



POWER & PRINCIPLE

Volume 3 Issue 1

Volume 3, Issue 1
Winter 2019/2020

MASTHEAD

Staff:

Publisher:
Ryan Evans

Executive Editor:
Doyle Hodges, PhD

Associate Editors:
Galen Jackson, PhD
Van Jackson, PhD
Stephen Tankel, PhD

Editor-in-Chief:
William Inboden, PhD

Managing Editor:
Megan G. Oprea, PhD

Editorial Board:

Chair, Editorial Board:
Francis J. Gavin, PhD

Editor-in-Chief:
William Inboden, PhD

Robert J. Art, PhD
Richard Betts, PhD
John Bew, PhD
Nigel Biggar, PhD
Philip Bobbitt, JD, PhD
Hal Brands, PhD
Joshua W. Busby, PhD
Robert Chesney, JD
Eliot Cohen, PhD
Audrey Kurth Cronin, PhD
Theo Farrell, PhD
Peter D. Feaver, PhD
Rosemary Foot, PhD, FBA
Taylor Fravel, PhD
Sir Lawrence Freedman, PhD
James Goldgeier, PhD
Michael J. Green, PhD

Kelly M. Greenhill, PhD
Beatrice Heuser, PhD
Michael C. Horowitz, PhD
Richard H. Immerman, PhD
Robert Jervis, PhD
Colin Kahl, PhD
Jonathan Kirshner, PhD
James Kraska, SJD
Stephen D. Krasner, PhD
Sarah Kreps, PhD
Melvyn P. Leffler, PhD
Fredrik Logevall, PhD
Margaret MacMillan, CC, PhD
Thomas G. Mahnken, PhD
Rose McDermott, PhD
Paul D. Miller, PhD
Vipin Narang, PhD

John Owen, PhD
Patrick Porter, PhD
Thomas Rid, PhD
Joshua Rovner, PhD
Brent E. Sasley, PhD
Elizabeth N. Saunders, PhD
Kori Schake, PhD
Michael N. Schmitt, DLitt
Jacob N. Shapiro, PhD
Sandesh Sivakumaran, PhD
Sarah Snyder, PhD
Bartholomew Sparrow, PhD
Monica Duffy Toft, PhD
Marc Trachtenberg, PhD
René Värk, JD
Steven Weber, PhD
Amy Zegart, PhD

Policy and Strategy Advisory Board:

Chair:
Adm. William McRaven, Ret.

Hon. Elliott Abrams, JD
Hon. Brad Carson
Hon. Derek Chollet
Amb. Ryan Crocker
Hon. Eric Edelman, PhD
Hon. John Hamre, PhD
Hon. Kathleen Hicks, PhD

Hon. James Jeffrey
Paul Lettow, JD, PhD
Hon. Michael Lumpkin
Hon. William J. Lynn, JD
Kelly Magsamen
Gen. David Petraeus, Ret.
Dan Runde

David Shedd
Hon. Kristen Silverberg, JD
Michael Singh, MBA
Adm. James G. Stavridis, Ret., PhD
Hon. Christine E. Wormuth

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Foundation



04 **Does Might Make Right? Individuals, Ethics, and Exceptionalism**
Francis J. Gavin

The Scholar



12 **Forming the Grand Strategist According to Shakespeare**
Peter Campbell and Richard Jordan

34 **The Ethics of Acquiring Disruptive Military Technologies**
C. Anthony Pfaff

62 **Whither the "City Upon a Hill"? Donald Trump, America First, and American Exceptionalism**
Hilde Eliassen Restad

The Strategist



96 **What Is a Moral Foreign Policy?**
Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

110 **Sense and Indispensability: American Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty**
Azita Raji

118 **What Went Wrong? U.S.-China Relations from Tiananmen to Trump**
James B. Steinberg

The Roundtable Feature



136 **How to Revive Congress's War Powers**
Oona A. Hathaway

DOES MIGHT MAKE RIGHT? INDIVIDUALS, ETHICS, AND EXCEPTIONALISM

Francis J. Gavin

In his introductory essay for Vol. 3, Iss. 1 of TNSR, the chair of our editorial board, Francis J. Gavin, discusses the choices made by individual statesmen, how to evaluate their motives, and the role of ethics in making grand strategic choices.

Like many new professors of international relations, my early career syllabi often included Thucydides' Melian dialogue from the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In the fifth century B.C., the great sea power Athens demanded that the small island of Melos, an ally of Sparta, lay down its arms and become a vassal of the Athenian empire. The Melians thought this both unjust and unwise — why not simply allow Melos to remain neutral? Wasn't it immoral to force a free people who posed no threat to relinquish their independence? The leaders of Athens were unmoved. "Since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." When the Melians refused to surrender, the Athenians conquered the island, and "put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves."¹

I taught this dialogue to demonstrate to young, presumably idealistic students that the world was a dangerous place, where military power was the critical variable, and the most important outcomes in the world, such as war and peace, were shaped by the structure of the international system. I would also give them a more modern example from the 1992 movie *Unforgiven*. The film takes place in Big Whiskey, Wyoming, where William Munny, the main character, played by Clint Eastwood, reluctantly joins with two others to claim a \$1,000 reward offered to avenge the mutilation of a prostitute. In the course of the story, a tyrannical and cruel town sheriff, Little Bill, has impeded justice and tortured and killed Munny's oldest friend. Toward the end of the film, Eastwood's character has the sheriff cornered. Bill begs for his life. "I don't deserve this. To die like this." Before shooting him, Munny replies: "Deserve's got nothing to do with it."² The universe is cold, unforgiving, and unfair.

