

Strategy for a Post-Power Projection Era

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	ii
Introduction	2
Chapter one: American Power Projection from the Continental Era to the Cold War	6
The First Century: Continental Expansion and Continental Defense	6
The Spanish-American War to World War II: Overseas Expansion and Offshore Balancing in the Oceanic Era	10
The Cold War: Containment and Global Power Projection in the Transoceanic Era	15
Conclusion	19
Chapter Two: Power Projection Hubris	20
Power Projection, International Stability, and US Grand Strategy	20
Traditional Challenges to Power Projection	23
The New American Way of War and the Anti-Access Challenge	26
Conclusion	29
Chapter Three: The Potential Consequences of a Post-Power Projection Era	30
The Maturing Guided Weapons Warfare Regime and the Declining Viability of Power Projection	30
The United States and a Post-Power Projection World	32
Implications for the International System and American Strategy	34
Chapter Four: Developing a Strategy for a Post-Power Projection Era	38
A Strategic Alternative to Offshore Balancing	39
Elements of a Strategy for the Post-Power Projection Era	40
Conclusion	50

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States suddenly found itself in “the unipolar moment”: a period of unparalleled and historically unprecedented global dominance. This extremely favorable position rests on a number of factors, but it is sustained in large part by military power—in particular the ability to project military power overseas. By almost any measure, the United States possesses the world’s foremost land, aerospace, maritime, special operations, and nuclear forces. It also dominates the “global commons” of air, sea, and space, giving it a unique ability to deploy, operate, and sustain military units over vast distances.

Despite the United States’ extensive arms buildup and activist foreign policy during the Cold War era, and especially its unprecedented military dominance over the past two decades, sustained global power projection has essentially been a post-1941 phenomenon. Although the US Navy did conduct limited military operations abroad throughout the 19th century, and although the US acquired overseas territories by force in 1898 and intervened in Europe to restore the balance of power in 1917-1918, for more than a century and a half American national security policy was characterized by relative isolationism, periodic expansionism, and sporadic offshore balancing. By the mid-point of the Second World War, however, it became apparent that the United States would need to take a more active—and persistent—role in preventing the emergence of a Eurasian hegemon and ensuring the stability of the international system. The Cold War thus represented a major departure for the United States, which no longer relied on its insular geographic position to provide for its security, instead embracing a robust forward military posture as well as a grand strategy that focused on deterring major war through the ability to project massive military power overseas.

Over the past two decades, the importance of military power for achieving core American national security objectives has been so great, the challenges to employing US forces abroad have been so few, and the barriers to entry for potential competitors that might hope to acquire similar capabilities have been so high that analysts and policymakers have arguably taken power projection for granted. Few have seriously considered whether the United States can continue to project military power abroad as effectively and efficiently as it has in the past, and even fewer have grappled with the implications for American grand strategy and the stability of the international system as a whole if it cannot. Yet a number of trends suggest that both of these issues will soon need to be addressed. Although potential adversaries are unlikely to compete with the United States symmetrically, they are taking steps to offset key US advantages and counter the United States’ preferred methods of projecting military power. Moreover, the growing sophistication and proliferation of precision-guided weapons is eroding the distinction between “high-end” and “low-end” threats, while permissive environments operating environments are gradually disappearing. As a result, the United States’ ability to translate its overall military superiority into effective coercive power could decline sharply.

Given these emerging trends, this report has two principal objectives. The first is to examine the causes and especially the potential consequences of the United States’ declining ability to project

military power overseas. In particular, the ongoing maturation of this regime has the potential to dramatically alter the character of future conflicts, depriving the United States of a unilateral advantage it has not only come to expect but also to rely upon, undermining its ability to defend both its interests and allies overseas, emboldening adversaries to engage in aggressive behavior, and triggering major changes throughout the international system.

For example, as low- and high-end anti-access networks grow more robust, the United States may become a “hollow hegemon,” one that clearly stands above potential adversaries when applying comparative metrics such as the absolute size of its defense budget or the number of aircraft carriers and stealthy combat aircraft in its inventory, but that cannot employ its military forces effectively over transoceanic distances. If so, then aspiring local hegemons may become emboldened to act more aggressively toward both the United States and their neighbors.

US allies and partners may, in turn, lose faith in its security guarantees. If so, they will have two options: they can either work to enhance their own military capabilities in an effort to balance against local threats on their own or with their neighbors, or they can bandwagon with those threats. Choosing the former option, however, could reignite dormant historic rivalries, trigger arms races, and foster windows of opportunity and vulnerability as nations develop their own anti-access networks at different rates. This could, therefore, create *zones of persistent conflict*, unless and until a point of equilibrium is reached where all key nations in a region have a robust, defensive, anti-access network. Alternatively, if nations choose to bandwagon with an aspiring local hegemon, then *spheres of influence* could emerge in which those nations are essentially “Finlandized,” opting to reorient their foreign economic and security policies to accommodate the most powerful local actor.

At the same time, the United States may begin to rely more on indirect forms of power-projection, including the use of irregular proxies and surrogates, and may be forced to conduct military campaigns in peripheral theaters where anti-access/area denial capabilities do not exist or are far less dense. This would, in fact, be a return to a traditional pattern of great power politics that has been relatively dormant in the post-Cold War era, namely the existence of international rivalries that are largely characterized by positional competitions between opponents like the 19th century Anglo-Russian “Great Game” in Central Asia: ongoing struggles in peripheral theaters—often waged through local proxies—to secure critical natural resources, preserve access to economic markets, control strategically or economically vital lines of communication, and prevent adversaries from expanding their territory or influence, among other objectives. Finally, unless the United States can continue to project military power effectively, it could eventually be compelled to abandon its strategy of primacy—a strategy it has maintained for more than half a century—and accept a much more circumscribed role in international affairs.

The second objective is to develop a new strategy for a “post-power projection era” that could enable the United States to preserve its leading position and its influence abroad even if these trends persist. Specifically, this strategy has five main elements. First, the United States should take steps to preserve those power projection forces and capabilities that appear most resilient in the face of growing anti-access and area denial threats. This will require a far greater emphasis on platforms, systems, and forces that can survive an initial assault during a conflict, operate

from beyond the range of an opponent's conventional precision-strike weapons, and/or penetrate a dense anti-access network; the development of new concepts for projecting power into non-permissive operating environments; and aggressive efforts to divest capabilities that are likely to be most vulnerable and/or least effective under the emerging warfare regime, freeing valuable resources that can then be reallocated.

Second, the United States should encourage and enable its partners to develop ground, air, and maritime capabilities that would allow them to better defend their sovereignty, safeguard their interests, and deter aggression by aspiring regional hegemon. Like the "hedgehogs" erected in World War II to block an invasion force from landing on the beaches of Europe, it may be possible to create strategic "hedgehogs" that can constrain an opponent's ability to project power in its own region. This would, however, involve selectively proliferating certain precision strike capabilities to allies and security partners.

Third, the US should take steps to extend its global naval and aerial mastery—in particular so that it can continue to provide safe passage for friendly forces and global commerce—while minimizing the risks and costs of competing in the more highly contested domains of space and cyberspace. Continued US naval mastery will remain particularly important in the emerging warfare regime; it will provide the ability to engage in economic warfare against potential adversaries, for example by facilitating the seizure of (or by denying access to) critical commodities located overseas; it will provide the means to impose maritime blockades at a distance, denying an opponent access to imported raw materials as well as export markets for its own goods; it will inhibit opponents from projecting military power against US allies located beyond their immediate periphery; and it will dissuade its adversaries from competing vigorously on a global scale.

Fourth, the United States should prepare to operate through proxies, including non-state actors, and to engage in positional conflicts in peripheral theaters where opponents' weaknesses can be exploited more easily. In fact, these peripheral contests and proxy wars will tend to favor the United States. With its command of the air and maritime commons the US can hold at risk any opposing forces that deploy beyond the protection of an adversary's anti-access/area denial capabilities, as well as the lines of communication that sustain those forces. Moreover, if neither the opponent nor its local allies have built up robust A2/AD capabilities in theater, the United States may be able to use its legacy power projection forces quite effectively.

Finally, the United States should also be prepared for opponents to exploit opportunities in its own immediate periphery, namely the Western Hemisphere. It should, therefore, resurrect its own anti-access/area denial posture—one that was largely abandoned with the decline of coastal defense after the Second World War—to safeguard its homeland and the surrounding region. In short, the United States will need to update the 1823 Monroe Doctrine to ensure its continuing relevance in the new warfare regime.

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INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States suddenly found itself in “the unipolar moment”: a period of unparalleled and historically unprecedented global dominance. As William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks have observed, the US “has no rival in any critical dimension of power,” while the scope and scale of American primacy far exceed the advantages that Britain possessed over its rivals during the height of the *Pax Britannica* in the mid-19th century.¹ This extremely favorable position rests on a number of factors, including the size and strength of the American economy, the appeal of US domestic institutions and ideology, and its technological base and capacity for innovation. Nevertheless, it is sustained in large part by military power—in particular the ability to project military power overseas.² By almost any measure, the United States possesses the world’s foremost land, aerospace, maritime, special operations, and nuclear forces. It also dominates the “global commons” of air, sea, and space, giving it a unique ability to deploy, operate, and sustain military units over vast distances.³

Because of its considerable military strength, the United States has been able to promote and defend its interests overseas while enjoying the benefits of its insular geographic position; namely, it is far more secure from external threats than other major powers and remains the preferred ally for nations that fear local challengers more than a distant hegemon. Over the past two decades, however, the importance of military power for achieving core American national security objectives has been so great, the challenges to employing US forces abroad have been so few, and the barriers to entry for potential competitors that might hope to acquire similar capabilities have been so high that analysts and policymakers have arguably taken power projection for granted. Few have seriously considered whether the United States can continue to project military power abroad as effectively and efficiently as it has in the past, and even fewer have grappled with the implications for American grand strategy and the stability of the international system as a whole if it cannot. Yet a number of trends suggest that both of these issues will soon need to be addressed.

¹ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (July/August 2002), p. 23. The term “unipolar moment” was coined in Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs: America and the World 1990*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Winter 1990/91).

² Power projection can be defined as “political influence exerted at a distance through the use or threat of military force.” Dennis C. Blair, “Military Power Projection in Asia,” in Ashley J. Tellis, Mercy Kuo, and Andrew Marble, eds., *Strategic Asia 2008-09* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2008), p. 393. This differs from the definition offered by the Department of Defense, which emphasizes all elements of national power. It is, however, consistent with the Pentagon’s definition of “force projection,” that is, “The ability to project the military instrument of national power from the United States or another theater, in response to requirements for military operations.” Joint Publication 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, April 21, 2001, as amended through September 2010, accessed at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/.

³ Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003). Cyberspace is frequently identified as part of the global commons as well. If so, it is perhaps the domain that the United States currently has the least amount of control over, if any.

Today, potential adversaries are unlikely to compete with the United States symmetrically; that is, they are unlikely to devote the bulk of their resources toward traditional power projection capabilities or to emphasize combined-arms, force-on-force engagements against the American military in their planning efforts. Nevertheless, they are taking steps to offset key US advantages and counter the United States' preferred methods of projecting military power. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, for one, has argued that, "it is hard to conceive of any country confronting the United States directly in conventional terms." Nevertheless, "irregular forces will find ways, as they always have, to frustrate and neutralize the advantages of larger, regular militaries," while "nation-states will try to exploit our perceived vulnerabilities in an asymmetric way, rather than play to our inherent strengths."⁴

As Secretary Gates has also observed, this trend is already taking place across the spectrum of conflict. At the low end, "Hezbollah, a non-state actor, used anti-ship missiles against the Israeli navy in 2006." Regional powers with only modest conventional military capabilities are attempting to exploit US vulnerabilities as well. In the Persian Gulf, for example, "Iran is combining ballistic and cruise missiles, anti-ship missiles, mines, and swarming speedboats in order to challenge our naval power in that region." Finally, at the high end of the spectrum, China's military modernization efforts have indicated that, "the virtual monopoly the U.S. has enjoyed with precision guided weapons is eroding—especially with long-range, accurate anti-ship cruise and ballistic missiles that can potentially strike from over the horizon."⁵

Perhaps the greatest concern, however, is that the current efforts of Hezbollah, Iran, China, and others could merely be a harbinger of things to come. One senior US military official, Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz, has noted that, "The proliferation of precision means that *state and non-state actors* will continue to build sophisticated air defenses, long range missiles, and even short range precision systems that will threaten our bases and our deployed forces."⁶ If precision-guided weapons along with the capabilities necessary for longer-range targeting do proliferate horizontally (to a growing number of actors) and vertically (as those actors work to improve the depth, coverage, and sophistication of their surveillance and strike systems), a number of major changes to the security environment are likely to occur. For instance, the distinction between "high-end" and "low-end" threats will continue to erode as small states and even non-state actors becoming increasingly capable of imposing heavy costs on US forces. Most importantly, relatively permissive operating environments will gradually disappear as non-permissive environments correspondingly expand geographically and become progressively more dangerous. As a result, the United States' ability to translate its overall military superiority into effective coercive power could decline sharply.

⁴ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Remarks to the Heritage Foundation, Colorado Springs, CO, May 13, 2008, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1240>.

⁵ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Remarks to the Navy League Sea-Air-Space Exposition, National Harbor, MD, May 3, 2010, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1460>.

⁶ General Norton Schwartz, "Remarks to the Air Force Association Convention," National Harbor, MD, September 15, 2009 (emphasis added), accessed at <http://www.afa.org/events/conference/2009/scripts/SCHWARTZ.pdf>.

Given these emerging trends, this report has two principal objectives: first, to examine the causes and the potential consequences of the United States' declining ability to project military power overseas; and second, to develop a new grand strategy that could enable the US to preserve its leading position and its influence abroad even as this occurs. The remainder of the report is divided into five chapters. Chapter One summarizes the history of US military power projection from the late 18th century until the height of the Cold War. Chapter Two describes the often-underappreciated importance of power projection for the character of the international system, the stability of the international system, and especially American grand strategy in the post-Cold War era. It then discusses the emerging threats to power projection, in particular the growing sophistication and proliferation of anti-access capabilities. Chapter Three describes the likely implications of a maturing guided weapons regime, both for the United States and other nations as well. Chapter Four develops a strategy to achieve three principal objectives: preserving the United States' ability to project power for as long as possible, creating new alliance relationships to maintain American influence overseas as traditional power projection grows more difficult, and pursuing alternative methods of imposing costs on adversaries. The Conclusion offers suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER ONE: AMERICAN POWER PROJECTION FROM THE CONTINENTAL ERA TO THE COLD WAR

Despite the United States' extensive arms buildup and activist foreign policy during the Cold War era, and especially its unprecedented military dominance over the past two decades, sustained global power projection has essentially been a post-1941 phenomenon. Although the US Navy did conduct limited military operations abroad throughout the 19th century, and although the United States acquired overseas territories by force in 1898 and intervened in Europe to restore the balance of power in 1917-1918, for more than a century and a half American national security policy was characterized by relative isolationism, periodic expansionism, and sporadic offshore balancing. By the mid-point of the Second World War, however, it became apparent that the United States would need to take a more active—and persistent—role in preventing the emergence of a Eurasian hegemon and ensuring the stability of the international system. The extent and scope of that role, the global military posture that supported it, and many of the capabilities that would ultimately enable the United States to project power overseas throughout the Cold War and into the post-Cold War era subsequently took shape over the next decade.

