

## **Leading in Lean Times: Assuring Accountability and Assessing American Priorities in an Age of Austerity**

No global policy which has reality in deeds as well as words can fail to be primarily a policy of priorities – a policy of wise economy in the use of our own strength.

- George Kennan, 23 May 1947

Austerity focuses the mind. In times of plenty states can afford to pursue diffuse goals; in lean times, however, leaders must discern from among a nation's countless preferences its most pressing and abiding priorities. Since this task requires restraint and sometimes sacrifice, it can appear daunting and dour. But it also can be bracing – even restorative. Today, the slow wane of a decade of war frees foreign policymakers to reassess the nation's vital interests, and the gradual ebb of an economic downturn empowers domestic policymakers to reconceive long-standing entitlement programs. How American government relates to its citizens and how America relates to the wider world are both open for reconsideration. Rarely do such promising opportunities for bold thinking and innovative policymaking present themselves.

This paper aims to defend a modest, but perhaps counterintuitive, claim: austerity offers an opportunity for U.S. leadership as much as a challenge to it. This paper frames the central questions in five main policy areas: U.S. grand strategy, ways and means, global challenges to accountability, regional issues, and domestic sources of U.S. foreign policy. Above all, it asks delegates of SCUSA to consider U.S. leadership during lean times.

### **US Grand Strategy**

At the first SCUSA in 1949, the overriding U.S. goal in the coming decades was the containment of Soviet power. Once Soviet power had diminished and then disappeared, however, it became considerably more difficult to determine just what U.S. power is *for*. For a time, there seemed to be few ends that U.S. power could not pursue. With a view to these decades of strategic instability, and particularly in light of the impending contraction in means, debates over “American grand strategy” have acquired a fresh and sometimes frantic urgency.

Grand strategy entails the calculated relation of means to large ends.<sup>1</sup> In foreign policy debates, it signifies the overarching objective orienting all the means at a nation's disposal – diplomatic, economic, and military. Proponents of varied visions of American grand strategy agree that a nation lacking a comprehensive plan of action is doomed to lurch this way and that, acting inefficiently and ultimately ineffectively in pursuit of whatever goals happen to animate it at a given time. But because the notion of grand strategy is so expansive, touching not only on a nation's international engagements but indeed its very identity, visions of America's proper grand strategy abroad can be as diffuse and divisive as visions of American government's proper role at home. Even if one acknowledges that the United States would benefit from a clearly articulated grand strategy, it is by no means self-evident just what that grand strategy should be. The present age of austerity influences debates about U.S. grand strategy profoundly. Strategy is a political choice, and while political choices are always made under conditions of constraint, austerity makes these constraints even more important to strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> For this formulation, see John Lewis Gaddis, “What is Grand Strategy?” Lecture delivered at Duke University, 26 February 2009, <http://tiss.sanford.duke.edu/DebatingGrandStrategyDetails.php>.

What, then, should U.S. grand strategy be? How can the means and ends of U.S. foreign policy be best aligned? And once a grand strategy is formulated, how should it be implemented? How can the vision of the architect be made to animate the teeming hives of ambition and interest destined to carry out the plan?

## Ways and Means

Grand strategy is meant to unite all of a nation's means – military, diplomatic, and economic – in a single shared vision of its global goals. Coordination problems naturally arise, particularly in lean times. If the strategist's task is that of a conductor trying to keep multiple orchestras on the same sheet of music, under austerity each orchestra simultaneously is scrambling to keep hold of its instruments. One might start, then, by measuring means with a view to the ends they might serve.

### *Costless Wars?*

The ten years' war on terror has made the U.S. military the most potent symbol of American power. The military is also, however, the element of American power most likely to decline in an age of austerity. While domestic entitlements may have contributed more than defense spending to the recent expansion in government debt, the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have made deep cuts to the military an attractive option for budget hawks.<sup>2</sup>

Austerity already has favored the deployment of high-tech, small-footprint weapons like drones.<sup>3</sup> But these carry their own not-insignificant costs, not the least of which pertains to accountability. When presidents can bomb promptly, precisely, and covertly with no risk to American life, the domestic repercussions of military action suddenly become quite small. Simultaneously, repercussions abroad, where civilians frequently bear costs in lives lost and politicians bear the humiliation of attenuated sovereignty, can be quite significant. Austerity and technology thus serve to distance citizens from consequential foreign policy decisions.