The excellent articles in this issue caused me to

rethink the actual lessons of Thucydides' history, to say nothing of *Unforgiven*. A series of crucial questions tie them together: How do statesmen make choices about complex and consequential issues in the world? How do we evaluate both the motives and outcomes of these decisions? Are they driven by considerations of power and interest only, or do values and ethics come into play? What role does the political orientation of the regime, and the history and culture of a nation, play in decision-making?

It is important to remember that there is a perspective that sees placing an emphasis on ethics, individual choices, and regime type in international relations as misplaced. Athens was an enlightened, democratic society, led by intelligent, noble leaders who took civic justice in the *polis* seriously. In relations with their neighbors, however, Athenians believed that fear and power — not justice and mercy — shaped outcomes. This is, of course, the view of neorealism, perhaps the most dominant theoretical paradigm among international relations programs in American universities over the past half-century. For neorealists, the most important consideration when assessing global affairs is the anarchic structure of the international system.³ With no sovereign authority to arbitrate disputes, the components of the system — states — are forced to compete ruthlessly for survival and dominance, a competition that, in a "self-help" system, is determined by the balance of military power. States are like billiard balls — neither the quirks of particular leaders nor the internal, domestic characteristics of nations count for very much in this struggle.

History provides stark examples of what happens when structural factors are ignored. At the start of the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was the largest country in Europe, possessing a higher degree of tolerance and liberal governance than any of its neighbors. By the end of the century, it no longer existed, swallowed up by its neighbors — Russia, Prussia, and Austria — in three partitions. This outcome was the inevitable

¹ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, chap. XVII, "Sixteenth Year of the War - The Melian Conference - Fate of Melos," accessed at, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/melian.htm>, on Feb 4, 2020.

² *Unforgiven*, directed by Clint Eastwood (1992; USA: Warner Bros., Inc.).

³ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979).

product of power and national interest, and cannot be understood solely through an ethical lens, the choices of an individual, or the qualities of a particular regime. Poland disappeared because of the brutal realities of great-power politics shaped by international anarchy.

Whatever its merits, however, this kind of analysis can come at a cost. A singular focus on the balance of military power, with an emphasis on systemic forces that drives toward an almost law-like equilibrium, often underplays the role of choices and individual statecraft and grand strategy. As Peter Campbell and Richard Jordan remind us in their article in this issue, Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack argued in their seminal article, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” that “political scientists most frequently have argued that they must set aside both *fortuna* and *virtú*, and instead focus only on impersonal forces as the causes of international events. ... many political scientists contend that individuals ultimately do not matter, or at least they count for little in the major events that shape international politics.” Byman and Pollack begin their article with the story of Frederick the Great’s Prussia, which nearly met a contemporaneous fate similar to that of Poland. It was saved only by the unexpected death of Czarina Elizabeth, who hated Prussia, and the (brief) rise of Czar Peter III, who worshipped Frederick. Chance, character, regime dynamics, and grand strategic leadership provided Frederick with the reprieve he needed to save Prussia’s place in the world, changing forever the trajectory of Prussian, German, European, and, ultimately, world history. “Had it not been for the idiosyncrasies of one man and one woman, European history would look very, very different.”⁴

Looking back, it is strange that this excellent article, which generated a lot of attention when published in 2001, even needed to be written. What policymaker or historian thinks one can understand world politics without assessing Napoleon, Hitler, or Mao? Imagine switching the vice presidents and presidents of the United States in 1954 and 1965: A President Richard Nixon in 1954 would have been more likely to use American military power in Southeast Asia than Dwight Eisenhower, just as a President Hubert Humphrey may have worked much harder to avoid Lyndon Johnson’s military escalation in Vietnam a decade later. Franklin D. Roosevelt was almost unable to replace Henry Wallace with Harry Truman as his vice president during the 1944 Democratic Party convention. Had he

failed, the world after 1945 would have been a much different place.

While there has been a welcome renaissance of scholarship analyzing the role of individual leaders in international relations — I am thinking here of the recent work by Michael Horowitz, Elizabeth Saunders, and Keren Yarhi-Milo — there is much more to be done.

The whole concept of grand strategy only makes sense if choices are available and actually matter. And choices can only be evaluated by comparing them to alternatives, or to choices *not* made. This is what James Steinberg does in his penetrating essay, “What Went Wrong? U.S.-China Relations from Tiananmen to Trump.” While some scholars find counterfactuals controversial, we lack better methods for evaluating the plausible *ex ante* options policymakers had in the face of an unknowable future. Looking at the poor state of contemporary U.S.-Chinese relations, Steinberg explores the alternatives during three critical junctures: U.S. policy after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the debate over China’s entry into the World Trade Organization, and the Obama administration’s response to the Scarborough Shoal dispute. People may argue both with how he characterizes and evaluates the choices that were made and with whether different ones would have led to better or worse outcomes for the United States. However, it is hard to disagree with Steinberg’s claim that these decisions, taken without knowing the future, were difficult and consequential, and that any assessment of them must grapple with the roads not taken.

What traits make for the kind of person who makes these choices well? In other words, what makes for a good grand strategist? The answer is not always obvious. Campbell and Jordan suggest that an excellent place to look is in the characters and narratives of great literature. As their analysis of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* demonstrates, good battlefield tacticians and strategists may be terrible at the larger, more complex task of statecraft. The qualities that make for a great military leader — fearlessness, iron will, indomitability — don’t easily translate into political success, where humility, adaptability, and subtlety are often required. Read the article to discover the surprise character whose adaptability and cunning reveals the most impressive, if ultimately tragic, grand strategist in the play. Campbell and Jordan make a compelling case that immersing ourselves in great books, especially Shakespeare, is ideal training for understanding the tradeoffs and complexity that come

with making grand strategic choices. Great articles like this are precisely why TNSR exists — to provide a platform for the kind of innovative scholarly approach that boldly transcends narrow disciplinary concerns to look at important questions in a fresh, interesting way.

