

*Working Paper*

**The U.S. Enlargement Strategy  
and Nuclear Weapons**

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The United States is often accused of lacking a global security strategy. The United States, so the accusation goes, makes foreign policy and security decisions on an ad-hoc basis, prompted by the demands of politics and pressure groups, and in alternating bursts of idealism and realpolitik. Since none of these factors can safely be dismissed, there has to be something to the accusation. In an unpredictable world, a certain respect for the ad hoc may even be a good thing: a global strategy, carried out without regard to circumstances, would confine the United States to a conceptual straitjacket, depriving it of needed flexibility.

Nevertheless, the accusation is without merit. The United States has a global security strategy, in deeds if seldom clearly in words. The U.S. security strategy is to enlarge the areas of the world that it can control militarily and to weaken all states outside those areas. The strategy does not rely solely on military means, but enlarged military control is the end and military means—armed interventions, alliance extensions, arms sales—usually lead the way. Aside from a 1992 Pentagon trial balloon,<sup>1</sup> which was poorly received though accurate enough as far as it went, and a few other statements, the strategy has been manifested via a series of consistent actions rather than formal statements.

Along with this overall strategy, the components of which I give below, the United States also has policies regarding nuclear weapons. Some of these policies are stated, some are tacit. The stated policies include de-emphasizing nuclear weapons, discouraging nuclear proliferation, and pursuing nuclear arms reductions, a comprehensive test ban, and other nuclear-arms-control measures.

The tacit policy is reliance on deterrent nuclear forces to limit escalation of conventional conflicts and to offset the nuclear forces of other powers. By relying on nuclear deterrence, the United States assumes that nuclear deterrence between it and potential nuclear adversaries will be stable, where stable nuclear deterrence means that nuclear weapons on both sides will help defuse a crisis rather than move it toward all-out war. Though tacit, this reliance

has to be in the long run an essential part of an overall policy of military expansion and dominance.

These two policies, military enlargement and reliance on nuclear stability and arms control, are not compatible. Continued enlargement backed or led by military force will not support de-emphasis of nuclear weapons, let alone nuclear disarmament. It may not support nuclear nonproliferation even among allies, depending on whether the United States is seen to become overextended or overcommitted at home or abroad. Military enlargement weakens support for several of the arms-control measures on the U.S. agenda. Enlargement is also likely to lead to crises that will test the stability of nuclear deterrence more seriously than it has been tested since the early years of the Cold War.

The alternative to military enlargement would require the United States and the other principal military powers in the world to accept geographic restraints on the unilateral use of their power. Such acceptance would minimize nuclear-weapons-related risks. It would also, perhaps paradoxically, better serve continued U.S. power and influence than continued attempts at military enlargement. It might even be popularly acceptable. But it would represent such a change from the present U.S. strategic patterns that it is not likely to be acceptable today.

Nevertheless, welcome or not, limits will have to be accepted someday. Continued expansion, if not checked voluntarily, must lead to nuclear confrontation where the adversary is a nuclear power. Nuclear confrontation will lead either to nuclear war or to a mutual acceptance of lines of demarcation. Nuclear war is unacceptable and will not be accepted so long as rational decision-making prevails. Unfortunately, if not planned in advance, acceptance of limits will be reached through a succession of dangerous crises, some of which may sap U.S. power and influence.

In what follows I first remind the reader of the main components of the U.S. military enlargement strategy. Next I describe why other states, given the U.S. enlargement strategy, find and will continue to find nuclear weapons useful. These states are not all potential opponents. Third, I explain how the U.S. enlargement strategy undermines nuclear arms control. What is more important, I show why it will inevitably lead to nuclear crises. Last, I discuss the alternative strategy of military restraint and show how it would ensure U.S. influence for a longer time and with greater safety than the present strategy of unilateral U.S. military enlargement.

