

[ISSF Roundtable on Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy](#)

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Introduction by Richard K. Betts

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Introduction by Richard K. Betts, Columbia University

There are many international relations theorists in academia who opine on world order and grand strategy. There are many policy analysts in think tanks with deep understanding of military programs, budgets, and operations. There are not many, however, who combine both sorts of expertise in equal depth. Barry Posen is one of the very best of the very few who do. Since the Cold War he has focused on clarifying the logic of choice among several models of American grand strategy in the context of practical considerations of cost.

Posen's *Restraint* is the distillation of his thinking - and frustration - about regnant U.S. strategic philosophy and practice. It is perhaps the most thorough and thoughtful exposition of the strategic concept and calculations he freely admits command little political support among those who have controlled American foreign policy since the end of bipolarity. His *bête noire* is the elite consensus on the theory of 'liberal hegemony,' which overestimates benefits and underestimates the costs of exploiting unipolarity to promote American values at the point of a gun.

The following reviews span the range of judgments on Posen's case. Robert Lieber is most critical, Jolyon Howorth most supportive, and Paul MacDonald in between, though closer to Lieber. Were I to be among the reviewers myself I would tilt the balance with an enthusiastic endorsement of the Posen book.

To refute *Restraint* Lieber offers a faithful representation of the liberal hegemony logic that is the target of Posen's argument. He faults Posen and other realists for "nearly exclusive emphasis on offshore balancing and disengagement from U.S. commitments in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia" and a "rationale for inaction and neo-isolationism." While Posen focuses on the costs of military activism, Lieber believes he ignores the benefits or "the wider costs of disengagement." Where Posen includes Obama in his critique of dominant strategy, Lieber sees Obama's policies as closer to Posen's preferred restraint than to liberal hegemony. He sees the folly of Posen's argument in the "precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Iraq" and the alleged escalation of terrorism and emboldenment of adversaries due to U.S. retrenchment in the Middle East. Finally he argues that *Restraint's* emphasis on overcommitment is outdated given the upsurge of threats in the several years since Posen wrote.

Howorth counters by noting Posen's points that Lieber does not address in his review: "push-back from potential adversaries" and "cheap riding," which creates "a lose-lose situation for Washington." Echoing Posen's emphasis on the costs of activism, as opposed to Lieber's emphasis on the costs of disengagement, Howorth foresees worsening of the balance, as "global trends will ensure that the cost to the U.S. of its current grand strategy will continue to rise." He believes U.S. "leadership has become an end in itself" and endorses Posen's language in saying that Europe has been "infantilized" ... by its fetish for and dependence on U.S. leadership." He does echo Lieber, however, in saying that events of the past few years raise questions about the applicability of *Restraint's* logic.

MacDonald cites *Restraint* as an engineer's "blueprint" for "more modest American foreign policy" but faults it for insufficient theorization to explain the rise of liberal hegemony, without which it is "hard to know how to go about replacing it." He notes the advantages Posen sees in maintaining American "command of the commons," but asks, "would a grand strategy of Restraint enhance the ability of the U.S. to command the commons, or would it place it at risk?" In line with Lieber, MacDonald notes that liberal hegemony apologists would say that Posen's criteria for grand strategy are too narrow, that "An activist grand strategy could provide all sorts of non-security related

benefits.”

My own view of *Restraint* is thoroughly positive. True, the world has gotten more dangerous in the time since Posen wrote. Although Russian pushback and Chinese expansiveness do make choices more complicated, the essential logic of Posen’s assessment and recommendations remains powerful. The renewed Russian problem follows from Posen’s diagnosis of post-Cold War mistakes in western strategy, such as NATO expansion. The China problem is more difficult, but *Restraint*’s recommendation for American emphasis on maritime strategy is consistent with it.

Against the response of supporters of liberal hegemony, which is represented in the Lieber review, one might argue that it implies the main barrier to success of the liberal project is limitation of the United States’ willingness to invest its power. But one might ask, for example, how “precipitous” the withdrawal from Iraq should be considered after eight long years of combat and trillions of dollars invested, and whether enemy successes in the region have been due to the United States leaving the field or to the ineffectiveness of long and strenuous U.S. efforts in the face of local forces with their own agendas.

Participants:

Barry R. Posen is Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT, Director of the MIT Security Studies Program (<http://web.mit.edu/ssp/>), and serves on the Executive Committee of Seminar XXI (<http://semxxi.mit.edu/>). In addition to *Restraint* (2014), he authored *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (1990) and *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (1984), all three from Cornell University Press. He is also the author of numerous articles, including “Military doctrine and the management of uncertainty,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39:2, 2016; “The Case for Restraint,” *The American Interest*, (November/December 2007) and “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security*, (Summer, 2003.) He is currently working on the implications of the diffusion of power and emerging multipolarity for global security politics.

Richard K. Betts is Arnold A. Saltzman Professor and Director of the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia. He has taught at Harvard and Johns Hopkins’ School of Advanced International Studies, was a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and received his B.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard. Among Betts’ six books are three published by Columbia University Press: *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (2d edition, 1991; 1st edition Harvard University Press, 1977), *Enemies of Intelligence* (2007), and *American Force* (2012); and three published by the Brookings Institution: *Surprise Attack* (1982), *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (1987), and *Military Readiness* (1995). He is co-author of *The Irony of Vietnam* (Brookings, 1979) and editor of three other books

Jolyon Howorth has been full-time Visiting Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at Yale University (USA) since 2002. He is also Jean Monnet Professor *ad personam* and Professor *Emeritus* of European Politics at the University of Bath (UK). He has published extensively in the field of European politics and history, especially security and defense policy and transatlantic relations. Recent books include: *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union* (London: Palgrave 2007 (2nd edition 2014); *Defending Europe: the EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy* (London:

Palgrave, 2003); *European Integration and Defence: the Ultimate Challenge?* Paris, WEU-ISS, 2000; *The European Union and National Defence Policy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Robert J. Lieber (Ph.D. Harvard, BA Wisconsin) is Professor of Government and International Affairs at Georgetown University. His latest book, *Retreat and Its Consequences: US Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order* will be published in May 2016 by Cambridge University Press. In addition he is author or editor of sixteen books on international relations and U.S. foreign policy. Other recent works include *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why The United States Is Not Destined To Decline* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), and edited volumes including *Foreign Policy* (Ashgate Library of Essays in International Relations, 2008), and *Eagle Rules? Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the 21st Century* (Prentice-Hall and Woodrow Wilson Center, 2002).

Paul K. MacDonald is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College. He has held positions at Williams College, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Center for International Security and Cooperation. He has published articles in *American Political Science Review*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and the *Review of International Studies*. Oxford University Press published his first book, *Networks of Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics* in 2014.

Joseph M. Parent is Associate Professor of political science at the University of Miami.

Review by Jolyon Howorth, Yale University

This is a very important book. In 180 densely-argued pages, Barry Posen proposes a radically different grand strategy for the United States, based on the challenging notion of “Restraint.” Equally importantly, he demonstrates, with quasi-forensic precision, why the current U.S. strategy – which he dubs “Liberal Hegemony” (24) – is both misguided, increasingly out of date, and dangerous. The argument is meticulously woven, and supported by a wealth of scholarship, statistics, and references that should be the envy of every academic. It ranges across states and continents and across time. It is carefully and precisely worded, with full attention given to possible objections and alternative approaches. It is fair, balanced, and rigorous. It is also an argument with which this reviewer has a great deal of sympathy. Posen’s book will stand for many years as the most cogent, lucid, and compelling argument for a major revision of (and reduction in) the United States’ military’s global footprint.