Austerity also augurs reductions in overall manpower and increased reliance on highly-trained career soldiers, both of which seem likely to sustain a troubling trend: the widening divide between the U.S. military and the citizens it serves. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates has noted that after the move to an All-Volunteer Force in 1973, the military has grown increasingly professional and self-contained; as a result, “no major war in our history has been fought with a smaller percentage of this country's citizens in uniform full-time [as the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns] – roughly 2.4 million active and reserve service members out of a country of over 300 million, less than one percent.”<sup>4</sup> As the military draws down and budget pressures force reallocations of defense resources, policymakers must consider how to construct

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<sup>2</sup> For an excellent study of the various drawdown options and their strategic consequences, see LTG (Ret.) David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel, and Travis Sharp, *Hard Choices: Responsible Defense in an Age of Austerity* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, October 2011). For an alternative perspective, also see Peter Feaver, “Civilian Capability in An Age of Austerity,” *Foreign Policy: Shadow Government Blog*, 10 May 12.

<sup>3</sup> On the use of drones, consider: P. W. Singer, “We, Robot,” *Slate*, 19 May 2010, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/war\\_stories/2010/05/we\\_robot.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2010/05/we_robot.html); John Kaag and Sarah Kreps, “The Moral Hazard of Drones,” *Opinionator* (blog), 22 July 2012, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/the-moral-hazard-of-drones/>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Gates, “Lecture at Duke University (All-Volunteer Force),” 29 September 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1508>. The Pew Center has studied the decline in reported family connections to veterans. See “The Military-Civilian Gap: Fewer Family Connections,” 23 November 2011, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-family-connections/>. For debates over a return to the draft, consider Andrew Plosky, “No Panacea: Why a Draft Wouldn't Stop a War,” *OUPblog* (blog), 24 July 2012, <http://blog.oup.com/2012/07/why-a-draft-would-not-stop-a-war/>.

a military capable of promoting national interests at least cost – and in a way that reflects the fact that the military serves not just any society, but a republic of free men and women.

### *Long Live COIN?*

Policymakers must also consider the sorts of wars the military is likely to be asked to fight in the future. Few civilian leaders are eager at present to engage in new rounds of large-scale land war, much less counterinsurgency. As Defense Secretary Gates poignantly put the point in a 2011 speech at West Point, “any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined.’”<sup>5</sup> To send a squadron of ships or a fleet of bombers (or drones) might seem more attractive. But not all wars are wars of choice. According to one recent survey, there have been in the past two centuries some three hundred insurgencies. There is no greater reason to expect that insurgency and counterinsurgency will fade from the world than to expect that war itself will do so.<sup>6</sup> As the United States draws down forces that have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, therefore, there is a distinct danger that limited means will facilitate strategic shortsightedness.

### *Foreign Policy Challenges in 3D*

Austerity forces policymakers to reconsider not only the blunt hammer of military policy, but also the fine chisel of diplomacy. The appeal of diplomatic solutions to crises increases as lawmakers grow more reluctant to fund military interventions. And the patient anticipation of democratization through economic development begins to seem less anxious and uncertain once military liberation seems prohibitively costly. Indeed, advocates of U.S. assistance in foreign economic development have always pitched their case as not only a moral imperative but a bargain. As the Marshall Plan was getting underway in Europe, for instance, President Truman asked: “Which is better for the country, to spend twenty or thirty billion dollars [over the next four years] to keep the peace or to do as we did in 1920 and then have to spend 100 billion dollars for four years to fight a war?”<sup>7</sup> Given that a significant body of political science research has found a correlation between development and democratization, to what extent can soft forms of democratization take the place of hard power?<sup>8</sup>

### **Global Challenges to Accountability**

To evaluate ways and means properly is particularly challenging considering global issues confronting American policymakers. These issues not only blur conceptual boundaries dividing politics, economics, and even ethics, but call into question the power of the nation-state itself to address the most pressing problems of the day. American policymakers in particular have felt the force of these challenges to the efficacy of national policy. Although in many ways the world more closely reflects traditional American priorities – free markets, democracy, the

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Gates, “Speech at United States Military Academy (West Point, NY),” 25 February 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539>. Gates quotes General Douglas MacArthur.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organizations* 63: 67-106 (Winter 2009). On the permanence of counterinsurgency (and war), see Colin S. Gray, “Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory,” *Prism* 3:3 (June 2012): 17-32.

<sup>7</sup> This Truman quote appears in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> On the correlation of development and democratization, see, for instance: Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1991), especially p. 315-16; Art, *Grand Strategy for America*, p. 28-31; and Adam Przeworski, “Democracy and Economic Development,” in Edward D. Mansfield and Richard Sisson (eds.), *Political Science and the Public Interest* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press), <http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2800/sisson.pdf>.

protection of human rights – today than at any other time in history, the United States itself confronts its own decline and the rise of other powers. The post-American world may simply be the American world without America as its hegemon. But what role should America play in such a world?