## **I. The Enlargement Strategy**

U.S. foreign policy today is dynamic, oriented toward fundamental change within the countries of strategic rivals and many others, and usually backed by military force. U.S. political leaders and analysts sometimes depict the United States as a status-quo power. But, to other countries, the U.S. actions are not those of a status-quo power: national boundaries, traditional zones of influence, internal political and economic orders are all challenged by the United States, in ways large and small, for the other countries' own good, as we see it, or otherwise. Much of that dynamism is useful and reflects the historic position of the United States in the vanguard of many changes. What is in question here is the unilateral military aspect of it.

The main features of U.S. global enlargement strategy are well known. They are listed below to highlight the fact that they do constitute military enlargement, not (at this point) to argue whether they are on balance right or wrong.

*NATO expansion, without any prior constraint on further expansion, and with explicit consideration of eventual inclusion of the Baltic states.* This expansion is taking place over objections from all major Russian political parties, and despite clear messages that it revalues nuclear weapons for Russia<sup>2</sup> as well as for NATO itself. NATO expansion moves the United States toward greater responsibility for keeping the peace in Eastern Europe, a thankless task historically, with a high likelihood of further military action. The cost in money and risks to support this European expansion should it ever be seriously challenged will be high.

*An East Asia strategy that challenges China's national boundaries.* The current political agitation against China over Taiwan and Tibet may obscure the fact that, by its own and most other assessments, China has legal title to both lands as well as some title to the Spratlys and the Paracels.<sup>3</sup> Formally, U.S. policy acknowledges this, but some post-Cold War policies run against this acknowledgment. The new Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation imply a bigger Japanese military role in the region, including arguably the defense of Taiwan. The United States has also stated that it intends to keep armed forces in Korea indefinitely, unification or no unification.<sup>4</sup> Extending Japan's military role and stating that North Korea would eventually come under the U.S. military umbrella are instances of unilateral military enlargement.

*Enforcement of a dual containment strategy in the Middle East which posits hostility toward the two most powerful Muslim states in the region while supporting a number of weak client states susceptible to revolutionary change.* This policy has led to a major U.S. military presence in the region. U.S. policy against Iraq is not entirely unilateral,<sup>5</sup> being based on a UN Security Council resolution, but U.S. policy against Iran is unilateral. Dual containment may land the United States in the middle of a nuclear arms race with only Israel as a base of support. If Saddam Hussein has not given up on his nuclear weapons ambitions, Iran, with no support from the outside, cannot overlook its own possible need for a nuclear deterrent. Justifiably or not, this is a third area where the United States has positioned itself as the frontline military power and is attempting to change the status quo.

*Active competition with Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus.* The overall policy is aimed, not just at economic advantage, but at limiting both Russian and Chinese influence in areas where one or the other have traditionally been dominant. To date, the U.S. competition has not involved an overt military component, aside from the targeting of missiles on Afghanistan, the possibility of regional arms sales, and a U.S. base in Azerbaijan. It has involved covert action. As the competition evolves, the United States could find itself committed to fragile regimes in an area where geography and history offer it no advantage, so that maintaining these commitments will be risky and costly.

*Continued improvement in U.S. military forces, with the highest priority given to offensive projection forces.*<sup>6</sup> The U.S. expenditures on offensive weapons systems are greater than those of all its potential rivals together, and the qualitative advantage of the United States, in the theaters where it is engaged, is greater than the dollar figures would indicate. Further improving strike forces has the top priority in the U.S. defense modernization program. This emphasis on offense reaches beyond weapons systems: the U.S. government has not been

willing, for instance, to reach agreements that could improve the security of internationally connected, computer-based information systems, presumably in order to maintain a capability to carry out offensive operations against these systems. These actions are evidence of a continuing strategy of U.S. military expansion, not of a search for stability.

## **II. Uses of Nuclear Weapons Given the U.S. Strategy**

How does this military enlargement strategy affect the utility of nuclear weapons to potential U.S. adversaries and to others? This question has two parts. First, why do some states consider nuclear weapons useful? Second, what is the impact of the U.S. enlargement strategy on that perceived utility?