No doubt other authors in this roundtable review will rehearse and parse Posen’s systematic critique of Liberal Hegemony, which he portrays as seeking to continue to police the world, confident in the belief that states will increasingly embrace democracy under the guidance of the one “indispensable nation,” and that global market interdependence will increasingly render major conflict unlikely. Posen offers a realist’s riposte based on three key insights. First, the expansiveness of Liberal Hegemony produces both push-back from potential adversaries (who are growing in strength) and

'cheap-riding' from allies who see no reason to pay for their own security. This is a lose-lose situation for Washington. Second, global trends will ensure that the cost to the U.S. of its current grand strategy will continue to rise. Third, anti-Americanism is exacerbated worldwide by the growth of ethno-nationalist and religious identities that have become highly politicized. A grand strategy of Restraint would allow the U.S. to make significant cutbacks in its force structure, leading to a defense budget of just 2.5% of GDP. Current U.S. defense spending is deplored as a "subsidy to other prosperous nations" (27). Such a strategy would, crucially, allow the U.S. to perpetuate its "command of the commons" (135ff).

For the purpose of this review, I shall concentrate on Posen's argument that U.S. allies across the globe should be encouraged and cajoled – and if necessary threatened – to take over far greater responsibility for their own regional security. Within that broader context, I shall focus in particular on his seemingly dramatic proposal to "withdraw [U.S.] operational forces from Europe over a ten-year period, starting with ground forces" (90). This project should, he argues, be accompanied by the gradual transfer to European-Union (EU) control of all NATO institutions, including that of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe SACEUR, who should become a European officer.

Europeans are used to being lectured by Americans on burden-sharing. They have grown comfortable with it because the record of Liberal Hegemony has taught them that they do not need to take the lecturing seriously. Posen, however, clearly means it when he says that virtually all U.S. forces should be withdrawn from Europe. He repeats this message at regular intervals throughout the book. As long as the U.S. remains prepared to pick up the tab for European security, through NATO or any other agency, the Europeans will never step up to the plate. It is only when they become convinced that Uncle Sam is well and truly moving on (and away) that there is the slightest chance they will become serious about their own defense.

In 1999, the European Union embarked on the project currently known as the *Common Security and Defence Policy* (CSDP). This was predicated from the outset on the ambition of being autonomous from the U.S. and NATO. The logic behind this development differed from country to country. For the French, it was the culmination of a forty-year-old dream. For the British, it was an early response to increasingly urgent pleas from Washington for burden-sharing. The thinking in London was that only through an EU framework would Europeans agree to increase spending on security. In Berlin, the project promised institutional dynamism for European integration. In most other European capitals there was a sense that could only be a good thing for the EU if the UK and France could actually agree on defense policy. There was also a sense that, after Bosnia and Kosovo, there would be other challenges to stability in the European neighborhood in which the U.S. would not wish to be involved. The EU, in short, would acquire the *autonomous* ability to develop a strategy, to generate military capacity, and to launch overseas military missions. The problem is that this project has failed in all three ambitions. There is, as yet, no discernible strategy.¹⁴ Europeans have not generated any more capacity through the EU than they might otherwise have done through NATO. Between 2006 and 2013, EU defence spending fell by around 15 percent. The average number of troops EU governments deployed on overseas missions fell from about 83,000 to 58,000. And whenever there has been a serious crisis on Europe's periphery (the Balkans in the 1990s; Libya in 2011; Crimea and Ukraine in 2014), the Europeans have fallen back on NATO as the security provider of last resort. Meanwhile, their own CSDP project has become something of a sideshow.

Posen, like other realists keen to challenge the triumphalism of Liberal Hegemony, has long sought evidence of balancing behavior on the part of third parties. He believed he had found it in the EU's CSDP. A lively controversy surrounded this issue in the mid-2000s, in which U.S. realists argued (and liberal-hegemony scholars denied) that the EU was balancing against the U.S. Most realists qualified their arguments by adopting the concept of "soft-balancing."¹⁴ But Posen insisted that "the Europeans are hard balancing in the traditional realist way of balancing internally and externally to generate military capability."¹⁵ One problem with these discussions is that U.S. scholars misunderstood the institutional workings of the EU and failed to appreciate that "whatever might be the preferences of individual member states in terms of missions, institutions, or capabilities, CSDP has always been and done what *all member states* can agree on."¹⁶ As indicated above, that amounted to very little. By the late 2000s, U.S. policy-makers and analysts were more concerned about CSDP's limited ambitions, and even its perceived growing irrelevance.¹⁷ This was expressed forthrightly in February 2008 by the American Ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland: "I am here today in Paris to say that we agree with France—Europe needs, the United States needs, NATO needs, the democratic world needs—a stronger, more capable European defense capacity. An ESDP with only soft power is not enough."¹⁸ But Posen remained unconvinced. In *Restraint*, despite all the evidence (by 2013) of CSDP's inadequacies, he recidivates, accusing the Europeans of seeking "to punch up the capacity of the European Union for independent foreign policy action, including the development of a shadow military command structure outside of NATO." However, he apparently drops the charge of hard balancing: "The purpose here is limited, to have a capability in reserve against the possibility that the United States could prove capricious, and the Europeans would have to go it alone" (31).

Ultimately, the argument about balancing resembles medieval discussions about angels on pinheads. Posen's primary purpose is to make the case for the U.S. allies taking over responsibility for their own affairs. Allies are costing more than they are worth: "The bargain has become unprofitable for the United States and requires renegotiation.... If the US did less, and the allies perceived that this reduced their security, they could clearly afford to spend more" (34-35). In a blunt assessment of NATO since the Cold War, he deconstructs with great lucidity the repeated fecklessness and cheap-riding of the European allies and concludes, ruefully, that "to hand a problem to NATO is simply to hand it back to the United States" (39). Posen intends to break that vicious circle: the Europeans "will not do more unless the United States credibly commits to doing less" (66). For my purposes, this is a particularly intriguing aspect of the book. Posen's proposal to transfer NATO to the Europeans over a ten-year period is not as revolutionary as it sounds. In a report to President François Hollande in 2013, former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine argued for the "Europeanization of NATO."¹⁹ At the same time, Sarwar Kashmeri and I made out a case for a merger of CSDP and NATO, which is similar to that put forward by Posen: "It is time for Europeans to stop believing that the transatlantic defense and security equation cannot work without U.S. leadership, and time for the U.S. to accept that it does not have to lead everywhere in the world, and certainly not in Europe where its closest and richest allies dwell."²⁰

Posen's argument is supported by a number of assertions, all of which might warrant a rethink in light of international developments since the book was published. First, he stresses that the EU is not threatened by any external power. Russia, he insists repeatedly throughout the book (20, 71, 80, 87), is a declining power with no capacity to threaten Europe. The Islamic State IS had not made its appearance when Posen's book was published. Second, he observes that "Europe is inherently

stable,” with a common currency for eighteen member states, which makes it “laughable” to imagine security competition amongst its key members (87-88). Third, the EU, through CSDP, possesses “a good base on which [to] build an autonomous defensive capability” (89). Balancing has been forgotten. Fourth, the French and British nuclear deterrents could conceivably be “Europeanized.”¹³ Posen’s conclusion is that “the European Union provides as good a foundation for US disengagement as the United States will find anywhere in the world today” (90). In short, NATO can be transferred to the Europeans and, if they do not want it, it “can be permitted to lapse.” (90) Events in Europe since Posen’s book was written, including triple crises in the three policy areas that go to the heart of sovereignty (money, defense, and borders) might lead some to question the very foundations of his grand strategy of Restraint.

As with any work of contemporary politics, the world continued to move between the writing of this book (spring 2013) and its publication (June 2014). In particular, developments in the Middle East (the rise of the Islamic State and the aggravation of the Syrian civil war), in Eastern Europe (the Russian annexation of Crimea and the protracted civil war in Ukraine), and in the East and South China Seas (the escalation of Chinese military threats), have combined to create a significantly more challenging international context than was the case three years ago. Indeed, in response to instability in the Sahel, the U.S. is increasingly engaged (so far mainly with drones) in North Africa, a liberal-hegemonic development Posen could not have foreseen. The terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November 2015 have led to France declaring ‘war’ on ISIS. Had Posen known when he wrote this book what we now know about these new and serious threats to international peace, would he have written a different book? I cannot answer for him; my answer is that these events make his argument even more salient.

