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A Strategy of Conservation: American Power and the International System

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Overview

The overarching strategic challenge facing the United States is revitalizing the international system so that the nation might conserve its strength and power even as the global environment shifts. The United States, which has been the primary beneficiary of a stable international system and remains its preeminent power, must lead and shape a process of adapting the international system to provide greater stability and security in the 21st century.

The interstate system of international rules and institutions related to politics, economics, and security is under stress as many sub-state and transnational actors and processes undermine the wellbeing and security of states and persons. The system has failed to adapt to these challenges, raising questions about the continued relevance and legitimacy of its rules and institutions. This erosion of state and interstate capacity is a broad phenomenon that directly and indirectly undermines U.S. security and the American way of life.

The effective functioning of the interstate system was once a central goal of U.S. grand strategy, but since World War II, it has gradually devolved into an assumption rather than an end in itself. The effects of globalization and the consequences of a weakened international system could seriously erode U.S. security, but policy makers and the public do not fully appreciate this fact. Moreover, some U.S. policies designed to address discrete challenges have exacerbated the underlying structural problems of the system itself.

Creating an environment in which American citizens can continue to thrive and prosper demands a strategy of conservation with an internal paradox: in order to preserve stability, the rules and processes of the international system must adapt to new powers and challenges. U.S. national security strategy should elevate the importance of two major objectives: first, shoring up the system's extant component parts – states – to enhance basic governance (especially security) within their borders, and second, revitalizing and adapting collective approaches – rules, institutions, and processes – to respond more effectively to transnational security and economic threats. Ironically, this strategy requires enlisting the cooperation of non-state actors and developing new fora and tools for dealing with challenges such as global warming and terrorism.

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U.S. attention to these systemic ends cannot be exclusive of all other interests because of the inevitable tensions and tradeoffs inherent in international politics. Yet, even though the United States faces additional real and immediate security challenges, these challenges are properly understood and best addressed in the context of reforming an increasingly sclerotic interstate system.

The conservation strategy's very ambition demands alternative means to secure its objectives. The sources of state and systemic weakness are diffuse and deeply rooted, requiring sustained and multifaceted repairs. Solutions cannot reside wholly within the United States, despite its continued economic and military power. By definition, modernization and innovation of international governance require a high degree of consensus and active support from other states. Accordingly, the strategy's methods run counter to the conventional thinking reflected in contemporary U.S. national security debate and practice.

This paper focuses on two new complementary components of U.S. grand strategy: strategic flexibility and an indirect method. Strategic flexibility encompasses a host of policies designed to allow the United States to maintain its power and to shape the emerging security environment. The policies that enable strategic flexibility reflect a long-overdue update of the political, economic, and security assumptions that once buttressed U.S. foreign policy. The world is no longer divided into two ideological camps frozen by the threat of mutual assured destruction. Yet, American assumptions about the world and how to protect U.S. interests have barely changed since the height of the Cold War. America's unipolar moment is already en route to being eclipsed by an increasingly diverse cast of global characters with the capacity to degrade or enhance U.S. security. The United States retains predominance in many arenas, but longer-term demographic and economic trends in key states and the diffusion of power from states to other entities suggest an emerging, if still largely invisible, shift of global power. The United States must revisit deeply engrained habits in order to obtain greater freedom of action to protect its interests.

If strategic flexibility is required to adapt to changing global constellations of power, the indirect approach reflects realism about the relationship of U.S. power to the demands of a conservation strategy that preserves the power of states and the international system. The indirect approach means working predominantly through, with, and by other actors to achieve U.S. strategic goals. This tactic is essential to share the burden and achieve U.S. ends. Even if the United States knew precisely how to do so, it lacks the resources to strengthen all states and would hardly be a welcome interlocutor in all cases. Furthermore, the United States alone cannot provide sufficient legitimacy and strength to a revised social compact among states and possibly other global actors. That legitimacy and strength must come from the collective, with consent and support from other players. Thus, a strategy of conservation directly confronts U.S. foreign policy traditions and its strong national preference for self-reliance.

The strategy outlined here upends conventional wisdom and national preferences in other respects as well. A conservation strategy is counter to conventional wisdom in asking

Americans to think differently about the uses and limits of national power. First, conservation requires a sophisticated understanding of U.S. interests: a longer-term, holistic appreciation of what makes the United States strong. It demands considering the second- and third-order effects of U.S. foreign policy. It rejects zero-sum solution sets and accepts the need to tactically give as well as get in pursuit of U.S. strategic goals.

The conservation strategy demands far-sighted investment, rejecting a “get rich quick,” speculative approach to security in which short-term gains prove more costly over the long haul. This approach requires patience, as the returns may not be visible within a single budget cycle or presidential term. In essence, the strategy transitions the United States from a security speculator to a global steward and requires Americans to adjust their psychology accordingly. As such, a conservation strategy must surmount obstacles fundamentally rooted in U.S. political culture. Overcoming these tendencies is a tall order, but with inspired leadership, such as that of the post-World War II period, Americans can meet the challenge.

Challenges to U.S. Interests

The core sources of American power remain the freedoms, innovation, and optimism of its citizens. These characteristics have enabled Americans to develop technological, economic, and military strength and to meet pressing internal challenges. They have sustained the United States’ unity and power since its founding and are critical for its future.

