

Military Presence Topic Report

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Summary Section

Proposed Resolutions in Rank Order

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: Japan, the Republic of Korea, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: Japan, the Republic of Korea, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Djibouti.

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in the Middle East and/or Northeast Asia.

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, Northeast Asia, the Greater Horn of Africa.

Affirmative Case Areas

Affirmative teams would defend reductions in U.S. military presence in a specified country or region. The strongest case areas are Japan, South Korea, Bahrain, Kuwait, and possibly Djibouti. Across those areas, affirmatives could argue that reducing forward deployments decreases escalation risks, avoids entrapment, pressures allies to assume greater defense responsibility, reduces environmental damage from military bases, challenges imperial or colonial forms of U.S. power, improves human rights credibility, and reallocates resources away from outdated or overextended missions. The topic also permits cases with different levels of complexity: novices can debate troop reductions with an imperialism bad bent, while advanced teams can research particular bases, capabilities, command relationships, host-country political controversies, or redeployment advantages.

Negative Approaches

Negative teams would have strong ground defending deterrence, alliance reassurance, crisis response, international credibility, and the non-combat roles of U.S. forces. They could argue that reductions undermine deterrence against China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, or regional instability; weaken allied confidence; reduce humanitarian assistance and disaster response capacity; or create dangerous signaling effects beyond the country named in the plan. The negative would also have viable counterplans, including leveraging US assets for wins from host counties, confidence-building measures that assuage enemy concerns of US bases, within region relocation, mission reform (like keeping troops to do something benign), or deterrence upgrades. Critical negative strategies could argue that incremental reductions leave militarism intact, shift the battlefield home, misunderstand security dynamics or produce a “velvet glove” where the US would use newfound soft power to create new harms. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Debatability and Balance

Military presence offers balanced affirmative and negative ground because the core controversy is genuinely contested. There are credible advocates for retrenchment, anti-basing movements, burden-shifting, and reduced U.S. footprint, but also strong literature defending overseas bases as necessary for deterrence, alliance credibility, disaster response, and regional stability. The best resolutions preserve this balance by including multiple geographic areas without becoming so broad that preparation becomes unmanageable. Japan and South Korea provide especially deep China and North Korea deterrence debates; Bahrain and Kuwait provide distinct Middle East assurance, naval, land-force, and resource-tradeoff debates; Djibouti adds Africa but should be included cautiously because the literature is less robust.

Ballot Synopsis

A military presence topic would ask students to debate whether the United States should significantly reduce its overseas troop deployments in specified countries or regions. The topic is timely because U.S. forward presence remains central to current controversies over China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, alliances, defense spending, and the future of American global leadership. It is also durable because the United States is unlikely to eliminate its global military posture before the season begins, even if particular deployments shift. Affirmative teams could argue for reducing presence in Japan, South Korea, Bahrain, Kuwait, or Djibouti to decrease escalation, reduce human rights and environmental harms, shift burdens to allies, or challenge militarism. Negative teams could defend deterrence, alliance reassurance, crisis response, humanitarian missions, and credibility, while also advancing counterplans or critical objections. The topic has strong educational value because it gives students a concrete mechanism for debating international relations, domestic budget priorities, imperialism, deterrence theory, and the practical consequences of U.S. foreign policy.

Proposal Narrative

Appropriate History and Context for the Topic Area

The United States maintains the most extensive global military presence of any country. With more than 170,000 active-duty personnel stationed across 178 nations, few areas of the world remain unaffected by U.S. forces. In addition, U.S. defense spending exceeds that of the next ten highest-spending countries combined, and it sustains a permanent military presence in roughly 80 countries, many of which are not active war zones. Despite ongoing recruitment difficulties, and an increasingly unpredictable Trump, there is little indication that the United States intends to significantly scale back its overseas military commitments. These dynamics are not merely abstract concerns: forward basing shapes the security, sovereignty, economic conditions, and general well-being of host nations, as well as the strategic calculations of both allies and adversaries. For these reasons, I propose military presence as the topic area for the 2027-2028 season to encourage meaningful debate over key foreign policy questions.

Under this topic, affirmative teams would advocate reducing U.S. military presence in a specified country or region. While the precise advantages would differ depending on the case, recurring themes might include decreasing escalatory pressures on adversaries, encouraging allies to assume greater responsibility, advancing human rights, strengthening deterrence through a lighter footprint, abandoning outdated or imperial frameworks, or reallocating political and economic resources. Negative teams, in turn, would have access to a wide range of responses, such as arguments about deterrence, alliance reassurance, international credibility, and the non-combat roles of military installations. They might also defend alternative approaches, including reforming rather than reducing deployments, emphasizing diplomacy and confidence-building measures, or critiquing the broader logic of militarism rather than focusing on incremental policy changes.

Military presence provides an accessible yet distinctive entry point into the study of international relations. Given the complexity of global politics, centering debates on this issue offers students a concrete anchor for engaging broader theoretical frameworks. Debaters could explore foundational perspectives such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism, while also examining specific disputes about the consequences of U.S. deployments—for example, whether they deter adversaries or instead heighten the risk of escalation. Similarly, the effects of U.S. military commitments on allies remain contested, with some scholars suggesting that alliances can entangle the United States in unwanted conflicts, while others emphasize their stabilizing benefits.

This topic would also extend beyond international relations to include important domestic considerations. Questions surrounding defense spending, particularly in relation to funding for social programs, are central to contemporary political debates. Students would be able to engage issues of federal budget priorities and the political ramifications of opposing military deployments. In addition, they could analyze the domestic consequences of reducing overseas commitments, including how the return of personnel and equipment might affect communities within the United States.

Given the depth of available research and the diversity of argumentative approaches, the time is ripe for the high school debate community to revisit military presence as a topic. The last such topic occurred during the 2010–2011 season. While that may feel recent to some, most novice debaters in 2026–2027 will have no direct familiarity with it. Moreover, the global context has changed substantially since then. The earlier topic took place during the height of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, prior to Barack Obama’s pivot to Asia. In light of these shifts in the international environment, revisiting military presence now offers students a timely and valuable opportunity for debate during the 2026–2027 season.

Status of Current Policy, Legislation, and Pending Action

The current policy context is defined by a large and durable U.S. overseas posture, with the central controversies varying by region. Northeast Asia remains the strongest area for inclusion because Japan and South Korea host two of the largest overseas U.S. troop deployments and because the literature on both countries reflects broader debates about deterrence, alliance reassurance, burden-sharing, China,

and North Korea. The Middle East is also ripe for debate because U.S. forces in Bahrain and Kuwait support different forms of regional power projection: Bahrain centers naval power and the Fifth Fleet, while Kuwait centers land-based deployments and legacy logistics from the Iraq War. Africa is less developed as a resolutional region, but Djibouti is a possible country-specific inclusion because Camp Lemonnier is the only permanent U.S. military base on the continent. Europe is potentially fruitful because Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom host large numbers of U.S. forces, but it raises sharper uniqueness concerns because NATO and European troop withdrawals have become recurring points of U.S. political controversy.⁶

Probable Affirmative Case Areas

Northeast Asia

The region that I most strongly feel should be included in every resolution is Northeast Asia. Japan and South Korea host the most and third most, respectively, U.S. troops of any foreign country.⁷ The literature base on both sides of the debate surrounding U.S. presence in Japan and South Korea is robust and representative of broader debates⁸ about larger American military footprints.⁹

Japan

Debates over Japan could touch on a number of important foreign policy topics. Affirmatives could argue that reducing military presence from Japan could help prevent a U.S. military containment of China,¹⁰ help prevent environmental destruction,¹¹ encourage peace between Russia and Japan,¹² incentivize Japan to share more of the military burden,¹³ or encourage stronger regional governance organizations in Asia.¹⁴ Affirmative teams could also choose to argue in favor of removal from particular regions of Japan or specific bases. For example, there is a bevy of literature in favor of removing military presence from the Okinawa prefecture, arguing that bases there harm the alliance,¹⁵ violate the wills of the Okinawan public,¹⁶ and have unique environmental effects.¹⁷ Advocates also exist for removing specific types of weapons and military capabilities from Japan such as ballistic missile defense systems¹⁸ or aircraft carriers.¹⁹

Negative teams would similarly have high quality arguments to make against proposals that remove military presence from Japan. For example, there are several potential disadvantages based on the military impact of removing presence, including undermining deterrence of China,²⁰ hindering military responsiveness,²¹ or incentivizing Japanese nuclear proliferation.²² Additionally, the negative could argue that removing military presence could cause negative political²³ or diplomatic²⁴ consequences, undermine responses to natural disasters,²⁵ cause a shift to Guam,²⁶ or upend freedom of navigation.²⁷ Negative teams could also propose alternative courses of action, such as relocating bases to more favorable locations within Japan,²⁸ increases diplomatic communications with China,²⁹ or makes the U.S. deterrence posture more effective.³⁰

South Korea

Similarly, there is a robust debate surrounding U.S. military presence in South Korea.³¹ With over 28,000 U.S. troops in South Korea, there is plenty of room for the affirmative to offer different proposals for reduction or withdrawal. In doing so, the affirmative could argue that reducing military presence would yield advantages like decreasing the likelihood of a war on the Korean peninsula,³² encouraging South Korea to take up more of the military burden,³³ decreasing tensions with Iran,³⁴ signaling peaceful intentions to China,³⁵ or allowing South Korea to take more of a leadership role as a middle power.³⁶ Affirmative teams who are willing to push the limits of the topic could argue in favor of giving South Korea operational control over their military³⁷ or removing particular capabilities like THAAD missile defense systems.³⁸

The negative has a wide variety of positions that they could argue. Several disadvantages potentially exist to reducing military presence from South Korea, including undermining deterrence against China³⁹ or North Korea,⁴⁰ incentivizing South Korean nuclear proliferation,⁴¹ or causing disunity in the US-South Korea relationship.⁴² Negative teams could also argue that removing military presence from South Korea would undermine its credibility as a global partner⁴³ or would prevent prompt responses to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.⁴⁴ These disadvantages could be coupled

with counterplans that attempt to diplomatically resolve crises while maintaining military presence in South Korea⁴⁵ or increase confidence building measures in the region.⁴⁶

Middle East

One region that is ripe for debates, and should be included in most resolutions, are some of the Arab states in the Middle East. Of the many troop deployments in the Middle East, Bahrain and Kuwait ought to be included in the resolution due to both the number of troops deployed and the relatively sustainable controversy to debate for both in comparison to other options. Israel's campaign in Gaza has created a unique lens for which to discuss our relationship with countries in the Middle East—while the United States was in the midst of attempting to withdraw from the Middle East, Israel pulled us back in, meaning that now is ripe for debates about the Middle East.

Broadly, there are generic arguments applicable to both countries, including resource trade off arguments. Removing US troops from a given country would drastically free up resources for deployments to other areas either within the region or in different regions. This trade off could function both as an affirmative advantage and a negative disadvantage. Many argue that “freeing up forces and funds from the outsized Middle East force posture could be essential to meeting future requirements in East Asia,”⁴⁷ resulting in a vibrant debate about both the perception and impact of a massive shift in US presence from one region to another.

Bahrain

Bahrain hosts the headquarters of the United States' Fifth Fleet and Naval Support Activity Bahrain, a center piece of US power projection in the region. There are many advantages that could be read, including: advantages about naval accidents in the Gulf,⁴⁸ advantages about Bahrain's human rights abuses,⁴⁹ advantages about the country's relationship to Iran,⁵⁰ and advantages about the United States over-expending resources in the Middle East.

On the flip side, there is a large variety of negative arguments. Bahrain alone gives access to the core assurance and deterrence disadvantages for the Middle East. For assurance alone, there are disadvantage stories based on abandoning Israel during their campaign in Gaza,⁵¹ stories arguing against abandoning one Gulf State ally for another,⁵² as well as stories about how allies in regions external to the Middle East would view a large shift in American presence in a region of core interest. For deterrence, United States troops in Bahrain have a variety of purposes, including general arguments about Iranian⁵³ and Russian⁵⁴ interests over oil in the region, the deployment of counterterror operations,⁵⁵ and unique position of the United States' Fifth Fleet being critical to maintain naval dominance in the region.⁵⁶

Kuwait

Kuwait hosts the most US troops deployed over any other country in the Middle East, totaling around 13,500 troops.⁵⁷ Of these troops, most are stationed for an outdated war plan for Iraq War logistics, and have empirically not served a deterrent effect. However, they do act to make “foolish wars too easy to start”⁵⁸. This controversy alone, over whether they deter adventurist action, or make conflict escalation more likely, would be the central question of debates over Kuwait. Other advantages affirmative teams could make involve signaling of US deployments in the Kuwait towards the likes of Israel and Palestine, arguments about Kuwait's lack of support for international human rights law⁵⁹, and more based on the physical deployment of troops from an outdated mission.

While the advantages are seemingly similar to that of Bahrain, both countries establish different overall discussions due to the different troops deployed in each. Deployments in Bahrain are focused primarily on the naval power projection in the region, while deployments in Kuwait serve land-based missions and duties. As such, the negative would also have a variety of different arguments related to physical, land-based troops in contrast to naval power, and their deterrent capability⁶⁰. The negative could also make arguments about broader US-Kuwaiti relations, as the United States has made a central tenet of the relationship US troop deployments in the region⁶¹.

Africa/Greater Horn of Africa

U.S. policy toward Africa is under-represented in previous debate topics. However, given that Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is the only permanent U.S. military base in Africa, I would strongly advise against including Africa in any region-based resolution.⁶² The only country in Africa that I considered

for a country-specific resolution is Djibouti because no other country really has anything that meets most definitions of military presence.

Djibouti

I have a moderate recommendation for including Djibouti. The literature is not as deep and controversial as it is in other areas, but I could understand wanting Africa to be represented in the resolution. There is a reasonable literature surrounding counterterrorism operations that stem from Camp Lemonnier.⁶³

Affirmatives arguing for a reduction of presence from Djibouti could take a variety of approaches. One approach, for instance, could be to argue in favor of removing troops who perform civil affairs missions by arguing that they militarize diplomacy and cause conflict in Africa.⁶⁴ Other affirmatives may argue that counterterror operations performed by military presence in Djibouti undermine regional governance and encourage blowback that incentivizes more terrorism.⁶⁵ Other approaches could argue that, because of Djibouti's close relationship with China, Camp Lemonnier is an unsafe and ineffective place for the U.S. to conduct most of its Horn of Africa operations from.⁶⁶

Negative teams could also read a variety of arguments against reducing presence from Djibouti. For example, the negative could argue that U.S. military presence in Djibouti is key to counter-terrorism and drone operations in Africa.⁶⁷ They could also argue that, because of Djibouti's geographic importance, removing military presence would undermine shipping routes and encourage piracy.⁶⁸ Others may argue that reducing our military presence in Djibouti would undermine U.S. soft power in the region.⁶⁹

Djibouti should be considered in some country-specific resolutions. The topic authors do not, however, think that Africa or any region therein should be seriously considered in the resolution. Because of the lack of permanent military deployments in any other country, Africa (or the Greater Horn of Africa) is not particularly well suited to be in the resolution. I have included it in one of our potential resolutions in order to provide some more variety and because it was part of the 2015-2016 NDT-CEDA resolution, but I strongly advise against its adoption in the resolution.

Europe

Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom share almost 25% of all United States troop deployments, so it's a potentially fruitful area for debate. There certainly are affirmative advocates for a big reduction in European troops.⁷⁰ However, this is an area of the world where I have some caution about inclusion for one reason: negative link uniqueness. There is a constant threat from Trump to withdraw from NATO, and in 2020 Trump did withdraw almost 50% of troops deployed in Germany, though Biden reversed that in 2021. That said, I think that this area should be included because it would incentivize teams to do timely research on a pressing controversy.

Probable Negative Strategies

The most predictable disadvantages are deterrence and assurance. In Northeast Asia, negative teams could argue that reducing presence in Japan or South Korea undermines deterrence against China or North Korea, weakens military responsiveness, increases allied proliferation incentives, or damages alliance credibility. In the Middle East, negative teams could argue that reductions from Bahrain or Kuwait undermine deterrence of Iran or Russia, weaken naval dominance, compromise counterterror operations, or signal abandonment to allies. In Djibouti, negative teams could defend counterterrorism, drone operations, shipping lanes, anti-piracy missions, and U.S. soft power. Generic disadvantages are also available, including alliance credibility, deterrence credibility, diplomatic capital, domestic politics, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and regional instability.⁷¹

Counterplans would also be diverse. The negative could propose diplomatic engagement or confidence-building measures while maintaining military presence, relocate bases within the same country, reform missions rather than reduce deployments, increase burden-sharing, or upgrade command structures to make deterrence more credible. Critical negative arguments would challenge the affirmative as a partial or technocratic reform that leaves the broader logic of militarism intact. Those arguments

could indict selective reductions, nation-state focused international relations, militarized policy-making, or reforms that manage U.S. power rather than contesting it.

Past wordings:

High School Military Presence (2010-2011)

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce its military and/or police presence in one or more of the following: South Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey.

College Military Presence (2015-2016)

Resolved: The United States should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, the Greater Horn of Africa, Northeast Asia.

Alliances (2020-2021)

Resolved: The United States Federal Government should reduce its alliance commitments with Japan, the Republic of Korea, North Atlantic Organization member states, and/or the Republic of the Philippines, by at least substantially limiting the conditions under which its defense pact can be activated.

List of Resolutions

The stem of the resolution should read:

The United States federal government should significantly⁷² reduce its military presence⁷³ in ...

From there, the resolution could go in two directions: countries or regions.

So, it could read:

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: Japan, the Republic of Korea, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain.

If one wanted a longer list that included US presence in Africa, then:

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: Japan, the Republic of Korea, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Djibouti.

If one wanted regions:

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in in the Middle East and/or Northeast Asia.

Note about “Middle East” resolutions- that phrase could potentially be replaced with “Arab States of the Persian Gulf”, “West Asia,” “Near Asia,” or another similar phrase.

Or, a broader list of regions:

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in one or more of the following: the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, Northeast Asia, the Greater Horn of Africa.

If one wanted a more elegant non-list option, then:

The United States federal government should significantly reduce its overseas military presence.

Wording Discussion

The phrase “significantly reduce” is preferable to “substantially reduce” because it has a clearer contextual grounding in U.S. defense policy. Government documents have used “significant reduction” to refer to troop reductions, including a 20 percent reduction baseline, while “substantial reduction” has less predictable topic-*specific* usage.⁷⁴ “Military presence” is also preferable to broader phrases such as “military engagement,” “alliances,” or “security cooperation” because it focuses the topic on troop deployments and avoids re-litigating topics centered on arms sales, defense pacts, or other non-presence mechanisms.⁷⁵

Rationale for Ranking

The first resolution is the strongest because it includes the deepest and most balanced country-specific controversies: Japan, South Korea, Kuwait, and Bahrain. That combination gives the topic geographic diversity while preserving predictable preparation. The second resolution adds Djibouti, which improves representation of Africa but risks thinner literature and more uneven debates. The third resolution uses regions rather than countries, which may make the topic more flexible but could also expand the topic too much and create disputes about topical boundaries. The fourth resolution is the broadest regional option. It creates variety, but it also risks over-inclusion, especially because the Greater Horn of Africa is not as well supported by permanent U.S. military presence as Northeast Asia or the Gulf.

Application of the NFHS Criteria for Debate Topics

Timeliness and Durability

A military presence topic would strike an ideal balance between timeliness and durability. The U.S. military is always relevant in global geopolitics. Even as its recruitment numbers dwindle, the United States is increasing the scope of its military activity globally.⁷⁶ However, this topic's timeliness is not just because of the quantity of military activities, but also the nature of military challenges. In previous eras, the U.S. military had one primary adversary or challenger. Now, however, great power competition is occurring from multiple angles, necessitating a two-or-more pronged military strategy.⁷⁷ Changing politics in the U.S. and host countries ensure that broader military strategy will always be relevant and timely.

Each country or region could also carry its own set of events that make it particularly timely. For example, the US and Japan are in the process of upgrading its defense relationship in the “biggest revamp since 1951” against a backdrop of Chinese military expansion.⁷⁸ Similarly, the U.S. and South Korea are increasing military exercises because of growing cooperation between Russia and North Korea.⁷⁹ In the Middle East, the US military is front-and-center, with several Gulf allies trying to maintain regional security with uncertainty in Gaza.⁸⁰

One risk of many timely topics, however, is that changes can occur before or during the season that make the topic unworkable or moot. If the government takes actions in the direction of the affirmative, it makes it very difficult for the negative to generate unique disadvantages. Take, for instance, a topic about criminal justice reform. If Congress did something to reform qualified immunity during the middle of the season, it would be very difficult for negatives to argue that reforming policing in other ways would trigger some core topic disadvantage whilst simultaneously arguing that the status quo avoids those consequences. This is an important feature of the military presence topic: even though the topic will maintain its relevance and freshness throughout the course of a season, it is very unlikely that any major changes occur that would make the topic unworkable.⁸²

Accessibility and Material

The scope of U.S. military presence is vast and facilitates a large variety of debates. While many debaters will be interested in geopolitics, deterrence, and assurance debates, there is something for everybody. Students with interest in the environment will find a wealth of literature surrounding the environmental impact of military bases.⁸³ Similarly, debaters who are interested in understanding the historical legacy of U.S. imperialism and colonialism will find ways to integrate that into their arguments.⁸⁴ There is a plethora of information available on anti-basing movements, social justice, and U.S. military installments as well.⁸⁵

Although it is unlikely that every debater has a direct, personal relationship with U.S. military deployments abroad, this topic would allow students to draw connections between their day to day lives and the global impacts of a global U.S. military presence. This topic could be an important entry point for students to learn empathy with people from other countries, consider perspectives on U.S. militarism that are not common in American media, and understand the complexities of foreign policy.

Student Interest, Engagement, and Educational Quality

Debates about military presence are accessible for debaters of all skill levels. Debaters who have had exposure to international relations will be able to engage in in-depth research about specific military postures, intricacies of anti-basing movements, military technologies and adversarial responses, and creative solutions to miscalculation. There is an abundance of wonky, technical literature written about military policy that experienced debaters and researchers can sink their teeth into. Novices and less experienced debaters, however, will also be able to engage in debates and research. There are a number of think tanks that publish reports in accessible language on military policy. Numerous articles exist from

news cites and accessible media that advance common arguments about deterrence, containment, resource tradeoffs, and overstretch in ways that younger debaters could easily understand.

The success of the military presence topic in 2010-2011 (as well as the NDT-CEDA military presence topic in 2015-2016) demonstrates that students will not only have the ability to keep up, but also the motivation and interest to innovate. Additionally, the most recent NDT-CEDA topic about nuclear weapons reduction shared many similar themes about assurance, deterrence, entrapment, and criticism of military policy. A quick, informal survey of college coaches indicated that such a literature base is capable of sustaining an entire season, especially when more than one geographic region is included in the resolution.

Prior military presence topics also illustrated that the debates are high quality. Both affirmative and negative teams will have access to core ground about a topic that is controversial from both traditional policy perspectives and a critical perspectives. Although arguments like deterrence and assurance have existed on past topics, between the topic and those themes has been tenuous at best. Often, debaters have had to fight an uphill battle to win that the topic would meaningfully affect U.S. deterrence posture. On this topic, there is a clear and direct connection, which allows for students to get the most out of these debates.

This topic would have the benefit of easily accessible generic disadvantages on top of high-quality specific arguments. This allows for advanced debaters to engage in high-level, specific research while novices could have more predictability and consistency with what they cover in each debate. Each country or region would certainly have its own specific assurance or deterrence disadvantage (for example, Japan and South Korea have a very strong China deterrence disadvantage). But there is also a literature base about credibility theory that can enable a general “alliance credibility da” or “deterrence credibility da” that could apply to any affirmative case.⁸⁶ Similarly, high-level researchers could write arguments about the effects of military presence on the political system in each country, whereas novices could debate a more generic, but broadly applicable, diplomatic capital disadvantage.

Teams that enjoy critical approaches to the topic will have no shortage of literature bases to dive into. Affirmatives could argue, with very high level scholarly sources, that the U.S. military is an important tool of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. Negative teams could similarly critique the affirmative as a mere band-aid solution to militarism or argue that technocratic changes to military policy entrench those same structural issues.

Balance

The ground on this topic is exceptionally balanced between the affirmative and the negative. Anecdotally, the 2010 high school topic and the 2015 NDT-CEDA topic presented great parity between the affirmative and the negative. In terms of literature, there is a wealth of literature on both sides of the military presence conversation.

I have already outlined the country-specific affirmative and negative ground in the “potential resolutions” section of this paper. That information will likely be the most dispositive in determining the balance of ground between the affirmative and negative.

In literature about military presence generally, there is a great balance between affirmative and negative advocates. Across regions and countries, multiple themes exist for people who argue that the U.S. should reduce its military footprint. One common argument in favor of reducing military presence is that a larger U.S. military deployment risks conflict escalation by serving as a tripwire to provoke adversaries.⁸⁷ Others write about reducing military presence as a way to encourage better regional deterrence structures by having allies share more of the military burden.⁸⁸ Social justice and structural violence are also common arguments against U.S. forward deployment. Military presence can be linked to a broader form of American imperialism that comes at the expense of non-western countries.⁸⁹ Another frequent theme is that U.S. military presence provides political and diplomatic cover for authoritarians and human rights abusers.⁹⁰ Removing military presence could help to improve human rights in other countries and increase U.S. human rights credibility.

On the negative side, teams will be able to argue in favor of large, strong military deployments. Debaters could argue that the U.S. military serves as a deterrent against aggressive or hostile actors who would want to challenge the existing world order.⁹¹ Additionally, negative teams could argue that removing military presence would remove a core assurance to an ally that the US is willing to protect their security interests.⁹² Negative teams could also argue that there would be negative domestic consequences, especially political and resource tradeoffs, to reducing military presence abroad.⁹³ Military personnel in each country have unique, non-combat missions like humanitarian aid and disaster relief that they would be unable to perform if they were removed.