Arguably, the main reason for European dependency on the U.S. is the continued existence, under U.S. leadership, of NATO. Liberal Hegemony deduced from the Balkan Wars that the Western allies needed a powerful leader. That leadership has become an end in itself. With it has come continued European followership and free riding. It is this vicious circle that Posen wishes to break. In my view, that is the crucial challenge of the coming decade, not just in American interests but, crucially, in European interests. It is unhealthy, unsatisfactory, and unnecessary for the EU (with a GDP well in excess of that of the U.S.) to remain “infantilized” (the word is Posen’s, and I agree) by its fetish for and dependence on U.S. leadership. The EU has, since 2002, developed a “Neighborhood Policy” to address the massive challenges to the East and to the South. It has posited this as its absolute priority for foreign and security policy. Yet, during the Arab Spring and the Ukraine/Crimea crisis, that policy proved itself to be bankrupt. The EU can only generate a viable policy for its (extremely turbulent) neighborhood when it is master of its own strategy and military capacity. It has no hope of achieving that through CSDP. It can only learn to be a consequential actor through a Europeanized and transformed NATO. If the U.S. is serious about wanting the EU to step up to the regional plate, it should be prepared to help it complete that apprenticeship by progressively transferring leadership and temporarily enabling capacity. At the same time, a genuine policy of U.S. restraint would force the Europeans to address the structural problems of their Union. Moreover, only when they become autonomous as security actors can they negotiate with Russia the strategic partnership they have talked about but failed to deliver for two decades. If seriously left to their own devices, they would face a stark choice: streamline and accelerate their integration; or disintegrate. Restraint carries risks, but the present unhealthy imbalance between Europe and the U.S. is in neither party’s

historical interest.

Posen has charted an important new direction. His proposals are not restricted to Europe, but applied with equal conviction, although with gentler elements of transition, to U.S. allies around the world, especially in Asia and the Middle East. Liberal Hegemony should be replaced by Restraint. The outcome, for this reviewer, irrespective of the motives, would be in the best interests of global order.

Review by Robert J. Lieber, Georgetown University

Barry Posen's *Restraint* provides the definitive statement of retrenchment and offshore balancing as the basis of a realist grand strategy for the United States. The result is a sophisticated, accomplished and forthright work by an author with a keen analytical mind. To his credit, even where one disagrees with Posen's analysis or conclusions – as I do – there is a welcome directness in his writing. For example, he describes as “a fantasy” President Barack Obama's belief that the world should move to the abolition of nuclear weapons (73).

Major elements of Posen's approach will be familiar to many readers. He has been making the case for retrenchment for a considerable period of time, as in his widely cited 2003 article in *International Security*, “Command of the Commons;” in a 2007 *American Interest* essay that foreshadows the book; and in his 2013 argument for a transformative “Pull Back” in foreign policy.¹ In the book, though Posen situates his work squarely within a realist framework, he is explicit in noting that realists “do not agree on everything” (170-171). He cites differences with selective-engagement advocates as well as offensive realists. Nonetheless, the concepts of restraint -- i.e., political-military disengagement and offshore balancing -- which are the focus of Posen's work lie at the core of contemporary realism for academics and for policy experts who share the realist outlook. Indeed, whatever the nuances, offshore balancing has become close to synonymous with academic realism.

That being said, there are two noteworthy limits with the approach set out both in *Restraint* and by other contemporary proponents of this realist framework. One is conceptual and has to do with realism itself. The other concerns its timeliness and the extent to which both real-world events and Obama's foreign policies make the work and its deep critique of ‘liberal hegemony’ seem more backward looking than relevant as a current guide to policy and strategy.²

Realism itself has a long and rich lineage³, but it is best understood as a tradition more than as a theory. Its central positions are difficult to test or falsify, a limitation equally the case for liberal internationalism and constructivism. Moreover, contemporary academic proponents seem wedded to a narrow treatment of realism. They do so either with elaborate embellishments that are not necessarily embodied in the tradition itself,⁴ or – in the present case – they tend to interpret realism as dictating retrenchment and offshore balancing, when neither idea is obligatory for a realist understanding of international politics.

Posen does situate his work in key precepts of the realist tradition, including the absence of overarching authority in world affairs, the importance of power and security, and states' necessary concern for their own national interests. But he and other scholars have tended to reduce realism to a

nearly exclusive emphasis on offshore balancing and disengagement from U.S. commitments in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.^[1] These realists believe that absent the American presence, balance-of-power logic is likely to motivate local powers to balance against regional threats. Thus America can remedy its costly overextension abroad, husband its own blood and treasure, and devote resources to domestic priorities.^[2] For Posen and like-minded realists, the U.S. can and should avoid engagement in most foreign conflicts, but if intervention becomes necessary, it should emphasize naval forces rather than large numbers of combat troops and it should structure its own forces accordingly.^[3] In practice, however, offshore balancing offers a rationale for inaction and neo-isolationism. As critics have observed, the concept is much more attractive as an academic notion than a real-world strategic approach.^[4]

In broader terms, academic realist thinkers tend to share a reductive view of foreign policy behavior that undervalues agency. That is, they allow insufficient weight for the causal influence of ideologies, beliefs, history, and interests in shaping the behavior of foreign actors.^[5] In criticizing U.S. policy and security commitments abroad, Posen and others tend to see these as fundamental in provoking opposition to the U.S. However, if one considers the recent behavior of Russia and China, there are ample reasons to weigh more heavily the internal sources of state conduct than Posen and others would allow. Thus a respected scholar of the two countries, Gilbert Rozman, emphasizes domestic factors shaping Russian and Chinese behavior and national identity in opposition to Western concepts of world order. These include justifying authoritarian rule by taking pride in the communist legacy, emphasis on past historical differences with the West including the Cold War, prioritizing foreign-policy cooperation with each other while exaggerating threats from America, and the deliberate adoption of chauvinistic rhetoric and confrontational foreign policies to justify domestic repression.^[6]

No less a thinker than Kenneth Waltz, the intellectual father of modern structural realism, cautioned against the overly deterministic use of realist concepts in understanding state behavior. Three decades ago he wrote:

Structures shape and shove. They do not determine behaviors and outcomes, not only because unit-level and structural causes interact, but also because the shaping and shoving of structures may be successfully resisted.^[7]

In practice, Posen and other offshore balancers also overlook the wider costs of disengagement and inaction. Thus Stephen Brooks, William Wohlforth, and John Ikenberry make the case that America should “lean forward” in its foreign policy, and argue that retrenchment radically overstates the costs of engagement and understates its benefits. In an adroit reference to realism, they conclude that, “[To] retain a grand strategy of deep engagement after the Cold War is just what the preponderance of international relations scholarship would expect a rational self-interested leading power in America’s position to do.”^[8]

Restraint argues against the strategy of ‘Liberal Hegemony,’ which is described as dominating the foreign policies of Democrats and Republicans as well as the views of foreign-policy elites. But after nearly two full terms of the Obama administration, it is deeply problematic to define his foreign-policy strategy in those terms. To be sure, Posen includes Obama in his criticisms of over-reach, and the President has certainly made expansive use of drone attacks and Special Forces in actions against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and selectively reinserted American forces in

Iraq. Nonetheless, other realists do leap to the defense of Obama's foreign policy.^[22] Indeed, the overall approach that Obama adopted has been one much more inclined toward retrenchment than to Liberal Hegemony. The President has even referred to himself as a realist and cited Thomas Hobbes.^[23] His strategy has included reducing America's military capabilities, pulling back from regional and diplomatic commitments, and telegraphing a preference for retrenchment and disengagement. Yet taken together, these measures reduce the incentive for allies to follow Washington's leadership. Simultaneously, by lessening the likelihood that the U.S. could or would make good on its commitments or threats, Obama has increased the temptation for adversaries to act against American preferences.^[24] Thus the consequences of this realist experiment have been costly.

