arctic region transforms, Arctic and non-Arctic states as well as non-state stakeholders hold diverse and at times divergent interests. The concept of power and leadership in the Arctic transforms as well. Leadership and power will be defined more by logistics and infrastructure, science, technology, integrating traditional and 21st century knowledge, developing better predictive meteorological and ice modelling, and increasing satellite communications. Leadership in the Arctic will be multi-faceted and require a new, smarter approach to the region.

As one of eight Arctic Council member states, one of five Arctic coastal states and the current chair of the Arctic Council, the United States is seeking to redefine and modernize the concept of leadership and power in the Arctic by focusing on six areas of Arctic smart power.

These are:

1 "Smart Power," as defined by a 2006 bipartisan Commission launched by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) focuses on five critical areas: alliances, partnerships, and institutions; global development; public diplomacy; economic integration; and technology and innovation. [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071106\\_csissmartpowerreport.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071106_csissmartpowerreport.pdf).

- **Science Power.** The United States is a science power in the Arctic and it is seeking to leverage its significant scientific investments in the Polar Regions to gain a better understanding of the rapid and profound changes in the area. The ability to interpret these changes by improving predictive and integrative models, the increasing use of satellite communications, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and information and telecommunication technology will also improve the United States' understanding of the vast changes taking place in the region. It is crucial that this knowledge is considered in conjunction with indigenous populations' traditional knowledge. In its current capacity as Chair of the Arctic Council (2015-2017), the United States is seeking to develop a legally binding treaty which will enhance international scientific cooperation and information exchange.
- **Mitigating Climate Impact.** Greater international scientific understanding and predictability can shape policies that help reduce the adverse effects of climate change as well as raise public awareness and increase the sense of public urgency regarding the ongoing threats of climate change. The COP21 Climate Summit in December 2015 (where there was a side meeting of Arctic States) and the United States-hosted GLACIER (Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement & Resilience) Conference in Anchorage, Alaska in August 2015 have both enhanced international scientific cooperation, mitigating and resilience strategies along with the policy goal of limiting the rise in global temperatures to two degrees Celsius or below.
- **Upholding International Legal and Normative Authority.** The United States has been an active voice in improving Arctic governance by enhancing the effectiveness of the Arctic Council, playing a leadership role in the International Maritime Organization's development of a mandatory Polar Code for vessels, and through preventative agreements, such as the recently-agreed

declaration restricting fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean until there is more knowledge of marine resources and they are protected by a regulatory system.<sup>2</sup> The United States has failed, however, to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), although it accepts and implements the Convention as international customary law.

- **Promoting Sustainable Economic Development.** The Arctic is home to nearly four million inhabitants and Arctic states, such as Norway and Russia, depend upon their northernmost territories and seas for economic growth. As these populations are impacted by the dramatic changes to the region, there is a search for environmental protection and resilience as well as new economic activity, requiring a balance between environmental protection and economic development. As the US relies less on its Arctic region for economic development, primarily due to the dramatic change in its energy mix and its sparse Arctic population, it tends to place more weight on environmental stewardship than development and therefore tends to be less of a development leader and more of a conservation and preservation leader.
- **Readiness, Preparedness, Response and Resilience.** Whether or not the US seeks to economically develop the American Arctic is a domestic prerogative, but it is certain that other Arctic and non-Arctic states will actively pursue Arctic economic development, if they are not doing so already. This development relies on advances in infrastructure, including deep water ports, icebreakers, navigational aids and modern hydrographic charting, as well as enhanced safety measures and improved communications, particularly with regards to meeting the challenging requirements of search and rescue operations and oil spill response

2 Yereth Rosen, "5 nations sign declaration to protect Arctic 'donut hole' from unregulated fishing," *Arctic Newswire*, July 16, 2015. <http://www.adn.com/article/20150716/5-nations-sign-declaration-protect-arctic-donut-hole-unregulated-fishing> .

capabilities in the Arctic. The United States has led by encouraging the development of legally-binding agreements for both oil spill and search and rescue response, as well as the creation of a new institutional forum which will focus on the implementation of these two agreements – the Arctic Coast Guard Forum. However, limited infrastructure, particularly in the North American Arctic, will challenge the implementation of both agreements.