Additionally, negative teams would have access to a variety of counterplan or critical strategies. Rather than accept the status quo, negative teams could advocate for maintaining military presence, but repurposing it to do different missions. The negative would also have access to other counterplans that attempt to prevent crisis escalation through increasing diplomatic activities, relocate troops within the same country to avoid environmental or geographic pitfalls, or increase military presence in order to achieve greater deterrence or warfighting capabilities. Additionally, there is plenty of literature that the negative could use to challenge the assumptions of affirmatives, criticizing them for choosing when and how to strategically deploy militarism,⁹⁴ indicting the paradigm of international relations as over-focused on the nation-state,⁹⁵ or attacking the ways the aff upholds racist, colonialist structures.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that affirmative teams would be arguing for a reduction of military presence, there are plenty of articles that argue that militarized structures must be challenged holistically rather than focusing on one piece at a time⁹⁷ in order to prevent bogging down peace movements in single-issue victories.⁹⁸ Ultimately, both the affirmative and negative team would have high quality, well-evidenced arguments at their disposal to engage with a topic about military presence topic.

Novice Packet Guidance

A novice packet for this topic should include at least three affirmatives: Japan/Okinawa base reduction, South Korea troop reduction, and Kuwait troop reduction. It should also include one counterplan, such as leverage; one kritik, such as militarism or orientalism; and two disadvantages, such as China deterrence and alliance credibility. This structure would give novices predictable debates while still teaching core topic controversies.

Conclusion

Military presence holds great potential as a debate topic. Students are eager to engage in foreign policy debates, but the plethora of moving pieces makes it challenging for them to find a stable mechanism to start their investigative journey. Military presence allows students to focus on a large, tangible signal of U.S. foreign policy that provides balanced affirmative solvency and negative disadvantages.

This paper has thus far been written as a topic paper, not as a debate brief. Admittedly, it has been reliant on footnoted research. For definitions of core topic terms, however, I felt it was necessary to present briefed evidence in order to aid the topic committee.

Evidence – Definitions

Definitions—Significantly

Topical affirmatives must reduce troops in a region by 20 percent or 1,000 troops

S. 1376 2015

(S. 1376 – FY 16 Defense Authorization Bill, http://www.rpc.senate.gov/legislative-notices/s-1376_fy-16-defense-authorization-bill)

Expresses the sense of the Senate that the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan should be based on security conditions in Afghanistan and U.S. security interests in the region. It goes on to require the president to certify that any ordered significant reduction in U.S. forces in Afghanistan will result in an acceptable level of risk to U.S. national security objectives. A significant reduction is defined as the lesser of 1,000 or more troops or a 20 percent reduction of troops then deployed in Afghanistan.

Definitions—Reduce

Not eliminate.

Burke 23, United States Magistrate Judge. (Christopher J., November 17th, “Oasis Tooling, Inc. v. Siemens Indus. Software, Inc.”, United States District Court for the District of Delaware, No. 22-151-CJB, Lexis+ via KU Libraries)

The outcome here is driven primarily by the plain language of the claims. (D.I. 88 at 8) As Oasis points [*7] out, all of the asserted independent claims recite that the canonical forms "reduce" sensitivity of data analysis to non-functional variations in the design data within a particular cell[.]” (See, e.g., '545 patent, col. 81:64-66 (emphasis added); '571 patent, col. 81:53-56 (emphasis added)) The patentee did not include a requirement that the canonical forms eliminate all sensitivity of data analysis to non-functional variations—it instead chose the term "reduce." (D.I. 88 at 8, 21; Tr. at 9, 11) It is not disputed that the plain and ordinary meaning of "reduce" is to lessen, but not necessarily to eliminate entirely. (D.I. 88 at 21; Tr. at 16-17; see also D.I. 88, ex. C-3 at 3 (defining "reduce" to mean "to diminish in size, amount, extent, or number"); D.I. 88, ex. C-4 at 1 (defining "reduce" to mean "to bring down to a smaller extent, size, amount, number, etc."))

Reduce means a net decrease

Public Law 87-253

(Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1982, 97th US Congress, Sept 8, 1982, Lexis)

E) Prior to approving any application for a refund, the Secretary shall require evidence that such reduction in market- ings has taken place and that such reduction is a net decrease in marketings of milk and has not been offset by expansion of production in other production facilities in which the person has an interest or by transfer of partial interest in the produc- tion facility or by the taking of any other action, which is a scheme or device to qualify for payment.

This means the plan must explicitly preclude intra-regional/country transfer

Kentucky Ct of Appeals 84

(Paducah v. Moore, 662 S.W.2d 491, Lexis---sex edited)

No one quarrels with the appellants' argument that HN3 the city has the power to transfer or even discharge employees at will. The right to do so, however, is restricted by Statutes of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The language of KRS 90.360(1) above is quite clear in prohibiting reduction in grade of a classified service employee of the City except for cause and after a hearing upon appropriate written charges. In interpreting identical language concerning prohibition against reduction in grade provided for in KRS 95.450(1), our former Court of Appeals stated in Schrichte vs. Bornhorn, Ky., 376 S.W.2d 683 (1964):∂ . . . we are of the opinion that the term 'grade' means rank, whereas it appears that the appellant interprets it more broadly as job classification. Obviously by the use of the word 'reduce,' the Statute envisages a verticle scale. If a [person] is transferred without a loss in pay from one job category to another with comparable authority, his classification is changed, but his grade is not reduced.

Definitions—Military Presence

Stationing of troops. Subset of “military engagement” excluding arms sales, cooperation, subsidies.

Rooney et al. 22, Ph.D., political science, Vanderbilt University. Political scientist, RAND Corporation. (Bryan, 2022, “Introduction”, Chapter 1 in *Does the U.S. Economy Benefit from U.S. Alliances and Forward Military Presence?*, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA700/RRA739-5/RAND_RRA739-5.pdf)

We begin by defining our **key** concepts: U.S. military engagement and economic benefits. The term military engagement is a **more expansive concept** that also includes security cooperation, arms sales and subsidies, and partnerships with countries that do not have formal **alliances** with the United States.⁹ Here we focus on the two aspects of military engagement that have been most discussed in the grand strategy debate: alliances and forward military presence. We use the term ally to refer to a country with which the United States has a **formal treaty obligation** to come to that country’s defense in the event of an armed attack. For example, this category includes Japan, South Korea, and allies within the U.S. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).¹⁰ The term ally does **not** include U.S. partners, such as Israel and Taiwan, that have security ties with the United States but do **not** have a formal defense commitment from the United States.¹¹ Somewhat relatedly, U.S. forward military presence refers to the **stationing of U.S. armed forces** in another country **outside of wartime**. Although many U.S. allies host U.S. forces, there is not a **perfect** overlap between alliances and forward military presence. For example, the United States has based forces in partner countries such as Saudi Arabia, which is not a U.S. treaty ally.

Assets and activities.

Thomason et al. 95, Ph.D., International Relations, Northwestern University. (James S., August, “EVOLVING SERVICE ROLES IN PRESENCE MISSIONS”, Institute for Defense Analyses, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA304968.pdf>)

For purposes of this study military presence is defined relatively **inclusively**. It is taken to mean the overseas **assets** and **activities** of military units **not engaged** in combat. This definition is **consistent** with that provided in the draft National Military Strategy of the United States.⁶ This formulation does not by any means deny the value to the United States of U.S.-based military capabilities in promoting the objectives of presence. To the contrary, the framework spelled out in the next section implies that the U.S. has a wide range of foreign policy instruments to **achieve** the objectives of presence, including **U.S.-based power projection assets**. It is our conviction, based upon this analysis, that this collection of foreign policy instruments is likely to work best when it is used in concert, rather than in disjointed fashion.

Troops stationed in another country.

James & Imai 96, *associate professor of political science, University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

**associate professor of political science, University of Wisconsin-Parkside. (*Peggy Ann, **Kunihiko, November, “Measurement of Competition between Powers: The Cases of the United States and the U.S.S.R.”, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association, JSTOR via KU Libraries)

Military presence refers to the number of superpower **troops** stationed within the **satellite country** (rounded to the nearest 1,000; those under 1,000 were rounded to 500). Since this variable was strongly and positively skewed (toward 0 troops for 50% of the data) and contained an extreme value (5% of the cases had troops greater than 200,000), a negative reciprocal transformation was performed on the data.

Military presence means bases with forces

Layne 10 – Professor and Robert M. Gates Chair in Intelligence and National Security at the George Bush School of Government and Public Service

(Christopher, "Definition of Military presence" May 12th, <http://abnormalmeans.com/2010/05/definition-of-military-presence/>)

My interpretation would be that "military presence" means **bases** with combat forces (or bases that normally are maintained by skeleton units but are maintained to receive combat forces crisis/surge type circumstances). I do not think in the normal meaning of the term that the US has military bases in N. Korea.

Presence is defined as US military bases

Meernik 94 - Professor of Political Science at the University of North Texas and Associate Editor of International Studies Quarterly

(James, International Studies Quarterly, 38.1)

Nations possess a multitude of means by which they may protect their security and demonstrate their national interests to other states, such as forming alliances, spending money on armaments, and going to war. If we are to determine exactly where national interests lie, however, it is to visible demonstrations of commitment and concern for particular states and regions that we must look. The level of American military involvement in the area in which an opportunity takes place is perhaps the most visible demonstration of U.S. commitment. U.S. military involvement as defined includes: (1) an established American **military presence**, **defined as a U.S. military base**, (2) the furnishing of military aid to some state or organization, or (3) a prior use of force.

Military presence is defined as active military personnel---prefer our interp it's region-specific

Poon 6 - Professor in the Department of Geography, University at Buffalo-SUNY

(Jessie, Political Geography, ScienceDirect)

The major source of defense trade data comes from the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) where 1989 forms the earliest year that the data are available and 2004 the most recent (http://dataweb.usitc.gov/scripts/user_set.asp). From this database, current and historical records may be searched for U.S. exports to Asia Pacific countries with the end use category "defense." This ensured that dual use products were excluded from the search. Seven sectors may be identified for defense trade including military aircrafts, aircraft launching gear/parachutes, etc., engines/turbines for military aircraft, military trucks/armored vehicles, etc., military ships/boats, tanks/artillery/missiles/rockets/guns/ammunition, and parts/special goods, etc. Not all of the sectors will be analyzed because many countries contain only very sparse data. Approximately thirty Asia Pacific countries are identified to be engaged in defense trade with the US although this number varies from sector to sector. The countries include all members of APEC and the ARF but also extend to other countries that have been excluded from these arrangements such as Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Oceania. Defense exports are supplemented by two other sources of data, that is, US military presence and countries' military expenditure. US military presence is measured by the number and shares of **active military personnel** in the region. This information is compiled by the US

Department of Defense (<http://www.dior.whs.mil/mmmd/military/miltop.htm>). Statistics on military expenditures may be obtained from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (www.sipri.org). In addition, contextual information is also collected from research monographs on US military strategies. These reports are compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in Washington, D.C., and CRS constitutes the public policy research arm of the US Congress. Many of these reports include testimonials to the Congress regarding defense and strategic events in the Asia Pacific, and provide important documentation as well as evidence of US geopolitical interests, policies and developments in the region.

Presence requires non-combat activities – forces engaged in combat are excluded

Thomason 2 – PhD in IR, Project Leader, Institute for Defense Analysis

(James, “Transforming US Overseas Military Presence: Evidence and Options for DoD,” IDA Paper P-3707)

WHAT IS OVERSEAS MILITARY PRESENCE?

Our working definition of US overseas military presence is that it consists of all the US military assets in overseas areas that are engaged in relatively routine, regular, non-combat activities or functions. ∂ By this definition, forces that are located overseas may or may not be engaging in presence activities. If they are engaging in combat (such as Operation Enduring Freedom), or are involved in a one-time non-combat action (such as an unscheduled carrier battle group deployment from the United States aimed at calming or stabilizing an emerging crisis situation), then they are not engaging in presence activities. Thus, an asset that is located (or present) overseas may or may not be “engaged in presence activities,” may or may not be “doing presence.” ∂ We have thus far defined presence activities chiefly in “negative” terms—what they are not. In more positive terms, what exactly are presence activities, i.e., what do presence activities actually entail doing? ∂ Overseas military presence activities are generally viewed as a subset of the overall class of activities that the US government uses in its efforts to promote important military/security objectives [Dismukes, 1994]. A variety of recurrent, overseas military activities are normally placed under the “umbrella” concept of military presence. These include but are not limited to US military efforts overseas to train foreign militaries; to improve inter-operability of US and friendly forces; to peacefully and visibly demonstrate US commitment and/or ability to defend US interests; to gain intelligence and familiarity with a locale; to conduct peacekeeping activities; and to position relevant, capable US military assets such that they are likely to be available sooner rather than later in case an evolving security operation or contingency should call for them.

Presence is primarily training – not just troop presence

Lutz 9 - professor at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University (Catherine, “Obama’s Empire,” New Statesman, August 3, 2009, lexis)

Moreover, these bases are the anchor - and merely the most visible aspect - of the US military's presence overseas. Every year, US forces train 100,000 soldiers in 180 countries, the presumption being that beefed-up local militaries will help to pursue US interests in local conflicts and save the US money, casualties and bad publicity when human rights abuses occur (the blowback effect of such activities has been made clear by the strength of the Taliban since 9/11). The US military presence also involves jungle, urban, desert, maritime and polar training exercises across wide swathes of landscape, which have become the pretext for substantial and permanent positioning of troops. In recent years, the US has run around 20 exercises annually on Philippine soil, which have resulted in a near-continuous presence of US soldiers in a country whose people ejected US bases in 1992 and whose constitution forbids foreign troops to be based on its territory. Finally, US personnel work every day to shape local legal codes to facilitate US access: they have lobbied, for example, to change the Philippine and Japanese constitutions to allow, respectively, foreign troop basing and a more-than-defensive military.

Presence refers to deployed forces and infrastructure – DOD definition

GAO 1 – General Accounting Office

(“EUROPEAN SECURITY U.S. and European Contributions to Foster Stability and Security in Europe,” November, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/214.pdf>)

DOD defines overseas presence as the mix of permanently stationed forces, rotationally deployed forces, temporarily deployed forces, **and infrastructure** required to conduct the **full range** of military operations.

Presence includes crisis response and security cooperation

Henry 6 – served as Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy since February 2003 (Ryan, “Reposturing the Force: U.S. Overseas Presence in the Twenty-first Century,” ed: Lords,

<http://www.usnwc.edu/Publications/Naval-War-College-Press/Newport-Papers/Documents/26-pdf.aspx>)

Finally, operational access comprises the presence, global management, and surging of our forces overseas, all enabled by the political and geographic access we enjoy with hostnation partners. Presence is defined by the permanent and rotational forces that conduct military activities (training, exercises, and operations) worldwide, from security cooperation to crisis response. That presence consists of both small units working together in a wide range of capacities and major formations conducting elaborate exercises to achieve proficiency in multinational operations. Second, our posture supports our new approach to force management, which seeks both to relieve stresses on our military forces and their families and to manage our forces on a global, rather than regional, basis. Combatant commanders no longer “own” forces in their theaters; rather, forces are managed according to global priorities. Third, managing our military forces globally also allows us to surge a greater percentage of the force wherever and whenever necessary.

Definitions—Retrench/Retrenchment

Retrenchment aims to reduce costs and commitments by cutting defense spending, withdrawing from alliance obligations, scaling back on deployments, or reducing international expenditures. It includes the grand strategy of “offshore balancing.”

Colin Dueck 15, Professor in the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University, and the author of *Age of Iron: On Conservative Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2019), "The Strategy of Retrenchment and Its Consequences," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 04/13/2015, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/04/the-strategy-of-retrenchment-and-its-consequences/>

Over the past **decade** or more, **leading academic foreign policy realists** have argued for **US strategic retrenchment**. Retrenchment is a strategy designed to reduce a country's international and military costs and commitments.^[1] This can be done by **cutting defense spending**, withdrawing from **certain alliance obligations**, scaling back on **deployments abroad**, or reducing **international expenditures**. Retrenchment does **not necessarily** involve the avoidance of **all** strategic commitments. But the **desired direction** with retrenchment **is** one of **lowered cost** and **reduced commitment**.

One **especially stark version** of strategic retrenchment, **championed by** political scientists such as John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, Robert Pape, and Christopher Layne, **is** the concept of **offshore balancing**.^[2] According to its leading advocates, a strategy of offshore balancing would still try to ensure that no one major power dominates Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Persian Gulf. But it would make **others** assume the **main burden**, and rely on **local powers** to balance one another, while stationing US military forces over the horizon, either offshore or within the **United States**. An offshore balancing strategy would embrace **sharp reductions** in the **size of the US Army and Marines**, avoid **counterinsurgency** operations **altogether**, and **abstain** from **international** projects involving the **military occupation** or governance of **developing countries**. For the most part, it would **avoid foreign wars**. American forces would come onshore only if local powers proved **unable** to maintain regional balance of powers on their own. With the threat checked, US troops would then exit and go back over the horizon. According to Mearsheimer, offshore balancing would allow the United States to **disband existing alliance commitments** in Europe and East Asia, and **cut defense spending** to about 2 percent of America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The **scaled-back US military presence** overseas would further **undercut** support for anti-American **terrorism**, and reduce the need for other powers to develop their own **weapons of mass destruction**. At least, these are some of the benefits claimed for offshore balancing by its proponents.^[3]

It can be total or partial, de jure or de facto. De facto retrenchment can include removing conditions for the use of military force (relevant for our purposes for the ‘don’t defend Taiwan’ case, which the proposed wording would include if it is coupled with visible changes to military presence).

Brian Blankenship 25, Non-Resident Fellow at Defense Priorities, Assistant Professor of Political Science at University of Miami, PhD in Political Science from Columbia University, former positions at Dartmouth College and Council on Foreign Relations, published in *International Studies Quarterly* and *Security Studies* and *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, author of *The Burden-Sharing Dilemma: Coercive Diplomacy in U.S. Alliance Politics*, "Achieving burden-sharing: Retrenchment vs. conditionality," *Defense Priorities*, January 21, 2025, <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/achieving-burden-sharing-retrenchment-vs-conditionality/>
Retrenchment

Retrenchment can **vary widely** in its **form** and **extent**. At its **mildest**, retrenchment entails **partial troop withdrawals** **without** changes in the **level** of **political or military commitment**. At its **most extensive**, retrenchment can take the form of not only **total** troop withdrawals, but **also** cessations of **political and**

military commitments. The **latter** can be **de facto**—for example, abandoning **plans to defend allies** or **repurposing forces useful** for their defense—or **de jure**—**exiting the alliance outright**. In its more **modest** forms, retrenchment can imply **reducing but not eliminating** commitments, as in the case of the “Nixon Doctrine,” which pledged that the **United States would keep its treaty commitments** but look to **allies** to assume the **primary role** in their defense. During his initial remarks in Guam in July 1969, Nixon declared that “as far as the problems of military defense... the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.”¹²

It is the term Foreign Affairs used to describe the exchange it hosted between Hal Brands & Peter Feaver and John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt about offshore balancing.

Hal Brands et al. 16, “**Should America Retrench? The Battle Over Offshore Balancing**,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 6, November/December 2016, pp. 164-171, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43948394>

Retrenchment is the ‘overarching characteristic’ of offshore balancing.

Quan Yao **25**, assistant research fellow at the Institute of International Relations at Nanjing University, research focuses on grand strategy and Mekong regional governance, “Offshore balancing strategy assessment: Profound disagreements and determining factors for performance,” *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, vol. 80, no. 1, 02/23/2025, pp. 111-128, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020251320900>

“Playing hard to get”

The **overarching characteristic of offshore balancing** involves **strategic retrenchment**. During the initial and intermediate stages of implementing the strategy, the balancer adopts a **defensive posture** by **withdrawing military forces** from **offshore regions**, closing military **bases**, refraining from **military obligations**, and **exiting** military **alliances**, among other measures. However, if the offshore balance is on the brink of disruption, posing a severe threat to the balancer, “decisive” intervention will be required. This trend aligns with the indirect approach advocated by the renowned British strategist Liddell Hart, who believed that the longest way round is often the shortest way home from a strategic standpoint.¹⁵ Using the US as an example, Walt contends that “playing hard to get” means only intervening when overt aggression occurs and vital US interests are directly threatened. Such intervention is driven by a clear objective: to achieve a swift and decisive resolution.¹⁶

It has to be permanent (not meaning durable fiat, but meaning that it comes with a costly signal of durability) **and in excess of decreases in relative power** (i.e. an active policy choice, not the natural byproduct of something like a localized recession).

Brandon K. Yoder **19**, Research Fellow, Centre for Asia and Globalisation, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, “Retrenchment as a Screening Mechanism: Power Shifts, Strategic Withdrawal, and Credible Signals,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 63, No. 1, January 2019, pp. 130-145, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45132467>

The Retrenchment Debate

Retrenchment is **defined** here as an **irrevocable removal** of a state's **capabilities** regarding a **particular region** or **issue**, which does **not merely** reflect changes in the **overall distribution of power**. There are several aspects of this definition that bear elaboration. First, **retrenchment is distinct from decline**. Retrenchment entails a **reduction** in a declining state's regional capabilities **that exceeds** its overall loss of relative power. Second, **retrenchment must be costly to reverse**, at least to **some degree**. If the retrenching state can **reinsert** its capabilities **immediately** or **without cost**, it does **not constitute meaningful withdrawal**. Furthermore, **the costs of reengagement** should be **generally observable** to other actors, **such that the extent of retrenchment approximates common knowledge**.³ [FOOTNOTE 3 BEGINS] ³ In other words, retrenchment must constitute a **costly signal** that withdrawal is **not transient**. This can take the form of either “sunk costs” (the costs of withdrawal itself) or “tied hands” (costs of attempting to reengage). See Fearon (1997). [FOOTNOTE 3 ENDS]

Retrenchment as distinct from mere restraint requires actual withdrawal.

Kelly '19 [Robert Kelly, Professor of International Relations at Pusan National University. "US Foreign Policy: Restraint without Retrenchment." Lowy Institute. August 6, 2019.

[https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/us-foreign-policy-restraint-without-retrenchment\]](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/us-foreign-policy-restraint-without-retrenchment)

So **restraint** – **fewer wars**, **less** “**omni-directional belligerence**”, **more diplomacy** – is **not** too

controversial. I imagine most US allies would actually like this, too. Many US partners were dismayed at getting chain-ganged into the Iraq war, for example, agreeing to it only to retain US friendship. Similarly, Trump was nearly alone in pushing for war with North Korea in 2017.

It is **important** to **distinguish** this **restraint** from **retrenchment** though, which I do not think this literature does well. **Restraint** ultimately means **better US judgment** – less paranoia, less worst-case-scenario thinking, less willingness to describe every unfriendly government or far-off region as “strategic” to the US, less activism and jumpiness. No one disagrees with greater US perspicacity, except perhaps America’s most irresponsible partners such as the Saudi royals or Israel’s Likud party.

Retrenchment is **more** than this though. It is **actual withdrawal** of **US forces** back to the **Western hemisphere** from **forward bases** in **Eurasia**, specifically from Europe, the **Persian Gulf**, and **East Asia**. Given China’s rise however, retrenchment would like fall on Europe and the Middle East first. Europe, most observers would agree, has the wealth and state strength to do far more for its own security, while US policing of the Middle East is simply beyond even its superpower reach.

In its broadest form it also includes changes in domestic policy. This would not be topical by itself due to the topic’s regional requirement, but could be included as an accessory to in-theater changes depending on the wording.

Moritz S. Graefrath 24, Wick Cary Assistant Professor of International Security at University of Oklahoma College of International Studies, non-resident fellow at Defense Priorities, Ph.D. in Political Science from University of Notre Dame, former Max Weber Fellow at European University Institute, former Grand Strategy Security and Statecraft Fellow at Harvard Belfer Center and MIT Security Studies Program, "The false peril of great power retrenchment: Types of strategic withdrawals and their consequences," European Journal of International Security, vol. 10, no. 3, August 2025, pp. 331-349, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2024.43>

This is not to say that no efforts have occurred to disentangle some of the conceptual ambiguity surrounding retrenchment. Two efforts stand out as particularly important in this context. First, **MacDonald and Parent** themselves have **proposed the distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’** forms of **retrenchment**: **domestic** retrenchment policies, they argue, are **inward-looking** and serve to ‘reduce military **spending**, revise **force structure**, and reform outmoded **institutions**, while reallocating **resources** toward more productive investments’; **international** retrenchment policies, meanwhile, are **outward-looking** and implemented ‘to defuse potential **flashpoints**, **revamp global posture**, and **shift burden to allies**’.Footnote17 Second, Haynes has rightly critiqued the literature’s ‘unidimensional’ conceptualisation of retrenchment, arguing that this hinders productive theorising about when and how declining states decide to retrench. In particular, he highlights that there exists important variation in the ‘timing and pace’ of strategic withdrawals.Footnote18

But the topical international component retains a ton of variety with different possible policy effects.