### *Trade, Globalization, and the International Economy*

The economic downturn that began in 2008 has already helped to clarify this question, for arguably the most striking feature of that downturn was its disparate impact on the world's most advanced and most rapidly advancing economies. While U.S. GDP shrank slightly in 2008 (losing .4%) and severely in 2009 (losing 3.5%), the global economy as a whole grew at a steady rate in 2008, shrank slightly in 2009 (losing less than one percent) and then grew strongly again in 2010.<sup>9</sup> The world's largest advancing economies – China and India – avoided recession entirely. Many economists noted anxiously that 2009 witnessed the first decline in global output since before the second world war, but the same fact justifies as much amazement as alarm.<sup>10</sup> The fact that emerging economies increasingly drive global growth, however, raises the stakes for U.S. policymakers as they attempt to address the definitive question of post-American political economy: if economic globalization benefits the United States in absolute terms but weakens it in relative terms, to what extent do American economic and strategic interests diverge, and how can U.S. policymakers manage the gap?<sup>11</sup>

### *Consumption without Consequences?*

Since the industrial revolution, fossil fuels – first coal, then oil – have generated both economic growth and greenhouse gases. The success of international institutions in overseeing the global economy has been every bit as evident as their failure in overseeing the global environment. The reason for this divergence is fairly clear. While global economic coordination – whether via mutual reduction of tariffs, or collective enforcement of banking regulations – promises that all boats will steadily rise, global environmental regulation admits that all boats will fall in the short-term in order to avoid a more catastrophic crash in the long-term. This last case is a tough sell, particularly when it seems that not *all* boats will fall at the same rate.

Moreover, high oil prices also have increased incentives for innovations in drilling and discovery, which seem likely to cause a surge in energy supplies from shale oil in the near future.<sup>12</sup> The strategic consequences of these discoveries are potentially vast, but so too are the environmental ramifications. In addition to sustaining the global economy's reliance on fossil fuels rather than renewables, the extraction and processing of these reserves produces a range of pollutants, with potential damage that is not at present perfectly understood but appears significant.

Policymakers thus face a range of hard questions: Is it possible to foster the continued development and innovation in renewable energy without high oil and gas prices? If the United States becomes less dependent on foreign oil, what are the strategic consequences for the United

<sup>9</sup> See John Ravenhill, "The Study of Global Political Economy," accessed 26 July 2012, [http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199570812/ravenhill3e\\_ch01.pdf](http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199570812/ravenhill3e_ch01.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> See Steve Schiffens, "'Deeper' Recession Ahead Says IMF," *BBC News*, 22 Wednesday 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8011907.stm>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. GDP has increased sevenfold since 1949. While U.S. share of global GDP has not declined precipitously, it has declined, whereas China's has risen dramatically – more than doubling in the decade between 2001 and 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Anu Mittal, "Unconventional Oil and Gas Production: Opportunities and Challenges of Oil Shale Development," Testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, House of Representatives, 10 May 2012, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590761.pdf>.

States' bilateral relations with oil-producing states and its multilateral engagement (or lack thereof) in international environmental protocols? And how should U.S. policymakers balance the short and medium-term benefits of increased domestic energy production with the potential environmental catastrophes in the medium to long-term?

### *American Security in a Networked World*

If the story of the global commons seems increasingly tragic with a view to the environment, it is considerably more uplifting with a view to cyberspace. Not only has the advent of the Internet spurred global growth by expediting the division of labor and lowering transaction costs, but it has facilitated a number of democratic protest movements.<sup>13</sup> Cyberspace thus figures prominently in the spread of free markets and democratization, two areas of traditional U.S. strategic interest – and it does so at minimal cost to the U.S. government.

However, the Internet at present resembles the Wild West, in which the good (entrepreneurs) flourish alongside the bad (thieves and other outlaws).<sup>14</sup> What's more, the United States has pioneered the use of cyberspace for war as well as peace. In July 2011 the U.S. military placed cyberspace alongside land, water, and air as an "operational domain," and it was reported in 2012 that the United States had launched cyber attacks against Iran.<sup>15</sup> Mahan claimed in 1890 that "whoever rules the sea rules the world"; today it is starting to seem possible that whoever rules the web will rule the world. But can a domain exist simultaneously as a realm for the peaceful and free exchange of ideas and as a battlefield, indeed one on which the very economic foundations of a nation's power are exposed to attack? How should U.S. strategy in cyberspace weigh the competing goods of commercial and intellectual freedom on the one hand, and security on the other?