- **Arctic Security.** The future of Arctic security is now in question as Russia seeks to re-open 50 airfields by 2020, develop new strategic Arctic commands, increase the presence of its special forces, and modernize its nuclear submarine deterrent (which is based in the Arctic) – efforts that clearly exceed its near-term Arctic economic development. When the Arctic Council was formed in 1996, the US attempted to banish any discussion of Arctic security matters. Security issues have returned, however, and as yet there is no appropriate forum to enhance transparency and confidence in military movements in the Arctic. The United States has not acted as a leader in this particular arena and it is slow to recognize the change in the Arctic’s security environment.

#### BACKGROUND

The United States became an Arctic coastal nation in 1867 when then Secretary of State William Seward negotiated the purchase of the territory of Alaska from the Russian Empire.<sup>3</sup> This strategic transaction halted Russian expansion in the North Pacific, increased the territorial size of the United States by nearly 20 percent, and greatly enriched the United States as it simultaneously acquired vast amounts of natural resources including oil, natural gas and large fish stocks. At the time of the purchase, however, US interest and presence in Alaska was limited to access to the Pacific northern rim and intermittent military

3 “Purchase of Alaska, 1867,” *U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian*.  
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/alaska-purchase>.

oversight, and it was only after the discovery of gold near Sitka in 1872, and after the mining and fishing industries began to develop in the 1880s, that interest in developing Alaska for its resources increased.<sup>4</sup> Sparsely populated, the Alaskan territory also offered opportunities for new settlements and space to exploit resources. This became especially true after the opening of the first oil well near Eureka in 1953 and the subsequent increase in onshore drilling around Prudhoe Bay.<sup>5</sup>

The Arctic region has always served as a geopolitical bell weather of sorts, providing early signals of important strategic shifts. For the US, the geo-strategic importance of the American Arctic was evident during World War II. The region symbolized US territorial defence of the Aleutian Islands from Japanese attack as well as the close wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and the US as a supply lifeline was provided to the Russian Eastern Front via the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk. However, as the wartime alliance rapidly disintegrated and the US and USSR became Cold War arch-enemies, the United States constructed the distant early warning (DEW) line, which provided continental defence against a Soviet attack. Likewise, the Soviets developed their strategic submarine-based nuclear deterrent within the Murmansk-based Northern Fleet. During the Cold War, US and Soviet strategic bombers patrolled the Arctic ice while their submarines hid stealthily underneath it.<sup>6</sup> Just as the Arctic foretold Cold War tensions, it also signalled the thaw as East-West tensions lessened with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's historic 1987 Arctic "Zone of Peace" speech<sup>7</sup>, in which he declared: "What everybody can be absolutely certain of is the Soviet Union's profound and certain interest in preventing the north of the planet, its Polar and sub-Polar regions and all Northern countries, from ever again becoming an arena of war, and in forming there a genuine zone of peace and fruitful cooperation". This heralded a new and very promising dynamic in the Arctic.<sup>8</sup>

4 "Alaska Chronology," *State of Alaska*. <http://alaska.gov/kids/learn/chronology.htm>.

5 Ibid. "Report to the Secretary of the Interior: Review of Shell's 2012 Alaska Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration Program," *U.S. Department of Interior*, March 8, 2013. <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/migrated/news/pressreleases/upload/Shell-report-3-8-13-Final.pdf>.

6 Heather A. Conley, "Perspectives on Arctic Governance under the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council," *Korea Maritime Institute*, 5.

7 Mikhail Gorbachev, "The Speech in Murmansk at the ceremonial meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the city of Murmansk," October 1, 1987 (Novosti Press Agency: Moscow, 1987), pp. 23-31.

8 Heather A. Conley, "Perspectives on Arctic Governance under the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council," *Korea Maritime Institute*, 6.

The Arctic, through the development of instruments such as the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, a pre-cursor to the Arctic Council and the formation of the Council itself, has indeed become a region of international cooperation and an early regional adapter to attempts at preventative climate change diplomacy. The 2010 US National Security Strategy declared, “the United States is an Arctic Nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic Region, where we seek to meet our national security needs, protect the environment, responsibly manage resources, account for indigenous communities, support scientific research, and strengthen international cooperation on a wide range of issues.”<sup>9</sup> New and unforeseen environmental patterns have created both new opportunities and dangers for Arctic and non-Arctic states, as Arctic actors deploy a spectrum of soft and hard power tools to advance their interests and values. The Arctic region will not be immune to tensions but it can serve as an important testing ground for the successful deployment of smart power.