Moritz S. Graefrath 24, Wick Cary Assistant Professor of International Security at University of Oklahoma College of International Studies, non-resident fellow at Defense Priorities, Ph.D. in Political Science from University of Notre Dame, former Max Weber Fellow at European University Institute, former Grand Strategy Security and Statecraft Fellow at Harvard Belfer Center and MIT Security Studies Program, "The false peril of great power retrenchment: Types of strategic withdrawals and their consequences," European Journal of International Security, vol. 10, no. 3, August 2025, pp. 331-349, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2024.43>

Consider, for instance, **how MacDonald and Parent introduce retrenchment** in what arguably constitutes the most thorough discussion of the concept in the literature to date. **According to them**, ‘at base, retrenchment is an **intentional reduction** in the **overall cost** of a **state’s foreign policy**’ and – as its **defining characteristic** – thus denotes **decreasing grand strategic ambition** in one form or another. They then proceed to argue that, **in practice**,

retrenchment can take **various forms**, ranging from ‘economiz[ing] **expanses** by cutting ... **military spending** and **personnel**’, through ‘demoting the **importance** of some **issues**’ to ‘renounc[ing] existing commitments **altogether**’.Footnote13

In thus **grouping a variety** of disparate **strategies** – some far-reaching and costly, others of limited impact and comparatively cheap – they are **not alone**. For instance, **Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth** similarly **conceive of** retrenchment as a very **broad** conceptual category. To them, a state engaging in retrenchment can pursue a **variety of divergent strategies**: it could ‘scale back its global **commitments**’, ‘curtail or eliminate its overseas **military presence**’, ‘eliminate or dramatically reduce its global **security commitments**’, or ‘minimize or eschew efforts to foster and lead ... [an **international order**]’.Footnote14 For Trubowitz, retrenchment is a ‘status quo strategy’ which ‘involves scaling back existing commitments or military capabilities, or both’ – all three of which, of course, would have vastly different international effects.Footnote15 Finally, Atkinson and Williford argue that great power retrenchment denotes ‘declining **military expenditures**’ but intentionally remain **agnostic** about whether this means ‘drawing down foreign commitments or decreasing military investment at home’.Footnote16

This is not to say that no efforts have occurred to disentangle some of the conceptual ambiguity surrounding retrenchment. Two efforts stand out as particularly important in this context. First, MacDonald and Parent themselves have proposed the distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ forms of retrenchment: domestic retrenchment policies, they argue, are inward-looking and serve to ‘reduce military spending, revise force structure, and reform outmoded institutions, while reallocating resources toward more productive investments’; international retrenchment policies, meanwhile, are outward-looking and implemented ‘to defuse potential flashpoints, revamp global posture, and shift burden to allies’.Footnote17 Second, Haynes has rightly **critiqued** the literature’s ‘**unidimensional**’ **conceptualisation** of retrenchment, arguing that this **hinders productive theorising** about **when and how** declining states decide to **retrench**. In particular, he highlights that there exists important **variation** in the ‘**timing and pace**’ of **strategic withdrawals**.Footnote18

Yet, while these represent important **first steps** in **sweeping the conceptual minefield** surrounding retrenchment as a great power strategy, I argue that there remains a need for **further conceptual disaggregation**, specifically vis-à-vis the category of international – or external, outward-looking – retrenchment. To say that a state has, will, or should engage in international retrenchment can mean a **variety of different things**. At **one** extreme, it could mean **nothing more** than that a state is seeking to **reduce its international footprint** by **reducing** its **military presence** in a particular **region** of the world while **maintaining** a series of **bases** and **security commitments**. On the other, it could mean that it **completely abrogates** its commitments within a particular area and **fully withdraws** itself **militarily** as well as **economically** and **diplomatically**. The current, expansive treatment of the term in academic and policy discourses thus hinders a productive discourse on the consequences of engaging in retrenchment: the costs and benefits associated with various forms of retrenchment vary drastically, and to speak of the costs and benefits of international retrenchment overall thus makes little sense.

Political methodologists have long warned that ‘ignoring causally important **differences** between cases by **lumping them** together using excessively broad **definitions** of concepts’ can **stand in the way** of **productive theorising**. To gain **reliable insights** into the causes and effects of a phenomenon that occurs in various forms with ‘causally important differences’ – as is the case when it comes to international retrenchment – they advise ‘**disaggregating** the overarching concept into several sub-types and engaging in “**typological theorization**”’.Footnote19

To properly assess the **consequences** of **international retrenchment**, and specifically to evaluate the popular belief that a retrenching great power usually allows its rivals to gain marked strategic benefits and thus incurs significant costs, it therefore seems appropriate to employ a more **fine-grained conceptual framework** that explicitly distinguishes between different types of international retrenchment and thus allows for the kind of type-specific causal theorisation political methodologists recommend in cases like this.

A new typology of international retrenchment strategies

I propose a new **conceptual distinction** between four types of international retrenchment strategies: ‘**cutting back**’, ‘**downsizing**’, ‘**delegating**’, and ‘**abandoning**’. What unites the four is they each represent a **systematic**

reduction of a great power's politico-military footprint in a particular geographic space outside of its homeland, i.e. (international) retrenchment.^{Footnote20} Each strategy differs from the others, however, in terms of the **kind** and **degree** of disengagement it entails.

First, in terms of **kind**, some forms of retrenchments entail a reduction in a great power's **military footprint only**, whereas **others** simultaneously work to reduce a great power's involvement in the area's **diplomatic** and **economic** affairs. While the former usually takes the form of troop withdrawals, the latter might take a variety of forms. These include but are not limited to: reductions in the **economic and military aid** previously **provided** to incentivise friendly alignment; the **abrogation of economic or security treaties** meant to enshrine local actors' dependence; and other forms of direct as well as indirect support for the development of greater **independence** and **autonomy** in the making of economic and security policy.

Second, in terms of **degree**, some forms of retrenchment entail only a **partial** reduction in a great power's footprint within the respective space, while others are more far-reaching and completely abrogate a great power's presence. Evidently, this distinction is **crucial**. For instance, whether a great power **fully withdraws** military or leaves **parts** of its force **behind** must be expected to **fundamentally alter** the **strategic calculus** of both local actors as well as third parties.

Through their interaction, these two dimensions produce a four-way distinction between different types of retrenchment (see Figure 1). Before discussing each type in turn, two clarifying notes about this framework are in order. First, note that each form of retrenchment the framework identifies entails at least a partial reduction in a great power's military presence. Consequently, instances in which a great power moves to curtail its economic or diplomatic involvement in a particular area but leaves its military presence untouched do not qualify as cases of retrenchment for the present purposes.

Figure 1.

Four types of international retrenchment.

		Kind of disengagement	
		Military	Military + Economic/Diplomatic
Degree of disengagement	Partial	Cutting back	Downsizing
	Full	Delegating	Abandoning

Second, note that the four **ideal types** are not meant to capture **every possible form** of retrenchment great powers ever have pursued or will pursue. Rather, the typology delineates four ideal types which capture **distinct patterns of behavior** whose **differences** remain **unappreciated** by the conventional, **broader conception of retrenchment**. Future work might find, however, that an even finer-grained distinction could provide for an even more productive discourse and therefore seek to further disaggregate one or more of the types I outline.

MacDonald and Parent, who have published extensively on the definition of retrenchment as cited above, conceptualize it as gradual.

Paul K. MacDonald & Joseph M. Parent ²⁴, MacDonald is Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College, author of *The Dynamics of Power Politics*; Parent is Professor of Political Science and Co-Director of the Hans J. Morgenthau Program on Grand Strategy at University of Notre Dame, author of *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment*, "The Dynamics of US Retrenchment in the Middle East," May 29, 2024,

<https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/News/Display/Article/3789938/the-dynamics-of-us-retrenchment-in-the-middle-east/>

The United States, at the height of the war on terrorism, had more than 250,000 troops deployed across the Middle East. Today, it maintains a tenth of that number.¹ This instance of retrenchment, or the purposeful reduction of foreign policy costs, is even more dramatic than the American drawdown of forces in post-Cold War Europe, when those numbers fell to a quarter of their Cold War peak. **What impact will this retrenchment have on America's position** in the world?² Risks loom on either side: excessive retreat from the Middle East could damage US interests in the region and threaten American credibility globally, while inadequate retreat could exacerbate ongoing regional problems and endanger greater American interests and credibility elsewhere.

History offers a helpful guide. Many states have retrenched from regions around the world and have done so after military defeats, with varying levels of success. For the most part, grand strategy literature has not systematized American retrenchment in historical or regional contexts.

Deep engagement proponents argue that the United States **benefits** from **forward deployments** of military power, while advocates of **restraint** contend that the United States **can secure its interests** at a

much lower cost by **pulling back** from foreign commitments in the Middle East and elsewhere (though other regions invoked in these debates are often relegated to the background).²

In this article, **we draw on** existing **retrenchment theories** to **assess** whether **the** contemporary **Middle East** represents a favorable or unfavorable geopolitical environment for that strategy.³ Our core argument is that conditions broadly favor retrenchment, though with limitations. Because the rate of American decline is comparatively modest and because **the United States** is declining from the highest position in the geopolitical system and a dominant position within the region, **we expect** **retrenchment** to be **gradual**.

Definitions—Arab States of the Persian Gulf

Eight states---includes Yemen and Iraq

CNRM 15 - Circum Navigation Resource Management, Organization promoting immigration to the Arab States of Persian Gulf

(“Visa Immigration Service to Dubai/Gulf Countries,” <http://www.circumnavi.com/visa-immigration-service-to-dubai-gulf-countries/>)

“Arab states of the Persian Gulf”, “Gulf states”, “Gulf Arab states” or “Arab Gulf states” are referred to as Arab states bordering the Persian Gulf, namely Kuwait, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Most of these nations are part of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (formerly the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC).

7 states, not Yemen

Dolgov 15 – analyst @ Strategic Culture Foundation

(Boris, “Russia, Saudi Arabia: New Turn in Relationship,” <http://m.strategic-culture.org/news/2015/06/24/russia-saudi-arabia-new-turn-relationship.html>)

The Kingdom is the largest member of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, the **seven Arab states** which border the Persian Gulf, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. All of these nations (with the exception of Iraq) are part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the Arab States of the Gulf. The countries coordinate their activities in many areas. The Peninsula Shield Force (or Peninsula Shield) is the military side of the Cooperation Council intended to deter, and respond to, military aggression against any of the GCC member states. The rich in oil Saudi Kingdom is a leading member of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The profits received from oil exports allow Saudi Arabia to boost its economic, social and education infrastructure, as well as invest abroad, including the developed states of the West.

7 states-- Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Oman

Blackburn 12 – writer published @ Nova Science Publishers

(Trey, “Arab States of the Persian Gulf: Foreign Relations and U.S. Interests,” https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=31253)

This book examines the Arab states of the Persian Gulf including: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman; with a focus on their security, reform and U.S. relations. (Imprint: Nova)

6 countries

Gereis 14 – Manager, Middle East, International Trade

(Camil, “How to do business in the Gulf,” Australian Business Council, <http://www.australianbusiness.com.au/international-trade/export-markets/middle-east/how-to-do-business-in-the-gulf>)

The Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Gulf States, or Gulf Arab states are all terms that refer to this area and include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. These countries make up the economic and political block of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

Definitions—Northeast Asia

USPACOM defines Northeast Asia as Mongolia, China, Japan, North and South Korea

Admiral Keating, former Commander of USPACOM 2008 – Admiral, US Navy and Commander, U.S. Pacific Command (Timothy J., “USPACOM STRATEGY,”

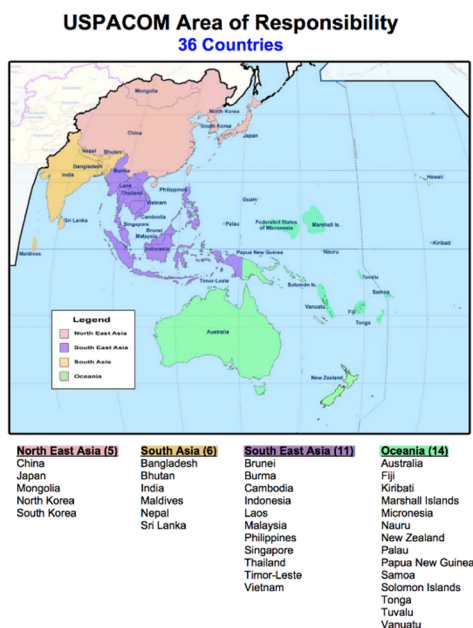
<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/adana/19452/pdfs/uspacom.pdf>)

Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific is inextricably linked to the immense magnitude of trade into, within, and out of the region. The region has become as significant a contributor to world economic output as either the U.S. or the European Union. U.S. trade with Asia is particularly enormous and currently valued at almost \$1 trillion annually. As economic interdependencies develop and grow in complexity, however, the potential for tension also grows due to conflict between economic allegiances and security partnerships. China, for example, is now the second largest trading partner of the U.S. and the largest trading partner for most of the nations allied to the U.S. in the region. Northeast Asia is home to some of the largest resource consumers and importers in the world. Most of the energy imported into North East Asia comes through the Strait of Malacca from Africa or the Middle East. As the demand for resources from developing nations in the Asia-Pacific increases and supply shifts toward Africa and Asia, the importance of freedom of movement will grow; as will the potential for heightened tensions. Sub-Regions To engage in this broad environment USPACOM divides the region into four distinct sub-regions: Northeast Asia, Oceania, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (see map page 2). This sub-regional approach facilitates deliberate and effective interaction by acknowledging variations in challenges and opportunities, priorities and resources, risks, threats and solutions. In Northeast Asia, deterring conflict on the Korean Peninsula continues to be a priority for USPACOM. Trilateral cooperation among the U.S., South Korea, and Japan is a cornerstone of our approach and the embodiment of the USPACOM emphasis on multilateral security frameworks. Japanese and Korean leadership continue to contribute effectively to regional security and stability. Through senior leadership engagement and focus on common cause issues, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster response, progress continues toward maturing the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship. Despite this progress, tension remains across the Taiwan Strait. Australia provides strong leadership across the great expanse of Oceania, exemplifying the USPACOM multilateral partnership effort. Emphasis in this sub-region includes enhancing host-nation capacity on response planning for humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, natural resource management, and maritime security. Australia has also joined with Japan and the U.S. in developing a trilateral partnership dedicated to improving security in the region. Additionally, USPACOM retains a Homeland defense obligation for the three Compact Nations of Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands.

Map referenced in above card

Admiral Keating, former Commander of USPACOM 2008 – Admiral, US Navy and Commander, U.S. Pacific Command (Timothy J., “USPACOM STRATEGY,”

<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/adana/19452/pdfs/uspacom.pdf>)



UN defines Northeast Asia as China, Taiwan, Japan, North/South Korea, RFE, and Mongolia

APFED NO DATE – Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (“OVERVIEW OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION,” http://www.apfed.net/pub/apfed1/final_report/pdf/overview.pdf)

The Asia-Pacific region covers an area from Mongolia in the north to New Zealand in the south, and from Central Asia and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the west to Kiribati in the east. The region is generally divided into five subregions, namely South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific. The countries within a subregion often share a natural and socio-cultural background, and experience similar environmental problems. The allocation of countries by subregion is shown in Table 1, following the practice in the State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific Report*****INSERT FOOTNOTE***** United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2000; State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 2000, United Nations, New York. *****END FOOTNOTE*****

Table 1: Subregions and Countries

Subregion	Countries
Central Asia:	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
North East Asia:	<u>China, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Mongolia</u>
South Asia:	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey
South East Asia:	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
Pacific:	Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Note: China includes Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan Province of China.

The region has enjoyed economic growth for the last four decades. In the course of economic development, however, rich natural resources have been degraded and the total number of poor people has

increased. APFED has identified the key social and economic factors upon which future directions of sustainable development of the region depend, and the status and perspectives of these factors are outlined below. They include population and urbanisation (population trends, urban population and urbanisation, rural-urban migration, urban poverty, and transforming demographic structures); economic development (growing and transforming economies, economic globalisation and its impacts, rural-urban gaps, energy sources and availability, and production and consumption); major social concerns (poverty, nutrition and health, education and gender discrimination, social cohesion, conflicts, and corruption); and technological development (technological innovation, information and communication technologies, biotechnologies, energy technologies, and cleaner production technologies).

China, Japan and Korea

Sup 4 – Professor, Economics Department, Myonji University, Korea

(Shim Ui, “THINKING ABOUT KOREA-MONGOLIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT,” The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs)

In today's world, there are three economic zones which no business can afford to overlook. Combined, they produced 84% of global GDP. The three zones are North America, Western Europe and Northeast Asia. Of the three regions it is Northeast Asia that offers the greatest growth potential. As the chart makes clear, Northeast Asia's share of the world's economy is only going to expand. The figures, and indeed the term “Northeast Asia” cover China, Japan and Korea. The vast Russian Far East is not yet included in statistics about the region. But if we include this area, with its huge untapped natural resources, low cost labor force, high educational standards and very high levels of pure science research the potential for growth is further underscored.

Definitions—Greater Horn of Africa

11 countries

FAO 14

(Greater Horn of Africa: Late and erratic rains raise serious concern for crop and livestock production,” <http://www.fao.org/giews/english/shortnews/hof03062014.pdf>)

The Greater Horn of Africa (including Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda), includes semi-arid areas that are susceptible to devastating droughts and high risk of food insecurity. A combination of agroclimatic constraints including aridity, erratic rainfall, soil erosion and deforestation; challenging socioeconomic factors, including high population growth rates, predominantly traditional agriculture characterized with low productivity in both crop and livestock production, high prevalence of poverty and low incomes; together with political instability and prevalence of conflict and civil insecurity render millions of people in the subregion to severe food insecurity and undernutrition. Rural populations relying on rainfed agriculture and pasture are particularly exposed to large seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations in water availability.

Eleven

UNITAR 13

(Advancing resilience to climate-related disasters in the Greater Horn of Africa, <https://www.unitar.org/advancing-resilience-climate-related-disasters-greater-horn-africa>)

11 June 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Addis Ababa played host to the 34th Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) and the Water Conflict Management and Cooperation Workshop, which took place on 29-31 May 2013. The Forum was organized by the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) and other partners to formulate a regional climate outlook for the June to August 2013 season over the Greater Horn of Africa (GHA). The Great Horn region comprises Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

8 countries

Mengisteab 14 - Professor of African Studies and Political Science @ Penn State

(Kidane, “The Horn of Africa,” Ch 2)

Conflicts in the Greater Horn

Introduction

This chapter attempts to identify and categorize the key conflicts that have ravaged the region during the last half a century or so and to briefly outline some of the socioeconomic costs and implications of the conflicts. Before delving into these tasks, however, a brief description of the basic characteristics and socioeconomic conditions of the Greater Horn is provided in order to familiarize the reader with the region.

The region consists of eight countries with an estimated total population of about 226.9 million in 2012 and a total area of 5,209,975 sq km (see table 2.1 for details). The countries of the region include: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, and they are all members of a regional integration, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), although Eritrea's membership in the regional body has been suspended since 2007.² Two of the youngest countries of the region, Eritrea and South Sudan, were formed through secessions from Ethiopia in 1993 and from Sudan in 2011, respectively. Somaliland has also declared its independence from Somalia but it has not yet obtained international recognition as an independent state.

Eight countries

Shinn 15 – Professor @ George Washington U

(David, “External Agency in the Greater Horn of Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Non- Regional Powers’ Engagements from the Cold War Era to Present,” <http://www.inafran.ru/en/node/250>)

The panel will prioritize the term Greater Horn of Africa (GHA) which includes eight countries in the northeastern part of the continent (Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda) and is often preferred to a commonly used Horn of Africa while discussing international politics in the region. Since the end of World War II, the Greater Horn has been one of the most conflict-ridden areas in the world. The inter-state relations in the region have been long characterized by a plethora of border-, land- and water-related disputes, many of which were created by colonialism, and negative historical memories that were further complicated in the post-colonial era and exacerbated by external interventions from within and outside the region. Given the region's strategic location at the crossroads of major land- and waterways and the availability of various natural resources in the GHA, this area has long attracted the attention of many extra-regional forces. This explains why the political decision-making in the post-colonial Greater Horn of Africa has constantly revealed a high degree of involvement from outside the region. In view of the complexity of extra-regional agency in the GHA politics, we believe that it is necessary to 'map' it in space and time by combining a historical perspective with a structural approach that would analyze political involvement 'from the outside' as a system of interdependent factors. With this consideration in mind, the proposed panel will include two subpanels focusing on two different periods of time. Both subpanels will place a special focus on the international dimensions of major inter- and intra-state political crises in each of the periods in question: e.g., The Eritrean secession conflict 1962-1991, the 1977-1978 Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia, the 1978-1979 war between Uganda and Tanzania, the second civil war in Sudan (1983-2005), the Somali civil war since 1991, the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute since 1998, etc. We particularly welcome contributions analyzing both the structure and agency of recent extra-regional involvements in the Greater Horn, e.g. its role in the U.S.-led war on global terrorism, other Western states' engagements in security-related issues, the growing economic presence of emerging powers from the East (China, India, Russia), etc. The session will also prioritize the discussion of Third World agency which often remains neglected in the academic discourse on the GHA politics. This includes, in particular, the ongoing political and economic engagements of Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other states in Asia, Middle East and North Africa [MENA].

Definitions—Europe

Europe is defined by boundaries. This would include Russia.

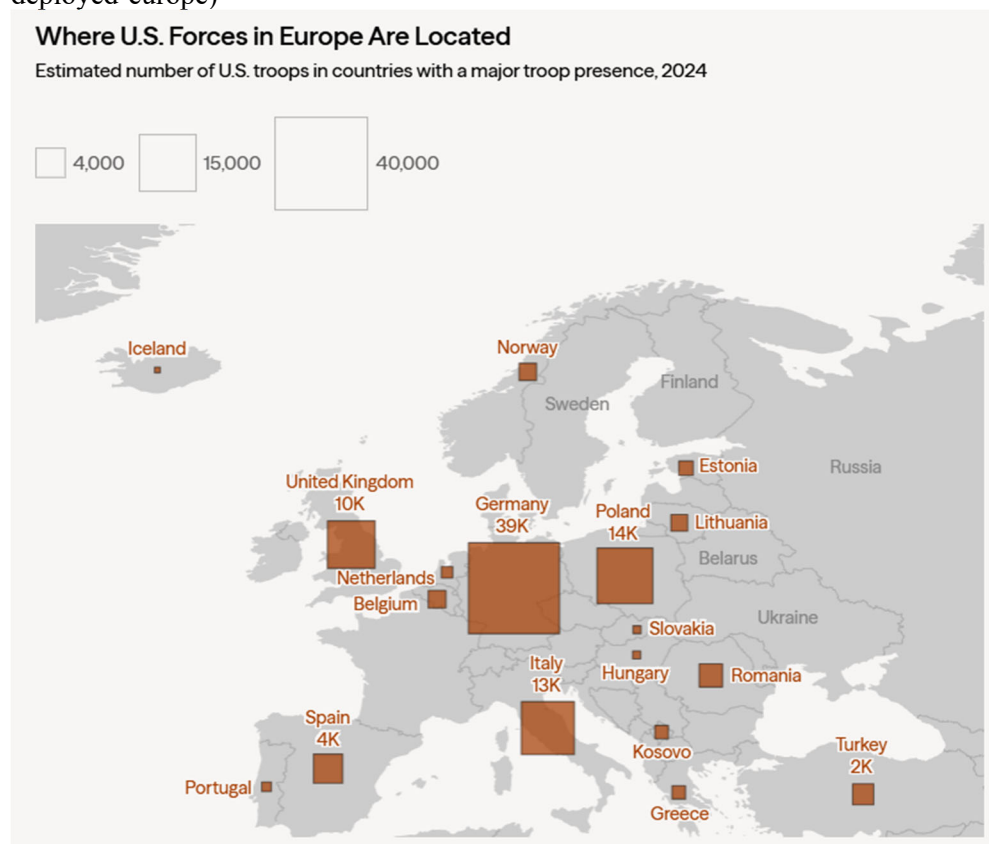
Global Connections 24 (“What is Europe?,” <https://www.glocal-c.com/europe/>)

Geographically, Europe is defined as the western part of the Eurasian continent. Its primary boundaries are as follows:

- **North:** Arctic Ocean
- **West:** Atlantic Ocean
- **South:** Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea
- **East:** Ural Mountains, Ural River, and Caspian Sea (border between Russia and Kazakhstan)

Here are the US forces stationed in Europe

Molly **Carlough 25**, Program Coordinator, Center for Preventive Action (“Where Are U.S. Forces Deployed in Europe?,” Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/where-are-us-forces-deployed-europe>)



Evidence – Substance

It's a Debate!

Debates between different grand strategy schools are heated and frequently receive book-length treatments.

Popescu 17, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Texas State University. (Ionut, 2017, “Grand Strategy, Emergent Strategy, and Foreign Policy Success,” *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy: How American Presidents Succeed in Foreign Policy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp. 1–26)

In light of such a demanding task, how should the United States government go about achieving grand strategic success? One segment of the grand strategy literature focuses on recommending alternative designs to be implemented. Recent books by Barry **Posen**, Robert **Art**, Bill **Martel**, and Paul **Miller**, among others, make the case for specific overarching frameworks for American grand strategy.³¹ The logical assumption underpinning the heated debates among advocates of various paradigms, such as **Restraint**, **Selective Engagement**, or **Conservative Internationalism**, is that the content of the grand strategic plans formulated by an administration matters greatly for the shape of the grand strategy followed by that administration. Similarly, the Washington think tank community produces a constant stream of reports outlining grand strategic frameworks, confirming the prevalence of the Grand Strategy model in Washington policy circles.³²

AFF---The Case for Restraint

The case for restraint is growing

Priebe et al. 24, Priebe is Senior Political Scientist and Director of the Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy at RAND; Schuessler is Associate Professor of International Affairs and Co-Director of the Albritton Center for Grand Strategy at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University; Rooney is Political Scientist at RAND; Castillo is Associate Professor of International Affairs and Co-Director of the Albritton Center for Grand Strategy at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University. (Miranda, 2024, “Competing Visions of Restraint,” *International Security*, vol. 49, no. 2, Fall 2024, pp. 135–169, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00498)

Restraint in the Grand Strategy Debate

Restrainers’ numbers in academia and influence in Washington **were limited** for **many years**. Writing in the mid-1990s, Barry Posen and Andrew Ross captured the grand strategy debate that followed the end of the Cold War, identifying four distinct schools of thought: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy. Their article describes neo-isolationism as “the least ambitious, and, at least among foreign policy professionals, probably the least popular grand strategy option.”⁷ Tellingly, Posen and Ross described prevailing U.S. grand strategy in the Bill Clinton administration as “selective (but cooperative) primacy,” a hybrid strategy that rejected neo-isolationism while drawing on elements of the other three grand strategic positions.⁸ In the years that followed, **the war on terrorism** reflected the triumph of a more **muscular version of primacy** in **Washington**.

Restrainers’ voices in the grand strategy debate have **strengthened since then**, increasing the **value** of **understanding their ideas** and how they might **contribute** to **future U.S. policy choices**. From the four

options that Posen and Ross identified in the mid-1990s, **the grand strategy debate coalesced** into **two poles** amid the Iraq War: **deep engagement** and **restraint**.⁹ [FOOTNOTE 9 BEGINS] For the view that the grand strategy debate has

collapsed into two camps, see: Posen, *Restraint*, pp. 5–11; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7–51,

https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00107. Analysts do not agree on the **terms** used for these poles. For example, Stephen **Brooks**, G. John **Ikenberry**, and William **Wohlforth** use the term **“retrenchment”** for the **restraint** pole.