The First Century: Continental Expansion and Continental Defense

Despite its enormous *potential* power, the United States did not project *military* power overseas in a significant way until the close of the 19th century. Instead, as Samuel Huntington observed, “threats to national security arose primarily upon this continent and were met and disposed of on this continent,” while a small Army and a limited Navy “did not permit [the United States] to project its power beyond the Western Hemisphere.”⁷ For more than a century, therefore, the overriding goal of the American military was continental defense. This was a fitting objective for a nation that was far more interested in expanding its control over North America than acquiring territory abroad, that was ideologically predisposed to view government-controlled military forces as a threat to liberty at home, and that also sought to avoid becoming involved in disputes between European powers.⁸ At the same time, the United States could maintain relatively small standing armed forces while incurring little risk because it enjoyed a tremendous degree of “free” security thanks to its geographic isolation, its growing strategic depth, and the European balance of power.⁹ These three factors ensured that potentially hostile nations would be too preoccupied with local threats to turn their attention to the Western Hemisphere, or, if they did, they would be unable to project military power effectively across the Atlantic and into North America.

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (May 1954), p. 485.

⁸ Walter A. McDougall, *Promise Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 42-47; and H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 1.

⁹ Alex Roland, “Technology, Ground Warfare, and Strategy: The Paradox of American Experience,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1991), p. 458.

During this “continental” era, the Regular Army remained a very small force that numbered between 6,000 and 15,000 troops in the decades before the Civil War (after beginning as a single regiment only several hundred strong), and still only had approximately 26,000 men under arms in the 1880s. Its primary functions included disrupting strikes and riots, occupying forts along interior borders, exploring new territories, and, most importantly, pacifying restive Native American tribes that opposed resettlement and posed a threat to further southern or westward expansion. The Army also manned the forts guarding the Eastern seaboard, the Gulf coast, and the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain (although the later two were for the most part demilitarized following the Rush-Bagot agreement between Britain and the United States in 1817).

Coastal defense proved to be an enduring Army mission. In 1794, for example, with the United States at risk of being drawn into the conflict between Britain and France, Congress voted to restore a number of existing coastal forts and build sixteen new ones. Then, following the British attacks against New Orleans and Washington, DC, during the War of 1812, President James Madison appointed a Board of Engineers to devise a new system of coastal fortifications. Although the war once again demonstrated the limitations of Britain’s transatlantic power projection capabilities, Britain still remained the United States’ principal external threat, and the Army assumed that a future conflict “would be a replay of the War of 1812 on a somewhat larger scale” requiring a “defense of the vulnerable coastal cities against seaborne attacks.”¹⁰

The Board’s report, submitted in 1821, “became the basic statement of national maritime defense and remained so until the 1880s.”¹¹ At the time, it appeared unlikely that the United States would build a Navy large enough to serve as the first line of defense against an invasion by Britain or any other power, at least not in the foreseeable future. Coastal fortifications were therefore viewed as a crucial defensive capability for several reasons. First, they protected American naval bases, thus facilitating operations at sea. Second, they enabled a small American Army to concentrate at key defensive points, rather than guessing where an opponent might attempt to land or dispersing itself along the entire coast. Third, they prevented an enemy fleet from freely accessing a harbor that could be used to build up a large invasion force. Fourth, individual fortifications could be manned with only a small number of soldiers, a benefit given the Army’s small size for much of the 19th century. Finally, because an opposing navy would be forced to land troops in undefended—and underdeveloped—areas, it would be unable to assemble its forces quickly to march on a major city. In the meantime, the US government could expand its small standing army with volunteers and militia units, eventually putting a substantial force of its own into the field.¹² As Brian Linn explains, the prevailing belief was that coastal forts “would deter a swift naval raid to seize a vital city, compelling the enemy to land troops on beaches far from the main transportation arteries.” As the invader attempted to organize its troops to conduct

¹⁰ William B. Skelton, “Samuel P. Huntington and the Roots of the American Military Tradition,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1996), p. 333.

¹¹ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, 60-61; and Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army’s Way of War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter 1.

an attack on land, “the Regular Army, swelled by patriotic citizen-soldiers, would then concentrate and force surrender or withdrawal.”¹³

Although the Army “aided the nation’s territorial and economic growth, manned the coastal forts, and fought Indians,” over time the second mission took precedence over the other two, which became progressively less relevant given changing circumstances.¹⁴ As the continental United States reached its territorial limits and Native American tribes ceased to pose a significant threat by the late 19th century, for example, the Army abandoned most of its frontier outposts and consolidated its forces. “With the Indian wars’ ending, the Army lost its most active mission. Police duty was an unsatisfactory substitute, and no strategist envisioned sending large expeditionary forces abroad.” For the Army, then, “coastal defense seemed its sole remaining function,” one that it was more than willing to embrace.¹⁵

Coastal defense was one of the principal missions for the US Navy as well; small gunboats were expected to complement Army fortifications and help defend key cities and ports. The Navy did engage in transoceanic power projection during the 19th century, however, albeit in a very limited fashion. In doing so, it had a number of objectives, including the defense of American merchants and expanding overseas trade. According to Russell Weigley, in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars, “the Navy’s most urgent immediate responsibility became the protection of American commerce by showing the flag to powers which might otherwise discriminate against it and by suppressing pirates and quasi-pirates—the Barbary corsairs again, cutthroats who took advantage of weak and tolerant governments by basing themselves in the newly independent Latin American states, East Indian and Asian brigands who became a nuisance when American commerce with the Orient enjoyed an astonishing growth.”¹⁶ The Navy was also tasked with interdicting enemy commerce in the event of a war with one of the European powers, a mission it had undertaken against France during the Quasi War and later against Britain between 1812 and 1814, although this proved to be far less important than commerce defense for much of the 19th century.

In support of these missions, beginning in approximately 1815 (following the second Barbary War) the Navy “stopped being a home-based force” and instead “became a globally-dispersed set of forward-stationed squadrons.”¹⁷ Although the number and location of these overseas “stations” shifted over the next several decades, they included the Mediterranean, South Atlantic, Eastern Pacific, Western Pacific, the Caribbean, and Western Africa. Stations were patrolled by squadrons that “normally consisted of one or two frigates or ships of the line and a larger number

¹³ Brian M. Linn, “The American Way of War Revisited,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 66 (April 2001), p. 508.

¹⁴ Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*, revised and expanded edition (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 251.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁶ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, p. 61.

¹⁷ Peter M. Swartz, *Sea Changes: Transforming US Navy Deployment Strategy, 1775-2002* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2002), p. 18.

of smaller but swifter vessels,” which were well suited to chasing down privateers and pirates.¹⁸ Squadrons were administrative rather than tactical units, however, and were not supported by permanent foreign bases, even though the United States did begin the process of overseas expansion by acquiring three of the Phoenix Islands in the Pacific Ocean during the early 1850s and Midway Island in 1967, and by negotiating basing rights at Pago Pago in Samoa in 1878 and Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1887.¹⁹ Instead, they generally relied on facilities and supplies that were leased from foreign governments, shared with commercial operations, or controlled by rival powers.²⁰

Despite its small size and lack of infrastructural support outside the continental United States, the Navy still “played an aggressive role in expanding commerce.” Notably, from 1798 to 1883, “it conducted more than 130 punitive expeditions, primarily in support of commerce,” while “naval officers negotiated treaties opening up new opportunities.”²¹ For instance, US naval forces bombarded Algiers and raided the North African coast in response to the threat from Barbary pirates, opened Chinese ports along the Yangtze River to American trade following the conclusion of the First Opium War, and did the same in Japan after Commodore Perry’s “Black Ships” entered Edo Bay in 1853. In sum, during the first half of the 19th century, “The U.S. Navy was an operational, militarily potent, forward expeditionary force.”²² It was not, however, a service capable of force projection against a major power, with the exception of individual ship-to-ship engagements and commerce raiding.

US national security policy generally and American power projection efforts in particular during the continental era thus remained quite limited, even after the massive mobilization effort that took place during the Civil War, which temporarily made the United States “the strongest military power on the planet.”²³ After the war’s conclusion both the Army and Navy “returned to their traditional missions in support of national policy,” in particular continental defense.²⁴ In summary, “military policy as it evolved during the 1790s basically remained intact for a century.

¹⁸ Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, p. 124. See also Weigley, *The American Way of War*, p. 61.

¹⁹ C.T. Sandars, *America’s Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 26-28; and Seward H. Livermore, “American Naval Base Policy in the Far East, 1850-1914,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1944), pp. 114-115.

²⁰ Linda S. Keefer, *Base Support for U.S. Naval Operations in the Western Pacific: A Survey of 19th and Early 20th-Century Developments* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, December 1992), p. 5. Earlier, US warships used the bases of allies to support military operations, for example French and Spanish bases during the War for Independence and British bases during the Quasi War with France. See Swartz, *Sea Changes*, p. 89.

²¹ Peter Maslowski, “To the Edge of Greatness: The United States, 1783-1865,” in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 229.

²² Swartz, *Sea Changes*, p. 19

²³ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, p. 167.

²⁴ Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, p. 249.

The nation would keep a small professional Army, augmented by militia and federal volunteers during wartime. The embryonic system of arsenals, shipyards, drydocks, and coastal fortifications would be expanded. The nation would rely on a small navy to show the flag in peacetime and to protect American shipping while plundering enemy commerce during wartime. In essence, a passive defense policy emerged that theoretically would preserve the country during a crisis until its latent strength could be mobilized.”²⁵

The Spanish-American War to World War II: Overseas Expansion and Offshore Balancing in the Oceanic Era

The United States first emerged as a legitimate global military power in the early 1890s when it began to enhance its power projection capabilities and plan for major military campaigns overseas, rather than simply “showing the flag,” expanding trade, or conducting punitive strikes and raids against far weaker nations. As Huntington notes, at the start of this new “oceanic” era the United States no longer faced any significant threats on the North American continent. It did, however, confront threats “from the Atlantic and Pacific oceanic areas and the nations bordering on those oceans,” namely Japan and Britain, potentially in concert with one another after their alliance in 1902, and increasingly from Germany as well. Given this change in the security environment, “it became essential for the security of the United States that it achieve supremacy on those oceans just as previously it had been necessary for it to achieve supremacy within the American continent.”²⁶

Like most rising powers, American geopolitical ambitions began to expand during this period along with its growing military and economic strength, which vaulted the United States into the ranks of the major powers, at least on paper. Those ambitions, in turn, were fueled by a number of ideas that gained traction around the turn of the century and had lasting implications for US force structure, posture, and national security policy, namely the importance of maintaining the Open Door, the need to attain command of the seas, and the responsibility and right of modern societies to intervene in less developed nations.

First, the combination of a growing economy and a series of recessions punctuated by internal unrest contributed to the belief that unfettered access to overseas export markets was essential for both economic prosperity and domestic stability. This guaranteed that US armed forces would play a greater role abroad. In China, for example, Washington deployed a small force as part of a multilateral military intervention to help rescue besieged foreign legations during the Boxer Rebellion and restore stability. Key US military officials also pressed (unsuccessfully) for the acquisition of a naval base in northern China as the other major powers leased naval facilities from the local government, established economic spheres of influence in the surrounding areas, and threatened US access to the potentially-lucrative Chinese market.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁶ Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” p. 487.

²⁷ J.A.S. Grenville, “Diplomacy and War Plans in the United States, 1890-1917,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 11 (1961), p. 11; and Livermore, “American Naval-Base Policy in the Far East,” p. 117.

Second, the work of Alfred Thayer Mahan—with its emphasis on the importance of sea control and decisive conflicts between opposing battle fleets—began to influence the Department of the Navy, which quickly moved away from its traditional focus on coastal defense and commerce raiding. Instead, US officials advocated a Navy comprised of battleships that could directly engage European rivals. A new building program was authorized by Congress in 1893, and by 1898 the Navy already had 11 battleships completed or under construction, in addition to a number of armored and protected cruisers. It was, therefore, “ascending toward European standards.” By 1914, when war broke out in Europe, the number of US battleships had more than tripled and the Navy ranked second only to Britain and Germany. Rather than dispersing these forces, which would have been consistent with the Navy’s prior deployment scheme, battleships were concentrated in the Atlantic—a necessary step to implement Mahan’s vision of dueling fleets attempting to gain command of the sea, and one that also betrayed a deep suspicion of Germany and its potential interests in Latin America.²⁸ Moreover, as one study notes, “it was not until the publication of Mahan’s great thesis...that [the Navy] and the country began to take an intelligent interest in the acquisition of coaling stations in distant regions for the purpose of implementing the government’s foreign policy and of offering adequate protection to the nation’s commerce.”²⁹

Third, the war against Spain—motivated in large part by a popular desire within the United States to end the Spanish occupation of Cuba and assist the beleaguered local population—transformed the United States into an imperial power with a number of overseas possessions. Specifically, Washington acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippine Islands in the Treaty of Paris, subsequently annexed Hawaii, Samoa, and Wake Island, and established a protectorate over Cuba. Although whether and where to build military bases became a hotly contested issue, the United States suddenly controlled territories that could enable it to project and sustain military forces at far greater distances. Equally important, the need to defend these territories from external threats and internal revolts provided a strong incentive to do so.³⁰ As Peter Swartz notes, “where the nation and its Army tended to see new sovereign American territory to be defended, the Navy and its Marines saw new overseas advanced bases necessary for the forward offensive progress of the battle fleet.”³¹

At the same time, there was also a growing sense of US vulnerability, one that contributed to an expanding conception of national security and a widening defensive perimeter. The balance of power, for example, provided a less reliable check against expansionist nations than it had in the recent past. In Europe, Britain’s relative strength was in decline while Germany was building a blue water fleet to complement its possession of the most powerful army on the continent. In Asia, the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the outcome of the Russo-Japanese war left an

²⁸ Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, pp. 280, 316-320 (quotation at p. 280). See also Grenville, “Diplomacy and War Plans in the United States,” p. 10; and Swartz, *Sea Changes*, p. 30.

²⁹ Livermore, “American Naval-Base Policy in the Far East,” p. 116.

³⁰ Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, p. 301.