In the country’s early years, Americans devoted their energies inward. Sheltered by oceans, settlers advanced across the continent, developing vast internal resources, commerce, and political relations. Over time, the nation expanded its reach overseas, seeking resources and building commercial and political relationships. Following World War II, the United States consciously embedded itself within, reshaped, and assumed leadership of the entire international system. U.S. strategy sought to promote an environment of global economic growth and stability within which Americans could continue to prosper and maintain their way of life.

Not only was the United States the chief architect of the modern nation-state system, it was a primary beneficiary. Through enlightened self-interest, the United States created international rules and processes that it could dominate in concert with allies and through which it could prosper even as others, including enemies, could also choose to participate and benefit. That international system included international economic institutions that facilitated economic growth, rules to regularize international and national behaviors, and collective security arrangements to deter and manage conflict. It also developed a progressive normative dimension regarding the treatment of persons and behavior of states towards citizens, creating norms such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the concept of a state’s responsibility

to protect its citizens. The system generally worked for others even as it worked particularly well for the United States.

This post-war system offered benefits to many who participated, even if some core tenets of that system sometimes failed to function as advertised. Indeed, the West used the threat of isolation from this international system, particularly from its economic premises and dimensions, as a key source of power during the Cold War. Integration was a significant carrot, and eventually it was perceived as politically and economically valuable even by states that once stood largely outside that system, such as China and the Soviet Union.

The weakening interstate system is neither the sole nor the most acute challenge facing the United States today. A contemporary Pentagon briefing would highlight several specific threats: global terrorist networks; large-scale insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan; unstable new or aspiring nuclear powers both hostile (Iran, North Korea) and friendly (Pakistan); China's rapid military and economic expansion; and vulnerable nuclear materials, among others. Security officials frequently highlight other various underlying trends of concern as well: a demographic youth bulge in poor, often Muslim, countries; diminishing energy and other natural resources; the diffusion of information and technology; environmental degradation; urbanization; and other phenomena that may be sources of instability. The erosion of state and interstate capacity and legitimacy lies at the intersection of traditional national security threats and these global trends of concern. Yet, this erosion is also virtually invisible; it is a subterranean process that links and exacerbates the more easily recognized and immediate threats.

The major challenges to U.S. interests can be separated into several often-overlapping categories. The striking link among the majority of the threat categories – dissolving states, non-state spoilers, fragile nuclear states, and eroding norms of global behavior – is the theme of state weakness rather than state strength. This theme suggests the need to focus on strengthening states directly and on adapting the global system to manage non-state actors and transnational challenges without displacing the central role of states.

Yet, problems of state weakness coexist with the very different challenge of shifts in global power and rising states. A handful of nations have the potential ability to rival or surpass the strengths of the United States. Although still largely benign, these new loci of global power are unmistakable. The nascent strength of emerging powers could become directly troublesome, and their strength will indisputably complicate U.S. efforts to shape the world. A central question, akin to those following World War II, is whether the United States can align its vision of the global system with the expectations and interests of other key players finding common cause in the adaptation of global politics. Weakening states, non-state spoilers, new and fragile nuclear states, new pressures on rules and norms, and rising state powers constitute the five main threats to global order.

Weakening States

The process of globalization both creates and destroys. The strength of transnational economic actors such as corporations, the instantaneous movement of capital, the fungibility of labor markets, and the spread of technology contribute to greater efficiencies but also limit the control of states and international regimes over the economy. Especially for smaller or weaker states, reduced power to control outcomes creates a perception of vulnerability to external forces. More fundamentally, the resources upon which globalization is premised, in particular available energy and other natural resources, are not sustainable. A meaningful international safety net, analogous to that provided within Western states, to ensure minimal standards of living regardless of a state's status in the global economy is notably absent.

Reduced state power extends beyond the economy to a variety of security challenges such as disease, environmental degradation, and armed conflict. These are also part of what most commentators mean by globalization. Throughout much of the world, citizens experience a human security deficit that neither states nor international or regional institutions appear capable of addressing.

Many states are losing their monopoly on violence and failing to meet their social contract, leaving individuals unable to satisfy basic human needs. Some states cannot control the borders that define their sovereign territory or plan with confidence for the future. In other countries, stagnant economies and weak or repressive political structures combine with demographics to create a youth bulge that can take malignant form internally or externally. Some governments function in capitals yet have effectively ceded entire regions to criminal sub-state actors beyond the reach of the state security apparatus. Whether a state has failed, partially failed, or is failing, such power vacuums can give rise to regional crises or provide safe haven or foot soldiers for criminal and terrorist networks. They pose a chronic threat that can occasionally become acute.

Non-State Spoilers

Related to the problem of weak states is the reach and potential impact of malignant non-state actors that essentially function as insurgents against the interstate system or its component parts. The insurgents about whom the United States is most concerned are global extremists engaged in terrorism against Western nations, but other non-state actors also create instability and danger in the United States and abroad.

Globalization has helped what were once marginalized or isolated actors – criminal networks, religious zealots, and national malcontents – to become major economic, security, and political challenges for states and their larger system of rules and processes. Some of these actors aim to weaken states in order to aggregate their own power in a governance vacuum, whereas others seek to remake states or suprastate entities in their own fantastic image. Technology for communication and destruction has fueled their

recruitment and networking, enabling these organizations to more easily graft onto local grievances and then re-brand and franchise themselves.