### *Can't Stop the Bomb?*

The wide availability of information and the free flow of goods and services across borders and oceans have been hallmarks of global progress. They also have made it considerably easier for conventionally weak nations to pick the deadliest fruits of Western science, without undergoing the economic and social developments that had initially made their discovery possible. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which first went into effect in 1970 and was extended indefinitely twenty-five years later, so far has proven quite successful – at least among its original signatories. But many worry that North Korea and Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons will generate a "tipping point" or "cascade" of proliferation.<sup>16</sup> Can the United States act effectively to counter this impending proliferation? Does the proliferation of nuclear weapons to arguably deterrable states significantly augment the risk of proliferation to non-state actors (such

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<sup>13</sup> On the contribution of the Internet to economic growth, consider the McKinsey report, *Internet Matters: The Net's Sweeping Impact on Growth, Jobs, and Prosperity* (McKinsey & co., May 2011), [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/research/technology\\_and\\_innovation/internet\\_matters](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/research/technology_and_innovation/internet_matters), which suggests that from 2006 to 2011, more than a fifth of mature economies' growth was due to the Internet.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow this metaphor from the authors of "Governing Cyberspace," a table paper for the 63<sup>rd</sup> Student Conference on United States Affairs," 2-5 November 2011.

<sup>15</sup> David E. Sanger, "Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran," *New York Times*, 1 June 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html?pagewanted=all>. On other nations' use of cyber weapons, see Michael Joseph Gross, "Enter the Cyber-dragon," *Vanity Fair*, September 2011, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2011/09/chinese-hacking-201109>.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Allison attributes worries of a "tipping point" to the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, and worries of a "cascade of proliferation" to the U.N. High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. See Allison, "US National Interests," Presentation to JHU/APL Rethinking Seminar Series, 18 February 2010, slide 9.

as terrorist groups)?<sup>17</sup> And what measures short of costly military intervention might plausibly deter aspiring nuclear powers?

### *Responsibility to Protect?*

The same global communications that speed commerce and disclose nuclear secrets have also made the concept of “humanity” more viscerally felt than at any time in the past. But the world has struggled to reflect its humanitarian concerns in effective and reliable policy. This is especially so when austerity limits the appetite of powerful nations to expend resources overseas. The moral demand to prevent human rights abuses is compelling and arguably increases in direct proportion to one’s power to act, yet the political challenge of humanitarian action is as complex as the moral issue at stake is straightforward. How, then, ought the United States to respond to those who insist on its – and every nation’s – “responsibility to protect” the world’s most vulnerable populations? And what (if any) is the strategic value of such intervention? Does U.S. influence diminish when it stands apart from efforts to curtail human rights abuses, or should the prospective challenges that humanitarian interventions sometimes entail dissuade U.S. strategists from engaging in them?

### **Regional Issues**

Since the American founding it has seemed to many strategists that one could discern U.S. grand strategy as easily as one could read a map. “If we are wise enough to preserve the Union,” Hamilton wrote in 1787, “we may for ages enjoy an advantage similar to that of an insulated situation.”<sup>18</sup> Hamilton had in view the vast expanses of water guarding the U.S. eastern and (one day) western flanks, which he viewed as the guarantors of liberty.

The centuries that have passed since Hamilton wrote have not undone the salutary effects of water’s “stopping power”; they have, however, succeeded in shrinking oceans to the size of channels, making what were once impenetrable barriers seem to American strategists more like bridgeable moats. Just as Britain had to look warily on the rise of a hegemon across the twenty-mile-wide Strait of Dover, so, in the wake of the industrial revolution, America had to look askance at any regional hegemon, European or Asian, who might muster sufficient military-industrial might to threaten the American homeland. And since U.S. military-industrial might has come itself to rest atop the shifting, oil-rich sands of the Middle East, the United States has had a strategic interest in keeping these resources out of a single power’s control. The strategic map that results from these insights has revived the distinction between regions vital to American interests – Asia, Europe, and the Middle East – and those that are merely peripheral.

### *Pivot or Pirouette?*

There is near-universal agreement among policymakers that Asia will be the focus of American strategy in the years to come. The reasons are compelling. Since 1969, Asia’s share of global GDP has increased from sixteen to twenty-eight percent, while Europe’s has declined from forty to thirty percent.<sup>19</sup> And while this economic gain has yet to express itself in military expenditures – Asia accounts for only a fifth of the world’s military spending – there is reason to

<sup>17</sup> See Kenneth N. Waltz, “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137731/kenneth-n-waltz/why-iran-should-get-the-bomb>.