To accomplish these objectives, future US foreign policy toward the Arctic will be shaped by three megatrends: the profound changes to the Arctic’s geophysical environment and its regional and global impact; greater human and commercial activity in the region; and an increase in global geopolitical tensions which will be reflected in the Arctic. To manage these changes in a way that preserves and promotes US influence and values, America’s Arctic smart power seeks to enhance scientific research and integrate this knowledge with traditional knowledge, mitigate climate impact, uphold international legal and normative authority, promote sustainable economic development, enhance readiness and resilience, and sound an alert regarding the return of security challenges in the Arctic.

#### THE FUTURE OF US POWER IN THE ARCTIC

##### *Knowledge as Power*

The United States is at the cutting-edge of scientific breakthroughs and studies in the Arctic. Harnessing the depth of its scientific community will allow it to play a leading role in understanding the rapid and profound changes occurring across the region and, as a result,

9 “National Security Strategy,” *The White House*, May 2010. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

put it in a position to develop and promote a pro-active Arctic policy. Over the past several decades, the US government has promoted new scientific research and activities in the Arctic, and the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 (ARPA), later amended in November 1990, provides for a comprehensive national policy dealing with national research needs and objectives in the Arctic. The ARPA established the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee, ((IARPC), the lead agency responsible for implementing Arctic research policy), to help set priorities for future Arctic research, work to develop and implement an integrated national Arctic research policy to guide Federal agencies, and coordinate and promote cooperative Arctic scientific research programmes with other nations.<sup>10</sup> The IARPC and the 16 Federal agencies that encompass its structure and are dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of Federal Arctic research efforts received \$6.033 billion in funding in 2016, a 1.7 percent increase from 2015.<sup>11</sup>

In its most recent biennial report, published in December 2015, the IARPC outlined its scientific priorities, ranging from coordinated field deployments to data sharing and interoperability. These activities generate knowledge that informs key national priorities such as homeland security; energy, water and food security; transportation infrastructure maintenance; and the protection of natural resources.<sup>12</sup> The report also highlighted key areas where greater research and understanding is needed, particularly in the areas of sea ice and marine ecosystems; terrestrial ice and ecosystems; atmospheric studies of surface heat, energy, and mass balances; observing systems; regional climate models; adaptation tools for sustaining communities; and human health.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most pressing issues facing the Arctic Ocean is ocean acidification, which threatens marine ecosystems and the coastal

10 "Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC), *National Science Foundation*, updated October 24, 2014. <http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/arctic/iarpc/start.jsp>.

11 "Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee: 2015 Biennial Report," *National Science and Technology Council Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability*, December 2015, pp. 2. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/NSTC/iarpc-biennial-final-2015-low.pdf>. "Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY 2016," *National Science Foundation*, January 4, 2016. [http://www.nsf.gov/about/congress/114/highlights/cu16\\_0104.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/about/congress/114/highlights/cu16_0104.jsp).

12 "Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee: 2015 Biennial Report," *National Science and Technology Council Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability*, December 2015, pp. 2. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/NSTC/iarpc-biennial-final-2015-low.pdf>.

13 *Ibid.*, 4.

economies that depend on them. Arctic waters are home to a wide range of species that are sensitive to pH levels and provide critical links in the food chain. Subtle changes in acidification can have serious implications for the Arctic fishing industry and dependent communities in Alaska. In an effort to reduce ocean acidification, the US announced at the 2015 *Our Oceans* conference that the National Science Foundation will commission the \$582 million US Ocean Observatories Initiative, promoting a better understanding of and response to ocean acidification and other environmental changes. Additionally, \$370,000 is to be allocated to the Ocean Acidification International Coordination Center through the IAES's Peaceful Uses Initiative.<sup>14</sup>

Another pressing challenge is the global rise in sea levels, due to the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet, which will impact approximately 123 million coastal dwellers in the United States along with many more coastal and island residents around the world. The relocation of large populations from coastal areas will be necessary, as will protection from storm-related coastal flooding and associated problems.<sup>15</sup> To prepare for such a scenario, scientists from the US Department of Energy, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the National Science Foundation (NSF), under the purview of the IARPC, are supporting field campaigns, research projects, satellite missions, and modelling to improve estimates of the current and future contributions that Arctic land ice will make to the rise in sea level.<sup>16</sup>

An important area of study is understanding complex and integrated Arctic ecosystems and how they are changing. This is a multidisciplinary challenge which involves biology, geology, anthropology, chemistry, hydrology, and other disciplines.<sup>17</sup> The IARPC has promoted a collaborative, eco-based system management approach among different federal, state, local and tribal agencies that leverages knowledge, expertise and capabilities, providing the opportunity to conduct important research in difficult and remote locations. By leading such a collaborate effort, the IARPC is improving

14 "Our Ocean 2015 Initiatives," *U.S. Department of State*, October 6, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/248350.pdf>.