Some actors, such as al Qaeda, have the potential to inflict catastrophic damage to states with system-wide effects and to completely escape the deterrence paradigm that has provided an important element of global stability. Current security concepts and concomitant pressures for preemption are insufficient, creating turbulence without fundamentally changing the equation. The problem, particularly with al Qaeda, is sufficiently grave and acute that it cannot be treated as derivative of root causes and must be addressed directly. The challenge for the United States is how to respond to this acute problem without undermining broader stability or weakening itself internally.

New and Fragile Nuclear States

The end of the Cold War offered an opportunity to reduce the incentives for acquiring nuclear weapons. Instead, a new class of weak and insecure states that are either seeking or expanding their nascent nuclear capability has emerged. These states do so in order to overcome a perceived security deficit vis-à-vis their neighbors and/or to guarantee the survival of a specific regime. Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan represent variations of this potentially destabilizing trend, but others are waiting in the wings.

These states may prove troublesome for the United States not only when they are antagonistic toward it and its allies. Deterrence will continue to function as a stabilizing external check on volatile nuclear states. These states' internal weakness, however, poses a new problem because of the uncertainties associated with the state implosion of a nuclear power. Nuclear capabilities provide little domestic strength or cohesion (except insofar as they reinforce national perceptions of power) and cannot avert internal collapse. Their frailty is thus a grave challenge because of the risk of nuclear weapons' use or transfer should control of the weapons slip away from the regime. The failure of a nuclear state poses threats that include but far surpass those of non-nuclear failed states, potentially threatening a broader constellation of states and peoples in immediate and devastating form.

Fragile nuclear states therefore pose new and difficult questions for the United States and international politics. What should be the international response to signs of dissolution within fragile nuclear powers? Is there an international "responsibility to protect" others in such circumstances? Who decides a response is necessary and what form does that response take?

Related is the issue of preventing new nuclear states, whether they are fragile or not. In the absence of revitalized international efforts to halt nuclear proliferation and to address security deficits more broadly, the number of nuclear states may grow; with them will come greater insecurity for other states and greater risks of spread to non-state actors.

Preventing the expansion of nuclear capabilities and the emergence of new nuclear states is important, but not at any cost.

Pressures on Rules and Norms

Recent trends are challenging and pushing longstanding rules and norms of international politics in new and often destabilizing directions. From one direction, transparency and public pressures have pushed normative judgments inside borders as nations pronounce sovereignty to be conditional upon respect for key human rights. Although this is an important development, it changes the fundamental Westphalian bargain of compliance with international rules in exchange for an essentially free hand internally.

An equally profound set of challenges emerges from states and non-state actors that seek to counter, exploit, or leapfrog the present interstate power structure. Whether these subversives seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or purposefully target civilians, they essentially reject widely accepted rules such as nonproliferation regimes and the laws of armed conflict that regulate international relations. Leading powers, principally the United States, have in turn responded by improvising within or, depending upon the perspective, violating those same rules in the name of countering the asymmetric or illegal actions of the subversives. Targeted killing, torture, and preemptive use of force are examples of such responses.

As the leading powers refuse to be handicapped by rules that the subversives reject, the international system enters a combustible period of normative flux. Rules, and to some degree the conceptual boundaries that accompanied them (such as what defines a state of war, a concept blurred by the indefinite nature of the war on terror), have become even more difficult to understand, apply, and uphold in practice. The modern system of states risks losing its normative syntax. Although the United States itself has done much to confirm cynicism about the role of law and ethics in international politics, the continuing dissipation of international rules and norms is contrary to the interests of the leading state power. The challenge is to adapt rules and norms to changing circumstances while retaining their positive impact and overall legitimacy for states that must uphold them.

Rising State Powers

U.S. planners are expert at crafting and justifying strategy against a specific state adversary. They face constant temptations to imagine China, in particular, in the major peer competitor role that the USSR once played. Although current measures of economic or military strength do not support such worries, the power of several key states is growing quickly, and current trends projected forward will yield a significantly more multipolar world than that of today. The United States' unipolar position is not likely to remain a permanent feature of global politics.

Rising regional powers can become key pillars that bring international stability or serious threats to U.S. interests. States such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China have even acquired their own acronym, BRIC, in briefings on the future security environment. China is of particular interest for reasons related to demographics, geography, economic potential, and interests that might clash most directly with those of the United States.

As these states increase their powers, they confront strictures of an outdated international system. Emerging regional powers such as Brazil and India present a new challenge to the UN Security Council and functional fora such as the Group of Eight (G8) that are still dominated by colonial powers of the nineteenth century. Can legacy powers accept the rise of these emerging powers and adapt governance structures to meet their needs? Or will these rising states undermine global systems, preferring regional hegemony devoid of more broadly defined rules of behavior?

If their ambition and interests are insufficiently recognized by the states with inherited seats of power, the upstarts will undoubtedly seek to displace or work around anachronistic international institutions. Channeling the energies of these powers against common threats and toward common benefits is a central challenge for the United States. This process is certain to entail compromises on short-term U.S. policy goals and normative preferences – and on the purposes and rules regarding the international governance architecture.