The practical implications of restraint and retrenchment have become starkly evident in the Middle East. In Iraq, a precipitous U.S. withdrawal allowed free rein for the bitterly sectarian Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, thus contributing to the renewal of insurgency and the rise of ISIS. In Libya, policies of 'leading from behind' and then eschewing support for reconstruction and order have been followed by chaos, institutional collapse, and a growing role for radical Islamists including al-Qaeda and ISIS. In Syria, unwillingness to provide early and meaningful backing for the moderate opposition as well as failing to enforce Obama's 'red line' against President Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons have undercut U.S. credibility and helped to allow a horrific civil war to escalate. Syria's neighbors have been weakened by a massive outflow of refugees and are threatened by the spread of ISIS and al-Qaeda. Russia has regained a Middle-East power position after having been expelled from the region four decades ago. And the refugee tsunami has swept into Europe, where it has triggered a virulent populist reaction and endangered European stability. In sum, as a consequence of America's retrenchment in the Middle East, terrorism has escalated, U.S. allies feel abandoned, adversaries have become emboldened, and the region has become more dangerous and unstable.

Beyond these conceptual questions, the book seems backward-looking. Posen himself notes that he wrote in spring 2013 (174), and describes his focus as the "last 20 years of activism" (69), especially the two decades following the end of the Cold War. Despite references to Obama, his emphasis is very much on what he sees as the excesses of the Bush and Clinton administrations. Thus in the opening paragraph of the Preface, readers are told of three major events that have affected his thinking: NATO enlargement to include "former vassal states of the Soviet Union," the war in Kosovo, and the war in Iraq. (xi). These are *bona fide* subjects for serious policy and strategy analysis and debate, but their relevance seems much less immediate at the present time than must have been the case as the author began thinking and writing on these matters more than a dozen years ago. As a result, the emphasis on political and strategic over-commitment seems dated in relationship to the events of recent years and the policies followed by the Obama administration. For example, in making the case for a military strategy of "Command of the Commons" (135-163), although Posen delves into detail about rising challengers and the need to take measures to maintain America's edge, his approach seems too complacent about Washington's ability to do so while enacting deep cuts in force structure and reducing the defense budget to 2.5 percent of GDP.

Similarly, some treatment of country specifics feels rusty. Posen describes Russia as the weakest of the four European powers and writes that "its conventional forces are weak" (87). But in Crimea and Ukraine, and more recently in Syria, the modernization and upgrading of Russia's military has become quite apparent. In turn, despite noting that the European Union (EU) is unwieldy and that it is not a single country, Posen writes that the EU "provides a good base on which Europeans could

build an autonomous defense capability” and that its Common Security and Defense Policy “demonstrates that they can look after themselves”(89). Yet not only the recent refugee crisis and Europe’s grave political disarray, but also the Eurozone crisis that began in 2009 make these assumptions seem wildly optimistic. In addition, Posen recommends that the U.S. should pull its remaining operational forces from Europe over a ten year period as well as withdraw from NATO’s integrated military command and that the North Atlantic Treaty itself should “be rewritten entirely or permitted to lapse” (90). These measures are inadvisable in the face of a predatory Russia that not only menaces its former republics, but also other states along its entire western periphery. To Posen’s credit, it should be noted that he begins the book with the observation that, “A grand strategy . . . is a set of concepts and arguments that need to be revisited regularly” (1). That caution is very much in order here.

In sum, though Posen calls for a grand strategy of restraint, the alternative to U.S. engagement and leadership in international affairs is likely to be authoritarian modernization and regional hegemony by countries that do not share American and Western values of liberty, democracy, and the enlightenment.¹³ The aggressive actions of Russia in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, Iran in the Persian Gulf and wider Middle East, and China in the East and South China seas illustrate this danger. Eventually, the U.S. will find itself needing to return to a more robust world role, whether through a reassessment of strategy or because foreign perils make such a change unavoidable. The active as well as prudent engagement of the U.S. is not in itself a sufficient condition for world order, but it is often a necessary one. America retains the capacity to act accordingly, but until it does the world is likely to become more dangerous and disorderly, with growing threats to regional stability, prosperity, and to the vital national interests of the U.S. itself.

Review by Paul K. MacDonald, Wellesley College, and Joseph M. Parent, University of Miami

“The United States has grown incapable of moderating its ambitions in international politics.” (1) With these stern words, Barry Posen begins building the case that American foreign policy needs to sober up. Drunk on power, the country spent much of the Post-Cold War period intervening all over the world, with delusions of imperial grandeur. American activism has worn out public support, unnecessarily underwritten capable allies, emboldened reckless partners, and failed – at great cost – to remake the world in Uncle Sam’s image. *Restraint* is America’s hangover cure.

In the Introduction, Posen explains how U.S. foreign policy arrived at this sorry state. What were once four grand strategic options have distilled down to two: Liberal Hegemony and Restraint (xii). Liberal Hegemony is a hybrid of Cooperative Security and Primacy; basically, it is the coercive export of American values. The Clinton Administration began melding these two grand strategies, but veered toward Primacy because of the Balkan wars and electoral pressures (9-10). It was only in 2001, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, that the two were fully fused (6). To balance against its rival, Restraint combines strands of Selective Engagement with Isolationism (7). It is effectively a maritime grand strategy of commanding the global commons to ensure American access to critical areas while limiting more ambitious and expensive commitments (xiii).

In Chapter 1, Posen evaluates the option of Liberal Hegemony and finds it wanting. First, it

overstates the benefits of forward defenses. The United States is inherently secure; it benefits little from foreign-policy adventures; it is not clear that the country's commitments are responsible for regional peace; and hegemony is not necessary for strong growth and security (61-63). Second, Liberal Hegemony is burdensome: it causes countervailing behavior, inflames identity politics, and encourages cheap riding and reckless driving by allies (65-67). Posen points out that the United States has been at war twice as often after the Cold War as during it, and has little to show for it (67).

In Chapter 2, Posen describes the alternative approach of Restraint. He generally advocates: "a phased reduction in U.S. political commitments and military deployments. The ultimate goal is to place the responsibility for the security of major and minor U.S. allies squarely on their shoulders" (71). As he develops the argument, he derides the drive to rid the world of nuclear weapons (72-74), and offers region-specific policies on how to decrease reliance on forward ground forces without causing instability. The goal should be U.S. defense spending of no more than 2.5 percent of GDP, because the United States faces few genuine threats, a cost ceiling imposes discipline and improves efficiency, and less defense spending is healthier for long-term economic growth (135-136). In Chapter 3, Posen goes in depth on how to command the commons, detailing the military strategy, force structure, and force posture of Restraint. The upshot is that naval, air, and space capabilities should have priority over ground forces, and that overseas bases should be converted from permanent facilities to prepositioned stocks that can provide "an infrastructure for the return of U.S. forces in extremis" (160).

Many have criticized Post-Cold War American foreign policy and counseled a more restrained grand strategy,¹⁶⁰ but Posen is the most thorough in working through what is not working and how exactly to do it better. Sensibly, he is not alarmist about the rate of American decline or the capabilities of rising states (16-20). Pragmatically, he does not recommend the U.S. embark on an immediate and rapid retreat from global politics (130-131). The alternative grand strategy he presents is meticulously drawn up but not rigidly so: he makes a compelling case that events are trending toward his argument, but he is under no illusion that change is easy or linear. All told, Posen has supplied one of the best blueprints for what a more modest American foreign policy might look like.

The blueprint metaphor is well earned. Posen has the mind of an engineer and has extensively thought through all the practicalities. Yet there are places where we wished that the theoretical foundations of Posen's argument could have come through more clearly. First, it is unclear what standards Posen is using to judge rival grand strategies, and why the consensus around Liberal Hegemony has proven so durable. Posen's balance sheet seems to consist mainly of security benefits and resource costs: good grand strategies are those that provide the greatest security at the cheapest price (3). Yet advocates of Liberal Hegemony might retort that this frames the issue too narrowly. An activist grand strategy could provide all sorts of non-security related benefits, including economic prosperity or a favorable ideological milieu. It also might be more expensive in the short term, yet be more predictable and court fewer risks over the long term. And since the United States is a relatively wealthy and secure state, policymakers might have the luxury to apply standards other than efficiency when choosing among grand strategies.