³¹ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, p. 33.

expansionist Japan as the preponderant power in the region, one that might target the United States' new possessions, in particular the Philippine Islands and perhaps even the Hawaiian Islands. Moreover, technological advances had increased the feasibility of long distance power projection for all major powers. Specifically, "the introduction of steam-powered warships and large passenger liners and merchant vessels made transoceanic military operations a reality." In Washington, however, the principal fear was no longer a direct attack on the continental United States but rather a genuine threat to the Monroe Doctrine, which had long proscribed direct European involvement in the Western Hemisphere, but had largely been enforced by the Royal Navy throughout much of the 19th century.³² According to Alan Millet and Peter Maslowski, "American policymakers worried about the newly annexed Hawaiian Islands, the Isthmus of Panama, where they intended to build a canal, and the unstable nations of the Caribbean."³³

Ultimately, after Britain effectively ceded dominance of Caribbean to the United States in the 1902 Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, the United States faced two major rivals: Japan and Germany. At the same time, continental defense gave way to hemispheric defense as the US sought to defend potential arenas from Japanese and German expansion in the Western Hemisphere, as well as protect the canal that would enable US naval forces to shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific after its completion in 1914. With these new threats and vulnerabilities, defending the United States suddenly "seemed to rest on the ability to mount immediate military operations to defend Hawaii, the Canal Zone, and Puerto Rico or to preempt any foreign power that attempted to establish a *new* military presence in places like the Virgin Islands, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic." As a result, "One of the primary concerns of American defense policy before World War I became the creation of a ready reserve force that could be sent beyond the nation's borders."³⁴

Despite this shift, power projection in defense of the United States' outermost territories still presented a major challenge. In particular, the Philippines were difficult to defend against a more proximate aggressor, in this case Japan, which was likely to overwhelm the small US Army garrison stationed there before any reinforcements could arrive.³⁵ This was due to the inherent problems of deploying sufficient forces quickly over a great distance, as well as a failure to provide for the support vessels and other enablers necessary to sustain and protect the American battle fleet. As J.A.S. Grenville notes, the US fleet remained "unbalanced," because "Congress had ignored the persistent requests of the General Board, passed on to them by the Secretary of the Navy, for adequate personnel to man the ships and for necessary auxiliary ships, cruisers, destroyers, transports, ammunition ships and above all colliers on which the movement of the fleet depended." Because of these deficiencies, "the battleship fleet could hardly reach San

³² On the de facto Anglo-American alliance to enforce the Monroe Doctrine, see Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 199-202.

³³ Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, p. 317.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318 (emphasis in original).

³⁵ On the vulnerability of the Philippines, see Louis Morton, "War Plan Orange: Evolution of a Strategy," *World Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (January 1959).

Francisco, let alone make a voyage of 10,000 miles from their Atlantic base to the Philippines.” War Plan Orange, the evolving strategy to fight Japan that was first completed in 1914, simply “underlined the fact that for many years to come the United States was incapable of fighting Japan.”³⁶

Nevertheless, the United States was able to send over two million men to Europe during the final year of the First World War, fighting on the Western Front and deploying to Archangel and Vladivostok during the ensuing Russian Civil War as well. This marked the first time that the United States would intervene to defend the balance of power in Europe and restore the equilibrium that helped ensure American security. It quickly became apparent, however, that America’s involvement in the European balance of power was an aberration; the Army quickly demobilized after the conflict ended and the nation as a whole drifted toward isolationism for nearly two decades. As Eliot Cohen notes, during the interwar period “most Americans viewed World War I as a grievous exception to a long-standing policy of noninvolvement in European affairs” and “a terrible mistake.” Over the next several years the Army was reduced in size from 2.5 million men to a low point of less than 110,000 in 1926, although this was still larger than the 100,000-man force that existed before the First World War. The Army also returned to its prewar emphasis on constabulary operations and the defense of outlying possessions like the Philippines. The Navy, however, remained larger than the Japanese fleet and qualitatively on par with the Royal Navy, and continued to plan for a conflict against one or more major powers.³⁷ In fact, this was indicative of a longstanding divide between the Navy, which had developed a geographically expansive conception of American economic and security interests, and the Army, which persistently held a far more narrow view that embraced autarky rather than overseas trade that could lead to foreign conflicts, and was also eager to shed its ongoing troop commitments in China and the Philippines—commitments that were considered unnecessary, unwise, and indefensible.³⁸

Ultimately, during the second half of the oceanic era the Army “was organized and equipped for small wars and coast defense,” while “the navy was fixated on a possible war with Japan,” which posed the chief threat to the United States once German power had been shattered in the First World War and strictly limited by the subsequent Treaty of Versailles. Moreover, due to its participation in the war Japan acquired German islands in the central Pacific, which lay astride US lines of communication from Hawaii to the Philippines—lands that Japan secretly reinforced in violation of the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty, providing it with a springboard to launch offensive operations into the eastern Pacific and to conduct a defense-in-depth of its home islands in the event of war with the United States. Although the US battle fleet was initially divided between the Atlantic and Pacific following WWI in an effort to deter both Japan as well

³⁶ Grenville, “Diplomacy and War Plans in the United States,” p. 16.

³⁷ Eliot A. Cohen, “The Strategy of Innocence? The United States, 1920-1945,” in *The Making of Strategy*, p. 429; and Fred Greene, “The Military View of American National Policy, 1904-1940,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (January 1961), pp. 356-357.

³⁸ See Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), chap. 1; and Greene, “The Military View of American National Policy.”

as the European powers, by 1922 it was reconsolidated, this time in the Pacific. Given the Navy's focus on the threat posed by Japan, it also spent the interwar period developing capabilities and operational concepts that would eventually form the backbone of US power projection in the Pacific theater during WWII and into the Cold War. For example, while it still prized battleships as the core offensive component of the fleet, the Navy "did not neglect the development and integration of naval aviation (especially carriers), submarines, base seizure, and mobile at-sea logistics." For its part, the Marine Corps worked to develop "a new and innovative body of doctrine on the conduct of amphibious assaults."³⁹

Interestingly, just as a new sense of vulnerability spurred the United States to shift from continental to hemispheric defense in the years immediately preceding the First World War, a growing sense of insecurity also preceded the attack on Pearl Harbor, America's entry into the Second World War, and the shift from hemispheric defense to a truly global defense policy and military posture. Moreover, while policymakers and pundits in the first decades of the 20th century began to fear technological developments such as steam propulsion and large vessels, which, in theory, were capable of transporting entire armies over great distances, changes in military technology once again played an important role in the late 1930s. Specifically, influential American policymakers believed that the United States could not remain aloof from the shifting balance of power in Europe and Asia because of several interrelated factors: the potential that a British collapse would remove the key barrier that prevented the German surface fleet from transiting the Atlantic Ocean and deploying forces into the Western Hemisphere; the possibility that fifth columnists in Latin America would establish air bases that could be used by the Axis powers; and the development of long-range aviation that could launch strikes against the United States from distant locations. As John Thompson explains, "By combining these threats—of German 'control of the Atlantic,' fifth column activity, especially in Latin America, and air attacks—a picture could be built up of gradual encroachment by an enemy upon North America."⁴⁰ For President Franklin Roosevelt in particular, "the air age called into question the concept of a separate Western Hemisphere."⁴¹

In fact, the fierce debate that took place between 1939 and 1941 between those who favored providing material support to Britain and those who preferred to maintain strict neutrality centered on competing views of American vulnerability as well as the appropriate scope of American national interests. Specifically, "the two sides differed about where to draw the geographical line in U.S. security—around the Western Hemisphere, as noninterventionists generally argued, or on the other side of the Atlantic, according to the Roosevelt administration

³⁹ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, quotes at pp. 39 and 69. See also Cohen, "The Strategy of Innocence," pp. 440-442; and Morton, "War Plan Orange," p. 227.

⁴⁰ John A. Thompson, "Another Look at the Downfall of 'Fortress America'," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (December 1992), p. 398. See also John A. Thompson, "Conceptions of National Security and American Entry into World War II," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 16 (2005); and Cohen, "The Strategy of Innocence", p. 453.

⁴¹ David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), p. 43.

and its allies.”⁴² After the fall of France in 1939 and especially the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the latter won the debate and the United States once again intervened abroad to restore the balance of power. This time, however, Washington embarked on “the most extensive strategic offensives in history,” conducting two simultaneous and practically distinct major wars in different theaters. The outcome of those conflicts would establish the foundation for a new era of national security.⁴³ Ultimately, “The years from 1939 to 1945 witnessed a revolution in the definition and scope of American foreign and defense policies.”⁴⁴ As the US debated involvement in the war, fought in Europe and Asia, and began to look ahead to the postwar world, “continental defense expanded to hemispheric defense and eventually global commitments.”⁴⁵

The Cold War: Containment and Global Power Projection in the Transoceanic Era

As World War II drew to a close, the United States entered what Samuel Huntington called the “transoceanic” era. With the expansion of its fleet during the war, the total defeat of Germany and Japan, and the erosion of British military power, the United States emerged as the world’s leading economic and military power, with virtually uncontested command of the seas. Nevertheless, its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, was a massive land power that threatened to overrun Western Europe with its army or, more likely, exploit the devastation caused by the war along with Moscow’s ties to local communist parties to expand its control over the continent. In Huntington’s words, “The threats which originated around the borders of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans had been eliminated. But they had only disappeared to be replaced by a more serious threat originating in the heart of the Eurasian continent.” US national security policy therefore centered around, “the projection, or the possible projection in the event of war, of American power into that continental heartland,” an objective that required naval forces such as “carrier aviation, fleet-based amphibious power, and naval artillery,” and ground and air forces that were positioned “closer to the scene of operations.”⁴⁶

Given the emerging threats that characterized this new era, which included not only the Soviet army but also the possibility of nuclear attack after Moscow tested its own atomic device in 1949, the United States could no longer rely on the geographic isolation of North America to provide for its security. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, for one, observed in 1945 that, “Our oceans have ceased to be moats which automatically protect our ramparts.”⁴⁷ Nor could the United

⁴² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴³ Cohen, “The Strategy of Innocence,” p. 444.

⁴⁴ Mark A. Stoler, “From Continentalism to Globalism: General Stanley D. Embick, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, and the Military View of American National Policy during the Second World War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (July 1982), p. 303.

⁴⁵ Greene, “The Military View of American National Policy,” p. 361.

⁴⁶ Huntington, “National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy,” p. 488.

⁴⁷ Cited in Thompson, “Another Look at the Downfall of ‘Fortress America,’” p. 394, n. 4.

States rely on a balance of power to emerge in Europe over time. Britain, France, and especially Germany were simply too weak to counter the Soviet Union on their own, and the fear of German rehabilitation and revanchism inhibited cooperation between the Western European powers until the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 formalized the US military commitment to Europe. The United States could not, therefore, resume its earlier role during the oceanic era as an “offshore balancer” that only intervened abroad once an expansionist power appeared on the verge of attaining continental hegemony. As Colin Gray notes, “The overriding goal in the Cold War, as in 1917-1918 and 1941-1945, was to maintain the balance of power *in* Eurasia rather than risk the nearly impossible task of balancing power *with* an effectively united Eurasia.”⁴⁸ The difference between the Cold War and the two World Wars (or between the transoceanic and oceanic eras), however, was that American involvement in Europe and Asia would be persistent, not episodic; rather than intervening in a war that was already underway, the United States would have to manage a global, long-term, peacetime military competition.

Within only a few short years after the conclusion of World War II, the overarching goal of preventing the rise of an Eurasian hegemon led to a number of departures from longstanding US national security traditions, including a major, sustained military buildup as well as significant forward-based and forward-deployed American forces. Perhaps most importantly, the United States established a vast network of military alliances, including multilateral alliances such as the Rio Pact in Latin America, CENTO in the Middle East, SEATO in Southeast Asia, ANZUS in Oceania, and NATO in Europe, as well as bilateral defense agreements with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—many of which persist today. According to Gray, “The need to design and maintain a strategy that extends American protection over allies and friends around the rimlands of Eurasia has remained the geostrategic corollary to of Eurasian onshore containment.”⁴⁹

Even at the height of World War II, US military planners were already beginning to envision and take steps to acquire a worldwide network of bases that would underpin American military power in the postwar era. According to Melvyn Leffler, two overriding objectives fueled the need for an expansive overseas basing system. “The first was the need for defense in depth. Since attacks against the United States could only emanate from Europe and Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded as early as November 1943 that the United States must encircle the Western Hemisphere with a defensive ring of outlying bases,” the purpose of which “was to enable the United States to possess complete control of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and keep hostile powers far from American territory.” The second key objective “was the need to project American power quickly and effectively against any potential adversary.” In particular, “The basic strategic concept underlying all American war plans called for an air offensive against a prospective enemy from overseas bases.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Colin S. Gray, “Strategy in the Nuclear Age: The United States, 1945-1991,” in *The Making of Strategy*, p. 598.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 601.

⁵⁰ Melvyn P. Leffler, “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (April 1984), pp. 350-351. This continued to be the case throughout the late 1940s, as the American inventory of forward-deployed, medium-range bombers far exceeded the

Despite the recognition early on that global power projection would be critical to American security, the precise geographic scope of Washington's emerging containment strategy remained unsettled during the late 1940s. Influenced by George Kennan, director of the State Department's newly established Policy Planning Staff, the Truman administration's notion of containment was limited, emphasizing the defense of critical geopolitical "strong points." This included major industrial centers such as Western Europe and Japan that would greatly enhance Soviet latent, economic, and military power if they fell within Moscow's sphere of influence, as well as potentially vulnerable areas surrounding those strong points, such as Greece and Turkey in Europe as well as the Philippines and Okinawa in northeast Asia. The alternative notion of "perimeter defense" was far more extensive, however, and advocated preventing the Soviet Union or any of its proxies from expanding their influence or territory anywhere in the world, due to the fear that this would trigger a "domino effect" or damage American power and prestige. The latter view was epitomized by NSC-68, the planning document authored by Kennan's successor Paul Nitze, which called for a significant increase in American defense spending and a major build-up of US conventional and nuclear forces.⁵¹

Almost immediately after the completion of NSC-68, which was greeted with skepticism in some corners given the Truman administration's determination to keep defense spending at a relatively low level, war began on the Korean Peninsula in the summer of 1950. The outbreak of the Korean War appeared to confirm the monolithic, expansionist view of the communist bloc presented in NSC-68, and helped generate support for its recommendations. Together, the war and the document had a profound impact on American national security policy for the next several decades.⁵² For example, the US defense budget in fiscal year 1950 was \$17.7 billion, and was reduced to \$13.3 billion the following year before supplemental funding was requested following the start of the conflict. By fiscal year 1953, however, the defense budget had climbed to more than \$52 billion. The increased funding not only supported the American war effort, but was also used to expand the US strategic nuclear arsenal, develop tactical nuclear weapons, and bolster US conventional forces in Europe.⁵³

At the same time, the conflict provided an impetus for the Truman administration to support the rearmament of West Germany.⁵⁴ Equally important, within months of the North Korean invasion

number of intercontinental bombers, although increased production of the latter and the replacement of forward-based, medium-range ballistic missiles with intercontinental ballistic missiles based within the United States or deployed at sea on submarines would reduce the need for some of those facilities. Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 120

⁵¹ See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chaps. 2-4.

⁵² Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 21-25.

⁵³ Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC-68 and the Soviet Threat," *International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn 1979), p. 140; and Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁴ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," p. 140; and Walter LaFeber, "NATO and the Korean War: A Context," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October 1989), p. 476.

the administration also decided to send between four and six additional divisions to Europe (four were eventually deployed), supplementing the two Army divisions that remained on the continent to conduct occupation duty. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson noted, this decision was “a complete revolution in American foreign policy and in the attitude of the American people,” and represented a major step toward the overseas garrison posture that characterized forward-based US military forces throughout the Cold War.⁵⁵ Until that point, NATO and the administration’s Military Assistance Program “concentrated on strengthening European, not American defense; neither contemplated, at the time, the permanent stationing of U.S. ground troops in Europe.”⁵⁶ Eventually, several hundred thousand American troops would be based in Western Europe, tasked with “fighting in place” against an invading Soviet mechanized force.