Nuclear weapons have been thought useful because they can deter attack against central national interests, like an invasion of the homeland, and because they are seen to rectify a conventional imbalance. Fifty years of cold, rather than hot, war attest to this kind of usefulness. Where lines demarcating central interests can be drawn, nuclear deterrent forces reinforce incentives against changing those lines by force even in the presence of conventional imbalance and of advantages to conventional offense such as prevailed in Europe during much of the Cold War.

That is the main but not the sole perceived use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons were also used by the United States against a non-nuclear opponent (Japan) to help end war on favorable terms. That use has not been repeated, but it has not been forgotten either. The many nuclear tests and studies since that time have reinforced its impact. The lesson drawn is that nuclear weapons, if used unilaterally, would be decisive.

Except for these two uses, the utility of nuclear weapons remains open to question. Nuclear-weapons status may have offered a seat at some important tables to Britain, France, and China, but there is little perception that it will do the same for Israel, India, and Pakistan. Where central interests are not involved, as in Vietnam and North Korea for the United States and Afghanistan for the Soviet Union, nuclear weapons have been irrelevant. There is little evidence so far of successful nuclear coercion between nuclear-weapons states.

As against that list of uses for nuclear weapons, governments of course also perceive dangers in acquiring, deploying, and relying on nuclear weapons. The main danger is that opponents will also get nuclear weapons and that nuclear deterrence, despite its theoretical advantage as supported by Cold War stability, will under different circumstances fail. No one knows how robust nuclear deterrence was during the Cold War. Then and now, sufficiently threatening crises, whether initiated by miscalculation or accident, could lead to nuclear war. Great care was expended during the Cold War to limit that danger and maintain the conditions for stability, that is to say, for the tendency to return to peace from crises. Beyond this fundamental danger, there are other costs and risks, having to do with more general international repercussions, to acquiring nuclear weapons. I focus in this article on the eventual stability of nuclear deterrence rather than other costs and risks, since the former is likely to matter more to the United States and other recognized nuclear-weapons states.

A central ingredient of stability in crises is the existence of a well-defined geographic separation between the regions of major importance to either side.<sup>7</sup> Clarity of separation between the regions has usually been brought about by prior crises, such as those in the early decades of the Cold War, and by war, as in Korea. With such separation, stability held during

the Cold War, though not without great harm to the peoples caught on the wrong side. Each side backed off when regions of central importance to the other side became involved.

Another important ingredient is good control of nuclear forces, including reliable warning and survivability. Potential adversaries must be assured that a first strike will not confer an advantage. Providing that assurance is uncertain and brings dangers of its own, since offensive and defensive measures are not easily distinguishable. It is also costly.

How does this array of advantages and disadvantages look to Russia and China and to potential nuclear-weapons states, given the U.S. strategy outlined? The U.S. strategy calls into question prior lines of demarcation. It also mounts a continuing technological challenge to conventional defenses. U.S. military superiority by itself could perhaps be accepted if it were coupled with a credible political understanding regarding the limits within which that superiority would be exercised. Such an understanding does not exist, however. U.S. declaratory policies as well as U.S. actions make it clear that the United States does not intend to subscribe to such an understanding.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, however nuclear deterrence looks to potential U.S. adversaries now, it is likely to be seen as increasingly useful as the U.S. enlargement policy is carried out. The United States has stated it will retain military forces almost around the world, from the Polish-Belarusian border to within a few miles from the Chinese coast—indeed including dominance over the Chinese littoral. U.S. representatives state that these activities are within U.S. capabilities and part of its obligations. Given that policy, the risks as perceived by others of keeping and upgrading their nuclear and conventional forces must diminish compared with the risks of facing an offense-oriented U.S. strategy with increasingly inadequate forces of their own.