How much should ethics and morals shape these decisions? And if we think they should matter, what metrics should we use? Joseph Nye reminds us in his compelling essay that defining interests in simply material or military terms is misleading. “Access to oil, sales of military equipment, and regional stability are all national interests, but so too are values and principles that are attractive to others.” By the same token, complex considerations come into play when debating what *means* are used to achieve goals in the world. “Using hard power when soft power will do or using soft power alone when hard power is necessary to protect values raises serious ethical questions about means.” Nye offers a framework for how to think about and evaluate the role of ethics in both the ends and means of statecraft. C. Anthony Pfaff lays out how and why profound technological changes make these moral and ethical considerations more important than ever. Automation, machine learning, performance-enhancing technologies — they all move choices further away from individual decision-making, with unsettling consequences. “Moral autonomy is required for moral responsibility.” Pfaff lays out a series of conditions that should be considered, involving consent, risk-reward, individual well-being, proliferation, sustainable alternatives, and the larger effects on society, when evaluating the normative consequences of embracing a disruptive technology.

Do different kinds of regimes make different kinds of decisions? More to the point: Is there something about the United States — its history and culture, its national identity, its governance — that makes how it engages with the world different, or more *exceptional*, than a model based on structure and power would predict? The debate on whether the United States is or is not exceptional, and whether or not that is a good thing, either for itself or the world, is a debate as old as the nation itself. As both Ambassador Azita Raji and Hilde Eliassen Restad remind us in their articles, these arguments have a particular resonance since the election of Donald J. Trump. Trump has explicitly rejected the exceptionalist narrative, both in his words and deeds. Power, interest, nationalism, and sovereignty are what matters, not universalistic

ideals or ethics. As Trump told the United Nations General Assembly in 2018: “We will never surrender America’s sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy. America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.”⁵

Restad highlights the Jacksonian roots of Trump’s nationalism. She argues that the strength of this type of worldview should not be underestimated, and that future American leaders will need “an updated story of ‘America’ in the world, a story that acknowledges the problems with the ‘liberal world order’ to address the concerns of the next generation of Americans, allies, and adversaries.” As Raji reminds us, America is a place “where hope compels us to believe that great things can still be done. That’s who Americans are. And if Americans are true to their values, then the United States will once again be a guiding light in the night for the world.”

If grand strategic choices matter, then outcomes are not inevitable or shaped only by structural factors. We must then study the individuals who make decisions and understand what motivated their decisions. What do they value and why? What role does their culture, history, and nation play? And how do we evaluate those choices as right, wrong, or somewhere in between? As Nye writes, “The important question is how leaders choose to define and pursue that national interest under different circumstances.”

None of this is to say that the structure of the international system doesn’t matter enormously. Structure and agency always mix, but rarely in ways that remove the responsibility of choice. My own life is shaped by a number of factors I did not choose, from my gender to my height to the time and place in which I was born. That does not remove me from judgment concerning the choices I *do* make or free me from the consequences of picking among alternatives. Saying ethics or values are important is also not to claim that interest or power are not critical variables for understanding the world. Both terms, however — interest and power — suffer from what social scientists call under-specification. As Nye reminds us, “It is tautological, or at best trivial, to say that all states try to act in their national interest.” Neither term explains very much, in the same way that offense-defense theory, with its emphasis on ease of conquest and the military balance, tells us very little about

4 Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 107, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092135>.

5 “Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, NY,” The White House, Sept. 25, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-73rd-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/>.

why the United States never conquered Canada. Nor is it clear what constitutes power in the 21st century: the country with the largest number of tanks and battleships, the most nuclear weapons, the largest coal and oil reserves, the best computer programmers, or the most attractive ideology? Too narrow a focus on any one factor can be dangerous. As Shakespeare reminds us, Coriolanus understood military strategy and power better than anyone — no one was better than he at winning on the battlefield. But that did not save him from grand strategic ruin.

At one point in Thucydides, the Melians point out the folly of so-called Athenian realism. “How can you avoid making enemies of all existing neutrals who shall look at our case and conclude from it that one day or another you will attack them? And what is this but to make greater the enemies that you have already, and to force others to become so who would otherwise have never thought of it?” Athens, of course, ultimately lost the war — more as a consequence of a public health crisis, we should remember, than by losses on the battlefield — and the island was eventually resettled by surviving Melians. Would Athens have prevailed if it had ignored the ritualistic platitudes of realism and offered a more compelling, appealing vision for its international leadership? Nye reminds us, “A moral leader must likewise consider the soft power of attraction and the importance of developing the trust of other countries.” This is not simply a matter of benevolence and charity. The United States, despite its complex and often problematic history, more often does well for itself when it does good. America’s history reveals surprising twists and turns, nothing like the other “billiard balls” in the system.

It is hard to recall during such troubling times, but American power and leadership in the world have often gone far beyond how many aircraft carriers or planes it possessed. There is some chance that the 2020 presidential election will feature two candidates who are dismissive of American exceptionalism, regardless of how it is defined. Is this a good thing — for the United States or the world? Is it possible that there is something different about the United States — both for good and for ill — which we forget at our own peril? Restad makes the case: “Leadership based on liberal ideals and institutions — rather than ascriptive characteristics — is also still the most attractive vision any great power in history has had to offer.”