<sup>18</sup> “Publius” [Hamilton], “Federalist Paper No. 8,” [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed\\_08.html](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_08.html).

<sup>19</sup>For this data, see USDA Economic Research Service, “International Macroeconomic Data Set,” <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/international-macroeconomic-data-set.aspx>.

believe that it will do so soon.<sup>20</sup> Within Asia, China continues to modernize its military, and although the United States spends in absolute terms more than five times as much on defense, China's expenditures are steadily increasing – by seven percent, for instance, in 2010 alone.<sup>21</sup>

All of this has led American policymakers to deploy a classic balancing strategy: the much-touted “pivot to Asia” of 2012. The pivot has had military dimensions, such as deploying marines to Australia and shifting naval ships from the Atlantic to the Pacific; it has also had economic and diplomatic dimensions.<sup>22</sup> This new U.S. strategy entails a calculated risk that immediate improvements in the security of the United States and its allies will not create a long-term security dilemma for China; after all, what seems containment to the container can seem encirclement to the contained.<sup>23</sup> And since in this case the rising power the United States seeks to contain is its second largest trading partner, which currently holds some \$1.7 trillion in dollar reserves, the challenge facing policymakers is complex indeed.<sup>24</sup>

Adding to the complexity is the prospect that what now seems like an inexorably stable rise could change. It has been thirty-six years since China experienced a recession, and yet in 2012 its rate of growth declined, albeit to a still-high 7.6 percent. Nevertheless, there are a number of apparent weaknesses emerging in the Chinese economy, ranging from a potential real estate bubble to rising industrial wages.<sup>25</sup> China also faces challenges arising from its population, which, thanks in part to its “one child policy” faces a looming disproportion between young workers and elderly pensioners, and which is so large as to contain a number of potentially dangerous religious and ethnic fault lines.<sup>26</sup> Seen from Washington, Beijing often seems the seat of Asia's presumptive hegemon; seen from Beijing the view is murky at best.

### *A Fate Worse than Debt?*

The view from Brussels, however, is even murkier. The great post-war project of European integration seems to be under threat. In no other region of the world have the geopolitical consequences of the recent recession been so profound. Formulating concerted European economic policy has proven difficult, raising new questions about the future of European integration.

Whereas European citizens might be willing to sacrifice for fellow-nationals, they have proven reluctant to sacrifice for fellow-Europeans. This has been particularly problematic in the German case, since Germany, alone among the EU nations, seems sufficiently wealthy to act as a lender of last resort to flailing nations on the EU periphery. Against this backdrop of EU turmoil, U.S. policymakers concerned with their own economic austerity have continued to press for more European involvement in Afghanistan and greater European contributions to NATO.

<sup>20</sup> “Recent Trends in Military Expenditure,” (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2012), accessed 26 July 2012, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/trends>.

<sup>21</sup> Ashton B. Carter and Jennifer C. Bulkeley, “America's Strategic Response to Chinese Military Modernization,” *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* 9:1 (Winter 2007): p. 50-2, [http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter07\\_gov/carter.pdf](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter07_gov/carter.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> On the “pivot to Asia,” see especially Hilary Clinton, “America's Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy* (November 2011).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of “security dilemmas” of this sort, see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> For recent developments in Chinese dollar holdings, see Tom Orlik and Bob Davis, “Beijing Diversifies Away From U.S. Dollar,” *Wall Street Journal*, 2 March 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203753704577254794068655760.html>.

<sup>25</sup> On Chinese real estate, see Kenneth Rapoza, “China Housing Bubble Re-Inflates,” *Forbes.com*, 18 July 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2012/07/18/china-housing-bubble-re-inflates/>.

<sup>26</sup> On China's demographic crisis, see for instance Feng Wang, “China's Population Density: The Looming Crisis” (Brookings Institution, September 2010), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2010/09/china-population-wang>.

Worries about the future of both NATO and the European Union have become common, and, with them have come long-term concerns about the return of the “German question” that bedeviled European policymakers for the past century and a half.<sup>27</sup> Insofar as the United States benefits economically and strategically from a pacified and prosperous Europe, the potential unraveling of Europe’s post-war institutionalization is worrying.