Tied into this issue of standards is the question of why U.S. policymakers have been so consistent in their embrace of Liberal Hegemony. At times, Posen hints that the answer might lie in the distribution of capabilities. As the unipolar power, it made sense that the United States would try to

impose its will through an activist and transformative grand strategy (8-9). At other times, the explanation seems to be ideological. An uncritical faith in democracy and American exceptionalism encouraged liberal crusades to transform other societies (10). Yet exogenous shocks and domestic politics also seem to play a role. The trauma of the September 11th 2001 attacks looms large, as do the political incentives to inflate foreign threats and champion tough responses (11, 173). Without a theory to explain the rise of Liberal Hegemony, it is hard to know how to go about replacing it. Has Liberal Hegemony always been a foolish grand strategy or has the balance of power changed in ways that make it increasingly unattractive? Does Liberal Hegemony reflect deeply held values tied to American identity or is it an unintended response to unexpected events? Do advocates of Liberal Hegemony err because they misread the evidence regarding its costs and benefits, or because they apply altogether different standards to evaluate success and failure?

Second, Posen contends that one of the main virtues of Restraint is that it would allow the United States to preserve the “command of the commons” (136). This is important, because command of the commons allows the United States to concentrate the capabilities of allies in a crisis, choke off the trade of potential aggressors, and place military assets ashore at the time and place of its choosing (140-142). Yet the theoretical connection between a more humble and restrained foreign policy and a maritime military strategy is somewhat unclear. Are a grand strategy of Liberal Hegemony and a maritime military strategy fundamentally incompatible? Given the fact that the U.S. established its command of the commons at the same time as it pursued Liberal Hegemony, the answer would appear to be no. Conversely, would a grand strategy of Restraint enhance the ability of the U.S. to command the commons, or would it place it at risk? An advocate of Liberal Hegemony could plausibly argue the latter: if the United States does not retain access to military bases in allied states, then it would find it much harder to project military power into contested regions and sustain command of the commons.

Here it is somewhat surprising that Posen does not say more about the debate surrounding so-called ‘anti-access and area denial’ (A2/AD) capabilities. Posen recognizes that some states are seeking to challenge the command of the commons, yet his conclusion seems to be that there is little the United States can do about this (149-150, 155-156). He argues that efforts to retain access to the contested airspaces or littorals of rival great powers are either going to require capabilities that are prohibitively expensive or operational concepts that are destabilizing and escalatory (32, 95, 104). We tend to agree with these claims, but it is worth noting that many do not. They contend that innovations in long-range precision strike, unmanned systems, missile defense, and enhanced information networks can allow the United States to retain access to contested areas.²⁴ These debates are technical, but raise a broader point: if the command of the commons is so valuable, why not strain to preserve it? If one adopts the reductions in force structure and global posture Posen recommends, does this not require the U.S. to accept that the commons it commands will be more circumscribed than has been the case in the past?

Third, Posen could say more about the theory of how one gets from here to there. If Liberal Hegemony is the consensus grand strategy today, when and how will it be replaced? Posen admits that it is unlikely that “politicians will read arguments offered by advocates of Restraint, have a eureka moment, and decide to transform our grand strategy” (174). The alternatives to such reasoned and foresighted change, however, are dismal. The U.S. might be forced to change course due to an unexpected crisis, such as an economic meltdown or devastating war. Or change could be

incremental, an outcome which Posen worries “will likely continue to prove inefficient” (174). Even if the U.S. adopts aspects of Restraint, “ambiguity may permit the advocates of Liberal Hegemony to promote policies that involve the United States in more half-baked and costly misadventures” (175).

We wonder whether this level of pessimism is warranted. It is an open question whether the United States is or has always been “incapable of moderating its ambitions” (1). As Posen himself notes, there have been significant instances of restraint, even in the recent past. President Bill Clinton reduced overall force structure 35-45 percent from Cold War levels, and did not fully fund what remained (10). A 2004 Global Force Posture Review called for a third fewer bases abroad, especially in Europe, to concentrate more forces at home and support rapid deployment elsewhere (15). President Barack Obama has limited the defense budget, reduced the number of Army brigades in Europe, drawn down troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and prioritized investments in naval and air power, much as Posen recommends. Indeed, U.S. foreign policy rarely remains fixed, Stephen Sestanovich has argued, but tends to cycle between moments of “maximalism” and “retrenchment.”^[24]

Posen might respond that this pattern is precisely the problem. Rather than making hard choices, U.S. policymakers embrace modest reforms that fail to solve the underlying problems and prove easy to reverse. Yet when it comes to U.S. grand strategy, there might also be good reasons for not going too far, too fast. After all, the strategic position of the United States is far from dire. Its relative power is declining, but not quickly and not by much. Its deficits and debt are worrying, but the fiscal picture has actually improved in recent years. It possesses far-flung commitments, but the overall burden of its foreign policy relative to the size of its economy is modest. There are compelling reasons for the U.S. to reduce its foreign policy ambitions from the lofty heights of the Bush administration. But it is unclear whether circumstances demand the United States go to the lengths Posen recommends. Does encouraging European states to contribute more to their defense require that the U.S. limit its ties to NATO (90-91)? Does defusing flashpoints with China require that the U.S. end its alliance with Taiwan (102-104)? Does avoiding the dangers of entrapment require that the U.S. accept the potential of a nuclear-armed Japan (79-80)?

What makes *Restraint* such a compelling read is Posen’s willingness to entertain such possibilities and to push his argument to its logical conclusion. And in the wake two costly wars in the Middle East and a global financial crisis, the time is ripe for a more humble and prudent approach to American foreign policy. That same prudence, however, may make policymakers hesitant to take the strong medicines that Posen prescribes.

Author’s Response by Barry R. Posen

Thanks to H-Diplo, its editors, and the reviewers who have contributed to this Roundtable. Many gracious things have been said about *Restraint*, which I naturally appreciate. The reviewers have also offered some criticisms, and raised some questions. Where possible I consolidate them. Below I respond to those that seem to me to be the most pressing, or of greatest interest to a wide audience: First is the observation by both Robert Lieber and Jolyon Howorth that the world has changed so much since I wrote the book that the prescription may no longer apply, though they disagree on what

prescription should apply. Second is the argument by Lieber that the Obama Administration has tested *Restraint* and the strategy has failed. Third is the question posed by Paul MacDonald and Joseph Parent as to why Liberal Hegemony, the present grand strategy, was chosen by the U.S. national security elite, why has it proven so sticky, and what this portends for reform. Lieber raises in a general way a fourth question about the relationship between realist IR theory and policy prescription. MacDonald and Parent raise a fifth question about the maritime strategy that I commend as the military instrument of *Restraint*, and whether I believe that there are inherent limits to what such a strategy can achieve.

Though each of the reviews offers a summary of my general argument, two important aspects were somewhat overlooked. The explicit purpose of the book is to develop a grand strategy based on a strictly construed assessment of U.S. security interests, or what once might have been termed 'vital interests.' These interests are the minimization of threats to U.S. sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and the power position necessary to ensure against these threats. I wished to demonstrate that on the basis of such an approach, one could build a relatively coherent, effective, and efficient grand strategy and accompanying military strategy and force structure that would involve the U.S. in fewer costly and indecisive wars. The present grand strategy of the U.S. includes many other elements--supporters argue that trade and the spread of democracy are so important that they merit a significant military effort, as MacDonald and Parent observe. My purpose was to show that U.S. national security can be protected without adding these objectives. Those who wish to employ military power to pursue them should demonstrate their importance to U.S. security, or they should admit forthrightly that they believe them worthy of vast expenditures of treasure and sometimes blood because of their inherent value, not because of their contribution to national security.

A second element of the argument that the reviewers did not revisit is the assessment of the basic national security position of the U.S., which is excellent. Geography, the economy, demographics, nuclear deterrence, the skills of the military industrial base, and the quality of the military render the U.S. very secure. Those who argue that projects abroad are necessary to ensure U.S. security have a high hill to climb. I argue that three issues overseas do require U.S. attention: preventing the rise of a Eurasian hegemon with control over the states in its penumbra, which today means China; minimizing the risk that nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of non-state actors; and vigilance against the potential for some terrorist organizations to develop sufficient capacity and global reach to affect significantly the safety of U.S. citizens as they go about their daily business. I suggest measured remedies to these potential threats, noting that even in the realm of remedies, restraint is in order.