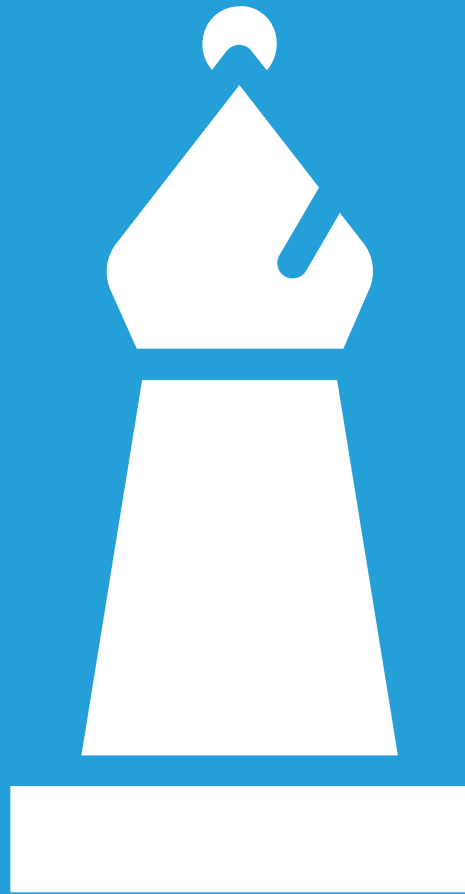
Returning to the film *Unforgiven*: William Munny had lived, to put it lightly, a bad life. He had murdered for hire before turning away from his past life to raise a family. He returns to mercenary

killing reluctantly and out of a desire to provide a future for his motherless children. The Wild West, not unlike the international system, was an anarchic, violent, self-help world. As the film progresses, however, Munny changes. He has finished the job and collected the reward, which Munny gives to a partner. When he learns his friend has been killed, however, he decides he must act. Munny understands that Little Bill was a cruel tyrant who terrorized a town. Despite the long odds, despite his own reluctance, Munny pushes on to kill the sheriff out of a growing sense of justice. In the end, deserve had *everything* to do with it. With Little Bill out of the way, the town can return to a lawful, fair order and Munny can move to San Francisco to start a legitimate business, raise his family, and leave his life as a bounty hunter behind.

Where Munny falls on the ethical scale is open to debate. What is not in question is that his choices, born of his own history, circumstances, and values, were both consequential and not inevitable, a series of choices that would elude even the most sophisticated algorithm. Which is why we rewatch the movie, and reread the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and talk about both with our friends, drawing different lessons and insights every time, and try our best to understand how to make hard decisions about a complex world in the face of an unknowable future. ■

Francis J. Gavin is the chair of the editorial board of the Texas National Security Review. He is the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and the inaugural director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at SAIS-Johns Hopkins University. His writings include *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America’s Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2012). His latest book, *Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy*, will be published by Brookings Institution Press later this year.





The Scholar

This section is dedicated to publishing the work of scholars. Our aim is for articles published in this journal to end up on university syllabi and policy desks from Washington to Tokyo, and to be cited as the foundational research and analysis on world affairs.



FORMING THE GRAND STRATEGIST ACCORDING TO SHAKESPEARE

Peter Campbell and Richard Jordan



Shakespeare, like Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, locates the crux of strategic genius in the analysis of character, both of individuals and of societies. A key ingredient in strategic education, therefore, should be the close study of human character — not least through classic fiction. In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare explores the relationship between tactics and strategy, the place of realism in strategic discourse, and the relationship between a strategist and his *polis*. His ideas anticipate modern debates in international relations theory, especially ones about the "first image" and *realpolitik*. He insists that strategic calculation cannot omit the analysis of leaders and the regimes that form them.

The personalities of statesmen and soldiers are such important factors that in war above all it is vital not to underrate them.

– Clausewitz¹

The great authors not only reveal themselves aware of statecraft, some are themselves strategists, exploring ideas fundamental to statecraft and international order.

– Charles Hill²

From 1922 to 1924, the U.S. Army assigned Maj. Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Panama Canal Zone. There, under Gen. Fox Conner, he would receive the kernel of an extraordinary strategic education, one that would see him through his position as supreme commander in World War II and two presidential terms. Conner sought to prepare Eisenhower for another European war, one the general saw as inevitable. He believed this war would draw in the United States, and victory, he realized, would turn less on military might than on how well Americans could manage their al-

liances. Thus, when Eisenhower arrived in the Canal Zone, Conner introduced him not only to Clausewitz and Jomini, but to everything from Freud to Nietzsche — any author who could teach him to understand the human psyche.³ Among these unusual tutors was William Shakespeare. In *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*, Eisenhower recounts how Conner used the Bard to instruct his eager subordinate:

He often quoted Shakespeare at length and he could relate his works to wars under discussion. 'Now when Shakespeare wrote his plays,' General Conner might say, 'he frequently portrayed soldiers, and not entirely fictional ones—historical figures such as Prince Hal and Richard. In describing these soldiers, their actions, and giving them speech, Shakespeare undoubtedly was describing soldiers he *knew* at first hand, identifying them, making them part of his own characters. Even when he was writing of Julius Caesar, the dramatist must have endowed him with an education, characteristics, mannerisms that Shakespeare knew in some of the leaders of his own time.'⁴

1 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), I.2.

2 Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 7.

3 Conner first met Eisenhower at Fort Meade, where he interviewed Eisenhower and a young George S. Patton Jr. about their ideas for employing tanks in modern warfare. Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), 62–65.

4 Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 187. Others have observed the accuracy of Shakespeare's technical knowledge of complex professions like seamanship: "The first scene of *The Tempest* is a very striking instance of the great accuracy of Shakespeare's knowledge in a professional science, the most difficult to attain without the help of experience. He must have acquired it by conversation with some of the most skillful seamen of that time" (Lord Mulgrave). Our thanks to Timothy Burns for pointing out this example. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest: With Introduction Notes and Glossary*, ed. David M. Bain (Marston, UK: Samson Low, 1892), 102 (see footnote 62).