Under the Eisenhower administration, however, Washington continued to hope that the need for a significant American military presence in Europe would end once NATO members expanded their own conventional forces. Their inability to offset Soviet conventional superiority soon led to the deployment of American tactical nuclear weapons, however, weapons that were developed and produced as part of the military buildup that began after the start of the Korean War. And, as Marc Trachtenberg notes, “nuclearization meant that the Americans, who controlled the most important forces and who in effect operated the strategy, would have to stay in Europe for a very considerable period of time.”⁵⁷ Moreover, in an era where the Soviets had nuclear weapons as well, there was simply no guarantee that the United States could regain control over Western Europe if its forces were pushed off of the continent at the start of a conflict.

The war also had a major impact on the American overseas basing posture. Between 1945 and 1949, US armed forces were in the process of withdrawing from Europe and Asia, demobilizing, and relinquishing many of the bases that had enabled the United States to project power in the European and Pacific theaters during the Second World War. Yet by 1957 the network of US overseas bases had once again expanded substantially. As a report produced by the Eisenhower administration that year noted, the new system of bases “was conceived and developed in great part following the Communist attack in Korea and was given its greatest impetus by that attack. Most of our major construction programs were initiated at that time on an urgent basis.”⁵⁸

Finally, and consistent with NSC-68’s theory of perimeter defense, “The Korean War also led the United States to extend militarized containment to continental Asia.” Although the United States had already begun to support the French efforts against Ho Chi Minh in Indochina to encourage France’s participation in the NATO alliance, fiscal support increased following the start of the Korean War. Moreover, even after the armistice brought the fighting on the Korean Peninsula to an end, “thousands of American troops would be stationed in South Korea, and the

⁵⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, p. 163.

⁵⁸ Frank C. Nash, “Report to the President: United States Overseas Military Bases,” Washington, DC, December 1957 (Declassified February 7, 1990), p. 4.

American Seventh Fleet would patrol the Straits of Taiwan” to defend the remaining nationalist forces from communist China, a threat that Washington had initially downplayed in spite of China’s considerable potential power.⁵⁹

During this period the United States was also taking additional steps unrelated to the Korean War that would shape its ability to project power overseas for the next several decades. For example, by the late 1940s the United States Navy had already developed a deployment strategy that “became the characteristic way the fleet would deploy for the next half century.” Between one and two aircraft carriers, along with their defensive escorts and logistical support ships, were forward deployed to the Mediterranean, to Northeast Asia, and eventually the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean region.⁶⁰ The United States was also developing nuclear propulsion systems for its carriers, submarines, and, for a time, some of its surface combatants; helicopters for air assault and vertical envelopment; carrier- and ground-based jet aircraft; prepositioned stockpiles of war related materiel; and surveillance satellites, among others innovations.

Conclusion

The Cold War represented a major departure for the United States, which no longer relied on its insular geographic position to provide for its security, instead embracing a robust forward military posture as well as a grand strategy that focused on deterring major war through the ability to project massive military power overseas. In fact, America’s global military posture and its Cold War strategy were deeply intertwined. The former was defined in large part by a network of overseas bases throughout the rimland of Eurasia with garrisoned ground and air forces, continuous forward naval presence offshore from the Eurasian rimland, plans to mobilize and deploy reinforcements that were based in the continental United States, the means to conduct strikes against almost any point on the globe from intercontinental distances, and a global surveillance and reconnaissance capability for early warning and targeting. This posture, in turn, supported deterrent threats against the Soviet Union and a host of extended deterrent guarantees to US allies. Although the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the Cold War came to an end, much of this posture and this strategy endured into the post-Cold War era.

⁵⁹ Jerald A. Combs, “The Compromise that Never Was: George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and the Issue of Conventional Deterrence in Europe, 1949-1952,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (July 1991), p. 365. See also LaFeber, “NATO and the Korean War.”

⁶⁰ Swartz, *Sea Changes*, p. 48.

CHAPTER TWO: POWER PROJECTION HUBRIS

At the end of the Cold War the United States was left with a military designed to counter a rival superpower, but without a rival left to deter or to fight. In the two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, therefore, the ability of the US military to project power overseas has been virtually uncontested. William Wohlforth, for example, has observed that the United States is now “the only state with global power projection capabilities; it is probably capable, if challenged, of producing defensive land-power dominance in the key theaters; it retains the world’s only truly blue-water navy; it dominates the air; it has retained a nuclear posture that may give it first-strike advantages against other nuclear powers; and it has continued to nurture decades-old investments in military logistics and command, control, communications, and intelligence.” At the same time, he argues, America’s military advantage has become so overwhelming that it is arguably self-perpetuating. Put simply, “any effort to compete directly with the United States is futile, so no one tries.”⁶¹ Although this optimistic assessment is not without merit, it downplays two important considerations: just how important American military power is for sustaining primacy, and just how fragile it has become.

Power Projection, International Stability, and US Grand Strategy

Today, American military dominance is crucial for at least three reasons. First, the ability to project military power overseas differentiates the United States from potential peer competitors—most of which can only conduct large military operations in close proximity to their own territory—and therefore underpins the unipolar structure of the international system. Russia, for instance, recently defeated neighboring Georgia in less than a week, but its victory exposed major shortcomings in equipment, training, logistics, and intelligence—shortcomings that would only be magnified if Moscow attempted to project power against a stronger or more distant adversary.⁶² In the case of China, which is emerging as the United States’ nearest conventional military competitor, the Department of Defense has observed that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) “will not be able to project and sustain small military units far beyond China before 2015, and will not be able to project and sustain large forces in combat operations far from China until well into the following decade.”⁶³

This situation is unlikely to change in the near future. Admittedly, economic power is the basis for military power, and the United States is now experiencing relative economic decline due in large part to the rise of regional powers such as China and India.⁶⁴ Most notably, reports from

⁶¹ William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), p. 18.

⁶² Roger N. McDermott, “Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces and the Georgian War,” *Parameters*, Vol. 29 (Spring 2009); and International Institute of Strategic Studies, “Russia’s Rapid Reaction,” *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 14, No. 7 (September 2008).

⁶³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2009* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2009), p. 20.

⁶⁴ On the importance of economic or “latent” power, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. xvi; and John

Goldman Sachs, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Energy Information Administration, among other organizations, all suggest that China's gross domestic product will surpass that of the United States in the next several decades, if not sooner.⁶⁵ Even if American economic strength continues to erode, however, few nations, including China, can realistically hope to develop comparable power projection capabilities over the next several decades. For example, developing a modern, robust blue water fleet (one of the traditional hallmarks of military power projection) requires investing in expensive platforms such as large-deck aircraft carriers, large surface combatants, amphibious assault ships, and nuclear-powered submarines; creating the massive infrastructure needed to build these platforms at home and support them overseas; and mastering the skills needed to conduct long distance, long duration missions and complex tasks such as carrier flight deck operations, underway replenishment, and anti-submarine warfare (ASW), among others.⁶⁶ Individually but especially collectively, these steps cannot be achieved quickly or easily.

At the same time, the United States possesses or retains access to a vast network of foreign bases and other facilities, which remain "crucial stepping stones for U.S. military power to transit the globe."⁶⁷ Yet those bases and the alliances that underpin them are a legacy of America's role in World War II and the Cold War, and would be extremely difficult for any other power to replicate, even in part. In fact, the roots of America's overseas military posture go back even further, and the circumstances that led to its creation are even more rare. As Kent Calder notes, "The foundations of the contemporary global basing system were laid most fatefully in London, two centuries ago and more...Perhaps the most important heritage of the British imperial preoccupation with basing was its strategic bequest to a wayward yet predestined one-time colony: a tradition and a physical infrastructure to support the massive American global presence that followed the United Kingdom's own decline." In short, "America had the unique

Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 60-61. Over the past several years a number of analysts and pundits have argued that US economic decline will soon lead the emergence of a multipolar world order. See, for example, Robert A. Pape, "Empire Falls," *The National Interest*, No. 99 (January/February 2009); Michael Lind, "Beyond American Hegemony," *The National Interest*, No. 89 (May/June 2007); and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of American Hegemony," in Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Primacy and its Discontents* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Dominic Wilson and Roopa Purushothaman, "Dreaming With BRICS: The Path to 2050," *Goldman Sachs*, Global Economics Paper No. 99, October 2003; Jim O'Neil, Dominic Wilson, Roopa Purushothaman, and Anna Stupnytska, "How Solid are the BRICs?" *Goldman Sachs*, Global Economic Paper No. 134, December 2005; Dominic Wilson and Anna Stupnytska, "The N-11: More Than an Acronym," *Goldman Sachs*, Global Economics Paper No. 153, March 2007; Albert Keidel, "China's Economic Rise—Face and Fiction," Carnegie Policy Brief, July 2008, p. 6; and Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Outlook 2009* (Washington, DC: EIA, May 2009), Reference Case Projections, pp. 124-125.

⁶⁶ Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects and the U.S. Response," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 75-76.

⁶⁷ Posen, "Command of the Commons," p. 44.

advantage...of building on Britain's prior basing structure—and often-neglected jump-start to Washington's sudden postwar emergence as a global superpower.”⁶⁸

Second and closely related, American military power helps to ensure the stability of the international system. Historically, major wars have often resulted from a power transition between a dominant but declining nation and a rising challenger.⁶⁹ Moreover, the former have often been maritime nations with global economic interests and an unmatched ability to project military power into distant regions (in particular naval powers such as the Netherlands, then Britain, and then the United States), while the latter have often been continental powers with large land forces and a desire to expand their territory (notably Spain, then France, and later Germany and the Soviet Union). According to a number of theorists, when the international system contains a leading economic and naval power, but no single continental power dominates its region, major wars can be avoided. When the leading maritime power loses its economic dominance and especially its military advantage, however, and a continental power simultaneously achieves a preponderance of land power within its region, the stage is set for a catalytic war that could reshape the entire international system.⁷⁰ As a maritime nation that has become the leading naval *and* land power since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has been in a unique position of dominance, one that has arguably contributed to more than two decades of major power peace.

Third, the ability to project military power globally underpins the most important and enduring elements of American grand strategy. Despite ongoing academic and policy debates over whether the United States should adopt a strategy of offshore balancing, selective engagement, primacy, or neo-isolationism, US strategy has consisted of at least two fundamental objectives since the end of the Second World War, neither of which seems likely to change in the near future.⁷¹ Most importantly, the United States has worked to preserve stability in the world's key geostrategic regions, particularly Western Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East. According to Christopher Layne, “Since the 1940s, the United States assiduously has pursued a unipolar distribution of power in the international system. And, in the three regions that matter the most to it, it has maintained a permanent military presence to prevent the emergence of new

⁶⁸ Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490-1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, “Hegemonic Threats and Great Power Balancing in Europe, 1495-1999,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January-March 2005); and Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, chap. 4.

⁷¹ On these alternative grand strategies, see Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97); Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997); Robert J. Art, “Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter 1998/99); and Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997).

poles of power and to maintain the kind of regional peace and stability deemed essential to upholding a U.S.-dominated international order.”⁷²

During the Cold War this involved containing Soviet expansion to prevent the Kremlin from controlling the majority of the Eurasian landmass, its resources, and its industrial capacity. In the absence of the Soviet threat, the United States shifted its focus during the 1990s to discouraging or countering territorial aggrandizement by regional powers such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The United States has also pledged to defend a host of allies overseas—not only to deter attacks against them, but also to dissuade them from taking actions or acquiring capabilities that could trigger destabilizing arms races or local conflicts. As of September 2010, for example, nearly 300,000 American troops were stationed outside of the United States and its territories, not including the 200,000 troops deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷³ These forces serve as a deterrent to regional aggression, a rapid response capability in the event of a conflict, and a symbol of the United States’ commitment to protect its allies and partners. At the same time, the United States has also sought to encourage a liberal economic order by ensuring access to the global commons, in particular by ensuring freedom of the seas to facilitate international trade and commerce.

Ultimately, as Secretary Gates recently noted, “For more than 60 years the United States, backed up by the strength, reach and unquestioned superiority of our military, has been the underwriter of security for most of the free world,” contributing to “stability, prosperity, and the steady expansion of political freedom and economic growth.”⁷⁴ Absent a robust capability to project military power abroad, the United States would not be able to deter aggression, however, to engage in coercive diplomacy, to assure allies that it can defend them if they are in danger, and to guarantee that the global economy can function without major disruptions.

Traditional Challenges to Power Projection

The United States’ unprecedented military power in the post-Cold War era is not only important for the character of the international system, the stability of the system, and American grand strategy, it is also historically unique. Power projection—especially *transoceanic* power projection—has always presented a significant challenge for major powers, even for maritime powers like Great Britain during the 19th century and the United States during the 20th century. Nearly fifty years ago, for example, George Kennan observed that, “Many Americans seem unable to recognize the technical difficulties involved in the operation of far-flung lines of power—the difficulty of trying to exert power from any given national center, over areas greatly remote from that center.” This led him to the sweeping conclusion that “the effectiveness of the

⁷² Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 5.

⁷³ Department of Defense, “Active Duty Military Strengths by Regional Area and by Country, September 30, 2010,” accessed at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/history/hst1009.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, “Statement on Department Budget and Efficiencies,” The Pentagon, January 6, 2011, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1527>.

power radiated from any one national center decreases in proportion to the distance involved.”⁷⁵ Although Kennan’s principal concern at the time was to debunk the notion that the Soviet Union was capable of world domination, and although his argument failed to explore the many factors that could erode or enhance the efficacy of power projection, his underlying point applied to the United States then and remains relevant today: employing military forces overseas, particularly against a determined or capable adversary, is an extraordinarily difficult proposition.

There are, of course, a host of variables that can impact the effectiveness of power projection in any given circumstance, including the distance and geographic terrain that must be traversed; the balance of aggregate resources between the nation projecting power and its intended target; the quality of military technology as well as the quantity of platforms available to both sides; the organizational structure of opponents’ respective military organizations; and the relative skill of their military personnel, to name only a few. In general, however, the most significant challenges associated with power projection arise in three distinct stages. Specifically, a nation must (1) deploy military forces beyond its territorial boundaries; (2) defeat the forces of its adversary or adversaries; and, depending on its objectives, (3) exercise control over the territory of a defeated opponent.

First, simply deploying effective forces in sufficient numbers to overwhelm a distant adversary is often a difficult task. Echoing Kennan and writing at nearly the same time, Kenneth Boulding argued that a nation’s military power is limited by a critical variable—what he called “the loss of strength gradient”—when applied over any significant range. As the distance over which a military force must travel before conducting operations increases, Boulding argued, the weaker that force will become: supply lines grow longer, more resources must be devoted to providing logistical support and protecting lines of communication, and fewer men and materiel are available for actual combat against an adversary. In short, “the further from home any nation has to operate, the longer will be its lines of communication, and the less strength it can put in the field.”⁷⁶ Geographic barriers can also inhibit the deployment of military forces. John Mearsheimer, for example, has emphasized the “stopping power of water,” arguing that “when great powers are separated by large bodies of water, they usually do not have much offensive capability against each other, regardless of the relative size of their armies. Large bodies of water

⁷⁵ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), p. 276. As one recent biographer notes, Kennan “loved to quote Edward Gibbon’s line that ‘there is nothing more contrary to nature than the attempt to hold in obedience distant provinces,’” a point he often made to highlight the difficulties that the Soviet Union would confront in attempting to control its satellites in Eastern Europe. Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt: 2009), p. 18.