International politics has moved on since the manuscript was put to bed, but to a great extent in ways that *Restraint* foresaw. The book takes as a given the National Intelligence Council's prediction of a diffusion of power.^[24] This process continues apace. Russia got off the mat and China continues to grow; non-state actors continue to find ways to increase their potential for violence; identity politics flourish. *Restraint* argues that these developments will make Liberal Hegemony much more costly and difficult to pursue, and this has proven to be the case. Because the book offered a more incremental approach to U.S. strategic change in the Far East than it did elsewhere, I will discuss Europe and the Middle East.

Russia, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, has made itself into a meaningful military

power, and is practicing a muscular foreign policy. It seized Crimea, subverts the Donbas, and backs the Assad regime in Syria. This does not mean that it is no longer possible to implement Restraint in Europe. Russia's power must be put in perspective. The National Intelligence Council assesses Russia's net power as a fraction of the European Union's today, and expects little improvement by mid-century.^[1] Its disastrous economic policies show no sign of change and the decrease in oil prices has made things even worse. Europe, taken as a whole, will remain quite capable. The question is whether Russia, by virtue of a sustained commitment to the generation of military power from a deteriorating economic base, can somehow cow Europe into submission. Would the Europeans invest so little in defending themselves in the absence of the U.S. military commitment that Russia could win what the Soviet Union could not--hegemony in Europe?

If Europeans feel insecure, they should spend more on defense, rather than come to the U.S. to bail them out. I criticize Europe's under-spending on defense relative to the U.S. That said, the Europeans do spend on defense, and can afford more. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that just France and Germany combined outspent Russia on military power for the last three years.^[2] That they seem to get less bang for the buck is an interesting military analysis question, but irrelevant to the point: Europe ought to be able to fend for itself now and in the future. By 2050 the Economist predicts that both Germany and France, but not Russia, will remain in the top ten economic powers of the world, at market exchange rates.^[3] A 'realist' of any stripe predicts some balancing against Russia. So far, the U.S. has been doing most of it, though there are signs of modest increases in Europe, at a level consistent with the logic of cheap riding.^[4] Like Howorth, I expect that the Europeans will not do much more unless the U.S. credibly commits to doing less. Experience, Collective Action Theory, Moral Hazard Theory, and Exit-Voice theory all point to this conclusion.^[5] Howorth gently chides me for expecting much of the European Union and suggests instead that some changes in NATO would better encourage a greater European effort. He is correct that the European Union (EU) security effort has been a disappointment. Nevertheless, the Europeans have two parallel sets of security institutions upon which to build a military counterpoise to Russia: NATO and the EU. The practices of military cooperation are well rehearsed; command structures are in place; the buildings are built. The economic and military potential are there. Europe is the place to begin a grand strategy of restraint.

Restraint argues that Liberal Hegemony has run into trouble in part due to the forces it has unleashed. The propensity of states to balance is one of them. The United States and its allies have pushed very hard in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union. NATO moved its borders eastward. This was unnecessary for U.S. security, or for that matter the security of any Western European allies. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the U.S. had assured the Russians that this would not occur.^[6] From time to time, U.S. and NATO leaders have discussed the entry of Ukraine into NATO. Any country in Russia's position would be alarmed by such a prospect. More recently, the EU effort to bring Ukraine into an 'association agreement' seems to have been launched without a thought as to how Russia might see it. These policies are all at the heart of Liberal Hegemony. This is not to exonerate Russia of all responsibility. Nor is it to suggest that a Realist would not have expected some Russian recovery and bumptiousness in any case. Nevertheless, if we do not like the Russia we have now, we should consider what role we might have had in creating it and perhaps amend our policies.

The greater Middle East has also changed for the worse, but these changes do not undermine the

case for *Restraint*. Syria has descended into civil war, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) emerged from an amalgam of Iraqi resistance groups including Al Qaeda in Iraq, and took advantage of the Syrian war. ISIL has formed its own state-like entity and has established outposts in other parts of the Arab World and effective terrorist cells in Europe. *Restraint* does not depend on the disappearance of such groups, it expects them and advises strategies to address them. Defense comes first; the tragic attacks in Brussels and France revealed holes in Europe's defenses. The purpose of offense is to keep dangerous groups off balance, and force them to spend resources defending themselves that they might otherwise spend on the offense. The Administration's arms-length offensive does seem to have broken ISIL's momentum in Iraq and Syria. And hanging back a bit also seems to have induced some burden sharing among the Russians, the Assad regime, the Kurds, and even the Iraqi government.

Pundits and publics demand instead the annihilation of ISIL, and President Obama has signed on, at least rhetorically. The United States' experience in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrates that this will probably prove costly, ineffective and counterproductive. *Restraint* advises that nationalism and other forms of identity politics are powerful political forces. Neighboring national, ethnic, and religious groups often resist rule by one another, and by visitors from afar. ISIL emerged from the civil war that swept Iraq after the U.S. knocked over Saddam Hussein, a civil war stoked initially by antipathy to the U.S. The 'surge' killed many of ISIL's forbearers in Al Qaeda in Iraq, as well as members of other insurgent groups, and incarcerated many more. ISIL was born, in part, in American jails in Iraq, which threw these various insurgents together and encouraged them to make common cause. Insurgent groups and terrorist organizations move, hide, morph, and reconstitute, especially on their home turf. It is not clear what the U.S. could have done to prevent this. Lieber imagines that this could all have been avoided had the U.S. stayed on in Iraq indefinitely, forcing the Maliki government to work with the Sunnis. A close look at Iraq in mid- 2010, when tens of thousands of U.S. troops were still present in the country, suggests that the situation was already going backwards; the 50,000 U.S. troop presence of "Operation New Dawn" did not prevent it.^[1] In any case, Shiite nationalists did not want the United States to stay, and some would surely have used violence to protest its presence had the Iraqi parliament approved such an arrangement, which vote-counters versed in Iraqi politics argue was never in the cards anyway.^[2] American efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that the United States cannot create legitimate and capable governments for others. A campaign to annihilate ISIL demands not only troops to conquer real estate, but a major political-military effort to occupy and govern parts of Iraq and Syria. Without such an effort, the United States can push ISIL out of towns and cities, but it cannot destroy it. For this reason, *Restraint* commends containment and harassment of ISIL.

Lieber suggests that *Restraint* has been tested and found wanting. Insofar as many of the problems that he decries have their roots in unrestrained policies of the two prior administrations, we ought to be wary of this claim. President Barack Obama, however much I admire him, has not committed the U.S. to restraint. Among his many unrestrained policies are the destruction of the Gaddafi regime in Libya; the early demand that Assad must go in Syria and cooperation with those who tried to hasten his exit, however ineffectually; the tiptoeing into the bog of an ISIL annihilation strategy; permitting the State Department to dabble in Ukraine's internal politics and the rush to do more in Europe to counter Russia without ensuring a parallel European burden-sharing effort.

The President does, however, seem very aware of the endemic problems of the Liberal Hegemony

strategy--especially the potential quagmires of armed state building, the difficulty of getting one's way through war; and the propensity of allies to cheap ride and drive recklessly. Obama understands that given the power trends in the world, even proponents of Liberal Hegemony will need to find a way to reform the strategy. Lieber thinks reform unnecessary, and wants to double down. MacDonald and Parent seem to believe that reform is possible. My own view is that the strategy cannot be reformed. A strategy of world-wide influence depends in the first instance on a hard power advantage that is waning. As that advantage wanes, the strategy depends on high credibility everywhere, because two or more large simultaneous challenges might break the military bank. Thus the temptation to fight 'small' wars to win the credibility to deter larger ones will be chronic. Frontiers everywhere mean that instability anywhere is a threat to someone or some value. There will always be constituencies for war. It is noteworthy that in the past two years participation in no less than five wars have been recommended by political figures and security experts as necessary to the security of the American people: to arm the government in Ukraine against Russia, to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria, to destroy ISIL, to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure, and to continue waging the anti-Taliban counter insurgency in Afghanistan.^[31] The United States has dabbled or participated in four of the five.