15 "Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee: 2015 Biennial Report," *National Science and Technology Council Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability*, December 2015, pp. 11. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/NSTC/iarpc-biennial-final-2015-low.pdf>.

16 *Ibid.*, 11.

17 *Ibid.*, 17.

the US's ability to predict and understand Arctic ecosystems that are vital to future economic opportunities and environmental protection.<sup>18</sup>

Another noteworthy area of study is sea ice networks. The ability to predict and forecast the extent, thickness and volume of future sea ice has important ramifications for economic activity, readiness, and national security. An expected increase in destination and transshipments across the circumpolar region will rely on accurate hydrographic mapping and models of sea ice cover. Without the proper information, shipping – whether a cargo vessel or a cruise ship – becomes a risky endeavour as ships can easily fall victim to shifting ice floes and become trapped between ice networks. Understanding these networks also has important implications for search and rescue and oil spill response. Inaccurate maps and models and limited satellite communications makes it extremely difficult to execute rescue missions should an accident occur. The IARPC has supported numerous projects to improve predictive skills ranging from hours to decades, and on a spatial scale ranging from local to regional.<sup>19</sup>

As a leader in Arctic science and understanding, the United States has established itself as a scientific data generator and international collaborator, particularly focusing on pan-Arctic observing networks and international scientific exchange.<sup>20</sup> Ambassador Mark Brzezinski, the Executive Director of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee within the White House recently announced a US-hosted Arctic Science Ministerial gathering in the fall of 2016. The ministerial will bring together Arctic states and other interested parties to advance and celebrate the contributions made by the scientific community. The administration hopes to build a new pan-arctic research coalition that will continue into the foreseeable future.

The lack of available scientific data and understanding has led the US to suspend Arctic economic development until more information becomes available, and it has issued moratoriums on commercial fishing in its territorial waters and sought action, in cooperation with the other four coastal states, to prohibit commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean until further scientific research can be carried out to provide a better understand of how warming seas are affecting fish stocks. The agreement recognizes the fragility of the region as well

18 Ibid, 17.

19 Ibid, 18.

20 US Chairmanship goals include expanding the Circumpolar Local Environmental Observers (CLEO) network. <http://arcticjournal.com/press-releases/1938/chairmanship-projects>.

as the importance of fish stocks to local and indigenous populations. Research will help track fishing stocks with the aim of ensuring that groups who depend on fish will not have their livelihoods threatened by commercial fishing. As with other resources in the Arctic, preemptive measures to responsibly develop them is a positive step for the region and a signal of future leadership.

### *Mitigating Climate Change*

Climate change is increasingly viewed as a threat to national security and the global economy. Increasing the sense of public urgency regarding the impact of climate change and seeking bold solutions to mitigate its affects are at the top of the Obama administration's priority list. The region is experiencing warming at twice the rate of the global average, so the Arctic is in many ways the "poster child" for urgent action. President Obama recently declared the Arctic region to be "on the front lines of climate change", and US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has labelled climate change the biggest national security threat.<sup>21</sup>

The United States has sought to lead efforts to raise public awareness of climate change. The United States Department of State hosted the GLACIER Conference (Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement, and Resilience) in Anchorage, Alaska on 30-31 August 2015 to highlight international and domestic priorities in the Arctic, specifically the impact of climate change.<sup>22</sup> The conference brought Foreign Ministers of Arctic nations and key non-Arctic states together with scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders from Alaska and the Arctic, including indigenous populations.<sup>23</sup> President Obama also became the first American President to travel above the Arctic Circle, using social media to document his interactions with the landscape and local populations. In doing so, he brought attention to the impact of climate change on Alaska's landscape. He cited Exit Glacier, which has receded 1.25 miles since 1815 and 187 feet in the last year alone, and Harding Glacier, which has decreased by about

21 Heather A. Conley and Caroline Rohloff, "Life on the 'Front Lines of Climate Change' in the U.S. Arctic," *CSIS*, August 28, 2015. <http://csis.org/publication/life-front-lines-climate-change-us-arctic>. Kate Sheppard, "Bernie Sanders: Climate Change Is The Biggest National Security Threat," *Huffington Post*, October 20, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-climate-change\\_561db3bbe4b0c5a1ce610f4c](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-climate-change_561db3bbe4b0c5a1ce610f4c).