Potential U.S. rivals are not the only states for which U.S. military expansion revalues nuclear weapons. For instance, Germany and Japan cannot assume that the United States will always remain in the front lines in Europe and East Asia. While the two live in different environments, they each have to worry about a powerful, nuclear-armed neighbor and sometime rival. Modern Russia and China have tended to be stable when their territories were not threatened. But the U.S. expansionism described will leave both Russia and China in a threatened position. If the United States were to pull out of Europe now or soon, some combination of European forces could maintain the present NATO boundaries stably since Russia has no strategic interest to the west of these boundaries. If NATO forces were on the Lithuania-Russia border when the United States pulled out, however, the situation would be far more fragile. Similarly, if the United States ever pulls back from advanced positions in East Asia, it would leave a far more stable situation if Japan were not committed in some way to the defense of Taiwan against China. With Russia and China threatened and the United States perhaps no longer so committed to frontline duty, nuclear weapons would be revalued, not only in the eyes of Russia and China but also in the eyes of Germany and Japan. In turn, if Germany or Japan took action, the circle of threatened states would expand.

### **III. Enlargement and Arms Control**

How does the enlargement strategy affect the prospect for nuclear arms control? The United States has a nuclear-arms-control agenda on the table now. Whether it is carried out or not matters to future U.S. security in the starkest terms. It will determine how many nuclear



weapons will be aimed at the United States, by whom, and on behalf of what objectives. But the agenda has a number of other ramifications as well: limiting defenses, banning nuclear tests. The following arguments do not go to the question of what type of arms control would be useful given the present U.S. grand strategy and its likely nuclear consequences. Rather they only point out the inconsistencies between the grand strategy and the arms-control agenda.

*START II–START III.* The START II agreement, signed and ratified by the United States and signed but not yet ratified by Russia, would cut deployed strategic nuclear weapons by about a factor of two below the agreed START I levels, themselves down by a factor of two from Cold War levels. The START III agreement, not yet negotiated, would cut the levels further, to the vicinity of two thousand deployed weapons, roughly six times the deployed levels of France, the United Kingdom, and China (as much as a hundred times the number of weapons that China could successfully launch against the United States).

The weapons being done away with were only marginally needed during the Cold War and are not needed now. Yet, the agreements are endangered by the present U.S. strategy. Political support for them has dwindled in Russia. China's nuclear numbers now are too low for China to be involved in START-like discussions, but U.S. strategy, by revaluing nuclear deterrence, constitutes an incentive for a nuclear buildup there also.

*Nuclear Weapons Abroad, No First Use.* A strategy of enlargement backed by military force will give new value to the stationing of nuclear weapons forward, for either tactical or strategic reassurance reasons, by the United States, and for tactical reasons by Russia. The present U.S. strategy also makes pledges of no first use unlikely. Russia has revoked its pledge; NATO retains the first-use option. China, with vastly inferior nuclear forces, has continued its no-first-use declaratory policy. But incentives to deploy and use matter more than declaratory policies. If there are no prior limits on how the conventional capabilities of the United States may be used or how far forward they will be stationed, tactical first use of nuclear weapons may be the only option perceived to be effective by some of the countries affected by the U.S. military expansion.

*New Nuclear Weapons, CTBT.* The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, just rejected by the U.S. Senate, is likely in the long run to affect adversely the reliability of the nuclear-weapons stockpile. How long the long run is depends on what changes occur or are made. That in turn depends on whether new weapons will be needed to fit new delivery vehicles or new deterrent missions.

If there are threats to central interests of nuclear-weapon states—threats to their territory, for instance, or the stationing of potentially hostile forces next to their territory—the reliability, real and perceived, and versatility of the nuclear stockpiles will matter more. On the other hand, if nuclear-weapons states feel secure, the nuclear deterrents may become more and more a background, existential factor in stable relationships, perhaps as the Great Lakes navies of the United States and Canada became after a century of disputes about the location of the mutual boundary ended. Thus, whether states rely or not on nuclear weapons has a direct bearing on the durability of the CTBT.