Policymakers, military officers, and scholars have praised Conner's principles of strategy.⁵ However, too few of them have commented on the diverse education with which he provided Eisenhower and its implications for engaging in strategy and policy. Conner sought to give Eisenhower more than a merely tactical, operational, or engineering education.⁶ He wanted to prepare him to work at the highest levels of strategy and policy, and for that he would need psychology, philosophy, and literature. In Shakespeare, Conner found an instructor who brought together all three.

In this paper, we treat Shakespeare as a serious strategic thinker, or at least, as someone who thought deeply and carefully about strategy. As the study of grand strategy gains traction among policymakers and the public, we want to encourage a new generation of students — much as Conner encouraged Eisenhower — to look for strategic wisdom not just among military minds and scholars of international relations and security studies, but among the philosophers and playwrights who have thought most profoundly about human character, even if they were not themselves military strategists.

Coriolanus chronicles the rise and fall of the Roman captain Caius Martius Coriolanus. The tragedy offers some of Shakespeare's most mature political thought — and some of his most timely. The play grapples with the tensions between elite and popular rule, the use of foreign threats for domestic gain, the operation and evolution of the ancient world's most effective political constitution, and the familial norms that undergirded the early Roman republic. In our age of populist revolts and unsettled norms, *Coriolanus* might be the most politically relevant of all Shakespeare's plays.⁷

Shakespeare seems to trace some of Coriolanus' strategic flaws to his upbringing and education. He suggests that from a young age Caius Martius imbibed the martial spirit of Rome. This education makes him formidable to Rome's enemies, but it also leaves him “churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man's conversation.”⁸ Shakespeare highlights this temper in the play, describing Coriolanus as a man who cannot relate to diverse human beings or bend with circumstance. Though

physically indomitable, his character is narrow, inflexible, and brittle. These flaws make him a failure as a strategist.

In this article, we explore the strengths and weaknesses of three strategists introduced in *Coriolanus*: a warrior out of place in the domestic politics of a democratic republic; demagogues who sacrifice national security for political gain; and a gifted statesman of a second-tier power with ambitions to something higher. Along the way, we observe how Shakespeare seems to suggest a common solution to all three situations, perhaps one he took from Plutarch, and one Conner certainly took from Shakespeare: Strategy should begin with the analysis of character. It demands a comprehensive appreciation of human nature and its purposes, one broader and more liberal than the strategists in the play exhibit.

The Play

Coriolanus is one of Shakespeare's later plays, begun, as best we can tell, in 1608. It follows the rise and exile of the Roman patrician Caius Martius, who will become Coriolanus. A formidable asset against Rome's enemies, Coriolanus also threatens the political liberties of ordinary Roman citizens. Consequently, he is exiled by the democratic element of the Roman state. In the same way that the prequel *Henry IV* explores the origins of the strife that wracks *Henry VI*, *Coriolanus* explores the tensions that later devoured the Rome of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, including how these tensions were set in motion four centuries before. Thus, where *Caesar* is about a twilight republic on the verge of despotism, and *Antony* the empire that came after, *Coriolanus* concerns the struggles of a vibrant republic to forge its constitution while preserving its security.

The play opens with a plebeian uprising protesting the cost of food and Rome's interminable wars. Menenius, a nobleman and Roman senator, attempts to persuade the people to disperse. Martius enters the scene, upbraiding the common people as “scabs,” cowards, and ingrates, unworthy to criticize their

In our age of populist revolts and unsettled norms, Coriolanus might be the most politically relevant of all Shakespeare's plays.

noble leaders.⁹ Neither Menenius nor Martius succeeds in breaking up the mob. Instead, the crowd disperses only when the Senate grants them political power through five popularly elected tribunes, who will represent the plebs in Roman politics.

Immediately afterward, we learn that the Volscians have invaded Roman territory. Martius is “glad on't” and hopes that the coming war will allow Rome to unite against a common foe instead of devouring itself.¹⁰ Martius acquits himself well in the ensuing fight: He almost single-handedly captures the Volscian city of Corioles, for which valor the Senate awards him the cognomen Coriolanus. Coriolanus then fights and drives off Tullus Aufidius, the foremost Volscian general, completing a decisive victory over the invaders.

Fresh from these victories, Coriolanus is persuaded to seek the consulship, the highest office Rome could bestow. However, ascent to this office requires the “voices” of the common people, and aspirants must humble themselves in the marketplace before the commons. Initially hesitant, Coriolanus submits to this humiliation. The people give their consent, and he prepares to take up the consulship. However, the Tribunes, seeing Cori-

olanus as a threat to their newly created offices, convince the populace to withdraw their approval. Coriolanus flies into a rage and denounces both the Tribunes and the people. The confrontation ends with the exile of Coriolanus from Rome.

In exile, Coriolanus plots his revenge. He seeks out the Volscians and joins with Aufidius. At the head of a Volscian army, Coriolanus comes to the gates of Rome. After rebuffing several Roman envoys, he finally relents when his mother, Volumnia, begs him to spare the city. Coriolanus returns to the Volscian assembly with a treaty favorable to their interests, but Aufidius mocks him for yielding to the tears of a few women. Aufidius and his partisans then mob and kill Coriolanus, concluding the tragedy.

There are three key strategists in this play. Each is exceptional in a certain sphere, but each is also deficient. Coriolanus, though irreplaceable in tactical engagements, is elevated beyond his competence and hamstrung by the narrowness of his education. The Tribunes of the People, Brutus and Sicinius, are Machiavels *par excellence*, but ones whose cynicism blinds them to the diversity of human motives. Aufidius would be a statesman of singular caliber, yet, by an accident of birth, he lacks a dynamic and complex political community in which his talents might develop. Each suffers some insufficiency, some imperfection, which limits his ability to formulate and execute a viable grand strategy — for unlike a mere military man or demagogue, the grand strategist must understand and move between all aspects of state power.