22 "Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: August 30-31, 2015," *U.S. Department of State*. <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/glacier/index.htm>.

23 *Ibid.*

10 percent since the 1950s, as well as a new study which estimated that Alaska's glaciers alone are losing about 75 gigatons (75 billion tons) of ice each year.<sup>24</sup> Initiatives such as President Obama's trip raise awareness of the impact of climate change and place the United States in a prime position to assert its influence over the development of the Arctic in coming years.

The United States has also participated in international efforts to adopt new approaches to mitigate climate change, such as raising awareness and pushing for renewed international commitments at the Paris Climate Change Conference, COP21, which took place on 7–8 December 2015. In the lead-up to COP21, the United States pushed for an international agreement that put in place a framework to limit global warming to no more than 2 degrees Celsius. This comes two years after the United States presented its Climate Action Plan, which announced its intentions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in such a way that they would be 26–28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.<sup>25</sup> The plan also includes the ambitious Clean Power Plan, which aims to limit carbon pollution from power plants; policies and programmes to accelerate investment in renewable energy and reduce emissions from hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs); and actions to protect American communities from the impact of climate change. This plan seeks to put the United States in a position to take the lead in mitigating the impact of climate change.<sup>26</sup> The signing of the “Paris Agreement” at the conclusion of the conference is attributable to US leadership. This historic agreement includes long-term goals to reduce carbon emissions and keep the global temperature rise “well below” 2 degrees Celsius by 2100, a transparency system to ensure that countries meet their promises, and a renewed commitment by developed countries to send \$100 billion a year from 2020 onwards to developing countries to support their efforts to fight climate change.<sup>27</sup>

24 Steven Mufson, “Obama visits receding glacier in Alaska to highlight climate change,” *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2015. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-visits-receding-glacier-in-alaska-to-highlight-climate-change/2015/09/01/dfacfe1e-50f6-11e5-9812-92d5948a40f8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-visits-receding-glacier-in-alaska-to-highlight-climate-change/2015/09/01/dfacfe1e-50f6-11e5-9812-92d5948a40f8_story.html).

25 Katherine Sierra, “United States: A Credible Climate Action Plan, but Political Uncertainty,” *The Brookings Institution*, pp. 44. <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2015/11/16-paris-climate-talks/united-states-sierra.pdf?la=en>.

26 *Ibid.*, 44.

27 Justin Worland, “World Approves Historic ‘Paris Agreement’ to Address Climate Change,” *Time*, December 12, 2015. <http://time.com/4146830/cop-21-paris-agreement-climate/>.

### *Upholding International Legal and Normative Authority*

While the United States has clearly led the way in efforts to promote scientific research and mitigate climate impacts, its leadership regarding international legal norms is more of a mixed bag. On the positive side, the US has pursued improvements in Arctic governance, specifically through the Arctic Council, the International Maritime Organization's mandatory Polar Code, and preventative agreements such as a fishing moratorium in the Central Arctic Ocean. As the current Chair of the Arctic Council, it has prioritized effective governance and pursued governance innovations such as enhancing the ability of Arctic states to execute their search and rescue responsibilities and emphasizing safe, secure, and environmentally sound shipping.<sup>28</sup>

The United States has also played a leading role in maritime governance, one example being the International Maritime Organization's Polar Code. As an IMO member, the United States has played its part to ensure that the Polar Code is adopted. The code outlines specific requirements to enhance maritime safety, training, and environmental protection in the Polar Regions and consists of two parts: one which addresses safe design, construction and operation, and another which addresses environmental protection.<sup>29</sup> The Polar Code takes into account the unique risks associated with operating in this dynamic region, including ice, low temperatures, high latitude, remoteness, severe weather, and limited charting.<sup>30</sup> By signing the Polar Code, the United States is helping to improve the safety of all ships traveling across the Arctic region and uphold a framework that can be further built upon and improved as we gain more experience of operating in this new and ever-changing region.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the international legal framework upon which the Arctic rests, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adopted in 1982 and enforced in 1996, establishes a legal regime covering all aspects of the seas and oceans as well as a management scheme for seabed resources. The US has so far failed to ratify this,