For non-nuclear-weapon states wanting to build nuclear weapons, the CTBT is an additional obstacle, beyond the other political and economic obstacles in the way. It is not an insuperable technical obstacle if the most efficient weapon, in terms of yield per unit weight for instance, is not needed. Testing is probably needed, however, if the goal is to cram a



hundred weapons on a nuclear submarine, for instance, and perhaps also if the goal is to put a single nuclear weapon on a small ballistic reentry vehicle or a cruise missile.

Thus, if the United States is to maintain its present grand strategy of enlargement, the CTBT will come to place a burden of unknowable proportion both on that strategy and on the counterstrategies of those states that seek to limit U.S. expansion for their own security. No one today can determine what will be needed to maintain the kind of flexible capability to carry out and then control escalation in regions close to our rivals' territories, or claimed by them. Over the longer term, however, a CTBT is likely to be incompatible with reevaluation of nuclear weapons and the present U.S. strategy.

*ABM/TMD.* The demarcation between national defenses (ABM) and effective theater or alliance defenses (TMD) is fuzzy. But it is clear that the purchase of thousands of interceptors for theater purposes and of very capable satellite-borne and ground- or sea-based sensors would lay the basis for a nationwide defense. In turn, a defense system that is viewed as effective would constitute the single most effective argument for other states, especially China, to develop MIRVs. MIRVs are the most effective counters to defenses, since the offense can multiply the numbers of attacking warheads at a fraction of the cost of fielding additional defensive missiles and their support. For the same reason, ABM deployments will also make further offensive reductions on the part of Russia very unlikely.

*Nuclear Nonproliferation.* The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and associated agreements have been stable and acceptable to most states so far. Their main value may have been to foster and bolster non-nuclear-weapons neighborhoods, for instance in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. The lack of symmetry between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states has been of more concern to arms controllers and international lawyers than to security establishments.

The great-power stability induced by the Cold War supported nuclear nonproliferation: there was little chance of great powers going rampant against small powers outside their zones of influence as there had been prior to World War II. That stability is gone. To the extent that the security situation appears dangerous or unstable to a nuclear-weapons-capable party to the treaty, the question of nuclear weapons must come back on the table. Both perceived U.S. overexpansion and U.S. withdrawals from commitments could make for perceptions of danger on the part of states that have declined the nuclear option to date.

As this quick review makes clear, nuclear arms control generally depends on the adoption of policies that do not make nuclear deterrence valuable to anyone. The United States is not following such a policy now. To go further and make nuclear weapons obsolete, one needs to make nuclear deterrence obsolete. This means some fundamental agreement among potential adversaries and rivals as to where and how military power will be applied. The United States is not ready to reach such agreement. So long as it is not ready to do so, whether others are ready or not is academic. Nuclear weapons will therefore remain an ingredient of international rivalry for some time to come. We now turn to the question of how these rivalries among nuclear and nuclear-capable powers will be resolved in the presence of the U.S. military enlargement strategy.

## IV. Enlargement and Crisis Stability

If the United States maintains a policy of enlargement backed by military force long enough, great-power crises will sooner or later occur, whether in the Baltics, Iran, Central Asia, Taiwan, or Korea. Crisis stability—the ability of the international system to move back from the brink—among nuclear and nuclear-capable powers will therefore be tested. Nuclear weapons provide a potentially catastrophic downside to all-out war, but if this potential catastrophe is to exercise a stabilizing effect two conditions must be met. First, the connection between what a decision-maker is contemplating and all-out war must be clear to him. Second, the decision-maker must see noncatastrophic alternatives to all-out war. In the parlance of game theory, there must be good enough, even if not perfect or complete, information, and there must be preferable alternative payoffs to nuclear war.