Barry **Posen and Ikenberry** use the term **“liberal hegemony”** for the **deep engagement** pole. Posen, *Restraint*, p. 5; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 2. Some within the restraint camp use the term **“offshore balancing.”** See, for example,

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>. [FOOTNOTE 9 ENDS] **Deep**

engagement calls for the **United States** to remain a **security leader** in three key regions (East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East) through **commitments to allies** and **partners**, a role made **credible** by its **forward military**

presence. Beyond this **core** set of prescriptions, there are **deep divisions** among “deep engagers,”¹⁰ including about how ambitious U.S. aims should be and what role liberalism and multilateralism should play in U.S. foreign policy.¹¹ The **restraint** camp includes the **neo-isolationists** that Posen and Ross discuss as

well as a much **larger** group calling for **less dramatic** reductions in U.S. military involvement across the globe.

Concerns about U.S. overreach in the war on terrorism **reenergized the** grand strategy **debate** within **academia** and made **more scholars sympathetic to restraint**.¹² More recently, interest in restraint has

grown in the **public** sphere. Restrainers’ calls to end the **endless wars** in the Middle East **gained support** on **both sides** of the aisle.¹³ Elected in 2016, President Donald **Trump** **did not adopt** a grand strategy of restraint,¹⁴ but

he **did** voice restrainers’ **concerns** about alliances and adopt **some policies** that restrainers applauded, such as negotiating a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹⁵ Since then, Republicans have adopted a platform that includes calls for a **stronger military** as **well** as restraint-friendly themes, such as using force “sparingly” and promoting allies’ burden sharing.¹⁶ Although restraint remains a **minority view**, the shift in the distribution of power away from the

United States and the costs and risks associated with intensified great power competition could draw **more supporters** to the restraint position and produce a shift in U.S. grand strategy **in the future**.¹⁷

A robust literature has formed in the last several years concerning the wisdom of US retrenchment. It's not just the Cato-demics anymore.

Kupchan 22, Senior Fellow and Director of European Studies, Council on Foreign Relations; Professor of International Affairs, School of Foreign Service and Department of Government, Georgetown University; Former Director for European Affairs, National Security Council; Former Assistant Professor of Politics, Princeton University; B.A., Harvard University; M.Phil. and D.Phil., Oxford University; Author of multiple books on international affairs including *The End of the American Era* and *Power in Transition*. (Charles, 2022, "A U.S. Strategy of Judicious Retrenchment," *Polarity in International Relations: Past, Present, Future*, eds. Nina Græger, Bertel Heurlin, Ole Wæver, and Anders Wivel, Governance, Security and Development, pp. 369–388, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05505-8>)

The core argument of this chapter is that if U.S. leaders are to fashion a new consensus, they will need to do so around the notion of "judicious retrenchment." Judicious retrenchment entails **significantly reducing America's military commitments** in the strategic periphery while maintaining its role in preserving great-power peace and catalyzing collective action to address global challenges. The aim is to bring U.S. **grand strategy** back into **alignment** with the nation's **political will** and restore an **equilibrium** between its **objectives** and its **power**. **Many indicators** point to the potential for political **agreement** to emerge over a **grand strategy of retrenchment**. Public **opinion surveys** reveal a **clear preference** for "restrained engagement" (Halpin et al. 2019). The American people twice elected Barack **Obama**, a Democrat who called for "nation-building at home." They then elected Donald **Trump**, a Republican who unabashedly pursued a grand strategy of **neoisolationism** and **America First**. Indeed, Trump's America First approach to foreign policy broke from the liberal internationalism of the past eight decades, resonating more with the isolationism and unilateralism of U.S. grand strategy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kupchan, 2018). Trump Republicans were not alone in favoring a pullback from the Middle East. Most of the Democratic senators seeking to succeed Trump supported his decision late in 2018 to begin the withdrawal from Syria and Afghanistan. The 2020 Democratic platform called for "turning the page on two decades of large-scale military deployments and open-ended wars in the Middle East" and asserted that the United States "should not impose regime change on other countries" (Democratic Party Platform, 2020). Although committed to internationalism and multilateralism, President Joe Biden early in his presidency announced a full military withdrawal from Afghanistan and plans to remove U.S. combat troops from Iraq. He stood by his decision to quit Afghanistan even after the Taliban's unexpectedly rapid advance produced a chaotic evacuation from Kabul in August of 2021. At the same time, Biden enjoyed strong bipartisan support for resolute efforts to counter Russia's invasion Ukraine. Democrats and Republicans alike also agree on the need to counter Chinese expansion in the Asia-Pacific. The United States is pulling back from the periphery while holding steady in the strategic heartland of Eurasia. Congress and the American electorate may be deeply **polarized**, but there is an **emerging consensus** that the nation should **pull back** from the role of global guardian that it has played since the 1940s. If Democrats and Republicans are again to unite behind a new brand of statecraft, it is one that entails doing less, reducing the nation's strategic footprint, and offloading some of its international responsibilities to others.

Debate among **scholars** and **public intellectuals** is heading in the **same direction**. An **expanding chorus of mainstream international relations scholars and public intellectuals** are **calling for the nation to retrench**, leading to a **healthy back-and-forth between competing camps**. (Bacevich, 2020; Bremmer, 2015; Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016; Daalder & Lindsay, 2018; Dueck, 2015; Haass, 2013; Hurlburt, 2019; Kupchan, 2020; Mandelbaum, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2018; Onea, 2013; Posen, 2015; Preble, 2019; Thrall & Friedman, 2018; Walt, 2018; Wertheim, 2020b).

Prominent academics from the nation's **premier universities** are **filling the pages of Foreign Affairs** with calls for the United States to **dismantle the primary strategic commitments** it has **upheld since World War II** (Allison, 2020; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016; Posen, 2013; Wertheim, 2020a). The libertarian **Cato Institute** used to be the **sole** prominent **home** in the nation's capital for strategists advocating that the United States return to policies of **nonentanglement**. But in 2019, George Soros, a generous benefactor of liberal causes, and Charles Koch, a conservative philanthropist, teamed up to provide funding for a **new** Washington **think tank**—the **Quincy Institute** for Responsible Statecraft—which "promotes ideas that move U.S. foreign policy away from endless war and toward vigorous diplomacy in the pursuit of international peace" (Drezner, 2019).² The collapse of the compact behind liberal internationalism has produced an **unusual alliance** between **anti-war progressives on the left** and **libertarian nationalists on the right**.

It's very salient but not-yet-adopted, which is the perfect window for debates.

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Restraint in the Grand Strategy Debate

Restrainers' numbers in academia and influence in Washington were limited for many years. Writing in the mid-1990s, Barry Posen and Andrew Ross captured the grand strategy debate that followed the end of the Cold War, identifying four distinct schools of thought: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy. Their article describes neo-isolationism as "the least ambitious, and, at least among foreign policy professionals, probably the least popular grand strategy option."⁷ Tellingly, Posen and Ross described prevailing U.S. grand strategy in the Bill Clinton administration as "selective (but cooperative) primacy," a hybrid strategy that rejected neo-isolationism while drawing on elements of the other three grand strategic positions.⁸ In the years that followed, the war on terrorism reflected the triumph of a more muscular version of primacy in Washington.

Restrainers' voices in the grand strategy debate have strengthened since then, increasing the value of understanding their ideas and how they might contribute to future U.S. policy choices. From the four options that Posen and Ross identified in the mid-1990s, the grand strategy debate coalesced into two poles amid the Iraq War: deep engagement and restraint.⁹ [FOOTNOTE 9 BEGINS]

For the view that the grand strategy debate has collapsed into two camps, see: Posen, *Restraint*, pp. 5–11; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7–51,

https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00107. Analysts do not agree on the terms used for these poles. For example, Stephen Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William Wohlforth use the term "retrenchment" for the restraint pole.

Barry Posen and Ikenberry use the term "liberal hegemony" for the deep engagement pole. Posen, *Restraint*, p. 5; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 2. Some within the restraint camp use the term "offshore balancing." See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>. [FOOTNOTE 9 ENDS]

Deep engagement calls for the United States to remain a security leader in three key regions (East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East) through commitments to allies and partners, a role made credible by its forward military presence. Beyond this core set of prescriptions, there are deep divisions among "deep engagers,"¹⁰ including about how ambitious U.S. aims should be and what role liberalism and multilateralism should play in U.S. foreign policy.¹¹ The restraint camp includes the neo-isolationists that Posen and Ross discuss as well as a much larger group calling for less dramatic reductions in U.S. military involvement across the globe.

Concerns about U.S. overreach in the war on terrorism reenergized the grand strategy debate within academia and made more scholars sympathetic to restraint.¹² More recently, interest in restraint has grown in the public sphere. Restrainers' calls to end the endless wars in the Middle East gained support on both sides of the aisle.¹³ Elected in 2016, President Donald Trump did not adopt a grand strategy of restraint,¹⁴ but he did voice restrainers' concerns about alliances and adopt some policies that restrainers applauded, such as negotiating a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹⁵ Since then, Republicans have adopted a platform that includes calls for a stronger military as well as restraint-friendly themes, such as using force "sparingly" and promoting allies' burden sharing.¹⁶ Although restraint remains a minority view, the shift in the distribution of power away from the United States and the costs and risks associated with intensified great power competition could draw more supporters to the restraint position and produce a shift in U.S. grand strategy in the future.¹⁷

AFF---Middle East

Here's an advocate for withdrawal from the Middle East.

Adam **Gallagher 26**, contributing fellow at Defense Priorities (“Why US Middle East Bases Are a Disadvantage, Not a Deterrent,” National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/why-us-middle-east-bases-are-a-disadvantage-not-a-deterrent>)

Justifications for the US military presence in the Middle East have become exercises in circular logic. Since the US and Israel launched the Iran War on February 28, Iran's attacks on US bases have killed multiple US service members, injured many others, and damaged billions of dollars' worth of US military equipment, while providing limited utility in the conflict.

These bases are the physical manifestation of the United States' needless entanglement in the region. Even as the United States chooses yet another Middle East war, there are very few direct threats to US national security emanating from the region. The only reason that Iran, or any of its allies, poses a threat to the United States is because of the presence of these bases and the tens of thousands of troops deployed to the region.

The United States should redress its overextension and close most of the bases as part of a broader retrenchment from the Middle East. Given that such a maneuver would be politically impractical amid war, the United States should use the eventual termination of this conflict as an opportunity to pull back and significantly reduce its presence in the region.

A substantial presence is unnecessary for solving Middle Eastern stability.

Adam **Gallagher 26**, contributing fellow at Defense Priorities (“Why US Middle East Bases Are a Disadvantage, Not a Deterrent,” National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/why-us-middle-east-bases-are-a-disadvantage-not-a-deterrent>)

US interests in the region are **limited** and certainly **do not justify such a substantial presence**. Middle Eastern states should be just as, if not more, responsible for keeping sea lanes open and ensuring the flow of oil—indeed, they have a strong incentive to do so. The same goes for the threat posed by groups like ISIS, which are a much greater threat to regional states than the United States. More broadly, most of the challenges the Middle East faces are **political** and **can't be resolved** by an overly militarized US presence in the region.

AFF/NEG---Prolif Debate

Affirmatives could argue that withdrawal would lead to selective and contained proliferation, and this of course is also a DA. Allowing friends to proliferate is a serious point of departure for many analysts who think the current approach is unsustainable.

Jennifer Lind 24, Associate Professor of Government at Dartmouth, Associate Fellow with Chatham House, Faculty Associate with Harvard's Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies, "Do Friends Let Friends Go Nuclear?" Lawfare, 5/5/24, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/do-friends-let-friends-go-nuclear>

For the past few decades, the United States and its partners have wrestled with how to deal with a hostile country's decision to acquire nuclear weapons. Nuclear programs in Libya, North Korea, and Iran were condemned by Washington and its allies as threats to peace and to the global nonproliferation regime. The United States and others adopted a range of policies, both carrots and sticks, to prevent "rogue" nations from going nuclear.

Today, the United States faces a different proliferation challenge. U.S. allies and members in good standing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—such as Germany, Poland, and South Korea—are expressing fears about growing regional threats, doubting the reliability of U.S. nuclear umbrellas, and debating whether they need nuclear weapons to bolster their security. How should the United States and other countries respond?

Anxiety on the Peninsula

In South Korea, North Korea's development of intercontinental missile capabilities has fueled fears about the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Previously, if North Korea used nuclear weapons against the south in a war, the United States could promise to retaliate without fear of American cities being hit. Today, however, U.S. cities would be in North Korea's crosshairs. Many South Koreans doubt that a U.S. leader would decide to strike if it would put U.S. cities and citizens at risk.

As a result, South Korea's long-dormant debate about an independent nuclear arsenal has resurfaced. Many officials and foreign policy elites express support for developing weapons, and polls show a majority of the public—around 70 percent—also approves. Other options being debated are the return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula or a nuclear sharing agreement with the United States.

During the 2022 Washington Summit between the two countries, the Biden administration sought to reassure South Korea of the credibility of the U.S. deterrent. The administration pledged to consult Seoul in nuclear planning for the peninsula and sent a nuclear-capable submarine for a port visit to Busan. Since the summit, however, "South Korean public confidence in the credibility of U.S. nuclear assurances has not increased," reports the Asan Institute in Seoul. "In fact, survey results show that it has actually decreased." The debate is thus far from resolved—and may intensify if Donald Trump is elected in November. After all, statements by Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign and while in office alarmed South Koreans that the United States might draw down its military forces on the peninsula—or end the alliance altogether.

South Korea is an NPT member, but the treaty's Article 10 allows for members to withdraw if "extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this [t]reaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country." When North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003, it also cited Article 10, but many NPT members rejected its argument. North Korea's nuclear program has since faced nine UN Security Council sanctions resolutions. Many South Koreans worry that they would face similar opprobrium and sanctions if they followed suit.

Rising Threat Perception in Europe

South Korea isn't alone in its doubts about the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly elevated threat perception in Europe, and recent trends in the United States also worry European leaders. They see a large and influential faction of Republicans in Congress rejecting aid to Ukraine and are alarmed by the prospect of a second Trump presidency, given his statements criticizing NATO countries' "delinquency." More broadly, European leaders perceive that America's longtime bipartisan globalist consensus is dissipating, as the New York Times's Peter Baker writes, "under the weight of globalization, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Great Recession of 2008-09 and Mr. Trump's relentless assault on international institutions and agreements."

As a result of these trends, European analysts are increasingly debating what a future European nuclear posture might look like absent the United States. France's president startled many observers last week when he suggested that French nuclear weapons could provide an umbrella for the broader European Union. Emmanuel Macron said, "I'm in favor of opening this debate, which must therefore include missile defense, long-range weapons and nuclear weapons for those who have them or who have American nuclear weapons on their soil." The French president commented, "Let's put everything on the table and see what really protects us in a credible way."

Sharing a border with Ukraine and hosting millions of war refugees, Poland feels the threat of Russian aggression keenly. Poland's prime minister announced in 2023 his country's desire to host NATO nuclear weapons. "Due to the similar statement in the wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea."

NATO's nuclear sharing program began in the 1960s. Members of the program include Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey; Poland would be the sixth member. Members currently host about 150 U.S. B61 nuclear gravity bombs—bombs that remain under U.S. control. This allows both the United States and host countries to remain in good standing with the NPT, which forbids the United States from transferring nuclear weapons and forbids the other countries from receiving them. Host countries' military forces train for nuclear missions and maintain the aircraft that would deliver the weapons. The United States maintains the legality of NATO nuclear sharing under the NPT because the program does "not involve any transfer of nuclear weapons or control over them unless and until a decision were made to go to war, at which time the treaty would no longer be controlling." (NATO also asserts that its nuclear sharing is legal because the program predates the NPT.)

Similar to today, NATO nuclear sharing was created to reassure U.S. allies about the credibility of the American nuclear umbrella. Namely, after the Soviet Union developed the capability to strike the United States with nuclear weapons in the 1960s, NATO countries worried whether the United States would ever retaliate on their behalf. For decades, NATO nuclear sharing has reassured U.S. allies. It may prove a solution to Poland's current fears.

In Germany, however, many people wonder whether NATO nuclear sharing is enough. During the Trump administration, the president's criticism of NATO initiated a German debate about a previously taboo topic. The newspaper Welt am Sonntag queried, "Do we need the bomb?" At the time, Maximilian Terhalle, a German academic based in the United Kingdom, wrote that Trump left Germany pondering "whether to continue relying on a United States that is now committed to signaling its unreliability or to begin pursuing its own nuclear deterrent—either on its own or as part of a new European security structure."

Trump's political resurgence has reinvigorated Germany's nuclear debate. "Atomic hawks," writes Matthew Karnitschnig, say "Germany must go nuclear! With Russia inching forward in Ukraine, the U.S. threatening to flake out as an ally, Germany should waste no time in pulling together a nuclear arsenal." But Karnitschnig and others note that Germany has a long-standing anti-nuclear movement with deep connections to German politics. The move to acquire nuclear weapons would involve a wrenching debate, one requiring Germany's perception of the threat from Russia—and doubts about the United States—to be severe.

Today's New Proliferation Challenge

Currently, Brussels, London, and Washington maintain a firm nonproliferation stance. At the Group of Seven's Hiroshima summit in 2023, the group issued a statement renewing its "commitment to achieving a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all." It also reiterated that the "overall decline in global nuclear arsenals achieved since the end of the Cold War must continue and not be reversed" and that "[t]he Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) must be upheld as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime."

But how should the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and others react when friendly countries—liberal democracies and law-abiding NPT members—argue that they perceive a security threat so dire they must abandon their nonproliferation stance? Given

America's long-standing commitment to nuclear nonproliferation, the natural inclination among U.S.

leaders may be to reiterate that America values its alliances and to dissuade and pressure its friends from

going nuclear. But if countries ultimately decide to take the step, a lack of U.S. empathy could

jeopardize alliance relationships. After all, other countries remember that the United States accepted the

spread of nuclear weapons to Britain, France, and Israel—and so would wonder why Washington cannot

show similar understanding to another friend that believes its existential security is at risk.

To address today's proliferation challenges, the first move—as shown by the Biden administration's policies toward

South Korea—is to listen to allies' concerns. Washington might take steps, as it did after the Washington Summit, to reassure the ally of the continued credibility of the nuclear umbrella. In some cases, conventional military solutions may be possible to bolster deterrence. It's quite possible that today's reluctant proliferators—loath to undermine the NPT, facing domestic political resistance, fearful of sanctions or nuclear

cascades—could be reassured by such policies. But if they prove insufficient, the United States and its partners can discuss options along a “nuclear continuum.” As Daryl Press and I have written, rather than facing a binary decision to “go nuclear” or not, countries have a range of options. Poland’s interest in nuclear sharing is an example of a step, short of nuclear acquisition, that a country might take to increase its security.

The case for selective allied proliferation is controversial and debatable.

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Few scenarios scare pundits and policymakers as much as the prospect of nuclear proliferation. Russia’s willingness to dangle the threat of deploying tactical nuclear weapons in its war against Ukraine, U.S. President Donald Trump’s ambiguous interest in nuclear testing, and the imminent expiration of the 2010 New START treaty (which limits the size of Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals) have reminded the world of the abiding destructive potential of nuclear weapons and reanimated fears of their use. American leaders are convinced that the spread of nuclear weapons would deeply hurt U.S. strategic interests and further destabilize the already fragile global order. In recent months, they have doubled down on their commitment to preventing proliferation, and the June strikes against nuclear sites in Iran have shown that Washington will use force to prevent more countries from acquiring the bomb.

For decades, the United States invested in a nuclear order built around nonproliferation, even as Cold War disarmament agreements such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty expired. Opposing proliferation among unreliable states and adversaries makes sense, but a blanket opposition to the further spread of nuclear weapons obscures the significant benefits they can bestow. The United States would do well to reconsider its strict adherence to nonproliferation and encourage a small set of allies—namely Canada, Germany, and Japan—to go nuclear. For Washington, selective nuclear proliferation would allow these partners to take on larger roles in regional defense and decrease their military dependence on the United States. For these allies, in turn, acquiring nuclear weapons provides the most dependable protection against the threats of regional foes, such as China and Russia, as well as a United States less committed to its traditional alliances.

Skeptics and nuclear pessimists might blanch at the idea of a world with more nuclear-armed powers, but such concerns are less warranted when proliferation is pursued selectively. Canada, Germany, and Japan have proven track records of rational policymaking and domestic stability that will make both nuclear accidents and any spiral of uncontrolled escalation unlikely. And, if carefully managed, there is ample reason to believe that proliferation in these countries would not lead to widespread efforts by others to develop their own bombs.

Far from ushering in a frightening new era of global instability, selective proliferation would help uphold the post–World War II order. Were Canada, Germany, and Japan to acquire nuclear weapons, they would rebalance global military capabilities in favor of a coalition of states committed to the rules-based system and to stopping the erosion of its key norms, especially territorial integrity. Selective proliferation would thus revitalize the increasingly brittle post-1945 order that has so benefited the United States and its allies.

A WIN-WIN
Senior U.S. officials have repeatedly emphasized the need to shift the burden of continental defense onto European allies and decrease their military dependence on the United States. Confronted by the geopolitical challenge of a rising China in East Asia and pressed for resources to address issues at home, Washington has come to see ending European free-riding as a top strategic priority. What stands in the way of Europe’s ability to provide for its own security today—and thus blocks a significant U.S. retrenchment—is the lack of German nuclear forces. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. leaders hoped to withdraw American forces from Europe but determined that unless Germany acquired a nuclear deterrent, the continent would not be able to guarantee its own security. As the historian Max Trachtenberg has noted, the United States rightly judged that British and French nuclear forces “could not provide the necessary degree of reassurance” that Europe would be able to deter the Soviet Union and its vast nuclear arsenal. Today, the same roadblock remains. Encouraging Germany to develop its own nuclear weapons would finally create the kind of self-sufficient Europe that enables an American exit.
German leaders and the German public recognize that military dependence on the United States leaves their country vulnerable to Washington’s whims. Shortly after his election in February 2025, Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced that it was time to “achieve independence” from the United States, and he has since become an outspoken proponent of substantial disarmament. But it will take a long time to build up Germany’s conventional capabilities, and Berlin still lacks a clear vision for how to meet the ambitious defense spending target of five percent of GDP that Merz and other European leaders agreed to at a NATO summit in June. Germany’s ongoing commitments to provide war materiel to Ukraine and the population’s reluctance to undertake military service hinder a speedy conventional military buildup. The development of an independent nuclear force would safeguard Germany against the possibility of a sudden U.S. withdrawal from Europe while offering a feasible and meaningful way to fulfill the five percent pledge.
Japanese proliferation will go a long way toward achieving the United States’ main goal in East Asia, namely, the containment of China through strong local alliances. From Washington’s perspective, the primary threat posed by Beijing is that it might achieve regional dominance and develop the military potential to seriously threaten the United States and its interests by, for example, disrupting semiconductor supply chains or establishing forward bases beyond its territory in East Asia and even further afield. Such Chinese regional hegemony would pose a major challenge to the United States.
Japan already enjoys the defensive benefit of being an archipelago country separated from its adversaries by the sea. If combined with independent nuclear capabilities, that advantage would effectively guarantee Japan’s security in the face of outside threats—and ensure that it does not fall under Chinese control. Beyond better defending itself, a nuclear-armed Japan would provide a more credible and immediate form of extended deterrence to East Asia than the United States can provide. China might doubt Washington’s willingness to risk nuclear war over developments in East Asia, but Japan’s proximity and direct stake in regional stability render its commitments far more credible.
A nuclear-armed Japan would also insert an extra layer in crisis escalation scenarios, allowing an effective response to Chinese aggression without directly drawing in the United States. When contemplating an attack on Japan, China would be forced to consider the monumental costs of Japanese retaliation independent of any additional American support. Having nuclear weapons would also equip Japan, and perhaps East Asia more broadly, to handle a sudden change in Washington’s security commitment. The Trump administration’s newest National Defense Strategy prioritizes the defense of the U.S. homeland and the Western Hemisphere over the threats emanating from China and Russia, signaling a potentially seismic shift in orientation.
In North America, Canadian proliferation would enhance American homeland security. Given the integration of the Canadian and American militaries within NATO and the bilateral air defense system NORAD, the two countries would be fighting together in virtually any conceivable hemisphere defense scenario. Although Canada does not face immediate threats to its territorial integrity from Russia or China, its relations with both countries have deteriorated significantly over the past decade. A Canadian nuclear deterrent reduces the chance that the United States would be called on to defend its continental neighbor, effectively freeing up American capabilities and removing an avenue of potential geopolitical encroachment. American support for a Canadian nuclear deterrent would also provide crucial reassurance about Washington’s commitment to continental defense at a time when the neighbors’ bilateral relationship is under strain.
For Canada in turn, possessing nuclear weapons signals to the United States that it, too, accepts shared responsibility for continental defense and that Ottawa can deter potential aggressors without American support. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney put it in March, Canada’s “old relationship” with the United States is “over.” Going nuclear would prepare Ottawa to face this new world by reconfiguring the continental partnership and helping the country go it alone. Further, the challenges of meeting NATO’s five percent spending target are equally more significant for Canada than they are for Germany. A nuclear nuclear deterrent offers a solution to this challenge that also results in a meaningful strategic asset in Canada’s arsenal.
Canada, Germany, and Japan each possesses the scientific and industrial capacity to successfully develop nuclear weapons on its own. For instance, Canada’s role as a major supplier of fissile material provides the basis for a joint effort to make these new nuclear capabilities a reality. What the three allies would need—and what the United States can and should provide—is public support and diplomatic cover for their transition to becoming nuclear-armed states, as well as technical and doctrinal guidance to ensure robust command-and-control safeguards.
NUCLEAR FIX
Traditionally, nuclear proliferation has been understood as a risk to the stability of the international order. As states acquire nuclear capabilities, regional and global balances of power shift, calling into question existing security arrangements. A state with a nuclear deterrent, the thinking goes, can behave predatorily since it is now insulated from attempts to rein it in. This conventional view is wrong—or at the very least too simplistic—because it assumes all proliferation will behave the same way. When states committed to defending international rules and norms acquire nuclear capabilities, proliferation, in fact, increases the stability and strength of the global order.
Canada, Germany, and Japan are among the leading states committed to the rules-based international order. All three frame their foreign policies and even their state identities in terms of good international citizenship. Select nuclear proliferation in these states would rebalance military capabilities and create a unified coalition of nuclear powers committed to thwarting potential revisionists. Such a coalition would help prevent further erosion of the rules, norms, and institutions of the post-1945 order, including the norms against conquest. It adds to the natural sources of stability it would provide, selective proliferation would thus strengthen the normative sources of stability essential to international order.
Selective nuclear proliferation should thus be framed and understood as an investment in the revitalization of that order. Effectively, Canada, Germany, and Japan would be helping to fill the gaps that have left Russia to see more favorable conditions for revisionism and that could lead China to make a similar calculation.
BE NOT AFRAID
Many of the typical concerns raised by opponents of nuclear proliferation do not apply to selective proliferation by U.S. allies. For instance, there is no reason to fear that Canadian, German, or Japanese nuclear weapons would end up in the hands of rogue states or terrorist organizations; all three are paragons of responsibility, state capacity, and domestic stability. There is also no need to worry about the rationality of these states. If the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un can exercise prudence and caution with regard to his nuclear arsenal, leaders in Ottawa, Berlin, and Tokyo can reasonably be expected to do the same.
Another concern is that if a few states pursue nuclear capabilities, a plethora of others will then move to do the same. This argument is unconvincing. Kind-of proliferation is typically the result of existing rivalries and heavily conditioned by geographic contiguity, as exemplified by Pakistan’s pursuit of a bomb in response to Indian proliferation. Canadian proliferation is unlikely to spur, say, Mexico, to pursue its own bomb. The European states that would have the greatest incentive to counter German proliferation—the United Kingdom and France—already have their own nuclear forces. Other possible proliferators, such as Poland, might be convinced to forgo an independent nuclear weapons program with multi- or bilateral nuclear sharing agreements. In East Asia, an acquisition of nuclear weapons by Japan might push South Korea to act on its long-held nuclear ambitions, but Seoul’s integration into the American security architecture substantially reduces its incentives to do so. Japan’s geographic advantage and the fact that it is not stuck in a frozen conflict (as South Korea is with a nuclear-armed North Korea) make it a more attractive candidate for selective proliferation than South Korea. To be sure, if Seoul decided to forge ahead and build a bomb, it would also be a safe and reliable nuclear custodian. Although Taiwan might theoretically want to follow suit, it has no plausible pathway to act on this desire because of its precarious geopolitical position in regard to China.
The potential for accidents involving nuclear weapons remains a reasonable concern. Although it is true that the spread of nuclear weapons would technically increase the possibility of inadvertent nuclear war, it remains so small that it would likely be outweighed by the tangible benefits to international stability and security. Even during the height of the Cold War, a time fraught with immense strategic and ideological rivalry, the two superpowers successfully avoided a nuclear exchange. One of the virtues of selective nuclear proliferation is that Canada, Germany, and Japan are among the most well-equipped to minimize additional risk. All have highly professional militaries, robust civilian control of those armed forces, and foreign ministries highly skilled in peaceful conflict resolution.
Other objections do not withstand scrutiny. For example, some U.S. experts have opposed proliferation among American allies on the ground that it would undermine the United States’ influence, specifically over Germany and Japan. The claim confuses strategic instruments with objectives. Washington’s fundamental aim in Europe and East Asia is to prevent any single state from dominating either region. Although American influence over allies offers an indirect and uncertain path to preventing the rise of a regional hegemon, nuclear weapons in Germany and Japan would virtually guarantee that result. In other words, selective proliferation sacrifices some U.S. influence, but only in exchange for the influence it was designed to achieve in the first place. The most understandable hurdle—and potentially the most difficult to overcome—is public opinion. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remains central to its collective memory. Post-1945 pacifism and general skepticism about nuclear energy predispose many Germans to oppose an independent deterrent. And Canada has long resisted even hosting nuclear weapons on its territory, let alone acquiring its own. Overcoming this apprehension will be difficult, and states will have to convince skeptical citizens that the acquisition of nuclear weapons will not just keep them safer but also boost the overall health of the rules-based order.
PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Implementing selective proliferation will not be easy or without risk. An immediate practical consideration is that Canada, Germany, and Japan would each need to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation

Treaty, in which they agreed not to develop a nuclear bomb. Commitment to the **proper process** for **withdrawing** from the treaty under international law **would signal their intent to stabilize** the **international order** and strengthen international **security** rather than **weaken** both. To the extent possible, NPT withdrawals should be carefully broached to key allies in **advance** to minimize alarm. Although it is unrealistic to expect **all** other countries to accept such withdrawals, pursuing nuclear proliferation in a **responsible** and **transparent way** would signal each country's **good intentions**. It is **here** that **American diplomatic cover** can prove **particularly valuable**, coordinating with France and the United Kingdom to ensure that the new nuclear states do not become the target of UN Security Council enforcement measures.

To provide as much reassurance to skeptical states as possible, the three proliferators should consider adopting a "no first use" policy, at least while they remain under the American nuclear umbrella. Although NATO was unwilling to commit to such a policy during the Cold War, Canada, Germany, and Japan face less stringent security challenges, at least at present, and can therefore contemplate taking this step in order to signal their commitment to maintaining the status quo.

Selective nuclear proliferation **requires careful management** to fulfill its potential, but it offers **genuine ground for optimism**. The case for it **remains** as **controversial** as ever, but it does matter greatly which countries get the bomb. If the proliferators are **allied**, **stable governments** and **responsible members** of the international community, then **more** nuclear weapons **might indeed be better**.

NEG---Leverage CP / DA

Leverage US presence to get concessions from host countries. Any aff would definitely forfeit a huge amount of US leverage.

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Retrenchment can **vary widely** in its **form** and **extent**. At its **mildest**, retrenchment entails **partial troop withdrawals** **without** changes in the **level** of **political or military commitment**. At its **most extensive**, retrenchment can take the form of not only **total** troop withdrawals, but **also** cessations of **political and military commitments**. The **latter** can be **de facto**—for example, abandoning **plans** to **defend allies** or **repurposing forces useful** for their defense—or **de jure**—**exiting the alliance outright**.

In its more **modest** forms, retrenchment can imply **reducing** but **not eliminating** commitments, as in the case of the “Nixon Doctrine,” which pledged that the **United States** would **keep** its **treaty commitments** but look to **allies** to assume the **primary role** in their defense. During his initial remarks in Guam in July 1969, Nixon declared that “as far as the problems of military defense... the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.”¹²

Burden-sharing is hardly the only goal that retrenchment’s advocates have in mind. Most directly, retrenchment is an avenue to **cost-cutting**.¹³ Similarly, retrenchment can be a means to **ameliorate the security dilemma** and alleviate **tensions** with **adversaries**, provided their intentions are not inalterably expansionist.¹⁴ Finally, retrenchment may reduce the risk of U.S. **involvement in local conflicts**, shifting the **defense burden** onto **allies**.¹⁵

When it comes to burden-sharing, retrenchment’s **main appeal** is in **generating urgency**. Withdrawing foreign-deployed **forces**, **communicating limits on** the amount of wartime assistance allies can expect, or **exiting an alliance** presents U.S. allies with a **fait accompli**. This **removes** any **doubts** allies might have about the **United States’ willingness** to do so and puts them in a position of having to choose how they react to reduced or eliminated U.S. protection. Moreover, it obliges them to react immediately, rather than allowing them to **stall** for time in case U.S. retrenchment never occurs. Indeed, there is some **empirical evidence** that both **alliances** and **U.S. troop levels** may **reduce partner defense** spending on the margin, though the finding is not universal.¹⁶

Conditionality

Whereas **retrenchment** would entail **unilateral** changes in U.S. commitments **regardless** of allies’ behavior, **conditionality** instead relies upon **threats** to **reduce** the **protection** allies receive from the **United States** **unless** they **invest more** in defense. As with **retrenchment**, these threats can take a variety of **forms**—from troop withdrawals to limits on the amount or timing of U.S. assistance to outright alliance exit.¹⁷

The basic logic of conditionality is to **leverage** allies’ needs for protection and fears of abandonment. For **maximal effectiveness**, conditionality must combine three elements. The first is **credibility**: allies must believe there is at least some chance the United States will follow through on its threats. The second is **impact**: the cost of fighting an adversary without U.S. support must be high. The more credible **and** impactful the threat, the more effective it will be. Of the two, impact is the more important, as even a low probability of abandonment is a cause for concern if the cost of being abandoned is high—for example, if an ally shares a land border with a much more powerful adversary.¹⁸ The third is **reassurance**: **allies are more likely to change** their **behavior** if they **trust** they will **not be abandoned** once they **comply** with U.S. demands.¹⁹

There is a good deal of evidence that when these conditions are met, conditionality can be **quite effective**. Case studies drawn from U.S. coercive diplomacy during the Cold War, for example, suggest that the United States has been more successful in wielding threats when allies fear abandonment and have a greater perception of external threat.²⁰ During the early 1970s, for example, the Nixon administration used congressional calls for withdrawing U.S. forces from Europe to make the case that NATO allies' best hope of forestalling withdrawals was to increase defense spending. Nixon argued in a meeting with NATO officials that "were the NATO partners to do more in their own defense, that would be quite decisive in firming up US support for making our present contribution to the Alliance."²¹ The result was increased defense spending, particularly by West Germany.²²

There is likewise **quantitative** evidence that allies spend more on defense when U.S. threats of abandonment are more **credible** and **impactful**.²³ Finally, **survey data** suggest that threats of abandonment may also increase **public support** for higher defense spending in allied countries.²⁴

Comparing the two strategies

Retrenchment and conditionality **each have advantages** but **also face challenges** that can limit their effectiveness. **Retrenchment's** primary challenge comes from **sequencing**. In cases where there is a powerful, proximate shared adversary, the United States might **prefer** to **fully execute** its withdrawal **after** **allies** have **sufficiently improved their own capabilities** to avoid the adversary taking advantage.²⁵ But facing such a scenario, allies have incentive to drag their feet and delay improving their military capabilities to prevent U.S. withdrawal.²⁶ This sequencing problem makes a **"graceful exit"**—one where allies seamlessly do more **as** the United States does **less**—**difficult**. To **offset** allies' incentive to **delay** force **improvements** in the hopes of **forestalling** U.S. withdrawal, retrenchment must either be executed **swiftly** and **decisively** or, if done **gradually**, must be **credibly committed to**. Doing so is **difficult**, as withdrawal plans may be derailed either by external events or internal opposition, as in the case of Jimmy Carter's failed attempt to withdraw ground forces from South Korea.²⁷ But by building internal consensus and publicly committing to following through, leaders may be able to make retrenchment more credible. For example, even though Carter's withdrawal plan was thwarted by opposition from within his administration and Congress, along with revised estimates of North Korean military strength, the South Koreans worried enough to substantially increase defense spending in part because Carter had promised withdrawal during his campaign.²⁸

Conditionality poses three challenges of its **own**. The first is that **allies may not view U.S. threats of abandonment as credible**. This may in some cases be beyond American control, reflecting allies' assessments of U.S. interest in their survival. But it may also be the result of American behavior, including pro-alliance rhetoric intended to reassure allies.²⁹ Joe Biden, for example, frequently refers to U.S. commitments as "sacred."³⁰

The second is that **allies may expect** that the United States will simply **abandon them** **after** they have made sufficient **investments** in self-defense. If they believe their **burden-sharing** will simply **facilitate** U.S. **withdrawal**, they are more likely to **refuse**. The solution to this challenge is the **inverse** of retrenchment's sequencing problem: to **conditionally promise** that the United States will **not abandon the partner** if it assumes **more responsibility** for its own defense.³¹

Finally, **conditionality requires frequent renegotiation**. Changing **circumstances**, including shifts in allies' willingness and ability to fulfill previous burden-sharing targets and in U.S. desire for greater allied contributions, **can upend previous bargains**. Because allies know that any bargain struck is temporary, and because they cannot be sure the United States will not continue to **escalate** its **demands** over **time**, they may wish to **dig in** their heels to deter future demands.³² Long-term use of conditionality may also tempt allies to view U.S. threats as **bluffs**.

As detailed above, **there is a good deal of empirical evidence that both retrenchment and conditionality can be effective** in stimulating burden-sharing, though there is little evidence that directly compares the two. In general, however, the two approaches are likely to be similarly effective because they share a similar precondition for effectiveness: that allies perceive a sufficient level of external threat. Neither retrenchment nor conditionality is likely to persuade countries that do not face a compelling threat to their security. Of course, threat plays a dual role when it comes to burden-sharing. If the threat level is too high, then the United States may be unwilling to abandon allies for fear of allowing adversaries to make a serious bid for regional hegemony. The situations most conducive to burden-sharing, then, are those where allied perceptions of threat exceed those of the United States.³³

There are cases where one of the two strategies may be preferable. Retrenchment's advantages are that it generates urgency, does not rely on allies believing in its credibility, and does not require frequent renegotiation. More so than conditionality, retrenchment decisively shifts the burden of defense onto allies and leaves little ambiguity about U.S. willingness to follow through.

Retrenchment may thus be particularly effective in two kinds of cases. The first are those where allies doubt the credibility of U.S. threats—for example, if an ally overestimates its strategic value or the amount of support it has in U.S. domestic politics. The second are those where the threat environment is benign. In such cases, even though allies are unlikely to invest more in defense if the United States withdraws, retrenchment may sow the seeds for future burden-sharing. That is, the United States can withdraw while the environment is favorable, giving allies incentive to adapt as the security environment changes and avoiding a future scenario in which it attempts to withdraw after the security environment has already deteriorated and allies have failed to adapt due to its protection.

	Retrenchment	Conditionality
Potential forms	• Troop withdrawals (partial or full) • Limitations on the timing or amount of U.S. wartime assistance • Alliance exit	• Threats to withhold protection from allies unless they invest more in their own defense
Source of effectiveness	• Urgency from reducing U.S. protection	• Allies' preexisting fears of abandonment
Conditions for success	• Allies perceive external threat • Commitment to execution regardless of allies' behavior	• Allies perceive external threat • Allies believe U.S. will withhold protection unless they burden-share • Allies believe that burden-sharing will not cause U.S. abandonment
Optimal use cases	• Allies that do not believe U.S. threats of abandonment • Allies facing benign threat environment	• Allies facing severe threat environment
Risks to U.S. interests in case of failure	• Dependent on allies' willingness and ability to balance potential regional hegemony	• Overextension • Entanglement in local conflicts
Risks to U.S. influence if successful	• Variable, depending on threat environment, interest alignment, issue area, and level of U.S. ambition	• Variable, depending on threat environment, interest alignment, issue area, and level of U.S. ambition
Risk of encouraging allied nuclear proliferation	• Variable, depending on allies' constraints	• Low

There are also cases in which **conditionality** may be **nearly** if not **equally effective**—particularly those where allies have a powerful, proximate adversary. In such cases, the disadvantages of conditionality relative to retrenchment narrow, as the urgency of the external threat makes arming more attractive even if the United States does not retrench. This is especially true for allies that border their adversary by land due to the risk that they might be invaded and lose substantial amounts of territory or even independence before the United States intervenes.³⁴ Similarly, if allies view U.S. threats of abandonment as maximally credible, then conditionality may yield results **similar to retrenchment**.

Ultimately, the two strategies' effectiveness is **likely similar** in **most cases**. Indeed, a **mixed** strategy that combines **elements of both** may be able to **offset** some of the **challenges** of **each**. Allies may be more likely to take U.S. threats of abandonment more seriously after a partial troop withdrawal, for example. The United States had a great deal of success encouraging South Korea to move toward self-reliance during the 1970s by withdrawing the Seventh Infantry Division in 1971 and wielding threats of more withdrawals.³⁵

NEG---Recommitment CP

There's a counterplan that fully recommitts to the LIO. The perm would fail because it simultaneously signals offshore balancing.

Robert **Blackwill 26**, Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy, "America Revived," CFR, <https://www.cfr.org/reports/america-revived>

This report argues that the competing strategies of restraint, American nationalism, and Trumpism all **fail** on different counts. Restraint presumes that abdicating the United States' global military presence will enhance both prosperity and security, a claim that has not yet been corroborated and is dangerous to test. American nationalism discounts international legitimacy and complaisantly expects that the United States can uphold prosperity and security by focusing predominantly, if not exclusively, on the U.S. homeland and its hemisphere and on bilateral trade. And Trumpism risks undermining the nation's prosperity, security, and legitimacy simultaneously because of its determination to advance American national interests at the expense of others.

Drawing from the grand strategies of primacy and liberal internationalism, the grand strategy of resolute global leadership is superior to all other alternatives. Like primacy, it affirms the importance of American military might, especially potent instruments for deterrence and force projection, to parry varied threats and defend the United States and its allies as far forward as possible to preserve favorable balances of power in critical regions. But unlike primacy, resolute global leadership accepts that China has emerged as a peer competitor, and this grand strategy does not believe in using military force for ideological goals. Like liberal internationalism, resolute global leadership emphasizes the requirement to underwrite international institutions, both to increase U.S. and worldwide prosperity and to create an international environment conducive to U.S. national interests. Resolute global leadership recognizes, however, that **military power is still central to geopolitics**, and it treats global institutions as important but useful only insofar as they advance those interests.

Although the current political landscape is unfavorable to resolute global leadership, it is the best grand strategy to sustain prosperity, enhance security, and cement the legitimacy of the United States as a powerful force in the international system. When the country confronts the implications of its experiment with Trumpism, resolute global leadership will offer the clearest route to a revival of American strength.

NEG---China Deterrence DA

Chinese leaders will view the plan as a validation of escalatory tactics and deploy them elsewhere

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As mentioned in the introduction, the United States faces two potential challenges in its relations with China: deterring China and reassuring China. On the one hand, it must convince China that it is committed to upholding the regional status quo, particularly freedom of navigation in the East and South China Seas and the defense of its key allies, including Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia.⁶² On the other hand, the United States must reassure China that it will not threaten the legitimate national interests of China if it behaves as a responsible stakeholder in the international system. A failure to reassure China that the United States is a status quo rather than a revisionist power could lead to a costly arms buildup driven by an acute security dilemma.⁶³ If motivated bias does play a significant role in how China interprets US signals, what are the implications for how the United States should tailor its deterrence and reassurance policy? Confirmation-motivated reasoning suggests that when the United States sends signals that contradict Chinese leaders’ preconceptions, then consistency, clarity, and strength are critical. China will act as a motivated skeptic and scrutinize the US signals when those signals do not fit with how its leaders see the United States. Policymakers need to make these signals as strong, clear, and consistent as possible. Any ambiguity or irresoluteness, signaled intentionally or unintentionally, will be picked up by motivated skeptics and will undermine reassurance or deterrence. Alternatively, when the United States sends signals that are consistent with Chinese leaders’ preconceptions, it can afford to be less consistent and to send weaker signals. In these instances, China will be less likely to pick apart US signals and more likely to be easily persuaded, regardless of the objective quality of the signal. Therefore, it may be in the best interest of the United States to conserve resources or send weaker signals to avoid putting itself at risk for costs. To truly appreciate how the United States should tailor its deterrence and reassurance signals using the insights of motivated reasoning, however, we must appreciate the current state of Chinese leaders’ perceptions. In particular, how do Chinese leaders see (1) US capabilities and (2) US intent? If China sees US intent as hostile and its military capabilities as threatening, then reassurance will be exceptionally difficult. However, if China sees US intent as benign and its capabilities as nonthreatening, reassurance will be simpler, but deterrence will be more daunting. There is no real consensus among Chinese policy elites on the threat posed by US capabilities. In general, they hold one of two perspectives regarding US power—either focused on US absolute and relative decline or the persistence of the gap in relative power between the United States and China.⁶⁴ Some Chinese intellectuals believe the United States is increasingly weak; Wu Liming argues that “to be frank, US power is declining and it hasn’t enough economic strength or resources to dominate the Asia-Pacific region.”⁶⁵ Others feel differently; General Chen claims that “a gaping gap between you and us remains” in terms of military power.⁶⁶ Although there is no agreement among Chinese policy elites on the extent of US military power, recent research indicates they hold increasingly adversarial views of US intent. As Nathan and Scobell stated in *Foreign Affairs*, “most Americans would be surprised to learn the degree to which the Chinese believe the United States is a revisionist power that seeks to curtail China’s political influence and harm China’s interests.”⁶⁷ Polls in a recent report by the Carnegie Endowment showed that less than 20 percent of Chinese government officials thought the United States could be trusted either a great deal or a fair amount. More than 60 percent saw the United States as a competitor, and more than 25 percent said it was an enemy. More than 50 percent of polled

officials also argued that US efforts to contain China's rise presented a serious problem for China.⁶⁸ Although China has benefited tremendously from the regional stability provided by the United States and its allies, it appears to increasingly feel US intentions are less than friendly. This presents immediate problems for US reassurance efforts and puts the United States at risk of falling into an acute security dilemma with China. While Chinese policy elites are split on the threat posed by US power, they view US intentions as threatening and will be inclined to scrutinize any signals that do not fit with this belief. China will likely be receptive to US deterrent threats which fit with its view of the United States as a revisionist, adversarial power, but it will be skeptical of US signals designed to reassure it that the United States has no intention of threatening China's interests if it behaves as a responsible power. This situation enables two alternative policy implications. The first is that deterrence will prove a more effective strategy for managing US-China relations than reassurance. The second is that deterrence will be easier and less costly than reassurance, but both strategies can be employed simultaneously and symbiotically provided the United States dedicates extensive resources to making its reassurance signals clear, consistent, and persistent. A Deterrence-Centric Strategy Broadly speaking, these trends in perceptions indicate that deterrence may simply be more effective than reassurance as a strategy for handling a rising China. US deterrence attempts toward China are likely to be effective given China's increasingly adversarial views of US intent. Reassurance, on the other hand, may fall on deaf ears unless it is executed to perfection. Motivated reasoning, driven by the desire to achieve cognitive consistency, will make Chinese leaders discount and discredit US reassurance signals. If this is the case, reassuring skeptical Chinese leadership would be difficult and possibly ineffective. Instead, the United States should utilize deterrence as the lynchpin of stable US-China relations. In regard to upgrading the US-Japan alliance, for instance, it should not prioritize convincing China that the alliance is not designed to contain China. Nor should it focus on sculpting the alliance in a way that alleviates Chinese concerns about Japanese remilitarization. Instead, it should rely primarily on deterrence to keep China from threatening Japanese security by reinforcing allied commitments to mutual defense, improving joint operational capabilities, and developing contingency plans for dealing with Chinese assertiveness in the East China Sea. Deterrence, rather than reassurance, will prove effective in upholding regional stability given Chinese predispositions to view US intentions as adversarial.

Signals of weakness trigger probing, not reciprocation

Mastro 15, PhD, an assistant professor of security studies at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, "Why Chinese Assertiveness is Here to Stay," *The Washington Quarterly*)

These efforts are commendable—the United States rightly works to preserve its military superiority and retain its ability to project power in the region. During the Cold War, when the greatest pacing threats were land conflicts, forward deploying U.S. forces in Europe and Asia were sufficient to demonstrate the credibility of the U.S. commitment to peace in those regions. But China is currently testing the waters not because its leaders are uncertain about the balance of power, but because they are probing the balance of resolve. This means that staying ahead in terms of military might is insufficient in contemporary East Asia. China's strategists are betting that the side with the strongest military does not necessarily win the war—the foundation of the deterrent pillar of its A2/AD strategy. Indeed, China's experience in fighting the Korean War proves that a country willing to sacrifice blood and treasure can overcome a technologically superior opponent. The belief that balance of resolve drives outcomes more so than the balance of power is the foundation of China's new, more assertive strategy; but U.S. responses to date have failed to account for it. Canned demonstrations of U.S. power fail to address the fundamental uncertainty concerning U.S. willingness, not ability, to fight. The U.S. focus on de-escalation in all situations only exacerbates this issue. The Cold War experience solidified the Western narrative stemming from World War I that inadvertent escalation causes major war, and therefore crisis management is the key to maintaining peace.⁷⁴ This has created a situation in which the main U.S. goal

has been de-escalation in each crisis or incident with Beijing. But Chinese leaders do not share this mindset—they believe leaders deliberately control the escalation process and therefore wars happen because leaders decide at a given juncture that the best option is to fight.⁷⁵ China is masterful at chipping away at U.S. credibility through advancing militarization and coercive diplomacy. It often uses limited military action to credibly signal its willingness to escalate if its demands are not met. Strategist Thomas Schelling theoretically captured this approach when he wrote it is “the sheer inability to predict the consequences of our actions and to keep things under control ... that can intimidate the enemy.”⁷⁶ Because China introduces risk for exactly this reason, the U.S. focus on deescalation through crisis management is unlikely to produce any change in Chinese behavior—if anything it will only encourage greater provocations. Beijing has identified the U.S. fear of inadvertent escalation, and is exploiting it to compel the United States to give in to its demands and preferences. In this way, the U.S. focus on de-escalation may actually be the source of instability by rewarding and encouraging further Chinese provocations. To signal to China that the United States will not opt out of a conflict, Washington must signal willingness to escalate to higher levels of conflict when China is directly and purposely testing U.S. resolve. This may include reducing channels of communication during a conflict, or involving additional regional actors, to credibly demonstrate that China will not be able to use asymmetry of resolve to its advantage.