Shakespeare and International Relations Theory

One challenge to taking character seriously in the study of strategy comes from our subfield, international relations. In this article, we argue that Shakespeare should be considered a strategic thinker. Fittingly for the man who, with some exaggeration, “invented the human,” Shakespeare's main contribution to strategic wisdom is his exploration of character and its relationship to strategy. Within international relations, however, the study of individuals — “the first image,” in the parlance of international relations theory — has languished for decades. A famous article enjoins, “Let us now praise great men,” but its clarion call

5 Robert Gates, “Reflections on Leadership,” *Parameters* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 5. Adm. Winnefeld quoted in Michael E. O'Hanlon, *The Future of Land Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 139.

6 When Eisenhower attended West Point, its curriculum had a very heavy emphasis on engineering. It was this confined education Conner sought to counteract. Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

7 It even makes an appearance in *The Hunger Games*. The aristocratic villain, who looks on the plebs of the districts as contemptuous vermin, is named Coriolanus Snow.

8 Shakespeare would have read this in North's translation of Plutarch's lives. Plutarch, “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. Thomas North (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), 135. For Shakespeare's use of Plutarch, see, Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (New York: Anchor, 2005).

9 *Coriolanus*, I.i.165. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are to the *Riverside Shakespeare*. William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J. M. Tobin (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

10 *Coriolanus*, I.i.224–25.

sounded for a deaf discipline:¹¹ In the past ten years, less than 15 percent of all articles published on the topic of international relations studied *anything* related to the first image.¹²

In international relations theory, the declining study of individuals closely follows the rise of neorealism, a theory attaching the greatest causal weight to the international system. Neorealism simplifies the world by assuming that states are unitary and rational; it holds that this approach can explain most conflict and cooperation between great powers. Neorealism, of course, is not the only approach to strategy, nor even the dominant one. However, much of the scholarship produced in its wake retains its rationalist framework. For instance, liberal institutionalists study how rational states can use international norms and bodies to overcome inefficiencies in their interactions, and theorists of the democratic peace often stress the role of rational substate actors in constraining regime belligerence.¹³ Meanwhile, constructivists reject a rationality assumption, but they often retain realism's emphasis on structure.¹⁴ For the first image, the implication of all these approaches is the same: A strong emphasis on either rationality or structure tends to leave individuals in the shade.

This neglect is not necessarily intentional. Some theorists do seem hostile to first-image explanations, like Kenneth Waltz, who dismissed human

nature and individual figures as unimportant to the study of international politics.¹⁵ Others, though — including many realists¹⁶ — are much more amenable to the first image, with some seminal works in security studies centering on careful examinations of individual leaders.¹⁷ In the broader discipline, there now exist game theoretic, psychological, and quantitative approaches, as well.¹⁸ Nonetheless, these works can safely be called unusual.

If we want to reinvigorate the study of the first image, perhaps one of the first places we should turn is literature — where characters have received far more sustained scrutiny than structures or rational agents. Having neglected the first image for so long, international relations theory has struggled to congeal a new tradition of studying the individual, but novelists and playwrights suffer no such impediment.¹⁹ Much like scholars importing established research programs from psychology, rather than beginning from scratch, we import a long-established tradition from creative fiction. And where better to start than with Shakespeare, who perhaps more than any other author understood human character in its manifold political contexts?²⁰

In fact, we argue that Shakespeare not only takes strategy seriously, he takes *realist* strategy seriously. He seems aware of the realist temptation to oversimplify human nature in order to try to understand the world, and he offers fair-

ly clear suggestions for how a strategist should and should not go about this task. He even seems aware of a nascent rational-choice approach to strategy, and he treats it with skepticism.

Defining Grand Strategy

Grand strategy is the highest level of policymaking. That is not to say grand strategy is the most difficult or the most noble. Rather, it directs (or should direct) strategies and tactics at lower levels of the state. It summarizes the way a nation and its leadership try to reconcile their means and their ends within a single, coherent approach to policy formation.

Popularized by B.H. Liddell Hart, the term originated in the interwar period. Before the Great War, military thinkers used the word “tactics” to talk about maneuvering troops to win a battle, and they used the word “strategy” to talk about using battles to win a war, but they lacked a term to talk about using wars to achieve political goals. After World War I slipped all bounds of political restraint, historians and practitioners realized the need for a word to relate war to the kind of peace it sought to achieve.

Liddell Hart defined grand strategy in this way: “to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war.”²¹ Liddell Hart's usage was adopted, and the phrase came to apply more broadly both to peacetime and to war. While there is no universally accepted definition of grand

strategy,²² they all seem to share a family resemblance that makes the term useful and increasingly common.²³ Sometimes, the phrase refers to an activity, as in Liddell Hart's definition. Other times, it refers to something cerebral, such as “a state's theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself.”²⁴ Historian Hal Brands offers perhaps the most elegant definition:

Reduced to its essence, grand strategy is the intellectual architecture that lends structure to foreign policy; it is the logic that helps states navigate a complex and dangerous world.²⁵

However we define the concept, two points are clear: First, grand strategy is a kind of framework by which a country relates to (and perhaps reshapes) its threat environment. Second, the practice of grand strategy predates the phrase by millennia.

Why Shakespeare's Rome?