Many states and peoples today, including Americans, experience the failure of international rules and interactions to adapt to or ameliorate the negative consequences of the very forces of globalism that they have unleashed. This dissatisfaction is reflected in domestic debates about free trade, genocide, climate change, nuclear proliferation, pandemic diseases, military preemption, and other issues. Yet these are seen as distinct and separable aspects of international security, with stovepiped debates occurring within different political constituencies and government agencies. These issues are linked to or exacerbated by the systemic failures of the international system, which also require action.

The United States has been reluctant to understand this linkage between international systemic weakness and U.S. security. The failure to grasp this connection has been a central flaw of U.S. national security strategy in the post-Cold War era, and it is precisely this failing that a conservation strategy will address.

Components of a Conservation Strategy

The fundamental goal of any U.S. national security strategy is to allow the United States and its citizens to continue to thrive and prosper. In order to preserve American power in the 21st century, the United States should aim to conserve and reform states and the international system. There are three component objectives within this strategy, based on a synthesis of the preceding threats and their bearing on U.S. security.

First, the United States must stigmatize, deter, and prevent the expansion of potentially catastrophic and system-challenging behaviors and actors while creating new rules and tools that address new threats. Second, it must enhance each individual state's (or, where necessary, other entities') accountability and capability for ensuring security within its area of responsibility, shrinking the amount of territory that lacks cognizable authorities. Third, it should revise bilateral and international expectations and institutions to channel emerging powers toward stable, system-reinforcing behaviors.

In the short term, these component objectives should align with the interests of a majority of states and peoples in a stable international environment and effective governance, a compatibility that is critical for the application of a conservation strategy. There will be tensions and tradeoffs, however, which deserve acknowledgment. Stability and state strength are not normative conditions per se, and may at least in the short term conflict with the goals of promoting human rights and democratic governance. Psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs indicates that physical security is paramount at the individual level; at the international level, stability can facilitate the advancement of other normative goals. Peace then becomes the paramount, albeit not exclusive, concern of this strategy. The strategy rejects normative crusading with destabilizing consequences in favor of stability that allows the incremental advancement of other normative goods. In the longer term, this approach is designed to protect U.S. interests even as global power continues to shift among and perhaps gradually beyond states. The art of applying a conservation strategy will lie in the effective calibration of continuity and change.

The component approaches and the specific policies and capabilities needed to fulfill a strategy of conservation derive from its ambition. The objective of stabilizing the interstate system and simultaneously transforming it for the 21st century by definition cannot be achieved by a single state or by force of arms. Several implications follow for the United States. It should demonstrate its benign intent as global leader; stress its broad interest in stability; and illustrate the alignment of its interests with other states, particularly great and rising powers.

These measures are key to sustaining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the strategy because the United States must rely heavily on other states, international institutions and rules, and non-state actors to achieve shared goals. A sustainable and effective strategy of this ambition must be executed indirectly in many aspects. The United States will require greater political and strategic flexibility, because the strategy demands the pursuit of different paths and partners. Diplomacy and paradigm-changing ideas are vital, as overreliance upon U.S. military power or economic means may be counterproductive and will inevitably be insufficient.

These approaches are not entirely new. A conservation strategy would still employ alliances, nuclear deterrence, and security assistance and seek to maintain conventional military superiority, a technological edge, and other staples of U.S. national security policy. The key differences are attaining greater flexibility to explore new policies and partnerships and working by, with, and through other partners to achieve shared goals.

In terms of carrying out the strategy, the first order of business is restoring U.S. legitimacy as a global leader to enhance its ability to achieve all other ends. Although this will be an ongoing proposition, many steps with significant impact can be taken immediately. Some of the most important measures entail simply halting recent controversial and counterproductive practices. As it restores its authority and repositions itself internationally, the United States will be more effective in dealing with individual challenges and better positioned to lead a more ambitious and longer-term agenda of strengthening and/or re-conceiving institutions and solutions to global problems.

The following description divides implementation of a conservation strategy into two main strategies: strategic flexibility and the indirect approach.

Strategic Flexibility

Strategic flexibility includes two main missions: ending destabilizing practices and undertaking new policy initiatives to strengthen global leadership.

America should cease practices and policies that fail to stabilize the international arena, either because they upend interstate relations or they galvanize international opposition to the United States. It must place the struggle against violent extremism in the proper context, downplaying its centrality to U.S. interests; America cannot let terrorism become the nation's sole preoccupation. Phrases such as the "global war on terror," "long war," "persistent conflict" and other negative, militarized paradigms to describe the United States' global purpose are counterproductive. The country instead must communicate a positive agenda and outcome.

Until the United States has significantly disengaged from Iraq, it will lack essential strategic flexibility to protect other long-term interests. In order to revitalize the process of Iraqi reconciliation, the United States should begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq. It must also clarify that it will not maintain permanent bases in Iraq. Intensified and broadened regional diplomacy can support and monitor Iraqi governance, and increased humanitarian assistance can help manage the consequences of withdrawal. Redeploying troops to other areas of the world is essential for restoring the U.S. armed forces' strength, shoring up military efforts in Afghanistan and against al Qaeda, repairing the U.S. economy, and restoring the country's international standing. In a related vein, Washington must reverse the U.S. policy of unilateral preemption, instead stressing prevention and collective action while reiterating the United States' enduring right to self-defense.