Gestures of US restraint are seen as vindication of Chinese aggression

Friedberg 15, PhD, Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton (Aaron, “The Debate Over US China Strategy,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 57.3)

The claim that the United States needs to find ways to reassure China reflects a questionable reading of the dynamics of the current strategic competition, as well as what appears to be an overly benign interpretation of Beijing's motivations and intentions. While it may be true that China's leaders see their ongoing military build-up as in some sense ‘defensive’, this does not make it any less threatening to their neighbours or to the interests of the United States. Proposals for restraint rest on the belief that the United States and China are on the verge of an ‘arms race’. In fact, a competition is already well under way. As during the Cold War, the mechanical ‘action–reaction’ image grossly oversimplifies the character of the interactions between the two sides and points towards prescriptions that are likely to be unhelpful, and possibly dangerous. China's leaders feel constrained and potentially threatened, not by any particular US weapons programme or operational concept, but by the presence of its forward-deployed forces, the persistence of its alliances and its continuing commitment to intervene on behalf of its friends if they are threatened or attacked. Beijing has had to live with these facts because, for many years, it lacked the means to challenge or change them. Today that is no longer the case. China now has the resources, as well as the resolve, to push back against American power, and it has started to do so. Many of its military-modernisation programmes appear to be aimed precisely at making it more difficult, costly and dangerous for the United States to continue to project power into the Western Pacific. Unfortunately, at this point in the sequence of strategic interaction, China's leaders are likely to interpret gestures of restraint not as an indication that a more aggressive approach is unnecessary, but rather as a sign that it is succeeding.

NEG---Elections DA

The plan's anti-alliance isolationism saves Trump in the Rust Belt [peer reviewed studies prove]

Kriner and Shen 20, *Professor in American Institutions @ Cornell, **Professor of law @ U Minnesota (Douglas, "Battlefield Casualties and Ballot-Box Defeat: Did the Bush–Obama Wars Cost Clinton the White House?," *Political Science and Politics*, 53.2)

However, on another tangible dimension, some Americans have experienced the costs of war much more acutely than others. Most directly, of course, the costs of war have been concentrated on those men and women who fought and died in foreign theaters as well as on their families. However, Americans' exposure to these costs also has varied significantly according to the experience of their local communities. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, for example, seven states suffered casualty rates of 30 or more deaths per million residents. By contrast, four states suffered casualty rates of 15 or fewer deaths per million. As a result, Americans living in these states have had different exposure to the war's human costs through the experiences of their friends and neighbors and local media coverage (Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012). Past research across multiple conflicts has shown unambiguously that this variation in local exposure to casualties affects Americans' wartime opinions and political behavior (Gartner and Segura 2000; Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997; Hayes and Myers 2009; Kriner and Shen 2009). At lower levels of aggregation, the disparities often are even more extreme. For example, as of the 2016 election, slightly more than 50% of US counties had experienced a casualty rate in Iraq and Afghanistan of one or fewer deaths per 100,000 residents. However, more than 25% had experienced a casualty rate more than 3.5 times greater, and 10% of counties had suffered casualty rates of more than seven deaths per 100,000 residents. Voters in these communities increasingly abandoned Republican candidates in a series of elections in the 2000s. To examine whether the Trump campaign was able to reverse the GOP's earlier losses among those constituencies hardest hit by the nation's recent wars, we conducted analyses at both the state and county levels. Following previous research on the electoral impact of local casualties (e.g., Karol and Miguel 2007), we operationalized the dependent variable as the change in the two-party vote share received by the Republican candidate from 2012 to 2016. This allowed us to examine where Trump outperformed Mitt Romney four years prior. Moreover, using the change in vote share from one election to the next provided an important measure of statistical control because many factors that affect the GOP vote share in a constituency should have remained roughly unchanged during this short four-year period. To measure variation in communities' exposure to wartime casualties, we accessed data from the Defense Casualty Analysis System of the Department of Defense (DoD) on 6,856 American soldiers killed pursuant to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷ Of these service members, 6,732 listed home-of-record information from one of the 50 states, and 10 hailed from the District of Columbia. From these data, we constructed casualty counts for each state and divided them by state population to construct a casualty rate per million residents. For most of these soldiers, the DoD also provided a home county of record.⁸ To capture the greater nuance in the uneven geographic allocation of casualties across the country, we constructed casualty counts for each county and then divided them by each county's population to create a casualty rate per 10,000 residents. Because the relationship is easiest to visualize at the state level, we first constructed a scatter plot showing each state's casualty rate on the x-axis and the change in GOP vote share from 2012 to 2016 on the y-axis (figure 1). Trump outperformed Romney in 40 of 50 states. However, the clear positive relationship shown in the scatter plot illustrates Trump's ability to make electoral inroads among high-casualty states. The bivariate relationship also is substantively meaningful. A two-standard-deviation increase in a state's casualty rate produced an estimated 2.6% increase in electoral support for Donald Trump. President Trump won the presidency despite losing the national popular vote by almost 3 million votes because of razor-thin margins in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan. All three of these states experienced casualty rates close to the

national median. A simple bivariate model suggests that if each state had suffered a lower casualty rate—for example, that of New York—Trump could have lost between 1.4% and 1.6% of the vote. Such **a shift would have changed all three states from red to blue and sent Hillary Clinton to the White House.** However, most states are large, heterogeneous places. The wartime experiences and direct exposure to war costs of residents of Upstate and Western New York, for example, may look different from those living in the New York City suburbs. To account for these intrastate differences and to paint a more nuanced picture, we conducted a follow-up analysis of the relationship between Iraq and Afghanistan war casualties and Trump's electoral success at the county level. The first column in table 1 presents results of a bivariate ordinary least squares regression of the change in GOP vote share from 2012 to 2016 on a county's casualty rate. As in the state-level analysis, the relationship is positive and statistically significant. Trump was even more successful in surpassing Romney's 2012 performance in communities that had suffered disproportionately high casualty rates. Prior research has shown that Iraq and Afghanistan war casualties are not randomly distributed across the country (Kriner and Shen 2016). Rather, they correlate significantly with other demographics that also might identify communities particularly receptive to Trump's candidacy. To ensure that county casualty rates are not serving only as a proxy for another characteristic identifying counties predisposed to support Trump to a greater degree than Romney, we estimated a second regression model including a number of control variables. Perhaps most important, because prior research has shown that recent war casualties have hailed disproportionately from communities with lower levels of income and educational attainment, we controlled for each county's median family income and percentage of adult residents with a college degree. Exit polls from 2016 showed that Trump performed well among voters without a college degree; as a result, **this is a particularly important control.** We also included three variables indicating each county's racial composition: the percentage of residents that were white, black, or Latino. Trump struggled to connect with African American voters, and his hardline immigration policies alienated him from many Latinos. As a result, we expected Trump to struggle to make electoral inroads in counties with large nonwhite populations. Finally, we controlled for the percentage of each county's population that lives in rural areas, as well as the percentage that are military veterans. The results are presented in column 2 of table 1. Even after including all of these demographic control variables (for which all of the regression coefficients align with expectations), the relationship between a county's casualty rate and **Trump's electoral performance remains positive and statistically significant.** Trump significantly outperformed Romney in counties that shouldered a disproportionate share of the war burden in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the county level, **the relationship between local casualty rates and Trump's vote share is substantively modest yet politically meaningful.** A two-standard-deviation increase in a county's casualty rate produced more than a half-point swing in the predicted two-party vote share from Clinton to Trump. AN ELECTORAL CHECK ON MILITARY ADVENTURISM? Whereas many analysts pointed to public frustration with the Iraq War as a contributing factor to President Obama's victory in 2008, the greatly escalated war in Afghanistan received little attention in 2012. Moreover, in the postelection analysis of the 2016 cycle, discussion of war fatigue was all but absent. America's ongoing wars in Central Asia may appear politically invisible precisely because their costs are largely hidden from view and paid disproportionately by a small segment of the electorate. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that Trump recognized and capitalized on this inequality in sacrifice. **Trump recaptured voters in this constituency** that had begun to turn away from Republican candidates in the mid-2000s in large part **by breaking from the party's foreign-policy orthodoxy.** **His message resonated with voters in communities largely abandoned by traditional politicians in both parties** Nevertheless, **whereas Trump's campaign rhetoric helped him return many voters in high-casualty communities to the Republican fold in 2016, he risks losing key electoral support if he simply continues the military policies of his predecessors.** Indeed, **Trump has given himself a difficult task—to follow through on** his bombastic rhetoric promising renewed military strength while simultaneously **avoiding costly policies that threaten a key constituency.** From this perspective, Trump's often wild

vacillations during his first three years in office may be at least in part a function of the competing incentives that he faces and not due solely to his erratic personality traits. Trump has followed through on his campaign pledge to “bomb the hell out of ISIS” while resisting calls for more troops on the ground. In August 2017, Trump reversed his prior support for withdrawing from Afghanistan and instead dispatched thousands of additional troops to step up operations against the Taliban. Yet, in private conversations, Trump often expresses support for an early withdrawal.⁹ In June 2018, he shelved his bellicose rhetoric toward North Korea and instead agreed at a summit with Kim Jong Un to end joint military exercises with South Korea, which the president dismissed as “provocative” and costly. Ultimately, it is impossible to know whether Trump’s militaristic or interventionist impulse will win out. His brusque dismissal of John Bolton in September 2019 coupled with his surprising sudden announcement of the withdrawal of American forces from Northern Syria certainly suggest that by the latter stages of his first term, his noninterventionist leanings were coming to the fore. However, as is his wont, Trump quickly complicated the interpretation of events when he took to Twitter within hours of announcing the Syrian withdrawal to warn Turkey that if it did anything that he—in his “great and unmatched wisdom”—deemed “off limits” in the void left by the American withdrawal, he would “totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey.”¹⁰ If Trump were to translate these bellicose sentiments into action against Turkey, Iran, or another adversary, it could spell political peril at the ballot box. Our results also have important implications for Democrats. Currently, the Democratic Party is engaging in a period of fitful soul searching in a quest to understand its inability to connect with many working-class and rural voters who abandoned the party of FDR for Trump. Much of this introspection has focused on the party’s position on trade policy and economic inequality and emphasizes identity politics. However, Democrats also may want to reexamine their foreign-policy posture if they hope to erase Trump’s electoral gains among constituencies that were exhausted and alienated by 18 years of war.

The public overwhelmingly supports foreign policy that reduces entanglement risks

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For decades, American foreign policy has rested on a consensus view about the United States’ role in the world. In an international order where there is one unrivaled superpower, foreign policy experts agree that U.S. soldiers and taxpayer dollars are essential for preserving global stability. But that is an assumption that is not necessarily shared by the American public, based on the findings of a new study Worlds Apart: U.S. Foreign Policy and American Public Opinion, conducted by the Eurasia Group Foundation (EGF), an organization I serve as Board President. No matter what party they claim allegiance to, Americans favor a foreign policy that resists entanglements abroad, the survey found—and it’s not limited to conservative libertarians on the right and liberal pacifists on the left. In every age group polled, respondents exhibited a waning appetite for the obligations and impositions of imperial governance. This isn’t the first time these findings have cropped up. Americans have been skeptical of overseas interventions for decades now. But this study provides the clearest picture yet of how Americans view the world at a moment when U.S. President Donald Trump is taking an unprecedented approach to foreign policy, and the fault lines of American politics are being redrawn. For all the (entirely fair) criticism of his chaotic and abrasive decision-making, Trump understands this wariness. Some insist he has hijacked U.S. foreign policy by expressing public doubt about the value of existing alliances and an interventionist foreign policy. But in many ways Trump’s views align more closely than others in Washington D.C. with the ways in which a majority of American taxpayers would define the future U.S. role in the world.

America First isn't just a Trump catchphrase. **When it comes to foreign policy, it's becoming a national worldview.**

I would argue that U.S. policymakers have an opportunity here — to **re-engage with their constituents**, at a time when the American public's outlook appears better-suited to the fraught geopolitical realities of the current moment.

NEG---EU Cohesion DA

The plan offloads security commitments onto Europe---that triggers existential security debates that divide Europe

Fix 19, program director for international affairs at Körber-Stiftung's Berlin office with a special focus on Russia and Eastern Europe. Previously, she was a doctoral fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. She holds a master's degree in theory and history of international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science and concluded a Ph.D. on Germany's role in European Russia policy, with Bastian Giegrich, **director of defense and military analysis at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and leads the team that produces the annual flagship publication The Military Balance. From 2010–15 Bastian worked for the German Federal Ministry of Defence in research and policy roles, while also serving as the IISS consulting senior fellow for European security (Liana, "EUROPEAN SECURITY IN CRISIS: WHAT TO EXPECT IF THE UNITED STATES WITHDRAWS FROM NATO," <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/european-security-in-crisis-what-to-expect-if-the-united-states-withdraws-from-nato/>)

Trump's musings about a NATO withdrawal have served as a wake-up call for some in Europe that Europeans urgently need to assume greater responsibility for their own security. This realization is one of the reasons why closer defense cooperation and a greater degree of strategic autonomy are high on the European Union's agenda. But are Europeans able to defend themselves? How would they think about their defense without the United States?

A policy game prepared by Körber-Stiftung and the International Institute for Strategic Studies sought to answer these questions this summer in Berlin. Five country teams with experts from France, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States addressed a fictional scenario that involved a U.S. withdrawal from NATO, followed by crises in a NATO member state in the western Balkans and across Eastern Europe. How would Europeans react to such a scenario? What are the red lines, interests, and priorities of the respective actors? How might Europeans organize their defense if the United States withdraws from NATO, and what role could the United States play in European security after the withdrawal?

The results of the game were sobering, with no clear upside for any of the participating teams. While a one-time simulation exercise, it provided valuable insights into the interests and preferences of European member states.

At the beginning of the policy game, most European teams adopted a "wait-and-see" approach focused on persuading the United States to return to NATO, offering concessions that were unthinkable before (from trade to energy). The unfortunate message for transatlantic relations seems to be that a threat to abandon NATO might actually yield some results.

Europeans started to take proactive steps only once the security situation in the scenario deteriorated significantly, and when it became clear that the U.S. withdrawal decision — at least in this simulation — was irreversible. Faced with a crisis in a NATO member state in the western Balkans (in the scenario, a pro-Russian coup d'état with Russian warships blocking access to the Mediterranean Sea), most teams anticipated that remaining NATO members would struggle to agree to invoke the principle of collective defense under Article 5 in this grey-zone scenario. Instead, the invocation of Article 4 — which involves only consultations in case the security or independence of a NATO member state is threatened — paired with sanctions on Russia and a robust response within ad-hoc coalitions were the preferred means of action. Without U.S. security guarantees, it seems, the credibility of Article 5 and the mutual defense commitment are questionable.

And then it got worse: In case of an escalation in the east (an incident akin to the Cuban missile crisis, involving an extended-range version of the SSC-8 Screwdriver land attack cruise missile with a range in excess of 4,500 km stationed in western Russia), European shortfalls especially in air and missile defense

were identified as an existential risk for European countries without nuclear capabilities after the United States has withdrawn all nuclear and missile defense assets in the scenario. Given that filling these gaps would require long-term investment, Europe would likely remain vulnerable for years to come in such a scenario.

Especially for Germany, a U.S. withdrawal from NATO would represent an existential security threat. The German team suggested exploring the possibilities of the Franco-German Aachen Treaty of 2019 and asking France and the United Kingdom to expand their nuclear umbrellas to other European countries. Developing a German nuclear weapons capacity was considered an unlikely option, due to domestic opposition. Yet, expanding the British and French nuclear umbrella would come at a significant cost: The burden-sharing debate would return to Europe. Nuclear deterrence will remain the Gretchenfrage of European security, and if expanding the British and French nuclear umbrella fails, some teams anticipated a proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe.

When it comes to institutional frameworks, from a French perspective, NATO would be dead without the United States: The French team preferred a new, E.U.-centered collective defense structure in the long term, with other actors affiliating on a bilateral basis. This position was met with skepticism especially from the British and Polish side; Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom were adamant that the NATO command structure should be maintained after a U.S. withdrawal and provide possibilities for the United States to “opt in” to any future security structure.

A post-Brexit United Kingdom, as envisioned in the scenario, would consider itself a leading actor in European security, willing and capable of shaping Europe’s future security architecture. Given its significant defense capabilities, the U.K. team saw its country in a powerful negotiating position and was skeptical of French and German leadership on defense issues. British red lines were the following: No E.U. army, no E.U. alliance or, as they said, the United Kingdom wants to design European security, not just sign on a dotted line.

As the representative for NATO’s most vulnerable-feeling eastern member states, the Polish team did not trust Europe’s ability to organize collective defense and was tempted to conclude bilateral deals with the United States. As the Polish team said, if the United States withdraws, the eastern flank should be the last place. A “bilateralization” of security and defense with the United States, including bilateral security guarantees, is the likely consequence. Interestingly, all teams rejected Russian overtures for conflict resolution in exchange for concessions on security, such as drafting a European security treaty based on Medvedev’s 2008 proposals. This demonstrates that Russia was not considered a credible security provider in Europe, despite suspicions that Germany might be tempted to engage in a dialogue with Russia on this.

For the U.S. team, subsidizing European security was no longer an option. The team felt that Europeans should put everything on the table for security guarantees, from trade to policy alignment on Iran and China. The U.S. team argued that countries that care will find a way to keep the United States engaged, and that Europe should take the lead in crisis management on the continent. In this scenario, a transactional relationship seems to be the new normal in U.S.-European relations, yet Europeans were disillusioned as they hoped for a continuous strategic U.S. interest in Europe and a values-based partnership. In contrast, the U.S. team in the game focused primarily on a fair deal addressing both defense and trade issues.

Thinking about the broader implications of the policy game, it becomes clear that without U.S. security guarantees, the principles of European unity and mutual solidarity were quickly challenged and Europe was at serious risk of splitting into different camps. While Europeans were in principle willing to organize their own defense, the shortfalls in military capabilities precluded meaningful action and led to a quick emergence of divisions. This could also occur under conditions short of U.S. withdrawal, such as a reduction in its European force posture or its willingness to engage. Any

degree of reduced U.S. commitment would thus exacerbate European divisions.

Divided Europe facilitates effective challenges to the liberal order

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It is precisely because Europe has such tremendous latent economic, political, and even military power potential that its future course and direction will be crucial to determining whether the 21st century is a democratic century. The European Union represents a model for the success of democracy, social market economies, and open societies. This is akin to how the power of America’s image—as a beacon of freedom and democracy—has served at points throughout history as motivation to those seeking freedom. The European Union also has been an inspirational model. The allure of closer relations with the European Union was enough to inspire people in Kyiv to take to Maidan Square. European Union membership remains a **tremendous carrot** for states on its periphery and perspective members to stay on the democratic path. Additionally, the example of the European Union shows how war-torn societies of different nationalities can overcome their differences to live, work, and govern in peace and prosperity. The European Union also demonstrates what can be accomplished when states work together, enabling it to be a **powerful force** for regional and international cooperation. Furthermore, the European Union does not just support multilateral approaches to address global problems, but it also serves as a real-world example of a multilateral approach to address a global problem—what to do with a war-ravaged continent whose nation-states can’t stop fighting one another. Therefore, the European Union is extremely deft in engaging in international processes, possessing the tact and patience that America sometimes lacks. Zakaria further explains that in an era of geopolitical competition, Europe “could play a crucial role in helping to preserve the rules, norms and values that have been built up since 1945. But Europe would need to harness its power and act with purpose.”¹¹⁰

A Europe that **acts as one** could be a strong voice in international affairs, not just as a key ally of the United States but as a crucial bulwark against China and Russia. As a result, China and Russia are working to keep Europe down—divided and weakened—and to build ties with select European states to block and stymie Europe from acting as one.¹¹¹ Europe is once again geopolitically contested and is now a key theater in this new geopolitical era.

The rise of China and the resurgence of Russia, as well as the emboldening of strongman autocrats around the world, have created not just a renewed geopolitical challenge to the United States but also an ideological challenge to liberal democracy.¹¹² Should the United States decide to mobilize to respond to this geopolitical and ideological challenge after the Trump administration, it will need to turn to its democratic allies in both Europe and Asia and seek to rebuild and solidify its relationships and alliances. In a 2018 Center for American Progress report, the authors identified the need for the United States to pursue a “democracy rebalance” to focus on building and cementing ties with America’s democratic allies. The logic is that the stronger America’s democratic alliances are, the stronger the United States will be.¹¹³ To ensure that the 21st century continues to be a democratic age, America will not simply need to pursue a foreign policy that aligns with its democratic values; it will also need partners. And Europe will be the most critical partner. **A strong, united, democratic Europe** assertively engaging the world **would be a huge** boon to the United States and huge **blow to** its **autocratic adversaries**. Put simply, America needs Europe to rise and its adversaries to become weaker.

China and Russia understand that and are engaging to deliberately weaken and divide Europe. Both Russia and China prefer to deal with European countries on a national level, where they have more leeway to cut political and economic deals. Russia and China also recognize that an increasingly integrated and united European Union would represent a **strong pillar in the liberal global order**. As

Leonard and Bildt, explain, “Great power competition is ... increasingly splitting the EU itself. Russia, China, and the US routinely exploit splits between EU member states and have become adept at watering down or blocking EU decisions.”¹¹⁴

NEG---Korea DA

Withdrawal leads to Asian war.

By Ju Hyung **Kim 25** (“The Taiwan Trap: Why Withdrawing U.S. Troops from Korea Risks a Two-Front War,” The Taiwan Trap,

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/06/23/the_taiwan_trap_why_withdrawing_us_troops_from_korea_risks_a_two-front_war_1118180.html)

The Indo-Pacific is entering an age of converging threats and limited bandwidth. Strategic clarity—not artificial prioritization—is now essential. Withdrawing U.S. troops from South Korea to reinforce Taiwan is not a zero-cost reallocation. It is a dangerous gamble that undermines alliance cohesion, degrades deterrence, and increases the odds of a simultaneous two-front war the United States is ill-prepared to fight.

NEG---Africa DA

Threats are growing, and absent the US, fills in.

Brandi **Vincent 25** a Senior Reporter at DefenseScoop, where she reports on disruptive technologies and associated policies impacting Pentagon and military personnel (“U.S. military posture in Africa shifts while terrorist threats intensify,” Defense Scoop, <https://defensescoop.com/2025/05/29/africom-military-posture-shifts-terrorist-threats-intensify/>)

While Africom pivots its approach to more directly assist its partners with becoming more self-sufficient, the commander noted, China is trying to “replicate every type of thing” the U.S. military is doing on the continent. Both China and Russia are also influencing African communities by offering short-term economic gains that could impact America’s national security interests in the years to come.

However, Langley said the command’s top strategic priority at this time involves countering threats to the U.S. homeland from terrorist factions — “the most dangerous of which are based in Africa.”

“Let me speak plainly about the threats we’re facing, especially in the Sahel region, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is the flashpoint of prolonged conflict and growing instability. It is the epicenter of terrorism on the globe. Terrorist networks affiliated with ISIS and Al Qaeda are thriving, particularly in Burkina Faso, where the government no longer controls vast parts of its own territory,”

Langley explained.

Extremist groups are simultaneously gaining ground across the Lake Chad regions as attacks are resurging.

NEG---Japan DA

No East Asian proliferation now. Ending defense commitments shatters trust in the Alliance, which prompts Japan to, cascading to South Korea.

Cha & Govella 26, *Distinguished University Professor, Georgetown University, President, Geopolitics and Foreign Policy Department, Center for Strategic and International Studies, **Associate Professor, Japanese Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, Senior Adviser, Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies. (*Victor Cha and **Kristi Govella, May 7, 2026, “Why Japan and South Korea Won’t Go Nuclear,” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/japan/why-japan-and-south-korea-wont-go-nuclear>)

A growing chorus of influential voices in Seoul and Tokyo seems to lend credence to the worry that this confluence of threats will prompt South Korea and Japan to cross the nuclear Rubicon. In 2023, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol mused that his country “could rapidly develop its own nuclear weapons” if the threat from North Korea continued to grow. Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul stated in February 2025 that nuclear armament was “not off the table.” Later that year, a comment by an unnamed senior government official advising Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expressing the personal opinion that the country should acquire the bomb sparked widespread public criticism—but some politicians, including former defense minister Taro Kono, argued that Japan should not shy away from a broadier debate about the pros and cons of nuclearization. These statements are not inconsistent with public opinion. Polling in South Korea shows support for nuclear armament as high as 75 to 80 percent. In Japan, support for the country’s three nonnuclear principles—to not possess or produce nuclear weapons or allow them to enter Japanese territory—remains strong, but over 56 percent of Japanese people support an open debate about these once taboo issues.

But despite the fever pitch of the debate, the worry that South Korea and Japan are on the brink of nuclearization is exaggerated. The majority of “strategic elites”—current and former officials, business leaders, scholars, and experts—in both countries are not in favor of going nuclear, at least for now. That ambivalence, however, is conditional: on the gravity of the threat, but also on the actions of each ally. If either Seoul or Tokyo chooses to take the nuclear leap, the other could soon follow. Even as it deals with pressing challenges elsewhere in the world, Washington would do well to recommit to extended deterrence in Asia to keep its allies from taking that decision.

PROLIFERATION PANIC

Public opinion polls and news-making soundbites dominate the public-facing nuclear discourse in South Korea and Japan. But as the political scientist Elizabeth Saunders has argued, the views of strategic elites ultimately have more influence on national security decisions than the general public. To better understand these figures’ views, in mid-2025 we distributed a survey to 860 South Korean and 515 Japanese strategic elites who, as recognized foreign policy experts in their countries, regularly participate in think tank and university conferences and other Track II dialogues on national security issues. Our research revealed that their views are far more sober when it comes to nuclear weapons than the pro-nuclear opinions often highlighted in the media. Despite the deteriorating security environment and the uncertainty of Trump’s “America first” foreign policy, the majority of elites in both countries are not in favor of going nuclear. When asked whether their countries should acquire nuclear weapons, 75 percent of strategic elites in South Korea and 79 percent in Japan responded that they did not agree or were unsure. Of the antinuclear respondents, 67 percent in South Korea and 65 percent in Japan did not believe nuclear acquisition would make their country safer. When pressed to choose a nuclear option, the majority of this nuclear-skeptical group—62 percent in South Korea and 54 percent in Japan—responded that they would prefer to pursue nuclear sharing within each country’s alliance with the United States rather than go it alone. This gap between elite and general public opinion may in part be attributable to elites’ more nuanced understanding of the reputational and material costs of going nuclear. Thirty-five percent of South Korean respondents who did not support nuclearization cited sanctions and the loss of international prestige as best explaining their choice, while only six percent of the group strongly agreed that nuclear weapons would increase security. In Japan, a plurality of elites against nuclearization—25 percent—were worried about initiating a nuclear arms race in northeast Asia and a further 18 percent expressed concerns about sanctions and prestige. Just five percent strongly believed that getting nuclear weapons would make Japan safer.