Taking the latter of these two conditions first, Russia, China, and the United States are likely to perceive preferable alternative payoffs to nuclear war under most conceivable circumstances. This might not so obviously be the case between a North Korean regime for which a military loss would mean political and probably physical death, and its adversaries. Nor is the quality of information, in the real world, independent of the perception of payoffs. To a government which sees loss as unbearable, information about the consequences of nuclear war, or about whether some step might lead to nuclear war, would be subject to significant filtering. Even in the United States, Russia, and China, one can readily imagine how a strong wish to avoid a political setback of some magnitude could affect the government's judgment about an adversary's resolve or resources.

Nevertheless, we can assume that the desire to avoid nuclear war, if the risk of nuclear war is perceived to be real and significant, will prevail over the desire to win in a crisis over the Baltics or Taiwan or Azerbaijan or Iran. The main question concerns the first condition for stability, whether the information about each side's resolve and capability in an escalating crisis is likely to be good enough to avoid bad outcomes, given the U.S. strategy of enlargement.

Unfortunately, continued enlargement means that the quality of information is not likely to be good, either in the United States or elsewhere. The places where U.S. enlargement is occurring are not central U.S. interests as they have been understood over the past fifty years. They constitute a no-man's-land between commitment and noncommitment. What the United States will do if its military outreach in Eastern Europe, in North Korea if Korea is unified, in Taiwan, in Central Asia is seriously challenged is not clearly understood in the United States or elsewhere. What cost in lives and money the United States will bear (and impose on others) has not been discussed with the public, let alone settled.

It is not difficult to imagine crises escalating in the areas noted. There is a disconnect between the United States and its potential rivals regarding U.S. military enlargement. The United States justifies its actions in idealistic, even crusading, terms, while its potential rivals perceive the actions in terms of realistic unilateral U.S. advantage. As a democracy, the United States cannot lightly abandon or change the terms in which it justifies policy to its public. As independent states responsible for their security, others cannot lightly abandon their realistic interpretation either. This is a recipe for escalation. Escalating crises with no mutually understood fallback position are more dangerous than anything that occurred during the Cold War.

Internal evolution in the polities of U.S. potential rivals will not offer a solution. “Democratic” Russia is no more disposed to accept U.S. troops in the states on its borders than the Soviet Union was. (The United States, always a democracy, has not accepted outside militaries on the same continent.) China may be evolving toward its own brand of democracy under the influence of its growing middle class, but few if any in China believe the United States has a right to determine the fate of Taiwan or Tibet or Korea. India is a democracy, and its democratic politics helped to make it a nuclear-weapons state. The “democratic peace” hypothesis, which says democracies don’t go to war with one another, applies only to settled democracies. It also requires a shared view of what constitutes permissible military action among democracies, a shared view that is incompatible with one-sided enlargement.

## **V. Is an Alternative Strategy Possible?**

Why should the United States risk so much? Why should U.S. security require U.S. military presence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, or U.S. dominance over the Chinese littoral and Taiwan, when it never has before? I believe that what is at stake is not so much strategy as domestic politics.

The motivating force for the strategy of enlargement is not in Europe or East Asia but in Washington, not in security requirements but in political requirements. It is difficult and unpopular in Washington, capital of the “world’s sole superpower,” to advocate prudence and limits, and to point out eventual weaknesses. Recognized lines of demarcation, though they made the Cold War safer than it would otherwise have been, are heresy to most of the Washington political establishment. In fact, the chatter among inside-the-Beltway commentators and their guests sometimes sounds as if the parties think the United States could win any war anywhere in the world at little risk to itself. Why this misconception, which most military leaders do not share? Three reasons come to mind.

One reason is the pride that follows success and that has proverbially been a poor counselor to the successful. The United States has been successful this century—a good thing, but leading to a temptation to think it can always be successful. It seems unpatriotic at this time of apogee to point out the limits of power. To advocate limits on military expansion, not just on grounds of good international relations, but because the military consequences themselves would be adverse, consigns one in some way to be an outsider.

The second reason is the huge defense establishment left from the Cold War, an Air Force that can penetrate almost everywhere, and a Navy that can prevail wherever there is water and some distance beyond. These assets are expensive, they have a big constituency, and so they must have some major use. Sometimes they do, but sometimes the powerful U.S. military option obscures the real choices available and their impact on our security and influence.