U.S. policy and practice must be reversed by committing to uphold international law governing the use of force during armed conflict, including a flat and unequivocal rejection of torture, closure of the detention facility at Guantanamo, and a revision of military tribunals to include meaningful protections for the accused.

The United States should also abandon the policy of imposing democracy by force, which has proven ineffective and destabilizing. It should instead focus on modeling positive democratic practices and promoting human security, both of which result from effective governance, regardless of regime typology. Diplomacy and bilateral levers can carefully and consistently support incremental political reform in nations with which the United States maintains close relations.

The United States should halt its development of new nuclear weapons and apply realistic criteria to research on strategic ballistic missile defense. In order to strengthen global nonproliferation efforts, America should unilaterally reduce its nuclear arsenals, recommit to working toward the goal of a nuclear-free world, and reinforce arms control regimes and incentive structures. It should also work with other countries to increase efforts to secure nuclear material globally.

As a final step in ending destabilizing practices, Washington should initiate a review of all bilateral and international agreements signed or rejected since the 9/11 attacks, including security cooperation agreements related to terrorism as well as global initiatives such as the Kyoto Protocol and the ICC. It should also indicate a willingness to participate fully in shaping future international conventions to address global challenges.

The second component of strategic flexibility aims to create greater room for political maneuver and credibility for global leadership through new policy initiatives that reshape relations with key states, rebuild alliances, and create new partnerships with rising powers – with the aim of marginalizing new or aspiring nuclear states and hostile non-state actors that challenge the stability of the international system. These steps should ameliorate hostility toward the United States and increase U.S. leverage to launch new and far-reaching initiatives. In some cases these policies are an exponential expansion of current efforts. In other cases, they represent significant departures from current U.S. policy.

In line with this mission, the government should require greater U.S. energy conservation through fuel efficiency standards and energy taxes and significantly increase funding for alternative energy development. This must be a presidential challenge, akin to putting a man on the moon, and will entail a populist educational effort, such as the national anti-smoking campaign. Such progress will signal a change in American attitudes; enable the United States to lead collective approaches to controlling climate change; and move the nation closer toward greater energy independence, which would fundamentally reshape strategic perceptions and options. This is essentially a call for national sacrifice and service, requiring large dislocations in the short term for a potentially game-changing strategic payoff.

The United States must also recast the struggle against terrorism as a predominantly criminal effort, including creating specialized terrorism courts to facilitate pursuit and prosecution of terrorist actors pursuant with transparency and accountability. Military efforts should combine selective and precise U.S. kinetic actions with an overall indirect approach of working by, with and through other states and actors. Non-military efforts

must be emphasized and systematically coordinated with the direct or indirect use of force.

Washington should reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process with high-level and consistent U.S. engagement. Innovative incentives are required to encourage the parties to successfully conclude negotiations that will allow them to live side by side in peace and security.

Finally, the United States can strengthen national resilience by increasing awareness of and strengthening responses to national crises such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks. Reframing the discussion from one of threat levels to response procedures stresses individual and community responsibility. A form of national service could include training in the infrastructure and local leadership of crisis response. Presidential leadership must prepare Americans without paralyzing them so that attacks and disruptions do not erode national will.

Indirect Approach

A key objective of the indirect approach is to leverage U.S. power by inducing other actors and institutions to more effectively support shared goals and to expand non-military tools and programs to achieve U.S. objectives rather than continuing to rely on military preeminence. From a U.S. perspective, these actions are designed to make virtue of necessity in the near term, when U.S. legitimacy and resources are depleted, and to enable a sustainable, devolved approach to security over the longer term as global power relationships continue to change. The four key facets of this indirect approach are diplomacy, military power, economic and other civilian assistance, and global governance.

Diplomacy

To reinforce international stability, Washington should reestablish the terms of its partnerships with traditional allies based on a division of labor. With Israel, the core issue is advancing the reality and third-party understanding of a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question. With European/North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, the central idea, contrary to the current U.S. focus, is not to expand their national military capabilities and commitments but instead to increase their concrete contributions to many non-military initiatives. Their roles could include international intelligence and police work, trade concessions, foreign assistance, political accommodation of other nations, and ultimately accepting a leadership role in international institutions that more accurately reflects the character of their power. While not abandoning military partnerships with traditional allies, the United States should accept the differences in political orientation and prioritization of issues and seek to develop complementary approaches to promoting international security.

The United States should reengage China, India, Russia, and other regional powers, recognizing their disproportionate interest in the character and stability of their geopolitical neighborhoods. Particularly in the near term, when the United States has limited capability to shape those affairs at the same time that it has growing concerns about new nuclear states and terrorist actors, U.S. policy should seek common cause with large and rising powers. Looking longer term, the United States should support greater roles and influence for these powers in the United Nations (UN) and new interstate or global organizations. The central idea is to vest rising powers in transparent and regularized processes of the international system.

The membership and focus of the G8 should be expanded, with criteria for China and other states to join so that they can engage other leading powers in this forum. The institution should deepen and expand the focus of its initiatives, including enhancing the stability of the banking system by initiating international banking reforms through Basel III deliberations, strengthening information technology security, and other common goals.

The United States should discreetly help to create space for moderate Muslim states to successfully govern and have influence beyond their borders. U.S. support often cannot take highly visible forms, as the knowledge of its involvement could be counterproductive. Washington must therefore provide greater incentives for Muslim governments and U.S. allies to take actions they may perceive as contrary to their interests. Muslim states, for example, should be encouraged to incrementally open political space to opponents of ruling regimes. The European Union (EU) should be encouraged to accept Turkey as a full member.