Before beginning to explore the grand strategic insights of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, we must offer a brief defense of literature as a legitimate storehouse from which to draw ideas about politics. Both scholars and practitioners emphasize the study of literature as essential to mastering grand strategy.²⁶ John Lewis Gaddis argues that the strategist, and especially the teacher of strategy, should rely primarily on narrative, whether historical or otherwise: “We need to see change happen, and we can do that only by reconstituting the past as histories, biographies,

11 Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 107–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092135>.

12 The TRIP project at the College of William & Mary tracks the number of articles in major political science journals studying individuals and their relationships to foreign affairs. The number cited here, 15 percent, includes any article that takes the first image seriously: whether qualitative studies of particular leaders, quantitative regressions on psychological variables, or anything in between.

13 Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67.

14 Alexander Wendt is explicit on this point, and while he significantly expands Waltz's conception of structure, if anything, he strengthens the emphasis international relations theory places on the structure instead of the individual. Consider this claim: “I argue that most of the attributes we normally associate with individuals have to do with the social terms of their individuality rather than their individuality per se, and these are culturally constituted.” Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42.

15 “The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia, a statement that will meet with wide assent,” said Waltz, with a certain naiveté. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 66.

16 Peter D. Feaver et al., “Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?),” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 165–93, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/016228800560426>.

17 See, for instance, Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

18 For a recent sampling, see, Michael C. Horowitz and Allan C. Stam, “How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders,” *International Organization* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 527–59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43282118>; Dominic D.P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, “The Rubicon Theory of War: How the Path to Conflict Reaches the Point of No Return,” *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 7–40, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00043; Jennifer Mitzen and Randall L. Schweller, “Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War,” *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 2–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.549023>; and, Scott Wolford and Emily Hencken Ritter, “National Leaders, Political Security, and the Formation of Military Coalitions,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2016): 540–51, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sq023>.

19 The discipline of international relations as it emerged in the interwar period began (at least in part) with the study of statesmanship. The study of individuals, then, is not so much a new frontier as a fallow one.

20 It is worth noting that the economist Michael Chwe makes a similar argument, though he suggests economists turn to folk tales and Jane Austen. His reason is compelling: “Game theory develops distinctively among the subordinate and oppressed,” which means that, in some areas, these traditions will have advanced beyond their formal study in the discipline proper: “We are still catching up to her [Austen's] insights.” Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2, 32.

21 B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 335–36.

22 Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073>. See also, Rebecca Friedman Lissner, “What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield,” *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (November 2018): 53–73, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/868>.

23 The study of grand strategy has stubbornly resisted theorizing. Despite attempts to dice the subject into abstractions and jargon, the best and definitive works on grand strategy all remain historical, even classical, in their approach. John Lewis Gaddis begins his recent book, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), by stressing his atheoretical and impressionistic approach to the subject, and his approach typifies the field. This lack of rigorous theorizing has led some thinkers to argue the idea must be vacuous or self-contradictory, but it continues to gain currency with popular, academic, and professional audiences. See, Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–50, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560444>.

24 Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

25 Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1. Note that Brands' definition helpfully contrasts grand strategy with foreign policy, with which it is often confused. It would be absurd to say something like, “employing airstrikes against Libya was not part of Barack Obama's foreign policy” — they happened at his direction, and they occurred overseas, making them both foreign and policy. But it would not be absurd to say, “Airstrikes against Libya were not part of Barack Obama's grand strategy” — they might have been incidental or even contradictory to his overall approach to foreign policy, as in fact, Obama came to believe that they were. Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine,” *The Atlantic* (April 2016): 7–90, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>.

26 The first chapter of Gaddis' *On Grand Strategy* canvasses Isaiah Berlin, Tolstoy, Stephen Spielberg's film *Lincoln*, and Homer — along with a lucid discussion of Xerxes' crossing to Greece. In the preface to *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), G. John Ikenberry (briefly) meditates on the film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. And Charles Hill spends virtually all of *Grand Strategies* applying the lessons of fiction to world order. (With John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Kennedy, Charles Hill pioneered Yale's program on grand strategy, which was among the first of its kind.) For all these authors, a work of fiction is not a mere illustration, a way to keep their audience entertained. Rather, it is a source of wisdom.

poems, plays, novels, or films. The best of these... are, in short, *dramatizations*.”²⁷ Fox Conner agreed. Before introducing Eisenhower to heavier works on history and strategy, Conner began Eisenhower’s strategic education with historical novels.²⁸ Charles Hill argues that “literary insight is essential for statecraft” because “both endeavors are concerned with important questions...only partly accessible to rational thought...a purely rational or technocratic approach is likely to lead one astray.”²⁹ Indeed, for Hill, literature is not just a complement to social science — it is almost a substitute.

Gaddis and Hill both argue that, to appreciate the coherence and evolution of grand strategy, one must study narrative. Thus, their emphasis on literature, while similar to that of an historian or philosopher, is also more limited: They are less interested in what a novel might reveal about its time and more interested in what it can say about the present. They suggest that, by submerging in these narratives, students come away with a better understanding of the present than they could acquire from abstract theorizing. Even if students of grand strategy do not attain a knowledge that lends itself to clear concepts and precise definitions, they will still be better strategists. In fact, important research into the mindset of grand strategists suggests that the best grand strategists may be those least enamored of abstract theoretical frameworks.³⁰

Policymakers seem aware of this fact. Another reason to study strategy with literature is that it in-

tensifies knowledge with lived experience. “Training schools in intelligence,” wrote CIA director Allen Dulles, emphasize the case method “in order to give the future intelligence officer not only knowledge, but experience and confidence.”³¹ Quoting the historian Michael Howard, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster made this point at the Naval Academy in 2018, arguing that broad historical study prepared not just the minds but the psyches and characters of officers — a vital function, since an officer is like “a swimmer who had to spend his whole life practicing on dry land.”³² Current policymakers echo this sentiment, and they seem to wish that political science produced more such scholarship.³³