Domestic and international media outlets have nonetheless overemphasized the voices of a minority of advocates for nuclearization, creating a skewed perception of the core national security consensus in both countries that has influenced Washington’s thinking on East Asian policy. For example, the Biden administration’s alliance-strengthening

measures in South Korea, including nuclear submarine port calls, were intended more to scratch what the administration perceived to be Seoul's nuclear itch than to amp up deterrence against North Korea.

GRADUALLY, THEN ALL AT ONCE

Despite the **dominance of nuclear skepticism** among policymakers in both countries, **elite attitudes are not immovable**. **Faltering confidence** in the **United States** could cause decision-makers in Seoul and Tokyo to **reconsider**. When presented with a possible scenario in which the United States reduced its military presence on the Korean Peninsula, 55 percent of South Korean elites who opposed nuclearization and 23 percent of their Japanese counterparts responded that their support for their country's acquisition of nuclear weapons would increase. A hypothetical **U.S. drawdown** had the **strongest effect on ambivalent elites**: 84 percent of South Korean respondents who were initially unsure about the prospect of acquiring nuclear weapons and **62 percent of Japanese respondents** who felt similarly **increased their support for nuclearization** in response to the scenario.

Surprisingly, **China's nuclear buildup and Russia's belligerence** had **little effect** on the attitudes of antinuclear elites; **only 14 percent of South Korean and Japanese respondents cited increased security threats from both countries as their top concern**. That neither development moved elites in either country may reflect the fact that they have already internalized the threats from Beijing and Moscow. U.S. unpredictability under Trump, on the other hand, is a new and unsettling development.

But a U.S. drawdown from Asia was not the only scenario that prompted elites to increase their support for nuclearization. When presented with a hypothetical Japanese acquisition of nuclear weapons, 79 percent of South Korean antinuclear elites said that they would increase their support for South Korean nuclearization. Sixty-three percent of Japanese antinuclear elites responded to a similar scenario about South Korean nuclearization by increasing their support for Japanese nuclearization. As with the drawdown scenario, ambivalent respondents were most swayed. Ninety percent of South Korean elites and 77 percent of Japanese elites who were initially unsure about nuclearization indicated that their support for getting the bomb would increase if the other country did so first.

In fact, this cascade effect is even more compelling than the fear of U.S. abandonment. The number of all Japanese elites who indicated that they would increase their support for nuclearization if South Korea acquired the bomb was 42 percentage points higher than the number of those who would increase their support for nuclearization in the event of a decrease in U.S. military presence. The survey revealed a similar dynamic among South Korean elites. Respondents who cited a change in Japanese policy in favor of nuclearization as a potential trigger for a more pro-nuclear stance outnumbered those who cited a U.S. drawdown by 13 percentage points.

In other words, the initial barrier to nuclearization is quite high, thanks to skepticism among both countries' elites. **Barring a major development**—a withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear umbrella or even just a **substantially weakened U.S. defense commitment**—opinion is **unlikely to shift** enough to **compel a major policy change** in Seoul or Tokyo. **But if the United States were to draw down** from Asia, opinion could **shift quickly**, and a **cascade** to the bomb could **follow**.

THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE

Washington should be heartened by the fact that South Korean and Japanese nuclear skepticism serves as a constraint on proliferation. But there are still signs that elites in both countries are genuinely troubled by the trajectory of U.S. policy. After all, 58 percent of Japanese elites who favored nuclearization cited the lack of a long-term U.S. security commitment to Japan as the main factor motivating their answer. In South Korea, although the top motivation for nuclearization was the threat of North Korea, 24 percent of pro-nuclear respondents expressed similar concerns about the United States.

The United States, for its part, has a great deal of agency in shaping these perceptions, and by extension, in keeping proliferation off the table.

The **Trump administration** has **called on U.S. allies in Asia and Europe to increase their defense spending**, but **Washington can still find ways to reassure** its **allies** in Tokyo and Seoul about its alliance commitments even as it

seeks to compel them to take on more security responsibilities. **The United States should continue extended nuclear deterrence dialogues with each** and “trilateralize” the discussion among the three. **Expanding missile-defense**

integration of information between Japan's sea-based assets and South Korea's ground-based assets, exercises to prepare for multiple and simultaneous missile attacks, and joint production of interceptors would demonstrate U.S. commitment and help **assuage concerns** about abandonment. **Closer consultation** between Tokyo and Seoul on security **issues**, including a bilateral security declaration to supplement the August 2023 Camp David security declaration between Japan, South Korea, and the United States, **would formally recognize the common threat** they face and would increase transparency between these two historically distrustful common allies of Washington. These steps would build on the efforts that Japan and South Korea have made in recent years to significantly strengthen their relations with each other, as well as with the United States.

For now, Washington can rest assured that **nuclear dominoes are not about to fall**. But it should not completely **cast the issue aside and neglect its security commitments** in pursuit of other endeavors in the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East, and Ukraine. **The cost of doing so could be a nuclear Asia**.

Questioning US reliability triggers Japanese proliferation

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The gradual institutionalization of extended deterrence within the alliance therefore meets a dual need: reaffirm U.S. security guarantees to Japan and strengthen the effectiveness of deterrence. To this end, Tokyo is being given a greater role in the strategy and supervision of the conventional side of this deterrence, which is also provided by the United States through its arms sales to Japan and its imposing military presence in the country.

THE U.S. EXTENDED DETERRENCE AS A NECESSARY GUARANTEE OF PROTECTION IN THE FACE OF GROWING REGIONAL THREATS
China’s gray-zone strategy and Beijing’s growing assertiveness in the East China Sea

Since its first nuclear test in October 1964, China has been at the heart of Japan’s security concerns. The singularity of this strategic situation lies in the conjunction of strong economic ties – it is Japan’s biggest trade partner – and growing geopolitical tension.

The main dispute between China and Japan concerns the Senkaku Islands,¹⁴ which helps to understand why Japan sees China as a growing threat in the region. This group of uninhabited rocks and islets in the East China Sea was ceded to Japan in 1895 via the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ending the Sino-Japanese War. The islands were under U.S. rule from 1947 to 1972, when Okinawa was returned to Japan, before being governed by the Japanese, without China making any territorial claims. These claims began in the late 1970s, concomitant with the discovery of vast hydrocarbon deposits within the continental shelf beneath the islands. In 2012, the islands, until then privately owned by a Japanese citizen, were nationalized by Tokyo.

This territorial dispute is instrumental in Japan’s perception of China. As a result, the latest National Defense White Paper, published in July 2021, portrays it as a state that “has relentlessly continued attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion, [...] [based on] unilateral assertions [...] that are, fundamentally, a violation of international law.”¹⁵ The main issue for the Japanese government is China’s method of circumventing the U.S. extended deterrence from below. This is the “gray zone” tactic of aggressive action that:

seeks to effect changes in the status quo while remaining below the level of provocation that would elicit a strong response from Japan or the U.S.-Japan alliance.¹⁶ China’s policy of changing the status quo can be studied in two stages, from the establishment of a safe zone to the development of forces capable of preserving it, as part of a policy of continuous pressure and fait accompli.

First, following on from the assertion of its historical rights, in 2013, in response to Tokyo’s nationalization of the islands, Beijing established an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)¹⁷ overlapping Japan’s and ostensibly including the Senkaku Islands. Japan regards such a measure as a sovereign violation, insofar as it infers that any flying over the Senkaku Islands should be controlled by the Chinese authorities, despite their inclusion in the Japanese EEZ.

The second part of this fait accompli tactic is the development of forces to limit access to the space around the Senkaku Islands and to maintain a constant presence there, which is perceived by Japan as highly hostile pressure. The presence of the Chinese coast guard in the contiguous waters of the Senkaku Islands reached a record 333 days in 2020,¹⁸ and came with legal developments of great concern to Tokyo, namely a shift from civilian to military administration under Xi Jinping’s command in 2018, and the promulgation in February 2021 of a new law authorizing them to have policing powers in waters under Chinese jurisdiction, with the ability to board ships, deny access, and fire in the event of a violation, etc.

This gray zone tactic by Beijing is now one of the Japanese government’s greatest concerns, in part because it seems to defeat the extended deterrence. Although three successive U.S. presidents over the past decade have reaffirmed that the 1960 security treaty – and thus extended nuclear deterrence – extends to the Senkaku Islands, these guarantees appear insufficient for two reasons.

First, as evidenced by the joint statement of Yoshihide Suga and Joe Biden when they met in Washington, D.C., on April 16, 2021, the United States merely defends Japan’s “administration”¹⁹ of the Senkaku Islands, which means neither possession nor, more importantly, defense of the same sovereign rights as if it were Shikoku or Hokkaido. Such is the ambiguity of the U.S. position with respect to this geopolitical dispute, which extends its extended deterrence to a territory over which it recognizes only Japanese administration, not sovereignty.

Moreover, U.S. extended deterrence in no way prevents the massive presence of Chinese ships around the islands, nor a very assertive declaratory policy by Beijing, such as the words of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi who, during his visit to Japan on November 28, 2020, declared before the Japanese government that Beijing would do everything to “guarantee China’s sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands.”²⁰

China’s operations on the ground as well as its declaratory policy thus increasingly defy U.S. security guarantees in Japan’s eyes. By remaining below the threshold of conflict, they undermine the credibility of extended deterrence over the Senkaku Islands, particularly with a view to driving the United States out of the region by rendering meaningless any U.S. nuclear strike that could be launched under extended deterrence if the Senkaku

Islands dispute were to escalate into open conflict, by the threat of a Chinese second strike. This is because any damage to the United States would, for Washington, be totally disproportionate to the initial stake – eight uninhabited islets in

the East China Sea. This explains the deployment of several hundred members of the ground SDF on the Ryukyu islands near the Senkaku Islands, capable of intervening on the front line in the event of aggression and aiming, beyond deterring Chinese vessels, to reassure the United States of Japan’s ability to take charge of its own defense in the area.²¹

North Korea and the limits of U.S. diplomacy

The progress of the North Korean nuclear program and the lack of results from successive attempts at negotiation in this proliferation crisis make the Pyongyang regime the second major threat identified by Japan and the second factor likely to weaken the U.S. extended deterrence.

In its March 2021 report on North Korea, the UN Security Council’s Panel of Experts on North Korea found that between August 2020 and February 2021, the regime continued its production of highly enriched uranium at the Yongbyon site, plutonium mining, naval modernization activities at the Sinpo shipyard, etc., and, despite doubts about the ability of North Korean missiles to re-enter the atmosphere, consider it “highly likely that a nuclear device can be mounted on the intercontinental ballistic missiles, and [...] that a nuclear device can be mounted on the medium-range ballistic missiles and short-range ballistic missiles.”²²

These findings follow Kim Jong-un’s decision in January 2020 to end his self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing²³ and ICBM launches, confirming the failure of negotiations with the United States. This failure should be viewed in the context of the Pyongyang regime’s military demonstrations. The October 10, 2020 parade unveiled a new ICBM, called Hwasong-16, which has been described as a MIRV,²⁴ while the closing parade of the 8th Congress of the Workers’ Party on January 14,

2021, presented a new SLBM, Pukguksong. The range of these two missiles, coupled with the MIRV, suggests that the United States would eventually be vulnerable to a North Korean strike, less likely to be stopped by U.S. missile defense.²⁵

Pyongyang's technological advances usher in a new era of threats to Japan and the U.S. extended deterrence. Japan is now within range of several types of North Korean missiles, while the new ICBMs would be likely to reach the U.S. territory.

As far as Japan is concerned, this is a direct threat as North Korea's exuberant rhetoric makes it one of the nation's mortal enemies. The April 2013 Law on Consolidating the Position of Nuclear Weapons State, specifies Pyongyang's framework for the use of nuclear weapons, aimed at "detering and repelling the aggression and attack of the enemy against the DPRK and dealing deadly retaliatory blows at the strongholds of aggression".²⁶ While the United States figures prominently among these "strongholds of aggression", its allies are also included to the extent that they are perceived as an extension of U.S. power; official speeches and the North Korean press, relayed by the online media outlet KCNA, frequently portray Japan as Washington's "pawn". Tokyo thus becomes the potential target of a North Korean nuclear strike, unconditioned by a possible no-first-use principle.

Rhetoric on the use of nuclear weapons has been supplemented by verbal provocations that clearly point to Japan as a target of Pyongyang. For example, following international sanctions in response to North Korea's sixth nuclear test in September 2017, the Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee declared that "the four islands of the archipelago should be sunken into the sea by the nuclear bomb",²⁷ accusing Japan of pandering to U.S. demands and failing to sincerely apologize for crimes committed during World War II.

While it seems difficult to see these threatening speeches as the counterpart of a coherent doctrine of nuclear weapon use, they show the extent to which North Korea perceives Japan as an enemy, an imperialist power that has only changed from the militaristic empire of World War II by being subservient to the United States today. From this adverse perception stems the sense of threat in Japan, especially in the face of North Korean nuclear and ballistic advances which, in addition to keeping the country within range, presuppose the defeat of U.S. deterrence.

Indeed, a study of the regime's rhetoric shows the extent to which the North Korean nuclear program is aimed at perpetuating the Kim dynasty and securing its territory against the United States. Kim Jong-un's July 27, 2020 address to Korean War veterans is a good example.²⁸ Seventy years after the end of the conflict, which was presented as a defeat of the "military offensive by the American imperialists", Kim Jong-un deemed that "the fierce confrontation with the enemy" continues and that "the threat and pressure by the imperialists to invade and plunder our state have increased moment by moment", before concluding that: War is an armed clash which can be unleashed only against a weak one. [...] Thanks to our reliable and effective self-defense nuclear deterrence, the word war would no longer exist on this land, and the security and future of our state will be guaranteed for ever.²⁹

The North Korean nuclear program is thus presented as part of an age-old tradition of resistance to the invader, especially since the glorified figure of Kim Il Sung, the personification of the struggle against the Japanese colonizer, is also evoked. It is thus the preeminent revolutionary weapon for the regime insofar as it guarantees the regime's survival against what it describes as American imperialist assaults. This is the official ideology of *juche* (a nationalist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism developed by Kim Il Sung and established as the official ideology by Kim Jong-il), making self-sufficiency, including in defense, the core of the regime's doctrine. The consequences of this ideology on the U.S. deterrence are immediate. The glaring conventional and nuclear asymmetry between North Korea and the United States forces Pyongyang to be pragmatic in implementing a minimal deterrence that can keep the United States at bay enough to continue building up its forces. This is why the regime's recent technical advances are aimed at defeating U.S. deterrence, and thus the extended deterrence inclusive of Japan. SLBM development is part of the process of building an ocean component, with the goal of achieving a second-strike capability that could cast doubt on U.S. guarantees of Japan's nuclear defense, out of fear of a strike by Pyongyang on its own territory. President Trump's failure to resolve the North Korean crisis despite using the novel format of bilateral summits has also contributed to a decline in Japanese confidence in Washington's ability to defend its interests in East Asia. The NIDS, the research arm of the Japanese Ministry of Defense, has acknowledged this failure in no uncertain terms, stating in a report that Japan believes the summits have produced "no fundamental change in the nature of North Korean nuclear and ballistic threats."³⁰

Thus, the intensification of Chinese and North Korean threats induces a strong sense of vulnerability for Japan, prompting numerous requests for U.S. assurances and guarantees from Tokyo. Faced with the emergence of significant decoupling risks and after the disruption of the alliance under President Donald Trump, Japan doubts the reliability of the U.S. ally and its security guarantees. This uncertainty is central to the question of a possible Japanese hedging policy, and to that of the acquisition of high-precision cruise missiles, with a view to a pre-emptive strike capability.

JAPAN'S UNCERTAINTY ABOUT U.S. NUCLEAR UMBRELLA GUARANTEES

Risks of delinking at the center of Japanese concerns

The growing threats from China and North Korea have two implications for Japan and its alliance with the United States. First, it shows that extended deterrence and U.S. diplomatic efforts are not enough to slow the modernization of their respective nuclear forces. Deterrence is in part a mental power struggle, based on the adversary's recognition of the credibility of the threat that is being presented and maintained. China's gray-zone strategy and Pyongyang's pursuit of its nuclear program can be seen as a test of that credibility.

The second consequence of the rise of these two threats is the risk of a strategic delinking of Japan's interests from those of the United States. A first way to envisage this delinking, previously mentioned, is tied to the progressive development of missiles likely to reach American territory from China or the Korean peninsula, as well as the eventual acquisition of a second-strike capability. Several researchers or political leaders indeed believe that the United States' new vulnerability to possible nuclear strikes from these two players would reduce or even eliminate any willingness to honor, if necessary, the nuclear side of its extended deterrence in respect of Tokyo.³¹

Although this theory is difficult to refute, reducing the potential causes of Japan-U.S. delinking to the technological advances of China and North Korea does not sufficiently reflect the uniqueness of these two situations. After analyzing Japanese concerns, two possible types of causes liable to lead to another form of strategic separation between American and Japanese vital interests can be considered.

First, this delinking could stem from the importance of economic ties between the United States and China, which could influence Washington's strategic calculus. This is a new factor compared to the Cold War, negating the parallel between SinoAmerican and American-Soviet rivalries. In 1971, the USSR accounted for only 0.2% of total U.S. foreign trade, and the U.S. for 0.8% of Soviet foreign trade.³² In 2020, China was the largest trading partner of the United States, accounting for 14.9% of its foreign trade, while the United States was the main destination of Chinese exports.³³ According to a Japanese researcher working on these issues, the economic interdependence between these two powers is sometimes seen in Japan as an advantage, precisely because it helps reduce the risks of an open conflict between Tokyo's two main partners.³⁴

This interdependence allows Japan to maintain strong economic ties with both China and the United States, by dissociating trade from geopolitical tension according to the doctrine of separating economics and politics (Yoshida doctrine of *seikei bunri*) formulated in the aftermath of World War II. However, economic interdependence between China and the United States can only prove to be an advantage for Tokyo if it has a calmer relationship with Beijing, with no risk of a territorial dispute such as the Senkaku Islands. Indeed, despite the assurances of firmness frequently reiterated by Washington, this interdependence could be an obstacle to massive American intervention.

Secondly, divergent perceptions of security could give rise to a delinking scenario. First, they could be external to the alliance, in the event of a misperception of the strategic environment or of U.S. and Japanese intentions by China and North Korea. This risk is particularly emphasized by the Japanese Ministry of Defense with regard to Pyongyang, insofar as the pursuit of its weapons program could lead the regime to believe that it has secured:

A strategic deterrence against the United States. However, if North Korea has such a false sense of confidence and recognition regarding its deterrence, it could lead to an increase and escalation of military provocations by North Korea in the region and could create situations that are deeply worrying also for Japan.³⁵

The risk here is that North Korea imagines that it has the capacity to implement an "aggressive sanctuarization" policy like Beijing or Moscow, and thus underestimate the resolve of the United States to protect South Korea and Japan. For this reason, Tokyo is particularly concerned about the possibility of Pyongyang misjudging the power relationship.

Finally, delinking due to divergent security perceptions within the alliance is also a possibility. It would depend primarily on different interpretations by Japan and the United States of the security environment in East Asia.

Discussion fora such as the Extended Deterrence Dialogue are designed precisely to limit any asymmetry of perceptions between the two allies. The frequency of these internal alliance meetings makes this cause of delinking less likely than the previous ones, without, however, invalidating it. For geographic and military reasons, North Korea is only a danger for the United States, whereas it represents an existential threat for Japan.³⁶

These risks of delinking are at the **heart** of Japanese concerns about the effectiveness of **U.S.** security **commitments**. They constitute the structural **uncertainty** of this extended deterrence situation, which was coupled, between 2017 and 2021, with **cyclical** uncertainty about Washington's **reliability**, due to Donald **Trump**'s position regarding the alliance.

Donald Trump's policy and its ambivalent reception by Japan

The declassification of the United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific³⁷ (drafted in 2017) on January 12, 2021, was not simply an attempt by the Trump administration to glorify its track record days before President-elect Biden took office. It provides essential hindsight on Donald Trump's objectives in relation to (among other things) the alliance with Japan, and allows for an analysis of the gap between stated intentions and actual results.

Two points seem essential with respect to Japan. First, the document acknowledges the Chinese ambition to "dissolve U.S. alliances" (p. 2) in order to exploit the vacuum left by possible delinking, hence the wish to adapt the U.S. defense strategy to this security context while strengthening alliances involving the United States. However, it is less about strengthening the bilateral structure itself and more of a desire to equalize roles and responsibilities, by "increasing burden sharing" (p. 4). The United States is signaling its wish to see Japan become a bridge to the Indo-Pacific security architecture by playing a greater role alongside it.

Second, regarding the threats identified by Tokyo, the Trump administration wants to deter China from using force against the United States and its allies, and convince the Pyongyang regime that "the only path to its survival is to relinquish its nuclear weapons" (p. 8). One of the main lines of this document is the desire for the United States' partners to take more responsibility for resolving regional crises, and the development of alliances that can counteract the Chinese advance, mainly through the Quad.³⁸

From this brief summary of the U.S. strategy for the Indo-Pacific, two criteria can be put forward to study the case of Japan and the alliance: the restoration of deterrence in relation to certain antagonists to prevent escalation; and the search for new partners and the creation of new formats as a means of resolving crises, especially in North Korea.

Given Japanese expectations of extended deterrence, the 2018 NPR arguably provided reassurance to Tokyo that U.S. security guarantees would be maintained.

First, it reaffirms the central role of nuclear power in deterrence, especially extended deterrence. Where the 2010 NPR and the Obama administration stated the aim of reducing the role of nuclear power in U.S. defense policy, the latest NPR presents it as the central means of deterrence and as the best way to reassure worried allies—avoiding, ipso facto, their possible proliferation.³⁹ Sole purpose is not mentioned, while the no-first-use option is firmly rejected. These doctrine choices thus met the expectations of the Japanese government, in line with the concerns expressed to the Obama administration to avoid the adoption of such principles in 2009.⁴⁰

Second, the 2018 NPR provides for an adaptation of the nuclear deterrence doctrine, through an adjustment of the extended deterrence that includes Japan. Nuclear deterrence is adapted to the adversary in order to strengthen its deterrent effect—in part in response to the growing aggressiveness of and development of strategic capabilities by both China and North Korea. Its flexibility is presented as a way to prevent it from becoming ineffective and to reassure an ally worried about increasing regional threats.

Finally, the third point in line with Japan's expectations is the expansion of counterattack options to match the adversary's capabilities. This point refers in particular to the tactical nuclear arsenals of China and North Korea. The NPR recalls that U.S. non-strategic nuclear forces such as the B61 bomb are "a key contributor to continued regional deterrence stability and the assurance of allies", before stating that:

Direct military conflict between China and the United States would have the potential for nuclear escalation. Our tailored strategy for China is designed to prevent Beijing from mistakenly concluding that it could secure an advantage through the limited use of its theater nuclear capabilities or that any use of nuclear weapons, however limited, is acceptable.⁴¹

This is how the United States endeavors to restore deterrence against China in order to avoid nuclear escalation in the event of a military conflict with Beijing. Japan reacted very favorably to this NPR through a statement issued by then-Foreign Minister Taro Kono the day after the NPR was released:

Japan highly appreciates the latest NPR which clearly articulates the U.S. resolve to ensure the effectiveness of its deterrence and its commitment to providing extended deterrence to its allies including Japan [...]. Japan shares with the U.S. the same recognition of such severe security environment.⁴²

It effectively corresponds to a strengthening of U.S. nuclear guarantees as well as a firmer stance by Washington in relation to pressure from China, especially in East Asia. It responds to what several researchers have described as insistent demands from the "hawks" of Abe's government (including Prime Minister Abe himself), who wanted Washington to strengthen its nuclear policy in response to the Chinese and North Korean threats.⁴³ The first criterion from the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, i.e., adapting nuclear doctrine to new regional threats, is thus the major positive aspect of Donald Trump's term in office with respect to the alliance with Tokyo, particularly in comparison to the fears of seeing the sole purpose principle adopted under the Obama administration.

The same cannot be said for the second criterion, i.e., the willingness to find new partners to resolve regional crises, most notably with regard to the North Korean crisis. While the first point satisfied Japan because it identified China as a threat to strategic stability, the second contributed greatly to sowing doubts in Japanese security circles about the reliability of the U.S. ally. The two causes of this failure, although they had significant consequences, remain cyclical in that they appear to be closely linked to the personality and political strategy of former President Trump.