Meanwhile, Americans can counter the “clash of civilizations” narrative at home by respecting and facilitating the success of local Muslim populations and by encouraging European nations to do the same. Encouraging facilitated dialogue across religions and among religious and state leaders at the highest level could also be helpful.

Finally, the United States should pursue potentially paradigm-changing initiatives in cooperation with other key states or international organizations. Candidates include alternative energy, climate change, and international economic development. U.S. contributions should be seen not as exclusively advantageous to Americans but also as benefiting a wider community.

Use of Military Power

Perhaps counterintuitively, U.S. military power is a key component of peacefully co-opting other actors into shared norms and objectives and moving away from a reliance on military preeminence.

The modernization of U.S. intelligence institutions and methods can help improve attempts to preempt attacks against the United States and its allies by aspiring nuclear states, unstable nuclear states, and non-state actors. The costs of acting late have become potentially catastrophic; acting early may avert crises altogether. The premium value of intelligence now lies in detecting and interrupting the acquisition of WMD or planned attacks against the United States.

Current reforms have been incremental and insufficient, but the United States cannot afford another bureaucratic reorganization. Instead it must focus on recruiting, rewarding, and retaining talent, particularly given the impending wave of retirements and lack of adequately experienced midlevel personnel. Human intelligence remains an essential investment for the foreseeable future. Timely, high-quality intelligence and analysis is no substitute for wise decision-making, but the latter is unlikely to occur without the former.

The United States should also take the lead in international disaster assistance efforts whenever possible. The unique capabilities of the U.S. military to respond quickly and efficiently in crises offer a powerful means of demonstrating American concern and leadership and of reshaping views of U.S. military forces, as was seen in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Washington must renew its support for UN peacekeeping in concrete, visible ways, not simply in full and prompt payment of UN assessments. Such support could include increasing training and materiel support – such as lift and equipment leasing – for peacekeeping forces and providing expertise to UN operations, similar to U.S. efforts to create a professional military structure for NATO. The United States should offer similar support for regional peacekeeping initiatives.

Counterterrorism missions must be segregated as much as possible from preventive, presence, relief, and stability operations. This is not just an issue of clarity within the chain of command; it is also an issue of U.S. credibility and success. Bleeding competing missions together undermines both in the longer term. This blurring of missions has complicated U.S. efforts in Afghanistan in particular and is likely to become a problem in other areas as well unless U.S. forces more successfully segregate humanitarian and political activities from counterterrorism efforts.

The United States and NATO must focus their military efforts on Afghanistan and the Pakistan border. This goal should be the sole exception to a general decrease in high-profile U.S. military activities in the short term, and it should be nested within a broader integrated initiative to stabilize Afghanistan and contain al Qaeda. As forces are withdrawn from Iraq, the United States should gradually expand the U.S. troop presence in contested areas. Non-U.S. forces should be focused in more stable sectors. The United States should join with other nations to significantly increase economic assistance to Afghanistan and promote reconciliation with Taliban leaders willing to integrate into national political power structures. To minimize the possibility of radicalization, the military should explore alternatives to permanent U.S. military basing in Muslim nations.

As it carefully reduces its large force deployments in Iraq, the United States must restore the health of its armed forces. Political leaders' failure to acknowledge the true costs of two lengthy wars has masked a hollowing out of the military, particularly the Army. While it gains breathing space, the armed forces must not only rebuild, but also reorient themselves to support a conservation strategy.

Prevention of conflict or attack on the United States is the clear priority. But given the enormity of that challenge, strategic economy of force is essential. U.S. efforts should seek to disrupt and divide enemies through targeted actions rather than trying to destroy every opponent. The United States should devolve significant responsibility to other states and leading regional partners that share its interest in stability. Over the coming decade, U.S. forces should focus on strengthening foreign security forces through capacity building and internal defense. U.S. regular forces should develop new concepts of operation for small-footprint, lower profile, and self-sustaining engagements. They must continue to decentralize operations and develop adaptive leaders.

In the medium term, then, a conservation strategy requires significant investment in and employment of conventional ground forces for prevention, while restoring joint readiness for unanticipated major combat operations. The United States currently faces no conventional peer competitor. Moreover, any future state competitors are likely to combine conventional and unconventional methods and capabilities. Accordingly, the United States should rethink its current modernization emphasis and effort. Continued pursuit of incremental evolution of platforms and weapons may be outmoded given the diffusion and transformation of threats. Hedging against a near-peer competitor should remain largely in the realm of R&D at this juncture. The U.S. military should concentrate scarce investment dollars on high-payoff investment for the longer term: developing energy independence, cyber security (and redundancy in core functions), and next-generation technology research and development.

Economic and Other Civilian Assistance

Economic and other civilian assistance is another key component of the indirect approach to long-term global security.

The United States should create an effective civilian expeditionary capability to help conduct stability operations in high-risk environments. This civilian corps should include representatives from civilian government agencies as well as external civilian experts who can carry out a range of stability operations tasks for which the military is not primarily prepared. The corps requires personnel with an operational mentality, cultural awareness, and significant tolerance of risk. The United States should not attempt to create a parallel to its military capability, but a lean but ready civilian operational component is an essential element of U.S. humanitarian, counterinsurgency, and post-conflict efforts.