MacDonald and Parent ask for an explanation of why Liberal-Hegemony became U.S. grand strategy, and why it seems so sticky. They observe, perhaps correctly, that if we really understood its causes, we might have a better understanding of whether and how it might change. It is common in our business for one scholar's independent variable to be another's dependent variable. Everything is related to everything else. My purpose, which I believed to be urgent, was to assess the success of the strategy that we have had, and propose another. That said, I will venture a response.

There are two possible types of explanation. The first is favored by Lieber: Liberal Hegemony was and remains the appropriate grand strategy for the United States. In an oddly contradictory paragraph he observes that two of our colleagues who favor the present strategy, William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks, observe that it was the obvious choice given our situation. This is a simple and powerful structural explanation, embedded in offensive realism--any state with the relative power that the U.S. enjoyed at the end of the Cold War would have tried to consolidate that power position and create a world in its own image. Indeed this is a deterministic realist explanation of the type that Lieber says he rejects. That said, I do believe that structure gives us part of the explanation. Lieber quotes Kenneth Waltz approvingly: "structures shape and shove. They do not determine behaviors and outcomes." For the very great, structures also seduce. The very great U.S. power position proved a temptation; it gave policy entrepreneurs the means to pursue a range of objectives. But it did not determine that pursuit. Many other things mattered, but they are difficult to disentangle. I and others have called the strategy 'liberal hegemony.' It is liberal because of its purposes great and small: the spread of democracy, free markets, and the rule of law to other countries; the elevation of same to the international system; and on the dim horizon- global zero, a world of no nuclear weapons, which can only make sense in a world without security competition. The strategy is transformative and revolutionary. These are the beliefs about politics that have guided America's own internal politics, but Americans believe them to be universal, not just as an aspiration but as the natural end state of the human condition. More importantly, Americans have nationalized those beliefs: they are part and parcel of the 'nationalism' of the United States. Not everyone agrees that these beliefs can be carried to the world through the judicious use of American power; but many do. The Cold War

ended with liberalism seemingly triumphant, which gave an extra impetus to those who wished to project these beliefs abroad.

How the Cold War was fought, and where it ended also mattered. It was a global struggle, with U.S. forces manning the ramparts everywhere. When the Soviet Union collapsed, these ramparts became a frontier, and we know what Americans do with a frontier. The Cold War required the development of a large talented national security elite--soldiers, diplomats, intelligence analysts, think-tankers of every stripe, and journalists. Any organization theorist could identify what the incentives were: find a new purpose that would allow these people to stay in business. All of these causes worked together in complicated ways. Weighing them, adducing other causes, and testing them becomes an interesting question if we can establish that the strategy is problematical, which I think I have done.

Still we can make some guesses from this stew of causes about what may cause a change of strategy. The easiest to imagine is a change in the structure of world power from unipolarity to something else. There is a lively debate in IR and Security Studies over whether such a change is under way, including how one would even measure it. Like the National Intelligence Council (NIC), I suspect that it is. Diminished U.S. relative power means rising costs that will complicate the strategy immensely. A second mode of change is more speculative. The influence of liberal ideas on U.S. foreign policy is mediated through the electorate. The projection of these ideas abroad seems more attractive to the public when their material situation seems secure. That is not the way the public now feels; indeed, sadly not only do many members of the public feel economically insecure, they have found leaders who encourage them to blame their problems on the 'other,' here and abroad. This is not a firm foundation for liberal hegemony. Changes are also afoot in the national security elite. I have given talks about restraint to many audiences; the most receptive are the middle levels of the military, the intelligence services, and occasionally people from the State Department--those tasked with implementing 'liberal hegemony.' They may not buy the *Restraint* remedy, but they are very attuned to its diagnosis of the present strategy's many problems.

Because a grand strategy is a political-military means-ends chain, I felt it necessary to lay out the military strategy that would support *Restraint*. I chose a strategy that concentrates on command of the global commons, the high seas, space, and air.⁴³³ The purpose of command is to maintain access to parts of the world that may be strategic, mainly the Eurasian land mass. The strategy does not assume that all war is made from the sea, air and space. Command of the sea and associated domains allows the U.S. to go where it wants to wage war in support of vital interests. The maintenance of command of the commons should cast a diplomatic shadow over the political world; enemies and friends know that the United States can change local military balances, and do so in relatively short order. But by keeping most of its forces in the U.S., it incentivizes others to earn its support.

MacDonald and Parent ask why, given the importance of sea power to *Restraint*, I did not assay into the military debate on Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities that are emerging in the hands of powers overseas, particularly China. Though I did not discuss this matter directly, I did address what I think this debate is about. I often quote Admiral Horatio Nelson's famous dictum that a 'ship's a fool to fight a fort'. Continental powers can, through the wise use of available technology, turn themselves into forts.⁴³⁴ This is the 'Area Denial' aspect of A2AD; advanced industrial powers ought to be able to make it very costly for naval forces, especially surface forces and aircraft, to operate within several hundred miles of their shores. Though I am no engineer this is a kind of physics problem. Ships run

out of munitions much faster than Forts. More energy is available on land than at sea. Forts can typically take more damage than ships and still function, and they do not sink. Airfields are more easily repaired than flight decks. The environment ashore provides more camouflage than the surface of the sea. One could go on, but these differences suggest to me that those who believe that the U.S. can assert command of the littorals, and more importantly the skies over China, must also be expecting to outspend China on military power by a considerable margin. This further assumes a degree of U.S. economic superiority that does not seem to be in the cards.

These continental advantages tend to peter out with distance from the shore--the open oceans, taking us to the Anti-Access part of the problem. Here the U.S. must dispute control with the ambitious littoral power; that is what command of the commons means. The U.S. is advantaged in this fight, mainly because it faces no enemies at home to divert its resources, and it enjoys unfettered access to the open oceans. Continental powers face enemies at home, and against those who command the sea must also devote resources to defense of their home waters. The continental power must then also operate in the open oceans and the skies above them. This requires serious military capital and a good bit of skill. The continental power must be able to reach the open ocean, and the shape of the land does not always favor them. China's concern with the first and second island chains tells the tale. Some states on the chain are rich enough to defend themselves and by doing so help preserve U.S. command of the commons. These states can use the same 'area denial' capabilities and technologies that China uses to keep the United States out to pen the Chinese in. The U.S. needs to incentivize the wealthy to do more of this. Others on the chain, such as the Philippines, are too poor to do more, and will need U.S. help. *Restraint* argues that the grand strategy of 'liberal hegemony' has run into serious difficulties for reasons that can be understood. These difficulties will probably grow. The strategy is not susceptible to reform because it is inherently expansive. It is susceptible to erosion, however, which I expect to arise mainly from increasing costs. The most important purpose of the book is to give those who are unhappy with the present U.S. grand strategy a place to stand, a sketch of a plausible alternative. I appreciate the care taken by the reviewers, which suggests that this sketch is indeed plausible enough to be worth criticism. But where there is one alternative grand strategy, there may be others, and I hope we will see some.

Notes

[1] The EU's current High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, is devising one. It will be showcased in July 2016. See Antonio Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy: Background, Process, References*, Paris EU-ISS, 2015.

[2] Robert Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States", *International Security* 30:1 (2005); Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30:1 (2005); Robert Art, "Hard Balancing Times Are Here Again," *International Security* 30:2 (2005); Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Power* (New York: Norton, 2005), 129.

[3] Barry Posen, "European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity," *Security Studies* 15:2 (2006), 164.

[4] Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon, "Still not Pushing Back: Why the European Union is Not Balancing the United States," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53:5 (2009), 737.

[5] Nick Witney, "How to Stop the De-Militarisation of Europe," London, *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, November 2011.