The first cause that has prevented stronger multilateralism, despite the fact that this is the central objective of the US Indo-Pacific strategy, is Donald Trump's transactional logic: all negotiations are conducted through a utilitarian prism borrowed from commercial practices, and immediate benefits must outweigh costs without taking the future positive externality of these costs (for example, the long-term maintenance of a vast network of alliances) into account. The distinction between friend and foe gives way to the financial optimization of a situation presented as having been, thus far, profoundly unfair to the United States and the American taxpayer. The American President's declaratory policy on this matter had in fact reached its peak during his election campaign in March 2016. When asked about the possibility of the nuclearization of South Korea and Japan in response to the Chinese and North Korean threats, Donald Trump gave an answer that can be analyzed in three steps. After recalling the excessive costs of maintaining alliances and presenting the United States as a financially strapped country, he said that it could no longer afford to be the "policeman of the world" before suggesting that a nuclear-armed Japan would defend itself much better against North Korea than with the U.S. extended deterrence.⁴⁴

Even before his election, Donald **Trump**'s **rejection** of **interventionism** and his **denunciation** of the **cost** of extended deterrence were such that he **broke the taboo** surrounding possible Japanese **proliferation**. During his term in office, **any effective U.S. intervention** in the event of a conflict thus **seemed to be contingent upon** a renegotiation of the **financial terms** of the alliance in a manner more **favorable** to the **United States**, **making** Prime Minister Abe's **cabinet less sure about U.S. reliability**.⁴⁵

Finally, the second reason why multilateralism has not been reinforced, as indicated in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, lies in President Trump's wish to break with the foreign policy adopted until then in East Asia. The case of North Korea is the most emblematic, with the summit diplomacy previously mentioned. The Bush administration took part in the "Six-Party Talks" aimed at finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis, bringing together the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia between 2003 and 2009. The Obama administration's "strategic patience" ensured that Japan and South Korea were involved in the implementation of multilateral sanctions in order to push Pyongyang to return to these talks, which were abandoned in 2009.⁴⁶

However, Donald Trump's policy on the matter has caused great concern in Japan, due to the escalation of rhetorical threats between the U.S. president and Kim Jong-un, while the summits between the two heads of state in Singapore and Hanoi have contributed to the marginalization of Japan in favor of a bilateral and interpersonal relationship, conceived by President Trump as the only means of resolving this crisis, which had been ongoing for more than twenty years.⁴⁷ The fact that Japan was thus sidelined in the resolution of the North Korean issue led some Japanese politicians and security experts to wonder whether their interests were not now being abandoned by the United States,⁴⁸ especially since Tokyo remained very committed to the "complete, verifiable, and irreversible" dismantling of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, and worried that it had not been consulted when President Trump decided to engage dialogue with Pyongyang.⁴⁹

Donald Trump's "end of alliances" policy between 2017 and 2021 thus raised deep concerns within the Japanese government about U.S. security guarantees, which the arrival in office of Joe Biden in January 2021 has not entirely lifted despite the profound differences between him and his predecessor.

The beginning of Joe Biden's tenure, between Japan's desire for reassurance and its persistent concerns

In his campaign as well as in the beginning of his tenure, Joe Biden tried to emphasize the break he represents with Donald Trump by putting diplomacy and alliances of the United States back at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. Japan has quickly risen to the top of the new administration's agenda, eager to reaffirm the unshakeable nature of the alliance and extended deterrence. The new president's assurances were expressed in two central meetings. The first was the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee, attended by the foreign affairs and defense ministers of both sides⁵⁰ on March 16, 2021. The communiqué of this meeting is marked by its emphatic vocabulary, linking the destiny of peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region to the alliance, whose strength is guaranteed by the United States: "The United States underscored its unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan, using its full range of its capabilities, including nuclear."⁵¹ Such language was repeated, sometimes verbatim, at the meeting between Joe Biden and Yoshihide Suga at the White House on April 16, 2021, this time speaking of "unwavering support for the U.S.-Japan alliance and our shared security".⁵² This rhetoric, in addition to the fact that the Japanese Prime Minister is the first foreign head of state to be received by the new U.S. president, is clearly intended to show the government that the reliability of the United States should no longer be questioned. However, beyond the rhetoric conveying a return to a form of normality and stability in the alliance, the election of Joe Biden is by no means a remedy for all the ills of extended deterrence for the Japanese government and security establishment. On the contrary, it raises two major doubts, for Japan, about the reliability of the U.S. ally. The first uncertainty is doctrinal and concerns the nuclear policy of the Biden administration. Pending the development of a new national security strategy, on March 3, 2021 the United States Presidency released the Interim National Security Guidance specifying the place assigned to military nuclear power by the new administration: We will take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, while ensuring our strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective and that our extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible.⁵³ Although U.S. allies in the framework of extended deterrence are explicitly mentioned, suggesting a willingness to engage and maintain existing guarantees, this desire for a reduced role for nuclear power echoes the view advocated by Joe Biden both during his vice presidency and during his 2020 campaign: As I said in 2017, I believe that the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be deterring—and, if necessary, retaliating against—a nuclear attack. As president, I will work to put that belief into practice, in consultation with the U.S. military and U.S. allies.⁵⁴

The term sole purpose is consistent with the new U.S. president's view of military nuclear power, which puts Japan back in the same position of uncertainty as before the Obama administration's NPR was written in 2010. This coincides with the Japanese government's distrust of recent Democratic presidencies, which were seen as less convincing on issues of nuclear security and the guarantee of extended deterrence.

This concern can be explained by the possibility of rising tension, or even a conflict, to which Japan would be directly exposed. With regard to North Korea, the application of the sole purpose principle creates strategic uncertainty in the event of Pyongyang's use of chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction, and suggests that they would only elicit a conventional response from the United States. The major risk then is that the North Korean regime would perceive a weakening of U.S. extended deterrence, possibly leading to increased confidence or risk-taking that could disrupt the status quo in East Asia. For China, the major consequence of sole purpose is that it rules out a nuclear response to a conventional attack in East Asia, whether massive or not. Extended deterrence would no longer cover a Chinese conventional attack that would result in a purely conventional response by the United States, inevitably involving Japan by virtue of the alliance and the constitutional guarantee of the right to collective self-defense obtained in 2015 by the Abe government. The sole purpose principle would therefore expose Japan to a non-negligible risk of conventional conflict on its territory (U.S. bases in Japan could represent prime targets) as well as to a separation from the United States, whose territory would not be affected by this type of conflict. The release by the Department of Defense on March 28, 2022 of a presentation of the NPR 2022⁵⁵ does not, however, mention the sole purpose concept, which the Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to rule out, for the time being, from the evolution of U.S. nuclear doctrine. The second major uncertainty for the Japanese government as regards the Biden administration is political. It stems from the dilemma that Tokyo now faces: the new U.S. president's willingness to put alliances back at the heart of U.S. foreign policy is an assurance that it will no longer be sidelined in regional crisis resolution processes, but it comes with a firm demand for reciprocity that could commit Japan to security far more than it would like. While the doctrinal shift toward sole purpose carries a risk of delinking, the new dynamic driving the alliance since Joe Biden's election presents a significant risk of "excessive linking" for Tokyo.

The rise of China is the main cause here. The development and modernization of its ballistic capabilities are sparking the desire in the United States to deploy, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, a new network of ground-based missiles presented by Admiral Philip

Davidson, former Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, as the only way to rebalance the strategic relationship.⁵⁶ This issue follows on from the previous administration, whose withdrawal from the INF treaty in 2019 had raised deep concerns within the Abe government, fearing that Washington would exert pressure to deploy intermediate-range missiles on Japanese territory to better deter China in the context of President Trump's rebalancing of the alliance.⁵⁷

Admiral Davidson's statements conclude with the need ("must") for the United States to deploy these missile networks along the "first island chain", i.e., from Japan to the Philippines, to contain the Chinese ballistic threat.⁵⁸ This measure, identified as a priority by Washington, is not yet presented as a formal request to Japan. It nevertheless represents a profound paradigm shift insofar as Tokyo has until now simply equipped Kongo and Atago destroyers with U.S. Aegis missile defense systems. The deployment of offensive missile systems would thus mark a turning point that is all the more problematic for Tokyo as Admiral Davidson sees it as a means of strengthening extended deterrence for both the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan.

Therein lies the major risk of excessive linking for Japan, reinforced by the joint statement issued by Yoshihide Suga and Joe Biden, in which the two alliance leaders mention Taiwan for the first time since 1969: "We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues."⁵⁹ This statement in no way amounts to a guarantee of protection by Japan and the United States to Taiwan, and even less so an offer of extended deterrence. Coupled with the issue of the deployment of U.S. missile systems in Japan, it nevertheless marks Washington's wish to involve Tokyo more fully in the alliance and the regional security issues it faces.

The strengthening of ties between Tokyo and Taipei, as well as Japan's own willingness to support Taiwan more in the international arena, do not depend solely on the United States and also stem from a sovereign political decision.⁶⁰ The most recent Defense White Paper, published in July 2021, further states that stability in the Taiwan Strait is an important part of Japan's security, which can be explained by its geographic proximity and the presence of U.S. armed forces on the island of Okinawa, close to Taipei. However, the alignment with Washington on this issue and the formulation of joint statements, in addition to the growing tension between Beijing and Taipei, increase the possibility of Japan's direct involvement in the event of a cross-strait conflict. The AUKUS alliance between Washington, London and Canberra, as a policy of containment of China by the United States, could thus push Japan to adopt unprecedented geopolitical positions with regard to China and Taiwan, for fear of being relegated due to its pusillanimity.⁶¹

This is where the notion of "excessive linking" comes in: the American desire to rebalance its ballistic capabilities with China and to achieve a firm position on the part of the alliance is increasingly making Tokyo the potential target of Beijing, whose rhetoric towards the Suga government has been particularly virulent: Japan, driven by the selfish aim to check China's revitalization, willingly stoops to acting as a strategic vassal of the United States, going so far as to break faith, harm relations with China [...]. We urge the United States and Japan to immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs, stop forming the anti-China clique, and stop undermining regional peace and stability. China will take all measures necessary to resolutely defend sovereignty, security and development interests.⁶²

An analysis of the U.S.-Japan alliance is necessary in any reflection on the concept of nuclear hedging applied to Japan and the possibility of Japanese nuclearization, because U.S. extended deterrence is at the core of its defense policy. Despite the strengthening of U.S. dialogue and security assurances, Tokyo's uncertainties in this regard persist due, in large part, to the growing Chinese and North Korean threats. Despite the change of president, Washington's demands and the shortcomings of the extended

deterrence remain the **same** in Japan's eyes, if not intensified. The alliance's situation here **confirm**s the idea that the **main challenge** of extended deterrence is not so much **deterring** the enemy as **trusting** the **security guarantees** provided to the ally. This constant uncertainty, inherent in extended deterrence, is the **starting point**, if not chronologically, then intellectually, of Tokyo's **ambiguous** relationship with military nuclear power and the possibility of **arming itself**. The previous U.S. administration, among others, was not mistaken, seeing the **credibility** of extended deterrence as the **best way** to avoid **nuclear proliferation** by its **own allies**.⁶³

NEG---Middle East DA

US troops in the Middle East are vital to peace.

Donegan 24 (Kevin, “Why US naval presence in the Middle East matters,”

<https://en.majalla.com/node/312056/politics/why-us-naval-presence-middle-east-matters>)

US naval presence in the **Middle East does matter**. Combined with US leadership and commitment, it has a strategic **impact** that can protect core US national interests and serve as the **cornerstone** of enhanced partnerships, deterrence, and regional stability.

NEG---Orientalism K

Offshore balancing's methodological commitment to states as black boxes or billiard balls obscures dynamics of dispossession and imperialism and leads to untenable policy conclusions. A Saidian contrapuntal reading enables telling counterhistories from below that motivate humanistic solidarity.

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Introduction

Acts of barbarism in the colonies, Aimé Césaire says in *Discourse on Colonialism*, do not stay in the colonies: violence, as Nazism has shown, boomerangs into the metropole.¹ What applies to action applies to theory and strategy. A great deal of commentary on neo-realist theory and strategy in Ukraine, presented in the media,² and a number of publications,³ critiques John Mearsheimer's rationalisation of Russian imperialism. The relationship between neo-realism and imperialism, however, does not originate in Europe; it boomerangs from other parts of the non-European world, as postcolonial scholarship widely shows.⁴ Despite outlining the imperial origins of neo-realist concepts, such as anarchy, the balance of power and sovereignty, postcolonial commentary does not engage with contemporary strategies employed by neo-realists. The focus of postcolonial scholars is on an alternative strategy, liberal hegemony, and its association with 'neo-imperial humanitarian interventionism',⁵ empty universalism and the Eurocentric 'liberal peace'.⁶ While 'liberal hegemony' as a strategy received its fair share of postcolonial critiques, the neo-realist alternative strategy of offshore balancing, perhaps due to its advocacy of a more restrained approach in US foreign policy, is left unnoticed by postcolonial scholars. This article offers a **postcolonial critique** of the **neo-realist strategy of offshore balancing**.

The offshore balancing strategy was popularised in recent years by, among others, Barry **Posen**, Christopher **Layne**, Stephen **Walt**, and John **Mearsheimer**.⁷ It is a strategy for the **United States** as an **insular power** with **weak neighbours** in its backyard and the **safety of two** expansive **oceans**.⁸ Proponents of the strategy 'capitalise on the inherent strategic advantages' that such insularity offers to keep the **United States** 'powerful and **secure** without pursuing a **costly** and **expansive grand strategy**'.⁹ The strategy stipulates that the most **cost-effective way** to ensure America's security is to **retain its hegemonic position** in the **Western hemisphere** and **prohibit other great powers** from attaining America's feat in **their regions**. Where potential hegemonies are likely to rise, such as China in East Asia, the strategy stipulates that America should establish **balancing coalitions** against them.¹⁰ Where no state has the capability to become a regional hegemon, such as in the Middle East or Europe, proponents of the strategy argue that the US military should **remain offshore**. US military engagement in the Middle East and the 'special relationship' with Israel, these scholars argue, **harm US interests**.¹¹ In Europe, the decision to expand NATO antagonised Russia and led to the crisis in Ukraine.¹² In both cases, the strategy operates on a **neo-realist ontology of 'billiard balls'**, namely the assumption that Israel and Russia are **states** like **any others**, driven by **survival under anarchy**. In the case of **Israel**, this translates to the strategy's commitment to Israel's **survival alongside a Palestinian state** and an **even-handed stance** on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the case of Russia, this translates to the strategy's call to respect its security concerns and offer concessions.

This article employs Edward **Said**'s contrapuntal reading to **challenge** the account offered by proponents of offshore balancing of the conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine. To employ Said's contrapuntal reading as a method means to account for the **'intertwined and interconnected histories'** of **imperialism** and **resistance**, the **dispossessors** and the **dispossessed**, in the transnational relations of empire.¹³ The state in this account, whether Israel or Russia, is **not a black-box**, but **embedded in relations of empire and resistance** that operate in a **transnational space**. Said's contrapuntal reading showcases how the discourse of empire operated **historically** – and **still operates** – within this space, to **essentialise cultures**, advance **stereotypes**, **dehumanise** populations and enable policies that shape the conflicts in

Palestine and Ukraine. A **contrapuntal** reading **challenges** this discourse and counters its depoliticisation of the relations of empire and resistance by **re-embedding them** in the political and economic realities. By narrating these relational histories and realities, Said's contrapuntal reading opens possibilities to engage with the **histories of the dispossessed**. These histories entail **longer time frames** of imperial violence than **reified** accounts whose reference point is the **state**. In Palestine and Ukraine, they reveal stories of imperial violence that did not begin in 2014, 2022 or 2023, but are **enduring** in the social, political, economic and cultural relations that constitute imperialism and anti-imperial resistance across a longer timescale. This reading, the article argues, presents two **challenges** to the strategy of offshore balancing. First, it shows that the strategy's treatment of Israel and Russia as **states like** any **others** **morally equalises** the **dispossessors** and the **dispossessed**, and leads to **unviable policy conclusions** – namely, the **two-state solution** (Palestine) and **concessions** (Ukraine). Second, it shows that the strategy's assessment of these conflicts is solely based on **capabilities** – that is, their impact on the balance of power – harms US national **security** and threatens the survival of the United States as a **liberal democracy**.

The article presents two contributions to advance scholarly debates on postcolonial International Relations (IR). First, it advances postcolonial critiques of neo-realist concepts and assumptions by pushing these critiques beyond the theory and towards their application via the strategy of offshore balancing in Palestine and Ukraine.¹⁴ The contribution here showcases the nexus between theory and strategy. Offshore balancing is a strategy whose stance seems, at first glance, to be neutral towards all states – which are, after all, treated 'alike' and 'normal'. This article shows that such a seemingly neutral stance, in fact, is not only politically and morally problematic in practice, but also fails to serve what justifies offshore balancing as a strategy: US national security. Second, since the 2007 Millennium forum on Said,¹⁵ his contrapuntal reading received greater attention in IR.¹⁶ The article builds on this scholarship by extending the empirical application of Said's contrapuntal reading to the current conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine. By reading Palestine and Ukraine alongside each other, the article extends Said's work beyond Palestine and speaks to scholarship that aims to provincialise IR 'from the East'.¹⁷ It provides a 'common vocabulary' that contributes to recent calls for a 'closer engagement between academics ... working on the "Global East" and the "Global South"'.¹⁸ This common vocabulary enables postcolonial scholars to set aside internal disagreements, such as on NATO's dualistic role,¹⁹ and direct areas of agreement towards a coherent postcolonial strategy guided by humanist ideals.

The article proceeds in three steps. First, it outlines the strategy of offshore balancing and its account of the conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine. Second, it draws on Said's contrapuntal reading to offer an account that challenges the strategy's assumptions and conclusions about these conflicts. Third, it highlights the implications of this reading for the strategy's failure to meet its ultimate objective to safeguard US national security. Offshore Balancing in Palestine and Ukraine: A Restrained Strategy in the US National Interest

The offshore balancing strategy takes advantage of America's insular position to maintain its security at a minimum cost. America's insular position, proponents of the strategy argue, means that it is secure in the Western hemisphere. Beyond the Western hemisphere, America's security depends on balancing against potential regional hegemony. Where no regional hegemony is in sight, such as in the Middle East or Europe, the strategy stipulates that the United States should show 'restraint'. In the Middle East, this means military disengagement and ending the 'special relationship' with Israel. The strategy instead calls for an even-handed approach to a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In Europe, it means that NATO expansion was a mistake. The strategy calls for a recognition of Russia's security interests and concessions.

Offshore balancing emerges in neo-realist literature as an alternative restrained strategy in US foreign policy to the hubristic strategy of liberal hegemony. Walt and Mearsheimer, along with others,²⁰ critique the strategy of liberal hegemony for its hubristic call for expansive goals, such as the spread of democracy, in the attempt to make the world in America's image. This strategy is flawed, says Mearsheimer, because it leads to 'a highly interventionist foreign policy that involves fighting wars and doing significant social engineering in countries throughout the world' that end up in failure.²¹ Examples of such failure include NATO expansion into Central and Eastern Europe, which explains 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault'.²² Furthermore, they include attempts at regime change across the Middle East.²³ To Walt, Mearsheimer and contemporary neo-realists such as Layne and Posen, liberal hegemony is the root cause of conflict across the world: from the 'forever wars' in the Middle East to the impact of these wars on the radicalisation of Al-Qaeda, the unnecessary antagonism with Iran and the blank cheque to allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia to act recklessly in Lebanon and Yemen.²⁴ These scholars thus suggest a more restrained alternative: offshore balancing.

The offshore balancing strategy, according to Layne, rejects the US 'preponderance' in a post-Cold War era where few problems in the world engage US vital interests.²⁵ Offshore balancing, Layne argues, 'eschews the ideological crusading on behalf of democracy' and is thus 'based on prudence and self-restraint in the conduct of US strategy'.²⁶ 'Instead of policing the world' this strategy proposes that 'the United States would encourage other countries to take the lead in checking rising powers, intervening itself only when necessary'.²⁷ Offshore balancing, Rosato and Schuessler write, implies that the US should 'balance against other great powers and to take a relaxed attitude toward minor powers'.²⁸ The strategy, therefore, should not be confused for isolationism, since it calls for America to maintain the balance of power and restore it when needed.²⁹ Offshore balancing is fundamentally a 'balance of power strategy', Layne says.³⁰ Contrary to liberal hegemony, the strategy implies that 'military power would remain central to U.S. national security, but its use would be as a last resort rather than a first impulse'.³¹ In practice, this means that 'if there is no potential hegemon in sight' then 'there is little reason to deploy US ground or air forces'.³² 'By pursuing a strategy of offshore balancing' Walt and Mearsheimer thus argue, 'Washington would forgo ambitious efforts to remake other societies and concentrate on what really matters: preserving U.S. dominance in the Western hemisphere and countering potential hegemony in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf'.³³ In the Persian Gulf, the key US interest to proponents of the strategy is unhindered access to oil.³⁴ To advance this interest, no power in the region should gain hegemony and monopolise this access. As the balance between the Sunni Gulf regimes (allied with Israel) on one side and Iran on the other is maintained, proponents of the strategy argue that this interest can be pursued from offshore. The United States should thus militarily disengage from the Middle East and end the 'special relationship' with Israel. 'What does offshore balancing say about US relations with Israel?' Mearsheimer and Walt ask, and they answer: 'It is time for the United States to treat Israel not as a special case but as a normal state'.³⁵ The proposal to treat Israel as a 'normal state' means 'Washington should be prepared to intervene if Israel's survival were ever threatened'.³⁶ Meanwhile, the United States should be prepared to distance itself from Israel's policies that do not align with American values and interests.³⁷ Posen and Layne agree. The end of the special relationship, to Posen, means an end to the US 'subsidy' of Israeli expansion of settlements.³⁸ While 'the US has a moral commitment to Israel's existence that it must honour', Layne writes, 'as an offshore balancer, the US would also seek to reduce the widespread anti-Americanism in the Islamic world by taking an even-handed stance on relations between Israel and Palestine'.³⁹ As a 'normal state', Israel should receive support only in proportion with its survival needs. 'The United States can and I believe should' Posen writes, 'sell Israel the weapons it needs to deter attacks from enemy states'.⁴⁰ The United States should not, however, subsidise 'policies that are not in its interests'.⁴¹ Proponents of offshore balancing such as Walt, Mearsheimer, Posen, and Layne thus call for an even-handed approach to a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁴²

In Europe, proponents of offshore balancing argue that no power since the end of the Cold War has the ability to become a regional hegemon.⁴³ 'Germany and Russia are going to get relatively weaker over time' Walt reasons, 'because their populations are gradually declining and becoming considerably older, and no other potential hegemon is in sight'.⁴⁴ 'Russia', says Posen, 'certainly can make no bid to hegemony'.⁴⁵ Following the end of the Cold War, the United States should have thus 'steadily reduced its military presence, cultivated amicable relations with Russia, and turned European security over to the Europeans'.⁴⁶ NATO expansion was a mistake that antagonised Russia and neglected its security interests, leading to the crisis in Ukraine. 'Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise' writes Mearsheimer, 'after all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests'.⁴⁷ 'Imagine how the world might look like today had the United States embraced offshore balancing when the Cold War ended' asks Walt, 'for starters, there would have been no NATO expansion'.⁴⁸ In turn, Walt adds, this 'would have avoided triggering Russian security fears, thereby removing its incentive to maintain "frozen conflicts" in Georgia, seize Crimea, and destabilise Ukraine'.⁴⁹ 'Contrary to the conventional wisdom in the West', Mearsheimer writes in his 2022 Foreign Affairs article (following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine), Moscow did not invade Ukraine to conquer it and make it part of a Greater Russia. It was principally concerned with preventing Ukraine from becoming a Western bulwark on the Russian border. Putin and his advisers were especially concerned about Ukraine eventually joining NATO.⁵⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt thus call for a Ukrainian 'concession' to 'Russia's legitimate concerns'.⁵¹ Others agree with Mearsheimer and Walt that Russia is driven by security and was antagonised by NATO expansion. In line with Walt and Mearsheimer, these scholars, including Rosato, Posen, Layne, Lieven, and others, argue that 'the Russian invasion was a rational act' and that there is room for negotiations only if 'each side would make painful concessions'.⁵²

In sum, offshore balancing, according to its **proponents**, offers a sensible substitute for the **hubristic** strategy of **liberal hegemony**. A substitute that takes advantage of America's insular position and protects its security at **minimum cost**. The strategy operates on the assumption that Israel and Russia are states like any others whose functions are to survive under anarchy. As neither state has the capability to become a regional hegemon, the strategy recommends military disengagement. This means ending the 'special relationship' with Israel and an even-handed approach to a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the case of Russia, it means concessions to address its security concerns. Is the assumption that Israel and Russia are states like any others – that is, driven by survival – congruent with the **reality** and **history** of these **states and conflicts**? The article turns to Said's contrapuntal reading to offer an alternative account of these conflicts that challenges the strategy's assumptions and conclusions.

Contrapuntal Reading as a Method

This section outlines Said's contrapuntal reading as a method in IR, before applying it to critique offshore balancing in Palestine and Ukraine. 'Adopting contrapuntal reading as a **method**', Pinar **Bilgin** writes, 'is one way in which "intertwined" and "overlapping histories" of the **coloniser** and the **colonised** could be **grasped**'.⁵³ To grasp the 'intertwined and overlapping histories' of the coloniser and the colonised, the

analysis should demonstrate an ‘awareness both of the **metropolitan history** that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts’.⁵⁴ In other words, it should situate historical and current events in the **relations of empire and resistance** that operate **transnationally**. In this reading, the state, whether Israel or Russia, is **not** a **black-boxed unit** whose **internal politics** is **separate** from its **IR**, but a **‘contrapuntal ensemble’** **embedded** in relations of empire and resistance, internally and externally, historically and in the present.⁵⁵

In highlighting the transnational relations of empire and resistance, Said’s contrapuntal reading challenges the discourse of empire that, in a myriad of ways, defines the **‘other’** in terms of a **negation**, a lack.⁵⁶ This discourse operates on the **orientalist distinction**, which Said critiques in *Orientalism*, between the **‘orient’** and the **‘occident’**.⁵⁷ In this distinction, Said writes, ‘the oriental is **irrational**, **depraved** (fallen), **childlike** . . . the **European** is **rational**, virtuous, mature, **“normal”**’.⁵⁸ The discourse of empire **cages** the **orientalised other** into an **essentialised entity** whose properties, of ‘backwardness’, ‘irrationality’, inability to self-govern, are **internally ordained**. Said’s contrapuntal reading challenges this cultural and racial essentialism and its depoliticisation of the relations of empire and resistance – its reduction of these relations to cultural and racial stereotypes – by re-embedding them in the **political** and **economic realities**. If orientalism deprives the orient from the right to **narrate itself**,⁵⁹ a **contrapuntal** reading, by narrating these relational histories and realities, as Geeta **Chowdhry** argues, ‘engender(s) the articulation of **exiled voices into IR**’.⁶⁰ It opens possibilities to engage with what Meera Sabaratnam refers to as **‘histories from below’**.⁶¹ These histories entail longer time frames of imperial violence than reified accounts whose reference point, start and end dates, is the black-boxed state.

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