U.S. foreign assistance should be increased, with the goal of achieving a contribution that is roughly commensurate with the United States' proportion of global military spending.

The increase would add some \$30 billion annually, a significant figure until compared to current defense expenditures. Specific initiatives would focus less on bilateral assistance than on multilateral initiatives and less on promoting democratization than on improving the results of governance for citizens' security and wellbeing. The key challenge for the United States will be combining this stabilization approach with political efforts to promote incremental reform in countries of particular security interest and in countries with which America has long-standing bilateral relationships.

The United States should create a global pool for national risk coverage, a subsidized insurance fund for states suffering from natural disaster or terrorist attacks, to help make them more resilient in the face of such disasters.

America should also lead allied developed nations in making trade concessions to reinvigorate the Doha round of trade negotiations and restore confidence in international economic agreements.

Pioneering a new multilateral Global Adjustment Initiative (GAI) could help nations adjust to the economic dislocation of globalization. The GAI would emphasize transparency, accountability, and human security. It would have less stringent criteria than the Millennium Challenge Account because it would be less concerned with ideology than impact and would seek to assist less-capable states as long as they were moving on the desired trajectory. These states would not need to meet formal requirements of democratic rule in the American image, but their programs would have to effectively enhance the basic human security of citizens.

Finally, the United States should encourage Muslim states to create a Muslim Development Corps to train and fund their youth as a means of supporting economic and social wellbeing at home and abroad. The Corps would provide peaceful alternatives to jihad for the youth bulge in many poor Islamic countries. It would also function as a social safety valve and potential economic catalyst, akin to the role played by the U.S. Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression. Finally, the Corps would seek to undermine the strategies of radical groups for garnering the support of Muslims by meeting basic human needs.

Global Governance

Improving global governance is a crucial component of the effort to foster stability and prosperity worldwide.

Accordingly, the United States should develop multilateral support for an effective collective response to failing nuclear states. It should lead the UN or a broad coalition of states in developing guidelines for assessing and responding to the threat of disintegrating nuclear states. The pressures driving the U.S. preemption strategy are real, but a unilaterally defined and executed policy of preemption is highly destabilizing. Moreover,

a nuclear power at risk of losing control of its weapons of mass destruction is a special multilateral problem demanding a broadly accepted response. Such a scenario appears to create a new “responsibility to protect” that transcends state boundaries and involves the protection of a wider community of global citizens. Governments should begin discussing the roles of the UN or regional organizations in authorizing intervention. They should consider investing the International Atomic Energy Agency with the authority to oversee the safety and dismantling of nuclear capabilities in the event of intervention in a failing nuclear state.

A new paradigm for “trusteeship” of failed states or of regions within states could help the international community confront the collective security challenge of ungoverned spaces. This is a sensitive issue because of sovereignty concerns. Yet at present, many ungoverned areas within states have broader security ramifications. Sovereignty entails responsibility for controlling activities within borders. When this responsibility is not fulfilled, the international community has an interest in becoming involved. States should begin articulating and codifying such expectations and developing models for assisting states in fulfilling those expectations.

When states are incapable of policing threats in such regions, they are free to seek assistance from other states, but assistance through an international capability may be more acceptable and sustainable. The UN, regional organizations, or ad hoc groups of like-minded states should develop response capabilities that transcend the band-aid of peacekeeping to include governorship for extended periods of time. This governance capability could also be used in the event of state failure, but should be developed essentially as an adjunct to state capacity where it is lacking.

International decision-making must be modernized to incorporate rising powers. The UN, with its host of current and potential critical activities that require Security Council authorization, risks irrelevance unless the organization’s decision-making reflects modern power realities. The UN must therefore find ways to accommodate the aspirations and power of India and Brazil at a minimum, and to address the disproportionate leverage of “grandfathered” European powers. Although many argue that Security Council reform per se is unattainable, it should be pursued alongside the development of creative auxiliary decision-making processes that might ease the way toward future reform. Member states need to confront the reality of informal consultative mechanisms, which would lack the transparency and accountability of the Security Council process, in order to move toward reform. The United States and other Security Council members can, through their independent and collective decision-making, begin acknowledging the growing role of emerging powers. They can also incorporate these states in other non-UN fora such as the G8 or create complementary fora to bring rising powers into solutions for global problems.

Similarly, international decision-making and problem solving must incorporate non-state actors as well. Even if states remain the dominant actors for the foreseeable future, non-state entities are increasingly important aspects of global challenges and solutions. In some cases, sub-state actors hold power in armed conflict and failed states and therefore

must become part of a brokered political settlement. In others, non-state actors such as private businesses or nongovernmental organizations are significantly affected by and potentially able to assist in addressing problems that also affect states. These problems include global warming, terrorism, cyber attack, and global pandemics.

Integrating non-state actors into rule formulation and solutions is a vital new challenge for global governance. It poses new challenges for states, such as creating incentives for non-state actors to participate, minimizing the “free rider” problem of non-state actors enjoying the benefits but not contributing or complying, and managing increased diversity of power within the still-anarchic state system. The United States should propose to expand UN-sanctioned processes or create new consultative fora to integrate non-state actors into international discussions and action plans. To sustain global governance in the long term, the United States should begin building and experimenting with models of global governance that transcend interstate institutions issue by issue.