The third reason is that there is not much audience for arguments about strategic stability and nuclear escalation risks. Outside a specialized group, policymakers and the press are tired of hearing about nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons were to be forgotten along with the Cold War. Basing an argument about U.S. limitations on such ideas makes it doubly unwelcome.

These reasons and probably others have brought about a sea change in the fundamental U.S. military posture over the past ten years. The United States has gone from a mainly

defensive and deterrent posture, where the military was used to protect a zone of democratic allies and expansion was left to economic and political forces, to an offensive posture, where the military, through wars and alliances, is often in the lead.<sup>9</sup> That is a fragile posture over the long term. Eventually, dangerous crises over nonessential issues will put an end to military enlargement—not a happy prospect for U.S. influence or much of anything else. To avoid that prospect, the imperatives of a world with nuclear weapons—well understood during the Cold War but now out of the public mind—must be taken into account.

The impact of nuclear weapons among nuclear-weapons states is essentially to strengthen defensive postures. Their potential bilateral use puts the cost and risk of war beyond any reward to be obtained from offensive war. Even before the nuclear age, twentieth-century wars among major powers did not reward their initiators with any traditional measure of value: territorial expansion, greater influence, or economic power. Nuclear weapons enhance the drawbacks of initiating war by many orders of magnitude. Once they diffuse to other countries, so will the modern highly effective conventional weapons on which the United States now has a temporary monopoly.

Since rivalries for relative power will continue among nations, the United States must emphasize the aspects of these rivalries that will give it the greater gains for the least risk of catastrophe. That is not, for the United States, Russia, and China, control directly or indirectly over greater territory. All three powers need allies and clients, but for none of the three is military control over added territory a major security asset.<sup>10</sup>

Where the United States should accept limits on its military reach, given today's political alignments and trends and future military technologies, warrants more serious professional study than it has received. But that lines will be drawn and enforced, with or without U.S. forethought, must be accepted as inevitable. If they are drawn by agreement, there is nothing to prevent U.S. political and economic influence to extend beyond these lines, as it does now. If they are drawn in anger, this will not so readily be done. With some forethought, the fact of eventual limits on military expansion can play to U.S. relative advantages.

In the fifty years following World War II, the United States adopted a middle ground between retreat into isolationism and an offensive global strategy. That middle ground permitted U.S. and democratic influences to reach a peak not before attained. When the United States attempted to go on the offensive militarily into regions controlled by others, as in Vietnam and North Korea, it did not win militarily, lost ground politically, and democratic values did not gain in the world. Military offensives for the sake of principle or domestic politics were seen by others (and many at home) as infringements on their security and independence. They did not win converts to democracy. The only exceptions were Germany and Japan, where the citizens of those countries accepted that they had attacked the United States first and where a preliminary form of democracy had existed before being lost to dictators.

The acceptance of limits on military expansion would breathe new life into the arms-control agenda. This would particularly benefit the United States. The United States is not only well provided with nuclear weapon systems, it is extremely secure and well defended in other respects as well. Policies that enhance the value to other states of nuclear and other advanced weapons tend to reduce rather than augment U.S. relative power. A stabilization of the strategic situation, on the other hand, of which arms control is a part, works to make U.S. military advantages last longer.

Even with respect to U.S. conventional military superiority, the less it is used the longer it will last. As Hiroshima gave away the most important secret of the atomic bomb by showing

that one could be built, so the Gulf War gave away the most important secret of modern accurate weapon systems. As the Gulf War technologies that make the United States so superior today spread, conflicts will become extraordinarily destructive. Something similar to mutual nuclear deterrence will occur: accepting limits will be seen as preferable to war.