⁷⁶ Kenneth E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 231. Albert Wohlstetter, by contrast, maintained that, “the theory that military strength declines in a straight line with distance has never been correct.” Although his critique of Kennan and Boulding emphasized the possibility that emerging technologies would significantly decrease the costs and difficulties associated with long distance transportation and communication, he downplayed the notion that technology would also enable an adversary to more effectively threaten a distant power’s forces, bases, and lines of communication. Albert Wohlstetter, “Illusions of Distance,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46 (January 1968), p. 243.

are formidable obstacles that cause significant power-projection problems for attacking armies.”⁷⁷

Second, presuming a nation can deploy substantial forces abroad, it still faces the dilemma that defense usually has the advantage over offense, an observation frequently associated with the rule of thumb in land warfare that attacking forces require a 3:1 numerical advantage over the defender, at least at specific points along a broad front. Absent this advantage, a defending force can exploit a number of inherent advantages to prevent a breakthrough and wear down an attacker, including the ability to quickly reinforce and resupply areas under assault by exploiting interior lines of communication; to select fighting positions that maximize the impact of defensive firepower; and to rely on natural barriers or employ fortifications, mines, and obstacles to inhibit the attacker’s approach.⁷⁸

Third, if the ultimate objective of power projection is territorial aggrandizement or achieving indirect control over an opponent rather than simply conducting a punitive campaign, it may be necessary to occupy large swaths of territory after military operations are concluded successfully. Yet occupation has tended to exacerbate the difficulties often associated with employing military forces effectively over significant distances. As Michael Mann has argued in his sweeping examination of ancient and modern empires, throughout history “The political radius of practicable rule by a state was smaller than the radius of a military conquest. An army achieved success by *concentrating* its forces. It pushed through unpacified terrain, protecting continuously only its flanks and rear and keeping open intermittently its lines of communication. Those who could not run away submitted, formally...But ruling over those who had submitted involved *dispersing* force, which was throwing away the military advantage. No conqueror could eliminate this contradiction.”⁷⁹

Together, these factors (and others as well) have inhibited major powers from influencing events abroad, defeating enemies overseas, and expanding their territory. At the same time, the ability of maritime powers like Britain and the United States to project power over greater distances and far more effectively than their adversaries, in concert with their global interests and responsibilities, has also constrained power projection by weaker nations. Simply stated, the possibility of outside intervention has often discouraged nations from attacking their neighbors or deploying military forces outside of their borders. America’s ability to project power, therefore, inhibits others from doing so or renders their efforts ineffective.

⁷⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 44.

⁷⁸ See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, “Assessing the Conventional Balance: The 3:1 Rule and its Critics,” *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Spring 1989). On the notion that defense generally has the advantage over offense at the strategic and operational levels, see in particular Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁷⁹ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 142 (emphasis in original).

The New American Way of War and the Anti-Access Challenge

The United States has often been able to avoid these challenges or overcome them through superior material resources, technological and operational innovation, and a high level of military proficiency, although ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are a reminder that occupying foreign territory and controlling hostile populations are invariably costly and difficult. Nevertheless, the United States' ability to project power appears to be waning as a result of two developments in particular. First, prospective opponents have studied the "American way of war" over the past two decades and identified a number of critical vulnerabilities. Second, the maturation and proliferation of the guided weapons warfare regime is enabling nations as well as non-state actors to exploit those vulnerabilities more effectively.

Since the end of the Cold War a distinct "style" of American military power projection has emerged, one that has influenced how the United States conducts flexible deterrent options in response to crises abroad, how it plans for major combat operations against likely adversaries, what capabilities it purchases, and what operational concepts it employs. This style is characterized by a number of attributes, some of which are old while others are relatively new: a reliance on large, high signature forces such as aircraft carrier strike groups and heavy ground combat brigades; the use of high-demand, low-density assets that cannot sustain significant attrition, ranging from carriers, to ballistic missile defenses, to short-range combat aircraft and long-range strike systems; the ability to mobilize forces over an extended period of time before initiating combat operations; the need to deploy and sustain those forces over extended lines of communication; the need for large theater airbases, ports, and ground force staging areas to accommodate a massive influx of US troops, equipment, and supplies before and during a conflict; and the support of an extensive computer and space-based information infrastructure to coordinate military forces over vast distances, share intelligence, and provide navigation and targeting data.

The current American style of power projection has diverse origins. For example, the drawdown or "peace dividend" that followed the Cold War left the United States with a smaller military, one that could no longer withstand significant losses if confronted with an adversary that was actually capable of imposing high costs on US forces. Compounding this dilemma, the United States has long demonstrated a preference for technological substitution, that is, the use of material rather than manpower to the greatest extent possible. As Alex Roland has observed, "The American style of war has come to be protection of its troops with material resources and technology."⁸⁰ Yet this has contributed to the acquisition of increasingly advanced—and increasingly expensive—platforms in smaller and smaller numbers. The United States also made changes to its global military posture in response to the shifting post-Cold War strategic environment. Instead of remaining a garrison force that was expected to fight in place against an invader, the US military has become a more expeditionary force, one that deploys from permanent bases in the United States and overseas to distant theaters of operations.

At the same time, a number of explicit and implicit assumptions were made in the aftermath of the Cold War and the First Gulf War, assumptions that have guided planning efforts for nearly

⁸⁰ Roland, "Technology, Ground Warfare, and Strategy," p. 464. See also Gray, "American Strategy in the Nuclear Age," p. 590; and Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, pp. xii-xiii.

two decades. Three in particular stand out. First, the US military would likely be called upon to conduct humanitarian or peacekeeping operations against poorly armed and equipped forces, or major theater wars against regional powers like Iraq and North Korea that were smaller, weaker versions of the Soviet Union—an enemy the US military had spent decades planning to fight. Second, the United States would have the support of local allies during any military operations, including base access, overflight rights, logistical support, and perhaps even token combat support. Third, the United States would retain a unilateral advantage in precision-guided weaponry and other high-technology capabilities. As a result, opponents would have at best a minimal ability to threaten US theater bases, supply lines, C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) assets, or the air and naval platforms that operate far from or high above the battlespace.⁸¹

Although American post-Cold War military operations have often been effective, in many ways the United States has been fortunate in its adversaries, most of which have been unwilling or unable to mount a serious challenge to US military forces. Yet this situation is rapidly changing and, as a result, the assumptions of the past twenty years no longer appear viable. For example, China is currently developing a multidimensional anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) network to guard its eastern air and maritime approaches, one that is likely to include a variety of counter-air, counter-space, and counter-network capabilities, as well as extended-range, conventional precision strike weapons and the C4ISR systems necessary for accurate, over-the-horizon targeting at ever-greater ranges.⁸² According to General Wallace “Chip” Gregson, the current Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, “it has become increasingly evident that China is pursuing a long-term, comprehensive military buildup that could upend the regional security balance.”⁸³

Specifically, China’s A2/AD network is intended to exploit a number of potential American weaknesses, including the US military’s dependence on large and easily targeted forward bases, most of which are also on the territory of allies that are susceptible to coercive pressure; its need to flow significant forces into a distant theater over an extended period of time before undertaking any major combat operation, which allows an adversary to target undefended air and sea lines of communication, and to launch attacks before US forces are fully prepared; and its extensive use of vulnerable space-based assets (such as satellites traveling in predictable orbits) and computer data networks (such as unclassified systems used to store and transmit critical

⁸¹ Mark A. Gunzinger, *Sustaining America’s Strategic Advantage in Long-Range Strike* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009), p. 12; and Evan Braden Montgomery, *Defense Planning for the Long Haul: Scenarios, Operational Concepts, and the Future Security Environment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009), p. 8.

⁸² Anti-access capabilities/strategies are used to prevent or constrain the deployment of opposing forces into a theater of operations, whereas area-denial capabilities/strategies are used to restrict their freedom of maneuver once in theater. For an overview of current A2/AD challenges, see Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010).

⁸³ Quoted in Bill Gertz, “Inside the Ring,” *Washington Times*, December 16, 2010.

data) for C4ISR.⁸⁴ Ultimately, in China the United States will soon find itself confronting a well-armed opponent that can concentrate its numerically superior forces against limited targets sets that are not structured to absorb attrition, for example ballistic missiles against a handful of bases; submarines against a small number of carriers, replenishment vessels, or sealift ships; strike fighters against strike fighters; or kinetic- and directed-energy systems against large satellites. In the face of this challenge, it is not clear that the American military's post-Cold War concepts of operation can be sustained without incurring an unacceptable level of risk.

At the same time, China's military modernization is likely to be merely the first instance of a much broader trend, namely "the proliferation of precision," even to traditionally "low-end" threats such as minor powers and non-state actors. For instance, Iran is currently developing a variety of anti-access capabilities, including fast attack craft armed with anti-ship cruise missiles that can "swarm" larger warships, land-based anti-ship cruise missile batteries for coastal defense, and a small fleet of conventionally powered submarines, including several relatively advanced, Russian-built Kilo-class submarines and a larger number of "midget" submarines.⁸⁵ Iran has also invested considerable effort into developing ballistic missiles over the past two decades. Although reliable information on Iran's ballistic missile arsenal is extremely limited, it does appear to have a significant inventory of short-range missiles and a small but growing number of longer-range systems. Although none of these systems are very accurate, Iran's emphasis on missiles with increased range could enable it to pose a significant threat to US allies throughout the Middle East, many of whom could deny American forces access during a crisis to avoid being attacked themselves.⁸⁶

Alternatively, consider the July 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, which frequently is described as the prototype for future "hybrid" conflicts that will combine elements of both conventional and irregular warfare.⁸⁷ During the 33-day war Hezbollah not only used unguided surface-to-surface rockets, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), it also employed a number of guided weapons against Israeli forces, in particular anti-

⁸⁴ On China's military modernization and strategy, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems Without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001); Roger Cliff, et al, *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Anti-Access Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007); and Randall Schriver and Mark Stokes, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army: Consequences of Coercive Aerospace Power for United States Conventional Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Project 2049 Institute, 2008).

⁸⁵ Office of Naval Intelligence, *Iran's Naval Forces: From Guerilla Warfare to Modern Naval Strategy* (Fall 2009), pp. 13, 17-18; Steven R. Ward, "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 568-569; and David Eshel, "David and Goliath," *Aviation Week*, March 28, 2010.

⁸⁶ On Iran's missile capabilities, see National Air and Space Intelligence Center, *Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat* (Wright-Patterson AFB, NASIC, 2009); Anthony Cordesman and Adam C. Seitz, *Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Birth of a Regional Nuclear Arms Race?* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009); Alan Cowell and Nazila Fathi, "Iran Test-Fires Missiles That Put Israel in Range," *New York Times*, September 29, 2009; and Michael Slackman, "Iran Says It Tested Upgraded Missile," *New York Times*, December 17, 2009.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007).

tank missiles and, in one instance, an anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM).⁸⁸ More ominously, Hezbollah has not only restocked its arsenal of rockets and missiles since 2006, it has also expanded and improved its capabilities over the past four years, acquiring systems with greater range and accuracy. Recent reports suggest that the group has acquired additional anti-ship cruise missiles; more advanced shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles; and liquid-fueled Scud surface-to-surface missiles with a range of more than 400 miles. It may also be equipped with solid-fueled M-600 surface-to-surface missiles that have a range of nearly 200 miles and are equipped with a Global Positioning System (GPS)-aided inertial guidance package, giving the missiles a circular error probable (CEP) of less than 200 meters.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Transoceanic power projection has always been difficult, but the United States has been able to overcome or avoid many of these challenges through a combination of its own efforts as well as fortuitous developments, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the United States' unparalleled ability to project power is frequently acknowledged, what is less often recognized is how important this has become for the character of the international system, the stability of the international system, and American grand strategy. Yet the growing sophistication and increasing proliferation of anti-access/area denial capabilities is likely to make power projection far more difficult in the decades ahead, first and foremost for the United States, but for others as well—a trend that could have far-reaching implications.

⁸⁸ On Hezbollah's strategy, tactics, and capabilities during the 2006 conflict, see Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008); and Andrew Exum, *Hizbullah at War: A Military Assessment* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006).

⁸⁹ Barak Ravid, "Israel to UN: Hezbollah Has Tripled its Land-to-Sea Missile Arsenal," *Haaretz*, October 31, 2007; Nicholas Blanford, "Hizballah Prepares for the Next War," *Time*, May 10, 2010; Charles Levinson and Jay Solomon, "Syria Gave Scuds to Hezbollah, U.S. Says," *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2010; and Alon Ben-David, "Israel Sees Increased Hezbollah Capability," *Aviation Week*, May 18, 2010. CEP is the radius of a circle within which 50 percent of a weapon's munitions are expected to fall.

CHAPTER THREE: THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF A POST-POWER PROJECTION ERA

During the First Gulf War the United States employed low-observable strike aircraft, aerial surveillance platforms capable of tracking mobile ground targets, satellite-based tracking and communication systems, and laser-guided munitions to dramatically enhance the effectiveness of its conventional forces. As a result, it was able to rapidly defeat the Iraqi military while suffering only minor losses. Since then, the United States has continued to improve its surveillance and strike capabilities, developing new communication and reconnaissance satellites, employing GPS-guided cruise missiles and gravity bombs, and fielding a variety of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), among other innovations. Even more importantly, it has also been the only major participant in the guided weapons warfare regime, giving it an enormous advantage over its opponents.⁹⁰

The ongoing maturation of this regime has the potential to dramatically alter the character of future conflicts, however, depriving the United States of a unilateral advantage it has not only come to expect but also to rely upon, undermining its ability to defend both its interests and allies overseas, emboldening adversaries to engage in aggressive behavior, and triggering major changes throughout the international system. Of course, the strategic consequences of the maturing guided weapons regime are likely to unfold over time, and will depend on a number of factors: how quickly potential adversaries develop anti-access capabilities, how advanced those capabilities are, and how effectively they are employed; whether American allies and security partners choose to remain under the US security umbrella, pursue a more independent defense strategy, or instead bandwagon with the strongest local actor; and what measures, if any, the United States takes to offset the deteriorating military balance and preserve its influence in critical geostrategic regions. Despite these uncertainties, the purpose of this chapter is to outline a number of possible outcomes based on current trends.

The Maturing Guided Weapons Warfare Regime and the Declining Viability of Power Projection

As described above, power projection, especially transoceanic power projection, has always been extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the continuing development of reconnaissance-strike complexes (RSCs)—the term used by Soviet theorists who first highlighted the possibility of an emerging revolution in military affairs in the late 1970s and early 1980s—is almost certain to exacerbate those difficulties, creating new challenges and imposing greater costs on *any nation* that attempts to employ military forces beyond its borders.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “The Pentagon’s Wasting Assets,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (July/August 2009).

⁹¹ On the origins and characteristics of reconnaissance-strike complexes, see the discussion in Michael G. Vickers and Robert C. Martinage, *The Revolution in War* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2004), pp. 10-11; and Andrei A. Kokoshkin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-1991* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 139-140.