Rising to the Challenge

Conservation recognizes the larger international, systemic implications and requirements of conserving American power. Accordingly, it seeks to both shore up and modernize an interstate system to promote stability within which U.S. safety, prosperity, and freedoms can be preserved. The strategy does not preclude the full range of unilateral or military U.S. actions to protect American interests, but it seeks to develop common understandings of threats and collective expectations about responses to these threats. It aims to strengthen the ability of states to provide security within their borders and to reinforce a system of global governance to address effectively the transnational and international threats of the 21st century.

Conservation requires the support of other states for two complementary reasons. First, the United States lacks adequate resources and tools to carry it out alone. The strategy therefore leverages states, non-state actors, and international institutions to strengthen or supplement states that are ineffective at ensuring internal security. In addition, reform of collective rules and institutions – by definition – requires consensus. Because cooperation from other actors is essential for the conservation strategy, the United States must be conscious of the interests and perspectives of others and preserve its own international legitimacy. Conservation therefore requires a longer-term, collective vision of how to keep the United States strong.

Democracies are famously slow to respond to chronic problems, often rousing themselves only in response to acute crises. As the Cold War ended, Americans were concerned first and foremost about securing a peace dividend rather than reexamining the requirements of international leadership. The United States did not fundamentally address the chronic problems of eroding states and international institutions. Occasionally, the U.S. government applied temporary band-aids to acute crises, but it largely failed to invest in sustainable solution sets. The United States chose not to create robust UN peacekeeping

capabilities. It raised fresh hopes about nonproliferation agreements and institutions but then deviated from that path. And while states joined to create new international laws and institutions to meet collective responsibilities to justice and to the environment, the United States stood aside. Instead of a global steward, the United States came to be seen as a global outlier, unconcerned with common problems and shared solutions.

Certainly the underlying failings of the system have not been solely the fault of the United States. Yet, during its unipolar moment of the 1990s, a decade of relative peace without any peer competitor, America allowed the underlying weaknesses of the international system to fester. That missed opportunity has left the United States today with less attractive and likely less effective options for addressing the dislocations caused by globalization, terrorism, and weak states.

A significant reason that U.S. leadership did not rise to the challenge was the complexities of domestic politics. Unfortunately, this remains a key impediment to crafting contemporary grand strategy. In domestic political debate, vocal constituencies scorn participation in collective security as an intrusion on sovereignty. They paint political compromise as forfeiting entitlements that they believe are due a preeminent power. They decry development assistance as a form of international welfare. Their faith in military might and unilateralism remains untarnished by evidence of its limits. This mentality, described as Jacksonianism by Walter Russell Mead, is imprinted on American politics – and continues to impose a severe constraint on U.S. global leadership.

In political terms, the overall international system lacks a domestic constituency or powerful bureaucratic proponent. There is no career reward for warning of a global “governance gap”. Policy makers tend to see particular manifestations of that gap and then work to address the specific issue independently. Furthermore, because systemic effects are corrosive and incremental, they are routinely pushed back in line behind the immediate challenges that greet Americans in the morning newspaper. As a body politic, Americans may come to recognize the system’s corrosion only after it has deteriorated beyond the point of manageable repair. .

There will often be real tensions between approaches that best strengthen the system and those that address particular challenges in a manner most favorable to the United States. To some degree, resolving that tension will be a matter of perspective and timeline – short-term versus long-term benefits – or an uneasy weighing of a specific policy impact versus incremental improvement across multiple issues of concern. Yet, many tradeoffs will also be real. There will be times when short-term exigencies require deviation from overarching strategic principles. The fundamental difference of a conservation strategy is its premise that the United States has a significant national interest in the character and effectiveness of the international system. The inability to recognize this interest and develop policies generally consistent with it has been a weakness of U.S. strategy in the post-Cold War era and the signal failing of U.S. foreign policy since the 9/11 attacks.

U.S. leaders must appreciate and educate Americans about the larger context of their national security. It requires investing in a stable interstate system in which all can

benefit, even if the United States benefits most. By the end of World War II, U.S. security had already become inextricably linked with the security, politics, and economic relations among other nations. Global integration has only deepened even as the players have fragmented to include a dizzying array of new actors and threats. The United States has a vested interest in retaining states as primary component parts while simultaneously making them work more effectively to stabilize relations among themselves and to address long-term collective threats.

Other states and peoples experience the international system's security, political, and economic deficits far more acutely than do Americans. The United States, for all its perceived post-9/11 vulnerability, remains the world's strongest power by many measures. As such, it is still able to compensate for many failures of that collective system. Yet, we should not want the negative effects of global trends – dislocation created by new state winners and losers; fewer means of addressing the economic, security, or governance deficits; and increasing transnational challenges that demand collective responses – to continue in their current trajectory with increasingly less-effective global rules and processes for addressing them.

A conservation strategy will demand national sacrifice and determination. Where the United States lacks adequate resources, it must apply imagination, persuasion, and patience. Ironically, the solution sets that best address challenges facing peoples may ultimately not be based on the unit of the state, which conservation seeks to salvage. Yet in a broader historical sweep, even if it is ultimately a transitional phase of international politics, the strategy should enable the more stable adaptation to an alternative paradigm of international security.