28 "Admiral Papp: Goals and priorities of the US Arctic Council chairmanship," *University of the Arctic*, July 2, 2015. <http://www.uarctic.org/news/2015/7/us-arctic-council-chairmanship-outlining-goals-and-priorities/>

29 Lt. Jodie Knox, "IMO Polar Code background and update from Arctic symposium," *Coast Guard Maritime Commons*, July 28, 2015. <http://mariners.coastguard.dodlive.mil/2015/07/28/7282015-imo-polar-code-background-and-update-from-arctic-symposium/>

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

despite 166 countries signing up. US ratification of UNCLOS would send a strong signal of US leadership in the Arctic and beyond, but the US Senate seems unlikely to do so in the near future.

#### *Encouraging Sustainable Economic Development*

Despite the current collapse in global energy and commodity prices, the Arctic will be an area of increasing global economic interest because it is rich in natural and mineral resources, as well as fish stocks, and it will continue to attract tourism and the shipping industry. Arctic and non-Arctic states are focused on economic development despite the estimated decades it will take to be fully realized. The US is an outlier in this regard and therefore not a leader on promoting economic development.

Despite the fact that the Arctic Council, the premier Arctic intergovernmental forum, was established with the mandate of promoting sustainable development, it has done little in this regard. However, under Canada's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2013-2015), Ottawa prioritized Arctic economic development and, despite US reluctance, successfully launched the Arctic Economic Council (AEC). The AEC is not part of the Arctic Council and it remains to be seen how its activities will be integrated into the Council's larger objectives. American Tara Sweeney, the current chair of the AEC and Executive Vice President of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC), has been a strong voice advocating for Alaska Natives. The AEC's working groups, include not only the Arctic business community but also the working group on Maritime Transportation; the working group on Telecommunications; the working group on Responsible Resource Development; and the working group on Traditional Knowledge, Stewardship, and Small/Medium Enterprise Development. Collectively they focus on developing solutions that drive Arctic business forward in a sustainable manner, making rules that guide shipping and ensure safety and establishing a framework for good business practices with indigenous residents and communities.<sup>32</sup>

As US Secretary of State John Kerry explained in May 2015 at the beginning of the US Arctic Council Chairmanship, "We want a region... where strong measures are being taken to mitigate environmental harm, where natural resources are managed effectively and sustainably."<sup>33</sup>

32 "Arctic Economic Council." <http://arcticeconomiccouncil.com/>

33 "Remarks at the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council," *U.S. Department of State*, May 21, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/05/242731.htm>.

However, after hearing concerns from other Arctic Council members that the US chairmanship agenda priorities were muted on economic development, the US has afforded greater attention to the economic and living conditions of the nearly 4 million people that inhabit the Arctic, many of whom are indigenous communities who operate in mixed economies, combining the economic needs of customary and traditional subsistence activities with economic opportunities and job growth. The US chairmanship has focused on telecommunications, evidenced by the creation of the Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic (TFTIA) as a means of improving telecommunications there. The US also leads the project on Remote Communities Renewable Energy under the auspices of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), which aims to develop and power micro-grid systems in small Arctic communities.<sup>34</sup>

The economic impact of slowing Arctic national economies is having a dramatic effect on the well-being of the people of the North. For example, the total revenue from oil for the State of Alaska halved from \$8.09 billion in 2011 to \$4.68 billion (projected) in 2015<sup>35</sup>, and Russia's ambitious development plans for the Arctic have been delayed due to the economic consequences of sanctions and dramatically lower oil prices. Norway's economy has also struggled, and required adjustments have been made to national and regional budgets. Finland has entered its fourth year of recession, requiring Helsinki to re-energize job creation in the Arctic. For the moment, Washington does not view Alaska's economic plight as a national issue: America's energy revolution has reduced the Continental US's need for Alaskan energy, so it is not pursuing a robust Arctic economic agenda.