The United States is likely to be for some time the world's strongest power in many dimensions. The question is how to use that power intelligently toward goals the United States wishes to accomplish, goals that include the maintenance of that power. Given the awesome power that nuclear weapons have to equalize other forms of military power, and the coupling between military expansion on the part of the United States and the value of nuclear weapons as perceived by other states, intelligent means dictate restraint in military expansion. Intelligent means also dictate restraint in demonstrating advanced conventional weaponry. Even if the United States maintains an edge, modern war will be increasingly destructive and the destruction will be increasingly two-sided. The United States has other means to carry out its goals, means that would be made more effective by military restraint beyond certain geographic limits.

In summary, the United States together with like-minded nations can again win the peace, but there are serious questions about how many wars it can win in the nuclear age as it expands further and further away from the regions where its central interests are well defined and supported by the public. The present strategy, which puts the United States in the front line of troubled regions and emphasizes military actions (interventions, alliances, and arms sales) as a first rather than a last recourse, will win little and incur great risks. It is not the road to continued U.S. influence, or to greater peace in the changing world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Tyler, "The Lone Superpower Plan: Ammunition for Critics," *New York Times*, March 10, 1992, p. A12.

<sup>2</sup> Alexei G. Arbatov, "Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles, and Prospects," *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998): 83–134, esp. pp. 87, 122–23, and 130; "The Putin Doctrine: Nuclear Threats and Russia's Place in the World," Stratfor.com Global Intelligence Update, 17 January 1999, <http://www.stratfor.com/SERVICES/giu2000/011700.ASP>.

<sup>3</sup> Japan ceded these areas back to China in the 1951 U.S.-Japan peace treaty, making China's title valid in U.S. as well as international law. The "China" in the treaty was not specified, but the United States has since recognized the PRC as the legal heir to all Chinese claims. Japan's recession was called for at least as far back as the Cairo declaration of 1943.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Wolf, "U.S. plans combat presence in any future Korea," Reuters, 9 July 1998. "The United States expects to maintain combat troops indefinitely in any future reunified Korea to help preserve peace and stability in Asia and the Pacific, Defense Secretary William Cohen said Thursday. 'We think that should continue . . . even if there is . . . a unification of the two Koreas,' he said at a joint news conference with his visiting South Korean counterpart, Cheon Yong-taek."

<sup>5</sup> For an argument that recent U.S. and UK operations against Iraq were legally more questionable than the Kosovo intervention, see Marc Weller, "The US, Iraq and the Use of Force in a Unipolar World," *Survival* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1999–2000): 81–100.



<sup>6</sup> Inter alia, see U.S. Department of Defense *Joint Vision 2010*, p. 8: “power projection, enabled by overseas presence, will likely remain the fundamental strategic concept of our future force.” Available at <http://www.dtic.mil/jv2010/jvpub.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Both experience and theoretical insights from game theory show the value of this shared information if worst outcomes are to be avoided. See Robert Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Also, Michael M. May, *Rivalries between Nuclear Power Projectors* (Stanford, Calif.: Center for International Security and Arms Control, Stanford University, May 1996).

<sup>8</sup> *Joint Vision 2010*, p. 3, gives “enlarging the community of free-market democracies” as an example of “policies we are likely to pursue in the years ahead.” What is noteworthy is not the statement itself, which has been made in numerous other forums, but its emphasis in fundamental U.S. military doctrine.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Krasner notes that what I “depict as grand strategy might be better described as a series of steps which policymakers have not considered in their entirety.” Thus, the United States may have, “almost without realizing it,” made military commitments that looked cost-free at the time but may have resulted in, and been seen by Russia and China as, imperial overstretch. Therese Delpesch makes the same point: “‘Overstretching’ is not the result of a deliberate policy but the sum . . . of diverse events.”

<sup>10</sup> Oil is not a serious exception. First, all three states have enough indigenous oil to sustain a wartime economy. Second, the peacetime global oil market could not be easily disrupted even by the United States, should it wish to do so. Peacetime access to oil, though perhaps not the cheapest oil, is so widespread that it would be all but impossible to deny to any of the three.





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