[6] Victoria Nuland, United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Speech to Presse Club and AmCham, Paris, 22 February 2008, accessed at: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2008/02/20080222183349eaifas0.5647394.html#axzz2YTODcQRZ>

[7] Hubert Védrine, *Report for the President of the French Republic on the Consequences of France's Return to NATO's Integrated Military Command, on the Future of Transatlantic Relations, and the Outlook for the Europe of Defence*, 14 November 2012.

[8] Sarwar Kashmeri and Jolyon Howorth, "Let Europe defend itself," *US News and World Report*, June 18, 2013: <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/06/18/syrian-crisis-highlights-need-to-merge-nato-with-the-eu> See also: Jolyon Howorth, "The EU & NATO after Libya and Afghanistan: The Future of Euro-US Security Cooperation," *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 8/1, March 2013.

[9] Posen's faith in nuclear weapons as guarantors of the peace (21, 71ff) seems unshakeable. This has been a problem in Europe since before the end of the Cold War. Although France has occasionally dangled the promise of extended deterrence to cover the EU, and particularly Germany, the non-nuclear states of the EU have shunned that prospect, preferring to remain nestled under the U.S. umbrella. Posen argues that the U.S. should have shed such a commitment after the end of the Cold War (76). This will be a harder nut to crack than transfer to the EU of U.S. leadership in the conventional and institutional context.

[10] Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Vol. 28, N. 1 (summer 2003); Posen, "The Case for Restraint," *American Interest*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November/December 2007): 7-17; Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2013.

[11] *Erratum*: The last name of Walter Russell Mead is misspelled as "Meade" (16, 191, 229).

[12] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1982, originally published 1561); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1932); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948); John H. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random, 1979). Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and "No One Loves a Political Realist," *Security Studies* 5:3 (Spring 1996): 3-26.

[13] E.g., Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016; Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, 2010).

[14] I critique this approach in my new book, *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order* (forthcoming: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming May 2016), 10-11 and 125.

[15] See, e.g., Eric Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Joseph M. Parent and Paul K. MacDonald, "The Wisdom of Retrenchment: America Must Cut Back to Move Forward," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 6 (November/December, 2011): 32-47; Stephen M. Walt, "Offshore Balancing: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Foreignpolicy.com*, November 2, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/02/offshore-balancing-an-idea-whose-time-has-come/>.

[16] Posen makes this point as do Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997) 86-124; and John Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," *The National Interest*, No. 111 (January/February 2011) 16-24 at 16.

[17] Bryan McGrath and Ryan Evans, "American Strategy and Offshore Balancing by Default," *War on the Rocks*, August 27, 2013, <http://warontherocks.com/2013/08/the-balance-is-not-inour-favor-american-strategy-and-offshore-balancing-by-default>.

[18] Lieber, *Retreat*, 11.

[19] Gilbert Rozman, "Asia for the Asians: Why Chinese-Russian Friendship is Here to Stay," *Foreign Affairs*, October 29, 2014; and Rozman, *The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order: National Identities, Bilateral Relations, and East Versus West in the 2010s* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press with Stanford University Press, 2014).

[20] Kenneth Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics," in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), 343.

[21] Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Lean Forward: In Defense of American Engagement," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2013): 130-142.

[22] E.g., Paul Pillar, "Obama the Realist," *The National Interest*, March 12, 2016; Christopher Layne, "Stuck in the Middle East: Offshore Balancing is the right strategy if Obama has the courage for it," *The American Conservative*, January/February, 2016; Shibley Telhami, "Syria and The Case for Restraint," The Brookings Institution, March 14, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2016/03/14-obama-syria-case-for-restraint-telhami#.Vu_gPbucSK7D.twitter.

[23] Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. president talks through his hardest decisions about America's role in the world," *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

[24] Lieber, *Retreat and Its Consequences*, 109.

[25] I make this argument in *Retreat and Its Consequences*, 137.

[26] See, for example, Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Responses to U.S. Primacy* (New York: Norton, 2006).

[27] See, for example, Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection," *International Security* 38:4 (Spring 2014), 139-140, 148-149.

[28] See Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

[29] *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, National Intelligence Council (NIC), Washington DC: 15-19. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/global-trends-2030>

[30] *Ibid.*, 17.

[31] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016*, 485.

[32] Long-term macroeconomic forecasts, *Key trends to 2050*, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, 3.; See also a somewhat more optimistic forecast for Russia in *The World in 2050*, PWC, February 2015, www.pwc.co.uk/economics. Table B-1: GDP at MER rankings: 40, which puts Russia in the top ten, but estimates that Germany and France combined would still be roughly 1.75 times the size of the Russian economy in 2050.

[33] *Defence Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Developments, Trends and Drivers*, Edited by Alessandro Marrone, Olivier De France and Daniele Fattibene, Chapter 1 - "Defence spending in Europe in 2016," <https://rusi.org/rusi-news/defence-budgets-and-cooperation-europe-developments-trends-and-drivers> projects increases in defense spending across Europe. The report by a consortium of European think tanks supported by the European Defense Agency is vague on whether these increases are nominal or real, though inflation in Europe is very low. In Western Europe, where the richest and most militarily capable countries are to be found the projected increases from 2015-16 are on the order of 2.7% from 2015-2016. Working from figures provided on p. 17, France projects sustained compound annual increases of roughly 2.0% and Germany 1.5% over the next four years. Even assuming zero inflation, based on U.S. experience with a modern military, this will be barely sufficient to modernize and sustain the extant forces. And the extant forces are widely reported to be in poor shape.

[34] Mancur Olson, and Richard Zeckhauser. "An Economic Theory of Alliances". *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 48 (3). 1966: 266-79; Timothy W. Crawford and Alan J. Kuperman, *Gambling on Humanitarian Intervention-Moral Hazard, Rebellion and Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970);

[35] Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security* 40:4 (Spring 2016): 7-44.

[36] Note the oddly prescient paragraphs in the Department of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security In Iraq*, June 2010, 35-36. "Violence in northern and central Iraq continues to be a challenge, particularly in Ninewa, where AQI remains focused on maintaining its logistical and operational hub in the face of debilitating pressure from U.S. and ISF operations." See also Omar Ashour, "Don't exclude an Al-Qaeda return in Iraq," *The Daily Star*, Lebanon, 9 July 2010 "...the current political conditions in Iraq may favor the organization's resurgence there. Those conditions include a deadlock in the outcome of the electoral process, a Shiite-dominated alliance that many Sunni Arabs perceive as exclusionary, and increasing marginalization of the Sunni Arab Sahwa (Awakening) Councils. Evidence of the deteriorating security situation is provided by the fact that at the end of 2010, "Three suicide bombers stormed in a police battalion headquarters ...and killed the commander in the restive northern Iraqi city of Mosul," the sixth attempt on his life. "Suicide Bombers kill Police Chief in Mosul," *The Daily Star*, Lebanon, 30 December 2010.

^[37] [Juan Cole](#), "This is the Way the Iraq War Ends, with Bangs and Whimpers," *Oct. 16, 2011, Informed Comment* Blog, <http://www.juancole.com/2011/10/this-is-the-way-the-iraq-war-ends-with-bangs-and-wimpers.html>, Infr.; see also [Katie Sanders](#) "Obama wanted to keep 10,000 troops in Iraq, ABC's Raddatz claims," August 24th, <http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/aug/24/martha-raddatz/obama-wanted-keep-10000-troops-iraq-abcs-raddatz-c/>.

[38] Barry R. Posen, "Just Say No: America Should Avoid These Wars," *The National Interest*, February 10, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/just-say-no-america-should-avoid-these-wars-12217>.

[39] In 2010 the Department of Defense added cyberspace to the global commons. See USDOD, Quadrennial Defense Review, February 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/QDR>. For a primer on cyber issues see Catherine A. Theohary and Anne I. Harrington, *Cyber Operations in DOD Policy and Plans: Issues for Congress*, January 5, 2015, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, R43848 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R43848.pdf>. I remain agnostic on conceiving of cyberspace as a global commons, in part because I do not yet understand cyberspace sufficiently well to make a judgment.

^[40] [Richard Norton-Taylor](#), "White elephants on the ocean?," *Guardian*, December 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/defence-and-security-blog/2015/dec/09/white-elephants-on-the-ocean>.