#### *Readiness, Preparedness, Resilience and Response*

Arctic economic development cannot occur without the development of infrastructure. If the US has a decidedly mixed view on economic development, it stands to reason that US leadership, with regards to both readiness and response, is equally mixed. While the US has taken a leadership role in identifying readiness and preparedness as a major task for the Arctic region – co-leading efforts to negotiate both the search and rescue and oil spill response agreements as well as

34 "2015–2017 Work Plan," *Sustainable Development Working Group*. <http://www.sdwg.org/project/sdwg-work-plan/>

35 "State Revenue," *Alaska Oil and Gas Association*. <http://www.aoga.org/facts-and-figures/state-revenue>.

providing the impetus for the creation of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum – it has still been very slow to develop the necessary infrastructure to implement search and rescue and oil spill response capabilities. The US is still contemplating whether to construct a new heavy icebreaker, and it is still considering whether to build an Arctic deep-water port.

Despite being the largest maritime power, the United States only possesses two functional icebreakers: the heavy-ice breaker *Polar Star*, commissioned in 1976 and only recently taken out of mothballs to extend its service for approximately ten years, and the *Healy*, a medium-strength icebreaker that was commissioned in 2000 and is mostly used for scientific research. President Obama announced in September 2015 that the United States would accelerate the acquisition of a new icebreaker, allowing the Coast Guard to develop and maintain the capacity for year-round access to the Polar Regions. Icebreakers represent only one element of US readiness, preparedness, response and resilience in the Arctic. Enhanced satellite communications, aviation assets, deep-water ports, and navigational aids are urgently needed as well.<sup>36</sup>

Offshore Arctic energy exploration in the US Arctic has been indefinitely postponed as the Royal Dutch Shell Company decided to end its drilling campaign and not pursue its leases any further, so numerous infrastructure and research projects have come to an abrupt end. In October, the Army Corps of Engineers announced another year's postponement to a study to determine the feasibility of its first deep-water port, which has been designed to support vessels in the Arctic. The Corps began studying the feasibility of a port in 2011, and it is now questioning the economic benefit of moving forward with the project.<sup>37</sup>

Potential future maritime accidents in the narrow Bering Straits have been an area of growing concern and a heightened risk factor as vessel traffic has increased through the Straits. The US Coast Guard has recommended a vessel traffic management scheme (e.g. speed limits, shipping lanes, and designated hazard areas) and the construction of ocean “highways” that would be hydrographically mapped to international standards and have state-of-the-art navigational aids. Steps are currently being taken to plot these shipping routes. Moreover,

36 Heather A. Conley, “To Build or Not to Build an Icebreaker? That is the \$1 Billion Funding Question,” *CSIS*, September 1, 2015. <http://csis.org/publication/build-or-not-build-icebreaker-1-billion-funding-question>.

37 Alex DeMarban, “Work toward deep-water port in Alaska Arctic on hold, Army Corps says,” *Arctic Newswire*, October 26, 2015. <http://www.adn.com/article/20151026/work-toward-deep-water-port-alaska-arctic-hold-army-corps-says>.

the IMO Polar Code will go into effect on January 1, 2017, although it remains unclear how the US will certify and inspect vessels for polar code compliance.

This system will be put to the test by the *Chrystal Serenity*, a 1,700 passenger and crew cruise ship which will traverse the ice-clogged North West Passage in summer 2016. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum will host a search and rescue exercise with participating nations this summer to identify challenges and gaps in search and rescue capabilities. The voyage of *Chrystal Serenity* will, in many ways, be the ultimate preparedness exercise.

Finally, the United States needs to better prepare itself for a rapidly transforming Alaska as coastal erosion will force indigenous villages to relocate inland and thawing permafrost will damage a range of infrastructures, including highways, pipelines and homes. The US Government Accountability Office estimates that coastal relocation for the village of Kivalina could cost up to \$1 million per person.<sup>38</sup> The United States has yet to factor the costs of climate resilience.

In this regard, power in the Arctic may simply be derived from the ability to save lives or prevent an environmental catastrophe by having ready and near-by capabilities to immediately respond and be resilient to disaster and climate impact.

### *Arctic Security*

Although the Arctic is considered a region of international cooperation, and one of the main goals of the US National Security Strategy for the Arctic Region is to preserve the region as an area free of conflict, the region is not immune to geopolitical tension. A rapidly transforming Arctic requires that Arctic coastal states enhance their military to protect newly exposed borders and territorial waters, but the Russian Federation's development of new military infrastructure, specifically new airfields, an enhanced nuclear posture, the increased presence of Special Forces and large-scale military exercises, is slowly eroding the cooperative development of the region. While the US government has begun to recognize this military shift, it has been slow to develop an appropriate response.