### *Tis the Season?*

In Asia and Europe, the United States traditionally has worried about the emergence of a regional hegemon capable of projecting military power into the Western hemisphere. In the Middle East, on the other hand, the United States fears not the military might of a potential hegemon, so much as regional instability that could interrupt the flow of energy supplies.

As of this writing, the “Arab Spring” had toppled four regimes (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen) and imperiled two others (Syria and Bahrain). U.S. policy towards these revolutions has been at once supportive and subdued. To paraphrase John Quincy Adams, the United States has been “the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all” but the “champion and vindicator only of her own”; or, as President Obama put it, the United States has “led from behind.” However, this aloof pose has proven, and may in the future prove, difficult to maintain: it requires that the United States watch passively as masses sacrifice for freedom and suffer grievous human rights abuses, calling loudly for U.S. assistance all the while; that the United States let democracy take its course, even when elections produce illiberal leaders; and that the United States accept an unaccustomed degree of instability in a strategically critical region.

And so it is in today’s Middle East, perhaps, that the central fault lines of American foreign policy lay most exposed: does the United States have an interest in protecting human rights even when it is not strictly in its “interest” to do so? Does an age of austerity require that the United States “lead from behind”; even if does not, is this nonetheless a prudent strategy for the United States to pursue? More broadly, in the wake of the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq, what ways and means will enable the United States to pursue its abiding interests (access to oil, e.g.) alongside competing concerns like anti-terrorism, democratization, and development?

### *Beyond 2014*

The “pivot to Asia” coincides with a pivot *from* the regions in which the U.S. military has been most engaged since 2001: the Middle East and South and Central Asia. Since the United States will continue for the near future, at least, to import roughly a quarter of its oil from the Middle East, this region will continue to be of vital strategic interest. The nature of U.S. interests in South and Central Asia is more difficult to discern.

On the one hand, the United States faces no emerging peer competitor in the region. India, the most powerful nation in military-industrial terms, has enjoyed rapid economic growth since 1991. However, India’s growth has been less impressive than China’s, and of the two the global recession has so far had a more decisive impact on India.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, India and the United States share a range of global and regional interests, leading India to be singled out as a

<sup>27</sup> See Christopher Meyer, “The Return of the German Question,” *Huffington Post* (website), 23 November 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sir-christopher-meyer/the-return-of-the-german-question\\_b\\_1110673.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sir-christopher-meyer/the-return-of-the-german-question_b_1110673.html). Also see Christopher Caldwell, “Über Alles After All: Europe’s German Future,” *Weekly Standard* 17:21 (13 February 2012).

<sup>28</sup> For data on recent Chinese GDP, see “China’s Economy: The First Quarter,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 April 2012, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealttime/2012/04/13/chinas-economy-the-first-quarter/>.

long-term strategic partner in the Pentagon's 2012 strategic guidance.<sup>29</sup> The only potential great power in the region is thus a close U.S. ally that appears to be growing closer.

Pakistan, on the other hand, presents a vexing problem to both Indian and U.S. policymakers. As its conventional forces have been eclipsed by those of its Indian rival, Pakistan has turned to unconventional forces – nuclear weaponry and support for insurgents and terrorist groups – to maintain some equilibrium. This confluence of unconventional forces raises significantly the chances that an undeterable non-state actor might gain possession of nuclear weapons; this possibility has been of great concern to the United States, particularly in the wake of 9/11. Since 2001, however, Pakistan has served as a U.S. ally in the war on terror. Even with all the attendant difficulties, many contend that U.S. interests will be better served with Pakistan as an ostensible friend than an avowed enemy.

A number of important factors in this relationship are presently in flux. The bulk of U.S. forces are set to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, with consequences for Afghan and regional stability that are difficult to determine and may remain so for some time. Also, the threat of terrorism has changed significantly. The Obama administration has restricted the goals of the conflict President Bush christened the “war on terror.” In the words of a recent strategic review, “We are not at war with the tactic of terrorism... we are at war with a specific organization – al-Qa’ida.”<sup>30</sup> This more limited war seems nearly won. Shortly after bin Laden’s death in May 2011 Secretary of Defense Panetta proclaimed the United States “within reach of strategically defeating al-Qaeda,” a claim that President Obama himself has repeated since then.<sup>31</sup> What remains of that mission seems likely to be fought with special forces units and drone strikes rather than large numbers of U.S. soldiers. As a result, the nature of U.S. engagement in South and Central Asia is likely to be quite different after 2014 than it has been since 2001. What form this engagement will take, however, is very much an unresolved question for U.S. policymakers.