Specifically, as emerging RSCs grow more sophisticated and proliferate more widely, the competition between power projection and anti-access could shift decisively in favor of the latter. Regional powers defending their territory or conducting limited offensive campaigns in their immediate periphery already benefit from a significant “home field advantage” relative to global powers attempting to conduct military operations in a distant theater.⁹² In particular, regional powers often possess superior knowledge of the local terrain, shorter and more secure interior lines of communication, a greater number of bases in close proximity to the area where a conflict is taking place, and the ability to quickly concentrate their forces against their opponent. By contrast, global powers like the United States must keep their forces widely dispersed in preparation for a variety of potential contingencies, transport and sustain those forces over significant distances once a threat does emerge, and rely on local allies for access to bases and other facilities—access that can be denied in a crisis. In a contest between the two, the presence of a robust anti-access network is likely to exacerbate a regional power’s inherent advantages while creating new asymmetries in its favor.

In particular, any large concentration of forces as well as the high signature platforms, fixed infrastructure, and exterior lines of communication that global powers depend upon are likely to become far more vulnerable. At the same time, efforts to overcome these glaring vulnerabilities may prove to be economically unsustainable or simply untenable. For instance, most anti-access capabilities remain far less expensive than traditional power projection forces or the investments that are necessary to protect them in non-permissive operating environments. To cite just one prominent example, the offense-defense balance between ballistic missile attack and missile defense is still heavily weighted in favor of the former, making the protection of bases—and perhaps also surface vessels in the near future—highly problematic. Another obvious countermeasure, namely dispersing forces to make targeting more difficult, would result in enormous logistical burdens, and could perhaps create new vulnerabilities as well.

In general, these trends have the potential to create a more “defense dominant” environment, at least at the operational level, insofar as taking and holding territory becomes far more difficult than repelling an attacker or engaging in a strategy of denial, that is, simply preventing an opponent from achieving its objectives. For example, any invasion force that must be transported over a large body of water will need to employ slow moving amphibious ships, which could be highly vulnerable to submarines armed with wake-homing torpedoes, swarming fast attack craft armed with guided missiles, and mobile land-based anti-ship cruise missile batteries, especially when those amphibious ships enter shallow waters or transit narrow geographic chokepoints, which will put them in range of the largest number of guided weapons while also constraining their maneuverability and limiting their reaction time. Landing forces will also be vulnerable to shore-based fires when approaching an enemy’s coastline, and will find it difficult to establish a secure beachhead if opposing forces are capable of launching attacks with guided rockets, artillery, missiles, and mortars (G-RAMM).

Even a ground invasion launched against a contiguous state could face enormous difficulties. Gaining air superiority, for example, which remains critical to success in ground combat, will

⁹² James R. Holmes, “Schelling Goes to Sea: Managing Perceptions in China’s ‘Contested Zone,’” *Defence Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June 2009)

present a significant challenge when the target of an attack is equipped with advanced air defense systems. Moreover, an invading force would also be susceptible to attacks from a variety of short-range guided weapons, a vulnerability that is likely to become more pronounced as its supply lines become extended and as fixed bases are established in forward operating areas. Even if an invader did succeed at conquering foreign territory despite these threats, irregular resistance forces could use G-RAMM capabilities to harass enemy forces and make any prolonged occupation prohibitively costly.

Of course, this does not mean that power projection will become impossible, even if anti-access capabilities do proliferate more widely. At the very least, it may be possible for stronger nations to use their superior material resources to defeat weaker states or non-state actors, if they are willing to suffer the costs of doing so; in some cases, raw power can still overcome a significant defensive advantage. Moreover, specific methods of power projection, for example missile bombardments, are likely to remain viable, insofar as they employ anti-access capabilities that are difficult to defend against as the key elements of an offensive campaign. In fact, in the emerging regime it will be useful to differentiate between two different types of power projection forces: those that are manpower-intensive and require sustainment in forward areas, and those that are less manpower intensive and do not depend as heavily on forward bases or a continual stream of supplies. While the former are likely to become more vulnerable and less effective, the latter will be increasingly attractive over time. Together, this suggests that in a more mature guided weapons regime, aggressors are likely to launch coercive wars against weaker nations aimed at increasing the costs of resistance and the likelihood of capitulation, while avoiding wars that aim to conquer and control foreign territory. Nevertheless, when an adversary is armed with precision-guided weapons, even intra-regional power projection against neighboring states could be extremely problematic.

The United States and a Post-Power Projection World

These trends are likely to impact many nations, particularly if they aspire to project power beyond their immediate periphery. If, for example, China hopes to deploy significant naval forces beyond East Asia and into the Indian Ocean or Arabian Sea for any sustained period of time, it will require new platforms, including aircraft carriers and support ships, as well as forward operating bases to refuel, resupply, and refit. Toward that end, it has not only demonstrated an interest in developing a fleet of carriers, it has also funded the construction of several deep water ports along the Indian Ocean littoral that have the potential serve as de facto bases in the future. This would, however, leave China with many of the same vulnerabilities that now afflict the United States.

Nevertheless, over the near-to-medium term, the United States is still likely to be affected far more than most other nations, for several reasons. First, the United States has already spent decades building and training its armed forces in support of a particular manner of power projection. Because of these immense “sunk costs,” therefore, the United States quite simply has more to lose than any other nation if the viability of traditional power projection declines substantially. Second, and closely related, American military forces have grown accustomed to relatively favorable operating conditions that could become the exception rather than the rule: access to large ports and airfields near the theater of operations that remain free from serious or sustained attack, the strong support of local allies during a crisis, uncontested strategic lines of

communication to deploy and sustain combat units, and a reliance on a diminishing number of increasingly expensive—and increasingly vulnerable—platforms. Even if US forces manage to adapt to the changing strategic environment, then, the costs and difficulty of doing so could be extremely high. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the United States is geographically isolated yet continues to have extensive overseas economic interests and security commitments. There is, therefore, a very high probability that future crises and conflicts will occur far from its territory, and a strong likelihood that these events could trigger some form of American military intervention, ranging from coercive threats to the actual deployment of combat forces. In short, a credible power projection capability to deter or counter aggression abroad will remain crucial to the United States, its interests, and its influence in the international system.

For the United States, therefore, the potential implications of a maturing guided weapons warfare regime are stark. Barry Posen, for example, has argued that despite its “command of the commons” the US military already faces considerable challenges in the “contested zones,” or “arenas of conventional combat where weak adversaries have a good chance of doing real damage to U.S. forces.” According to Posen, these arenas presently include airspace below 15,000 feet; complex terrain such as urban areas, mountains, or jungles; and littoral waters. Moreover, adversaries can inflict significant costs on US forces in these contested zones with rudimentary weapons; their advantage stems not from the quality of their equipment, but rather from their ability to exploit the local terrain and their access to superior reserves of manpower.⁹³

Yet these contested zones are likely to grow far more dangerous. In a more mature guided weapons regime, the most challenging aspect of power projection (whether transoceanic or intra-regional power projection) is likely to be the “last mile” problem. Specifically, deploying forces into hostile or denied environments will become increasingly difficult as the distance between an approaching force and its objective decreases. The reason is straightforward. Although the advent of precision-guided weapons has made accuracy independent of range, it has not made accuracy and range independent of cost.⁹⁴ It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that different types of precision-guided weapons will proliferate at different rates.

Specifically, shorter-range weapons such as mortars, artillery, and man-portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles are likely to spread more widely and more rapidly than extended-range systems such as ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges greater than several hundred kilometers. Not only are the latter more complex, more expensive, and more difficult to acquire due to export controls and international agreements such as the Missile Technology Control Regime, but the technical demands of locating and striking targets so far over-the-horizon are also significantly more challenging.⁹⁵ Yet less sophisticated capabilities—including anti-tank guided

⁹³ Posen, “Command of the Commons,” esp. pp. 22-42.

⁹⁴ Barry D. Watts, *Six Decades of Guided Munitions and Battle Networks: Progress and Prospects* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2007), pp. 14-15.

⁹⁵ The MTCR is a voluntary international regime consisting of 34 member nations, all of whom have pledged to implement export controls restricting the sale or transfer of missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (or the technology needed to build them) with ranges of 300 kilometers or greater and payloads of 500 kilograms or greater.

missiles, man-portable air defense systems, short- and medium-range anti-ship cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, electro-optical and infrared sensors, and computers that can rapidly process large amounts of data—are becoming more widely available. This could enable a host of regional powers, small states, and non-state actors to develop RSCs that may be rudimentary in comparison to China’s highly advanced A2/AD network, but which still have the potential to be extremely effective against an inadequately prepared opponent. It also means that anti-access capabilities are likely to be most dense and operating environments are likely to be least permissive in close proximity to an adversary’s forces or territory.

While military operations in contested zones are likely to become more difficult, these zones are also likely to expand and increasingly overlap with the global commons as states and perhaps even non-state actors gain the ability to target opposing forces with accurate weapons at greater ranges, further undermining the United States’ ability to project power abroad. In fact, the notion that the global commons are facing an increasing number of threats has become widespread over the past several years. Notably, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review maintained that, “A series of recent trends highlight growing challenges to stability throughout the global commons—from cyberspace attacks abroad and network intrusions here at home, to increased piracy, to anti-satellite weapons tests and the growth in the number of space-faring nations, to the investments some nations are making in systems designed to threaten our primary means of projecting power: our bases, our sea and air assets, and the networks that support them.”⁹⁶

Implications for the International System and American Strategy

Despite its current status as the preeminent global power, it appears that the United States’ ability to project military power is likely to erode over the next several decades, particularly if it continues to emphasize capabilities and operational concepts that are best suited to relatively permissive environments. Given that transoceanic power projection has underpinned the unipolar moment, the stability of the international system, and the core objectives of American grand strategy, what are the broader potential consequences of this development? If opponents can use precision-guided weapons to deny access to US forces and restrict their ability to maneuver, and if intervention abroad is likely to become far more costly in both blood and treasure, will the United States be able to enforce freedom of the seas, deter expansion by aspiring local powers, maintain regional stability, defend its allies, and preserve its position as the global hegemon?

I. The End of Unipolarity

The past twenty years have seen a persistent and inconclusive debate over whether the unipolar moment is likely to prove enduring or ephemeral.⁹⁷ There is little doubt, however, that military power, and in particular the ability to project military power over transoceanic distances, remains a critical differentiator between the United States and emerging peer or near-peer competitors. As noted above, moreover, it is also one of the most enduring differences, given the cost and

⁹⁶ Department of Defense, *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, pp. 8-9. See also the essays in Abraham M. Denmark and James Mulvenon, eds., *Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010).

⁹⁷ For an overview of this debate, see Eric S. Edelman, *Understanding America’s Contested Primacy* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010).

difficulty associated with developing traditional power projection capabilities. Nevertheless, as anti-access capabilities become more sophisticated and proliferate more widely, the American “military differentiator” may prove durable but increasingly irrelevant.

It is true, of course, that potential competitors from China, to Iran, to Hezbollah may obtain only a limited ability to project power over significant distances (via small blue water naval forces, missile forces, or irregular proxies) over the course of the next several decades. Yet the United States may also find itself unwilling or unable to project power against major powers, regional powers, and even some non-state actors if its armed forces are increasingly comprised of “wasting assets” that are vulnerable, ineffective, or both. As low-end and high-end anti-access networks grow more robust, the United States may become a “hollow hegemon,” one that clearly stands above potential adversaries when applying comparative metrics such as the absolute size of its defense budget or the number of aircraft carriers and stealthy combat aircraft in its inventory, but that cannot employ its military forces effectively. The result, in effect, would be an end to the unipolar moment.

II. The New Sources of Instability, Order, and Conflict

At the outset of the unipolar moment, Samuel Huntington argued that, “A world without U.S. primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth than a world where the United States continues to have more influence than any other country in shaping global affairs. The sustained international primacy of the United States is central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world.”⁹⁸ If anti-access/area denial capabilities become increasingly sophisticated and proliferate more widely over the next several decades, if the United States can no longer project power effectively as a result, and if US primacy therefore erodes or perhaps even comes to an end, several destabilizing possibilities could become a reality.

First, aspiring local hegemons may become emboldened to act more aggressively toward both the United States and their neighbors. They may, for example, brandish their military capabilities in tests or large-scale exercises, initiate crises over disputed territories or resource deposits, or engage in other provocative behavior in the hope of clearly establishing their dominance over local rivals (by demonstrating that weaker nations must tolerate their actions or accede to their demands), driving a wedge between the United States and other nations in the region (by revealing that the United States cannot or will not intervene on their behalf), or both. At the same time, these aspiring local hegemons may also be the catalyst for major shifts in patterns of trade and finance, particularly if they attempt to create exclusive economic zones that rivals are powerless to challenge, or preferential regional trading blocs that guarantee access to critical raw materials and “lock out” major power competitors.

Second, US allies and partners may begin to lose faith in its explicit or implicit security guarantees. As aspiring local hegemons develop robust anti-access capabilities, American forward-based and forward-deployed forces will grow increasingly vulnerable; rather than

⁹⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “Why International Primacy Matters,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), p. 83.

serving as effective instruments of deterrence and coercion, they may instead become tempting targets that are easy to destroy and difficult to reinforce. Fearful of provoking an attack on their territory or of being drawn into a conflict they cannot win, US allies could eventually choose to expel US forces permanently, restrict their access to key bases, or discourage the use of so-called “flexible deterrent options” (usually high visibility force packages that are assembled and deployed to demonstrate American resolve) during crises. Nations that seek to decouple themselves from the United States will then have two options: they can either work to enhance their own military capabilities in an effort to balance against local threats on their own or with their neighbors, or they can bandwagon with those threats. Choosing the former option, however, could reignite dormant historic rivalries, trigger arms races, and foster windows of opportunity and vulnerability as nations develop their own anti-access networks at different rates. This could, therefore, create *zones of persistent conflict*, unless and until a point of equilibrium is reached where all key nations in a region have a robust, defensive, anti-access network. Alternatively, if nations choose to bandwagon with an aspiring local hegemon, then *spheres of influence* could emerge in which those nations are essentially “Finlandized,” opting to reorient their foreign economic and security policies to accommodate the most powerful local actor, whether willingly or under intense coercive pressure.

Third, if traditional methods of power-projection are no longer viable or cost-effective then major powers (and perhaps minor powers as well) may come to rely more on indirect forms of power-projection, including the use of irregular proxies and surrogates, and may be forced to conduct military campaigns in peripheral theaters where A2/AD capabilities do not exist or are far less dense. This would, in fact, be a return to a traditional pattern of great power politics that has been relatively dormant in the post-Cold War era, namely the existence of international rivalries that are largely characterized by positional competitions between opponents like the 19th century Anglo-Russian “Great Game” in Central Asia: ongoing struggles in peripheral theaters—often waged through local proxies—to secure critical natural resources, preserve access to economic markets, control strategically or economically vital lines of communication, and prevent adversaries from expanding their territory or influence, among other objectives. For example, for large parts of the 18th century Britain and France competed with one another in North America and on the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul note that, “no total war erupted between the great powers from 1815 to 1914,” yet “limited and proxy wars were considered and used as legitimate methods of maintaining and enhancing state goals.”⁹⁹ Finally, during the Cold War, the dangers of nuclear escalation drove the US-Soviet competition from the core to the periphery; rather than fighting on the plains of central Europe, both sides fought against and through their clients in Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

III. The Future of American Strategy

As the preceding discussion makes clear, the growing sophistication and proliferation of reconnaissance-strike complexes has the potential to undermine the core elements of American grand strategy, namely, preventing any single nation from dominating the Eurasian landmass, deterring or countering aggression by regional powers, defending a host of allies across the

⁹⁹ James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, “A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 475.

globe, and guaranteeing access to the global commons in support of an increasingly globalized economy. Unless the United States can continue to project military power effectively, then, it will eventually be compelled to abandon its strategy of primacy—a strategy it has maintained for more than half a century—and accept a much more circumscribed role in international affairs. In effect, it may have little choice but to adopt a strategy of offshore balancing or even neo-isolationism.