There has been a noticeable shift in Russia's Arctic rhetoric and policy behaviour, leading to an increase in its security posture in

38 "Alaska Native Villages: Most Are Affected by Flooding and Erosion, but Few Qualify for Federal Assistance," *United States General Accounting Office*, December 2003. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/do4142.pdf>.

the Arctic. In spring 2015, Russia performed a snap military exercise (without prior notification), which put the Northern Fleet on full alert and mobilized over 45,000 troops. Russian military aircraft often fail to turn on their transponders when flying in crowded Northern European and Arctic airspace, and President Putin's appointment of Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who has made frequent nationalistic statements about the Arctic, labelling it "Russia's Mecca", has elevated tensions.<sup>39</sup> The Russian government has also announced the reopening of 50 previously-closed Soviet-era military bases in the Russian Arctic and an increase in Russian military personnel along the Northern Sea Route, but it has failed to provide clarity on how these enhanced military resources could necessarily be deployed to improve search and rescue or oil spill response and prevention capabilities.<sup>40</sup> There is a significant level of Russian submarine activity in the Arctic that has not been seen since the Cold War, particularly in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap. The United States is struggling to develop an appropriate response to Russia's growing military presence in the Arctic, while it maintains that Russia is an Arctic partner. A more detailed statement outlining greater US military presence in the region would reassure allies that Russia will not destabilize collaborative efforts to peacefully develop the region.

#### CONCLUSION

The foreign and security policy concepts of power and influence in the 21st century resemble a hybrid of traditional power methods and a more nuanced, smart power toolbox, consisting of the six smart power tools explained above. While the United States has performed admirably in several of these areas, future administrations must implement bolder efforts where US leadership is lacking and also adapt and enhance their efforts in areas where the US already excels. Adaption, resilience, and effective response to an ever-changing and increasingly competitive region are the hallmarks of leadership.

39 Ishaan Tharoor, "The Arctic is Russia's Mecca, says top Moscow official," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/20/the-arctic-is-russias-mecca-says-top-moscow-official/>

40 Heather A. Conley and Caroline Rohloff, "The New Ice Curtain: Russia's Strategic Reach to the Arctic," *CSIS*, August 2015, pp. ix. [http://csis.org/files/publication/150826\\_Conley\\_NewIceCurtain\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/150826_Conley_NewIceCurtain_Web.pdf).

The United States should re-double its efforts, both internationally and domestically, to strengthen its physical presence, enhance its influence, and use its persuasive powers to demonstrate effective leadership in the Arctic.





## About the authors

**Mika Aaltola** is the Programme Director of the Global Security research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

**Heather A. Conley** is Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, and Director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

**Anna Kronlund** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

**Eoin McNamara** is a Ph.D. Researcher at the University of Tartu.

**Matthew Melino** is a Research Associate at Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

**Leo Michel** is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, Atlantic Council.

**Kari Möttölä** is a Visiting Scholar, Professor at the Network for European Studies in the University of Helsinki.

**Adam Quinn** is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Studies in the University of Birmingham.

**Toms Rostoks** is a Researcher at the Center for Security and Strategic Research in the Latvian National Defense Academy.

**Ville Sinkkonen** is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Turku.



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# After Rebalance

## *Visions for the future of US foreign policy and global role beyond 2016*

Mika Aaltola & Anna Kronlund (eds.)

The foreign policy of the United States has often been seen as oscillating between a more withdrawn, isolationist perspective and more expanded, interventionist tendencies. This fluctuation between minimalism and maximalism allows future foreign policy to be evaluated, if one can correctly diagnose which phase of the supposed back-and-forth movement the US is currently in.

The fluctuation is anchored by three broad areas where a long-term bipartisan consensus has existed and will likely continue to exist in the United States. The US is seen as continuing to have an important role in the world, it is generally regarded important for the US to continue to be at least relatively engaged with the world, and the safeguarding of the commitments and alliance responsibilities is perceived as important. This report details the likely dynamics within these points of agreement. Its charts how they define and contain the options for future foreign policies in various regions and thematic areas.

The report identifies some observable trends that are likely to be relevant in the future as the United States moves beyond the era of Barack Obama's presidency. The first part deals with the more conceptual, doctrinal, and domestic side of US foreign policy tendencies, while the second part approaches more specific regional manifestations of the contemporary and likely future US foreign policy. Most of the chapters in this report were first presented to the second Helsinki Summer Session, which was organized by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in September 2015.