### *Africa and Latin America*

While the danger of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands seems likely to make South and Central Asia an area of greater concern to the United States than it would otherwise be, no comparable danger looms in Latin America or Africa. Indeed, threats to U.S. national security in these regions have more to do with failing states than with emerging powers.<sup>32</sup> U.S. policymakers have therefore had to worry about illegal trafficking, piracy, the drug trade, and the emergence of violent extremist organizations within ungoverned spaces. Each of these is a serious threat, but none has so far necessitated a sizeable U.S. military footprint. One Department of Defense official, in fact, has claimed that the U.S. military’s Africa command will have been a success if “it keeps American troops *out* of Africa for the next fifty

<sup>29</sup> Gopal Ratnam and Indira A.R. Lakshmanan, “India Looms Larger as U.S. Attention Shifts to Asia,” *Bloomberg* (website), 13 June 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-06-13/rising-india-looms-large-as-u-s-shifts-attention-to-asia.html>. In “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership” (Department of Defense, 2012), p. 2, the line reads: “The United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India....”

<sup>30</sup> “National Strategy for Counterterrorism” (June 2011), p. 2, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Panetta’s remarks are reported by Craig Whitlock, “Panetta: U.S. ‘Within Reach’ of Defeating Al-Qaeda,” *The Washington Post*, 9 July 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/panetta-us-within-reach-of-defeating-al-qaeda/2011/07/09/gIQAvPpG5H\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/panetta-us-within-reach-of-defeating-al-qaeda/2011/07/09/gIQAvPpG5H_story.html). For President Obama’s reiteration of Panetta’s earlier statement, see for instance: “Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Nation from Afghanistan,” 1 May 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-address-nation-afghanistan>.

<sup>32</sup> Africa alone accounted for fifteen of the twenty weakest states in The Fund for Peace’s 2012 *Failed State Index*, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi-grid2012>.

years.”<sup>33</sup> Much the same could be said with respect to the U.S. military’s Southern Command in Latin America.

Nevertheless, there are significant opportunities in these regions for innovative U.S. development aid, humanitarian outreach, and even democracy promotion. How to pursue these varied ends without committing the United States to military intervention has been a long-standing challenge – one made all the more pressing under conditions of austerity. And this challenge is only compounded by the close links between human security, on the one hand, and seemingly distinct humanitarian issues like famine, disease, and poverty, on the other. Attempts to address one without the other arguably endanger a policy’s success, but the costs of addressing both simultaneously are in many cases prohibitive. One attractive, low-cost option has gained special prominence of late: the use of U.S. special forces, military-to-military engagement, and even military contractors to train foreign armies. But this policy carries its own set of dangers. Armies trained to protect civilians today may endanger them at a later date, particularly in nations with less robust cultural and institutional guarantees of military subordination to civilian authority than the United States enjoys. How, then, can U.S. policymakers ensure that their attempts to empower regional partners will remain consistent with broader objectives for development and democratization? More broadly, how can the United States pursue policies that accord with its liberal principles in regions that, strategically speaking, are peripheral to core national interests? And how can the United States keep these regions peripheral when interventions by potential rivals such as China seem to presage future great power confrontations?

### *The View from Alaska*

The days are long past when Russia and the United States waged proxy wars across the developing countries of Latin America and Africa. Nevertheless, Russia plays a role in U.S. grand strategy that is at once important and obscure. Russia is no longer a military rival; however, its geographic position astride both Europe and Asia makes Russia relevant to calculations of force.

Russia’s location is also, however, a source of profound insecurity. If Hamilton thought the United States capable of playing the part of an island and thus a great sea power, Russia would seem cast by geography as the quintessential land power, a nation incapable of deploying nature’s “stopping power” on its side. Russia’s twelve thousand miles of land borders touch fourteen separate nations.<sup>34</sup> Russia’s expansive borders afford a number of advantages, not least a significant share of the world’s energy resources, and yet for all of its vast size Russia seems visibly to shrink as it is ground upon by the two tectonic plates of Europe and Asia.