CHAPTER FOUR: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR A POST-POWER PROJECTION ERA

If the United States can no longer project military power as effectively as it has over the past two decades, and if current trends suggest that its ability to do so could decline even further and faster in the decades ahead, then foreign and defense policies that assume or depend upon a nearly uncontested ability to project power overseas are unlikely to remain viable. What follows is a preliminary attempt to formulate an alternative American strategy for a “post-power projection” era, one that acknowledges the significant changes that are already occurring in the security environment, but that would still enable the United States to achieve its enduring strategic objectives, most importantly preventing hostile powers from dominating critical regions of the globe and avoiding destabilizing local conflicts. The aim of the strategy, therefore, is to preclude a sharp decline in both US power and influence as anti-access/area denial capabilities grow more sophisticated and proliferate more widely.

Before doing so, however, several points must be kept in mind. First, this strategy assumes that the maturation of the precision-guided strike regime will continue and perhaps even accelerate over time, particularly if nations such as China and Iran or non-state actors such as Hezbollah clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of their anti-access capabilities, encouraging others to mimic their efforts. Although this assumption may prove to be false, a prudent strategy should nevertheless identify new trends and attempt to avoid or mitigate their negative effects. At present, however, the United States appears unwilling to recognize (or reluctant to accept) that traditional forms of power projection are becoming less effective. It has not, therefore, adapted to the emerging warfare regime, for example by developing new capabilities and operational concepts that could extend its power projection advantage, at least for a time.

Second, this strategy also assumes that the maturation of the precision-guided strike regime will unfold over an extended period of time, perhaps gradually or perhaps in fits and starts. In either case, the United States will have opportunities to *shape* the emerging regime, for example by working to deny anti-access capabilities to some actors while actually proliferating them to others. Ultimately, a prudent strategy should not only resist the unfavorable consequences of new trends, it should also seek to exploit those trends to maintain or even improve a nation’s strategic position, and to impose greater costs on potential opponents while maximizing its own freedom of action.

Third, although a number of nations and non-state actors are likely to benefit from the maturing precision-guided weapons regime and will thus pose a much greater threat to US national security in the future, China currently represents the most immediate and significant threat. Not only does it have the potential to supplant the United States as the leading military power in northeast Asia and perhaps even the western Pacific, it could eventually replace the United States as the dominant nation in the international system. Accordingly, the strategy developed below focuses primarily on measures the United States could adopt to maximize its own power and preserve its dominance in the face of a rising China. At the same time, however, the United States is a global power that confronts a host of existing and potential challengers, many of which will share a number of similarities in terms of the capabilities they acquire and the threats

they pose. The elements of this strategy, therefore, are intended to be applicable beyond the case of China.

A Strategic Alternative to Offshore Balancing

As noted earlier, the inability to project military power effectively could compel the United States to retreat into isolationism. Put simply, if the United States cannot deter its adversaries or defend its allies, then it may be forced to shed many of its overseas commitments and accept a severely diminished ability to shape the external security environment. In fact, the maturation and proliferation of the precision-guided weapons regime could give added weight to those who are already calling for the United States to adopt a strategy of offshore balancing—a strategy that differs very little from isolationism—as its relative economic and military power continues to decline.

According to proponents of offshore balancing, the United States should abandon most if not all of its security commitments and adopt a posture similar to the one it maintained toward Europe and Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, that is, only joining with allies to preserve the balance of power when a major threat emerges to challenge the existing international or regional order. This strategy rests on several assumptions.¹⁰⁰ First, the combination of geographic insularity and a large nuclear arsenal makes the United States safe from most threats, with the possible exception of a European or Asian hegemon capable of dominating its region and becoming roughly as powerful as the Soviet Union once was. Second, the United States' current economic and military dominance is already waning, and efforts to perpetuate that dominance and prevent rival great powers from emerging will only provoke balancing coalitions and accelerate its decline. Third, America's alliances impose disproportionate risks and costs on the United States; not only do allies "free ride" on the US, they can also draw the United States into unnecessary conflicts. Fourth, because other states are geographically closer to any threats that might emerge, they should have a strong incentive to address them on their own.

There are, however, at least four major problems with offshore balancing. First, relying on local actors to balance emerging threats is a risky proposition. History has shown that counter-coalitions often fail to emerge in time to check a rising revisionist power before it begins a major war because of several recurring tendencies, including the decision by some potential balancers to bandwagon instead and accommodate the rising power, buck-passing by states in the hope that they can sit back and allow others to act so they will not have to, and disagreements between potential allies over issues relating to burden-sharing and strategy.¹⁰¹ As Josef Joffe pointedly notes, "benign neglect *à la* Britain works well only when regional balances take care of themselves most of the time," but in fact "most of them do not do so."¹⁰² Second, even if local

¹⁰⁰ For an overview of the offshore balancing argument, see Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," pp. 7-14; Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing"; Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, "Come Home, America"; Stephen M. Walt, "In the National Interest," *Boston Review* (February/March 2005); and John J. Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," *The National Interest* (January/February 2011).

¹⁰¹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁰² Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain'? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity," *International Security* (Winter 1996/97), p. 109 (emphasis in original).

actors attempt to check a rising power, either individually or together, they must be strong enough to do so effectively. According to Christopher Layne, a proponent of offshore balancing, “Because it is a ‘buck-passing’ strategy, offshore balancing is viable *only* in a multipolar international system. Offshore balancing is a lot like football: if you want to pass the buck (or ball) there has to be someone to catch it.”¹⁰³ It is debatable, however, whether American allies would be able to counter aspiring regional hegemony such as China and Iran without at least some direct US support. Third, by reducing its military presence and scaling back its alliance commitments, the United States could set the stage for more intense security competitions between local rivals, competitions that have been dampened by the “American pacifier.” Finally, if adversaries possess robust anti-access/area denial capabilities, the costs of redeploying after withdrawal and intervening against a rising power if its neighbors fail to establish a local balance of power may be prohibitively high.

Rather than withdrawing from forward security commitments in a precipitous and potentially dangerous manner, then, the strategy developed below emphasizes the importance of maintaining those forward commitments to shape the rise of emerging peer competitors and preserve regional stability. Nevertheless, the United States must radically reconceive *how* it maintains them and what instruments it requires.

Elements of a Strategy for the Post-Power Projection Era

There is little doubt that changes in the security environment could, and in fact should, lead the United States to revisit longstanding patterns of deterrence, extended deterrence, and war-fighting. For example, whereas American power projection forces have frequently been developed, postured, and employed to repel invasions against allies and to topple hostile governments, in the future US forces may be limited to *denying* an opponent’s objectives and punishing acts of aggression; that is, engaging in military coercion that stops short of establishing (or reestablishing) territorial control or overthrowing a foreign regime. Thus, a high priority should be placed on capabilities that can hold an enemy’s critical military forces and enablers at risk or that can interdict an enemy’s forces before it can project power, rather than capabilities that are primarily intended to take and hold territory. In many cases, then, the goal should be to create *zones of denial* rather than *zones of control*. This would, however, mark a significant change for the United States; as Colin Gray notes, although the US has traditionally been a sea power, “the American way of war has been quintessentially continentalist,” emphasizing “the quest for swift victory through the hazards of decisive battle rather than the slower approach of maritime encirclement.”¹⁰⁴ At the same time, the United States will also have to revise its traditional bargain with allies overseas; as opposed to being “protectorates,” those allies must become “buffers,” with the United States taking steps to enhance their capabilities so they can perform that role.

Despite these changes, a strategy for a post-power projection era should not represent a complete break from tradition. For example, the United States should continue to exploit its dominance of the global commons—above all its command of the seas—to confine its opponents largely to the

¹⁰³ Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, p. 25 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁴ Gray, “Strategy in the Nuclear Age,” p. 595.

land. In fact, most potential US adversaries are land powers, and, as Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery noted in 1958, “the great lesson of history is that the enemy who is confined to a land strategy is in the end defeated.”¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the United States should also attempt to selectively channel military competitions into peripheral theaters (where anti-access/area denial capabilities are limited or nonexistent) and use proxy forces or other indirect means to impose costs on adversaries, while defending against attempts by opponents to do the same. Each of these propositions is discussed in turn.

I. Preserving and Extending the Most Viable Elements of Power Projection

The first element of the new strategy is perhaps the most counterintuitive: the United States should take some discrete steps to preserve its ability to project military power effectively. Because the maturation and proliferation of the precision-guided weapons regime will occur over time, the United States will still have opportunities to prevent its overall military power from eroding precipitously. This will, however, require: (1) a far greater emphasis on platforms, systems, and forces that can survive an initial assault during a conflict, operate from beyond the range of an opponent’s conventional precision-strike weapons, and/or penetrate a dense A2/AD network; (2) the development of new concepts for projecting power into non-permissive operating environments, concepts that employ new platforms and munitions, use legacy forces in novel ways, or both; and (3) aggressive efforts to divest capabilities that are likely to be most vulnerable and/or least effective in the new warfare regime, freeing valuable resources that can then be reinvested.

Based on these considerations, there are a number of capability areas that will continue to prove useful in the future—areas where the United States already holds a significant advantage over potential adversaries. First, *long-range, low-observable, airborne surveillance-and-strike* platforms will be critical to deter or defeat opponents with robust A2/AD networks. Specifically, these platforms do not depend on vulnerable theater bases, they can avoid the advanced air defense networks that pose a major threat to non-stealthy aircraft, they can attack targets deep within an opponent’s interior, and they have the potential to hold both fixed and mobile targets at risk. Moreover, if the United States could develop new penetrating strike platforms with large payloads and relatively inexpensive, miniaturized, precision-guided munitions, it could help to negate the greater “magazine depth” that a continental opponent is likely to enjoy over a global power with fewer bases and longer supply lines

Second, land-based and submarine-launched *intercontinental ballistic missiles* (ICBMs) are extraordinarily difficult to defend against and could be used to strike critical fixed targets in an A2/AD environment. Although the United States has thus far declined to field conventionally armed ICBMs, this remains an option that could be exercised in the future, treaty and political limitations notwithstanding.

Third, *undersea warfare* platforms—both manned and unmanned—are likely to remain highly survivable and highly effective in the new warfare regime. Submarines can, for example, penetrate an opponent’s A2/AD threat envelope, holding its undersea forces at risk (including its

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace and Victory: Strategy and Statecraft for the Next Century* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1990), p. 67.

at-sea nuclear deterrent) and conducting limited, unwarned strikes against critical ground targets in the opening stages of a conflict.

Fourth, highly dispersed, low-signature *special operations forces* also appear attractive for projecting power in less permissive future environments. These forces might be used to conduct special reconnaissance, designate targets for standoff strike forces, perform direct action against high value targets located deep inside an opponent's territory, and support unconventional warfare campaigns against opponents in peripheral theaters.

At the same time, the United States should also consider developing new capabilities that could effectively counter acts of aggression and coercion in the new warfare regime. First, *offensive cyber warfare* may prove to be one of the most effective ways to project power against an opponent with robust anti-access/area denial capabilities, particularly as those capabilities grow more advanced and have more demanding C4ISR requirements—introducing new vulnerabilities that the United States could exploit. Moreover, if a hallmark of precision-guided weapons is accuracy independent of range but not of cost, computer network attack capabilities offer the prospect of accuracy independent of range *and cost*.

Second, if future conflicts are defined in part by the possibility of missile salvo exchanges, if offensive missile forces remain more effective and less expensive than either passive defenses or kinetic missile defense interceptors, and if regional powers have a significant advantage in terms of magazine depth, then *directed energy weapons* may prove to be critical. These systems have the potential to not only reverse this unfavorable cost-exchange ratio, but to provide nearly unlimited magazines. They could also be employed as an offensive capability on aircraft and space platforms, suppressing an opponent's missile forces before they are launched, and as a defensive capability, intercepting terminal phase projectiles.

Third, the US Navy could develop *surface-based intermediate-range conventional ballistic missile launch ships* that would deploy beyond the reach of an opponent's anti-access/area denial battle network. Although surface ships capable of launching ballistic missiles would not be as survivable as undersea systems, they would be far less expensive and would still have a high degree of survivability due to their ability to maneuver in the open ocean. Moreover, attempts to target these systems might force an adversary to deploy forces beyond the protection of its A2/AD network, enabling the United States to exploit its command of the seas and shift the military competition to an arena where it is likely to retain a significant advantage.

Fourth, existing forward-based forces as well as expeditionary forces that deploy over extended lines of communication and arrive at vulnerable theater bases are likely to become increasingly ineffective. Nevertheless, the United States could pursue an alternative option: *forward-based, ground-launched missile forces* equipped with hardened/deep underground weapons magazines and mobile launchers. These new garrisons could employ short-range missiles to hold an opponent's naval forces, land-based missile forces, airfields, and other high-value targets at risk. Despite the limitations imposed by the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and the US Army's retirement of its ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, the build-up of a ground-based missile force might be advantageous for the United States and complement the growth of similar

allied capabilities. Forward-based missile forces might even become a new form of presence, serving as a less vulnerable and more effective tripwire to deter future wars.

Given projected resource constraints, however, as well as the decreasing value of many instruments of traditional power projection, the United States should also divest of those legacy forces that are unlikely to be survivable or effective in robust A2/AD environments: *large surface combatants* that are intended to project power against land-targets from close-in ranges, such as aircraft carriers and naval artillery platforms; *short-range tactical aircraft* that depend on vulnerable forward bases and cannot operate effectively in the face of advanced air defense systems; *high signature amphibious assault forces* that deploy vulnerable landing craft and require large, secure beachheads; *heavy ground combat brigades* that have immense logistical requirements; and some *space platforms* in low-earth orbits.

Together, prioritizing capabilities that will remain effective against and relatively immune to precision-guided strike systems, while divesting capabilities that appear most vulnerable or least effective in the face of opposing A2/AD capabilities, would help to manage the United States' strategic transition into the post-power projection era.

II. Transforming American Alliances and Creating Allied “Hedgehogs”

For the last sixty years the United States has been able to deter attacks on its frontline allies through a combination of forward-stationed ground and air forces, naval forward presence, nuclear security guarantees, and the prospect of dispatching expeditionary forces from the United States to reinforce allies in the event of a conflict. During the Cold War these allies played an important role. As Colin Gray notes, America's “security wards” may have been dependent on the United States, but they still “distracted Soviet power and attention, served as physical barriers against Soviet access to the high seas, provided U.S. bridgeheads in Europe and Asia, and fielded useful, if not critical, ‘continental swords’ to complimentary to U.S. maritime, air, and central-strategic striking power.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, under this protective mantle US allies and security partners were able to reduce their own defense expenditures and “free ride” on US security guarantees, a dynamic that was only exacerbated following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For all intents and purposes, then, the pattern of US alliances and security relationships in the late 20th and early 21st centuries can best be described as a network of protectorates.