The Obama Administration sought a “reset” with Russia when it entered into office, but the more fundamental facts of Russian life and the strategic stance they inspire cannot be remade as easily as one can press a button. And thus U.S. policymakers face a deep dilemma: Russia can hardly be ignored and it can hardly be made to feel satisfied with world affairs. How then should it be approached? Can one resuscitate a disgruntled “dying bear” with carrots and sticks?<sup>35</sup> Can

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<sup>33</sup> Comments by then-Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Ryan Henry at a Meeting of USAID’s Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid (ACVFA), 23 May 2007. Cited in Lauren Ploch, “Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa” (Congressional Research Service, 22 July 2011), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Only China, the other prominent “authoritarian capitalist” state has a longer land border and touches more nations.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt has dubbed Russia a “dying bear” on account of a number of alarming demographic indices. See Eberstadt, “The Dying Bear: Russia’s Demographic Disaster,” *Foreign Affairs* 90:6 (November/December 2011): 95-108. For a rebuttal to Eberstadt’s analysis, see Mark Adomanis, “A Reply to Nicholas Eberstadt’s ‘The Dying Bear’ – Russia’s Demographics are not

one file down its claws without its lashing out? Or is it perhaps wiser simply to stand as far away as one can, in order to allow the bear either to heal and renew its own strength or to die with dignity?

### **Domestic Sources of U.S. Foreign Policy**

American identity has from the beginning appealed to a set of principles, or creed, to define itself.<sup>36</sup> And with this creed has come a certain ecumenism of ends, inspiring projects of nation-building abroad and assimilation of immigrants at home. America is not just any nation, then, but a liberal nation. These two root chords of American identity, liberalism and nationalism, can sometimes sound in harmony – as Lincoln sounded them when he spoke of a nation dedicated to a universal principle – but they are nevertheless distinct and thus capable of discord, particularly when one threatens to drown out the other.

#### *Disorder at the Border*

If over the past decade liberal ventures in nation-building have dominated American policy abroad, nationalist anxieties have been more evident along the borders of the “homeland.”<sup>37</sup> The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in 2001 represented what one analyst has called “the most significant government reorganization since the Cold War,” and it seemed to many, then and now, a sensible response to the novel security challenges arising from the open, often borderless, post-Cold War world.<sup>38</sup> To others, however, the Department has come to represent the excesses of the United States’ response to September 11 – the sometimes needless curtailment of civil liberties, the humiliating airport examinations, and the general withdrawal from a welcoming posture into a snarling, protective crouch.

Following its absorption of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in March 2003, the Department of Homeland Security also has been embroiled in contentious debates over American immigration policy. A spate of strict immigration laws at the state level – along with an inconclusive recent Supreme Court ruling – have increased the salience of political borders *within* the United States in national efforts to determine the nature of U.S. international borders. All of this has happened while the recession reduced drastically the number of illegal immigrants entering the United States.<sup>39</sup> And so policymakers are left with the challenge of determining how the United States should relate to other nations not only in foreign policy, but in areas where foreign shades into domestic policy.

### **Conclusion**

Despite myriad challenges facing U.S. policymakers today, lean times need not occasion pessimism. It is in times of penury rather than plenty that a nation’s priorities become clear, radical reapportionment of resources in light of these priorities becomes possible, and the

Exceptional,” *Forbes.com* (blog), 31 October 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2011/10/31/a-reply-to-nicholas-eberstadts-the-dying-bear-russias-demographics-are-not-exceptional/>.

<sup>36</sup> On the “American creed,” see especially Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>37</sup> On the oddness of the word “homeland” to describe the United States, consider James A. Bartlett, “Homeland: Behind the Buzzword,” *The Ethical Spectacle* (September 2001), <http://www.spectacle.org/1201/bartlett.html>.

<sup>38</sup> This quote is attributed to Peter Andreas by Brian D. Johnson, “Success of DHS Was Built on Relationship with Lab,” *Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory* (website), 9 September 2011, <https://www.llnl.gov/news/aroundthelab/2011/Sep/ATL-91011.dhs.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Tara Bahrapour, “Number of Illegal Immigrants in U.S. Drops, Report Says,” *The Washington Post*, 1 September 2010, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/01/AR2010090106940\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/01/AR2010090106940_pf.html).

foundations of future strength and accountability can be secured. Austerity affords a unique opportunity for reflection on these fundamental questions of American foreign policy.

Lean times demand and enable leadership. The charge to delegates of SCUSA 64 is to consider what form U.S. leadership can and should take across a range of policy areas. Which U.S. interests are vital and which are peripheral? What ways and means can the United States afford in pursuit of its interests? Which institutions and alliances augment these ways and means, and which (if any) unduly constrain or overextend U.S. power? And what modes of engagement with its peers will enable the United States to address both the root causes of the present age of austerity and emerging global threats?

The challenge laid before the delegates of SCUSA 64 is to allow austerity to focus the mind, and thus to articulate principles and policies worth pursuing in ages of austerity and prosperity alike. Not only in lean times, after all, are the varied means at the United States' disposal more powerful for being wedded to clear and discrete priorities. American power is always most effective when it is focused, efficient – austere.