As the United States' ability to defend its allies declines, however, the protectorate era is likely to come to a close. The maturation of the precision-guided warfare regime and the growing difficulty of transoceanic power projection will undermine the existing security bargain between the United States and its allies, in which the latter provide bases, host nation support, and token forces in coalition military operations in exchange for credible American security guarantees. Nevertheless, this development may also create an opportunity for the United States. As noted above, US allies will face a choice between bandwagoning with the most powerful nation in their region or adopting a more independent security strategy and acquiring more robust military capabilities. To preserve its influence abroad and exploit the longstanding advantage of its global network of alliances, the United States should encourage and enable its partners to emulate China's anti-access/area denial complex; that is, to develop air and maritime capabilities that

¹⁰⁶ Gray, “Strategy in the Nuclear Age,” p. 599.

would allow them to better defend their sovereignty, safeguard their interests, deter aggression by aspiring regional hegemony, and contribute more effectively in any future combined operations. Therefore, the second major element of a post-power projection strategy would involve selectively proliferating precision strike capabilities to allies and security partners. Like the “hedgehogs” erected in World War II to block an invasion force from landing on the beaches of Europe, it may be possible to create strategic “hedgehogs” that can constrain an opponent’s ability to project power in its own region.

Today, for example, little can be done on the part of US allies to counter China’s massive build-up of ballistic missiles. Yet the prospects for constraining China’s ground, air, and naval forces inside the first island chain are considerably greater, particularly if nations along its maritime periphery—including Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam—develop their own A2/AD capabilities. Each country’s “hedgehog” posture would assume unique “national characteristics” given its resources, geographic position, and the specific operational challenges of greatest concern. However, all of these archipelagic and littoral states could develop anti-ship and anti-submarine capabilities to limit the PLA Navy’s ability to project power beyond its own shores. Some of these nations may also be well suited to go beyond defensive anti-access capabilities. For instance, Japan’s Naval Self-Defense Forces might eventually acquire ship-based land-attack missile systems and an offensive mining capability, while its Ground Self-Defense Forces could develop shore-based missile forces to hold at risk approaching naval combatants and perhaps land targets as well. Vietnam might adopt similar capabilities on a smaller scale, in addition to small fast attack craft armed with anti-ship cruise missiles that could swarm PLA Navy surface combatants. In the case of a resource-poor but strategically located nation like the Philippines, the United States should at a minimum ensure that it does not fall into an opponent’s sphere of influence. Maximally, it may be possible to work with the Philippine military to improve its maritime domain awareness and undersea surveillance capabilities, impeding the PLA Navy’s ability to freely transit its sovereign waters; to employ anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons systems; and perhaps even to provide hide sites for future US ground-launched surface-to-surface missile forces.

It is important to note, however that if frontline nations develop their own anti-access/area denial capabilities and become less dependent on the United States for their security then, *ceteris paribus*, an alliance with the United States would hold less value for them. Therefore, in the coming “post-protectorate era” it will be imperative for the United States to fashion an alternative value proposition for its alliances, one that reflects a new pattern of military cooperation. Namely, allies would still rely on the United States to police the global commons, but in the case of a local conflict they would no longer be able to depend upon the US military as their first line of defense; instead, allies would have to defend themselves until American reinforcements, more likely in the form of global strike forces than troop deployments, can more directly bolster their efforts. To make this new arrangement more attractive and to retain some influence over its allies, the United States could agree to provide key enablers, including precision navigation and timing data as well as targeting information. Optimally, the United States would also provide any extended-range precision-guided weapons and delivery systems, and might serve as a lender of last resort for precision munitions, maintaining a global magazine and production line that could be extended to allies during a crisis.

This approach has a number of historical antecedents, including President Franklin Roosevelt’s “Arsenal of Democracy” concept and President Richard Nixon’s 1969 Guam Doctrine. The former sought to provide weapons to Britain and later Russia in the hope that the United States would not have to deploy ground forces to Europe, while the latter encouraged US allies to provide more for their own security, thereby conserving American power at a time when the Vietnam War was imposing heavy costs in men and materiel. Despite these precedents, creating hedgehogs would still require a number of major changes. First, the United States would have to cease encouraging its allies and partners to develop traditional power projection capabilities and conduct more out-of-area operations. Second, US defense industry currently focuses on the design and production of high-end systems for the American military; it would have to be retooled to produce anti-access capabilities that could compete in a market dominated by less advanced but less expensive foreign systems. Third, the United States would have to assume more risk in terms of technology transfer and develop new safeguards to prevent American capabilities from being used by hostile parties. Finally, creating hedgehogs may require the United States to reconsider some of its international treaty obligations, such as the Missile Control Technology Regime.

Ultimately, creating hedgehogs could not only help to preserve the United States’ influence and its overall position in the international system by constraining its most likely adversaries, it would also mitigate some of the most dangerous consequences of an offshore balancing strategy if the United States were eventually compelled to abandon some of its overseas commitments. Specifically, without capable frontline states to balance aspiring regional hegemons, offshore balancing would not be a viable strategy.

III. Preserving Command of the Commons

Command of the commons has been a longstanding strategic advantage for the United States, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, a number of nations and even non-state actors are now beginning to challenge US dominance of the seas, skies, space, and cyberspace. The United States’ ability to respond to these challenges is likely to vary across different domains. For example, as a global sea power the US would almost certainly have the upper hand in any Mahanian fleet-on-fleet contest, particularly if engagements took place beyond the protective umbrella of an opponent’s land-based, maritime reconnaissance-strike complex. Similarly, air campaigns outside of an anti-access threat envelope will continue to favor the United States. The emerging military balance is less favorable in space and cyberspace, however. Because the United States utilizes and depends upon space far more than other nations, and because many existing space-based platforms are highly vulnerable to both kinetic and non-kinetic counter-space systems, US dominance in this area is extremely fragile. In the cyber realm, the United States may have superiority but it does not have mastery. Its lead, if it exists at all, has been fueled by decades of investment in cryptology. But a number of other powers, including China, have reportedly developed formidable network exploitation and attack capabilities.

Given this assessment, a prudent strategy should concentrate on extending US naval and aerial mastery—in particular so that the United States can continue to provide safe passage for friendly forces and global commerce—while minimizing the risks and costs of competing in space and cyberspace. The United States should, therefore, improve its ability to deny the use of the high

seas and airspace beyond any country's territorial claims. With respect to naval forces, this could best be accomplished with a force mix that favors submarines and frigates; while the former will remain highly survivable and highly effective tools for maintaining command of the seas, the latter are relatively inexpensive and can be acquired in greater numbers than larger, more expensive, and potentially more vulnerable surface combatants. Air forces should emphasize long endurance surveillance aircraft and high-volume bombers to conduct surface attacks and interdiction. Finally, ground forces should seek to regain their anti-ship and anti-air competencies.

Continued US naval mastery will remain particularly important in the emerging warfare regime, for several reasons. First, it will provide the ability to engage in economic warfare against potential adversaries, for example by facilitating the seizure of (or by denying access to) critical commodities located overseas, which opponents may depend upon to fuel their economies. Second, it will also provide the means to impose maritime blockades at a distance, denying an opponent access to imported raw materials as well as export markets for its own goods. Third, naval mastery, together with control of the skies, will inhibit opponents from projecting military power (and engaging in coercion) against US allies located beyond their immediate periphery. Fourth, by preserving dominance of the air and maritime commons the United States could dissuade its adversaries from competing vigorously on a global scale, which would in turn reinforce their traditional—and much more geographically limited—focus on land power and local security challenges.

Finally, preserving command of the air and maritime commons is also a prerequisite for the final two elements of a post-power projection strategy: channeling the competition toward peripheral areas and insulating the Western Hemisphere. By retaining dominance in these two domains, the United States can continue to project power into theaters where anti-access capabilities are minimal, while also ensuring that adversaries will confront high barriers to transporting or deploying their own forces overseas—including into the western Hemisphere.

IV. Channeling the Competition Toward the Periphery

As noted earlier, if the United States and potential adversaries cannot easily attack one another directly because the proliferation of precision contributes to the emergence of a “defense dominant” environment, then the United States may need to operate through proxies, including non-state actors, and engage in positional conflicts in peripheral theaters where opponents' weaknesses can be exploited more easily. In the case of China, for example, while its extended-range reconnaissance-strike complex might deter a direct attack, the United States could still attempt to selectively “draw out” its forces and impose significant costs on them. In fact, opportunities for the United States to do so are likely to grow as Beijing's involvement in Africa, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asia continues to increase. Moreover, these peripheral contests and proxy wars will tend to favor the United States, for two principal reasons. First, with its command of the air and maritime commons, the United States can hold at risk any opposing forces that deploy beyond the protection of an adversary's anti-access/area denial capabilities, as well as the lines of communication that sustain those forces. Second, if neither the opponent nor its local allies have built up robust A2/AD capabilities in theater, the United States may be able to use its legacy power projection forces quite effectively.

One region where proxy wars/peripheral campaigns may prove to be particularly useful for the United States is Central Asia, an area that already concerns Beijing due to its growing demand for raw materials as well as its fear of unrest and irredentism in western China. Encouraging China to focus its attention on Central Asia, and increasing the costs it must bear should it deploy military forces there, would reinforce its traditional role as a land power, and could potentially draw resources away from air and maritime capabilities that pose a greater threat to the United States. Moreover, conflicts in Central Asia would likely ignite a clash of Chinese and Russian interests, further limiting Beijing's ability to concentrate its attention on the United States, and further reinforcing its need for strong ground forces to counter threats from geographically contiguous rivals.

Should the United States contest Chinese forces in this theater or in other peripheral areas, one option would be to proliferate short-range precision-guided weapons (including mortars, mines, and man-portable anti-tank, anti-armor, and anti-aircraft missiles), which could be used by indigenous irregular forces to impose heavy costs on an invading or occupying force. Minimally, the United States should seek to improve relations with strategically located nations to discourage them from offering permanent bases or access to China, which would improve its ability to project power into a peripheral theater. Equally important, the United States should also bolster its own unconventional warfare capabilities to more effectively work with indigenous forces and use them as a cost-imposing tool against potential opponents.

V. Insulating the Western Hemisphere

While the United States might attempt to draw opponents out and impose costs through indirect means such as local proxies, it should also be prepared for opponents to exploit opportunities in its own immediate periphery, namely the western hemisphere. Historically, the United States has relied upon geographic isolation not only to defend its homeland, but also to establish a sphere of influence free from great power intervention. In the future, however, the United States will need to revisit the concepts of hemispheric and homeland defense, issues that have been downplayed or even ignored over the past several decades (with the partial exception of preventing terrorist attacks in the United States and defending against potential ballistic missile strikes).

Specifically, the United States will need to take steps to prevent or counter three different types of threats. First, as potential opponents increase their strategic reach by developing extended-range naval, air, space, and cyber capabilities, they may gain the ability to attack the US homeland far from its shores. As a result, America's geographic position may no longer grant its territory sanctuary from conventional precision strikes. Second, potential opponents may seek to deploy their forces or gain access to bases *within* the American sphere of influence, effectively violating the Monroe Doctrine and creating strategic and operational dilemmas that the United States has not confronted since the Soviet Union stationed troops in Latin American and patrolled its submarines off the east coast during the Cold War. Third, adversaries may use proxies and surrogates in the western hemisphere, exacerbating local conflicts and fostering instability in neighboring states in order to distract the United States from other challenges. Moreover, if the US were to deploy troops in support of foreign governments confronting externally supported internal threats, opponents could attempt to tie down those forces and impose heavy costs on the United States.

As part of a post-power projection strategy, therefore, the United States will need to resurrect its own anti-access/area denial posture—one that was largely abandoned with the decline of coastal defense after the Second World War—to safeguard its homeland and the surrounding region. It should, for example, resume long-range naval reconnaissance patrols, improve early warning through advanced, over-the-horizon radar systems, stage naval pickets to guard against approaching hostile forces, improve its space surveillance network, and consider the use of military forces for territorial defense. It will also need to continue to improve its air and particularly its missile defenses. As opponents improve their ability to target the United States with conventional weapons, there will also be an increased need to consider defensive measures such as the dispersal of forces and command and control nodes, creating underground munitions production and storage facilities, as well as the appropriate nuclear declaratory policy for deterring conventionally armed attacks.

In sum, the United States will need to update the 1823 Monroe Doctrine to ensure its continuing relevance in the new warfare regime. It should be the policy of the United States to oppose any attempts by external powers to stage extended-range precision-guided strike capabilities within the Western Hemisphere, either at-sea or at land-bases within regional states. Further, it should be US policy to oppose the acquisition of extended-range precision strike systems capable of reaching the United States by any country in the Western Hemisphere. Finally, the United States will need to develop a strategy for Western Hemispheric Defense aimed at reducing sources of internal disorder in regional states that could otherwise be exploited by external powers. In this regard, there is merit to working indirectly through like-minded regional states such as Colombia to improve internal defenses in neighboring countries and counter the rise of narco-cartels before they can be exploited by external powers.

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CONCLUSION

For two decades the United States has enjoyed an unmatched ability to project military power overseas, a critical advantage which underpins the unipolar structure of the international system, helps to preserve the stability of that system, and supports the most important elements of American grand strategy. Although many assume this advantage will persist, a number of trends suggest that it could soon come to an end. Existing and potential rivals have already studied the American way of war, identifying vulnerabilities in terms of how the United States projects power and the specific instruments it employs to do so. Moreover, the growing sophistication of precision-guided weapons and the proliferation of these weapons to near-peer competitors, regional powers, small states, and even non-state actors will enable a host of opponents to exploit American vulnerabilities more effectively in the future.

These trends will not affect the United States alone; virtually all nations could find it increasingly difficult to engage in traditional forms of power projection, particularly over significant distances, in the decades ahead. Nevertheless, because of its geographic isolation, its global commitments, and its enormous investments in military capabilities that now appear to be “wasting assets,” they will impact the United States far more than most. Yet this does not mean that the United States should circumscribe its overseas interests, abandon its security commitments, or simply watch as new spheres of influence emerge in critical geostrategic regions. The emerging precision-guided warfare regime will develop over time, providing the United States with opportunities to extend its ability to project power and to lay the foundation for a new global strategy, one that would allow it to preserve its position in the international system as well as its influence over allies and adversaries alike, even as anti-access/area denial capabilities grow more sophisticated and proliferate more widely.

Future studies will examine several elements of the strategy developed in this report in greater detail, including “indirect” forms of power projection, such as the use of proxies and peripheral campaigns to distract and impose costs on potential adversaries; the specific military capabilities and postures that American allies in the Indo-Pacific region should adopt to constrain Chinese power projection over time; and the possibility of technological breakthroughs in areas such as direct energy, unmanned systems, computer network warfare, all of which could help to preserve the United States’ waning power projection advantage. In addition, there are other avenues for additional research that could expand or complement the findings presented in this report. For example, could the United States apply the “high-end” model of building partner capacity described earlier to regions other than the Indo-Pacific, perhaps the Persian Gulf region in an effort to limit Iran’s ability to threaten its neighbors and counter US power projection forces, or in Central Asia to constrain both China and Russia?