To these arguments, we might add a final one. Although we should be cautious when deriving lessons from fiction, classic stories have a claim to truth. A classic likely bears a strong resemblance to reality — it has verisimilitude — because if it did not, it would not have endured. A reader will suspend disbelief only so far, and so every time someone rereads a story, the reader tacitly affirms that its underlying view of how the world works does not greatly offend his or her own experience.³⁴ The fact that a classic tale survived speaks to its truthfulness. We might even go so far as to claim that we should trust a classic play more than a revisionist history. That said, we must also recognize that studies of fiction do not lend themselves to strict reproducibility.³⁵

So why Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*? Because *Co-*

riolanus clearly explores the relationship between international and domestic politics. It centers on the conflict between elites and the people, especially how this conflict shapes and is shaped by the quest for national security. Reconciling domestic and international politics is the most difficult challenge facing grand strategy, and nowhere does Shakespeare engage this theme more directly than in *Coriolanus*.

The Flower of Warriors

*So our virtues/Lie in th’interpretation of the time*³⁶

Before the actor George C. Scott immortalized him in front of Old Glory, Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., had already captured America’s imagination. His courage, irascibility, and enormous personality made him a public icon. But while a great tactical commander, Patton was thoroughly unsuited to strategic and political thinking. He disrupted allied unity with divisive comments about the Russians not taking part in the division of the postwar world.³⁷ Subsequently, after ill-advised remarks on denazification, Patton was removed from the military administration of Bavaria.³⁸ He displayed a violent temper: Twice he slapped an American soldier in the face and, consequently, was almost relieved of his command. Despite these character flaws, Eisenhower kept Patton in the war for one reason: He was irreplaceable as a combat commander, “one of the guarantors of our victory.”³⁹ Yet, once the fighting was over, Patton was finished.⁴⁰ As Clausewitz observes, some leaders are suited to the bloody engagements at the tactical level of war, and some are suited to the strategic level. “No case is more common,” he writes, “than that of the officer whose energy declines as he rises in rank and fills positions that are beyond his abilities.”⁴¹ Like Coriolanus, Patton’s tactical bent and disposition, which made him so indispensable

in the ferocious battles of World War II, made him a liability in strategy and policy.

We know that Coriolanus (the man) was of unique interest to Shakespeare, as no other playwright of his time wrote about this Roman.⁴² It is worth asking what in Coriolanus’ story Shakespeare found so arresting. The playwright may have seen connections between the story of Coriolanus and his own times. In fact, he weaves contemporary events into *Coriolanus*. Act I opens on a riot over food shortages, and this mob sets the stage for one of the play’s main themes: the clash between the common people and the political elite. Shakespeare’s London was rife with similar clashes, where food riots over the cost of staples like fish and butter were common.⁴³ The year before he wrote *Coriolanus*, authorities had bloodily suppressed the Midland’s Rising, which involved disaffected farmers. Tellingly, no food riots occur in Plutarch’s *Life of Coriolanus*, Shakespeare’s main historical source for the play.⁴⁴ It seems Shakespeare saw parallels between early Rome and the politics of his own time, and he deliberately altered the historical narrative to highlight them.⁴⁵

With typical penetration, Shakespeare explores the strengths and flaws of Coriolanus’ character. In this essay, we focus on one: how Coriolanus’ education formed his character, and what the near- and long-term consequences of such an education would be for Roman strategy.

With his father killed in Rome’s wars, Caius Martius was raised by his mother, Volumnia. From a young age, preparing for war consumed Martius. He bent his whole will to becoming physically unassailable. He succeeded so well that no contemporary Roman could match him in contests of strength, and, as even the common people acknowledged, he was “a scourge to [the] enemies” of the republic.⁴⁶ Shaped by this bloody education, Martius was held in the highest regard by the Roman nobility, and Shakespeare has them praise Martius as the ideal Roman

27 Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, 16. Drawing on Clausewitz, Gaddis emphasizes the pedagogical function of fiction: Its purpose is to distill the essence of past wisdom so that students do not have to learn all of history to anticipate how people will behave. Note that Gaddis’ argument differs subtly from that of Daniel and Musgrave, who argue we need to study fiction and film to understand how people who have consumed that fiction think. J. Furman Daniel III and Paul Musgrave, “Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (September 2017): 503–16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx053>.

28 Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 65.

29 Hill, *Grand Strategies*, 7. By “technocratic,” Hill seems to have in mind a certain scientism which mistakes policymaking for a kind of engineering.

30 Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, 9. He is discussing Tetlock’s findings about expert predictions.

31 Allen W. Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence: America’s Legendary Spy Master on the Fundamentals of Intelligence Gathering for a Free World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 178. For a similar argument, see, Eliot A. Cohen, “The Historical Mind and Military Strategy,” *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 575–88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2005.07.002>.

32 H.R. McMaster, “Remarks by LTG H.R. McMaster at the United States Naval Academy,” The White House, Jan. 21, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-ltg-h-r-mcmaster-united-states-naval-academy>. McMaster also argues against using history as an “exact playbook” and for using it to form the intellect to ask questions in the right way. An even stronger argument comes from Jon Sumida’s explication of Alfred Thayer Mahan: He argues that “the formulation of theory...was either secondary or hostile to the accomplishment of Mahan’s primary task.” Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), xv.

33 Paul C. Avey and Michael C. Desch, “What Do Policymakers Want from Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (June 2014): 227–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12111>. In a related study, Campbell and Desch gauge the level of policy engagement among political scientists in the United States. Peter Campbell and Michael C. Desch, “Ranking Relevance: Which Universities Rise and Which Fall in International Relations?” *New America Foundation*, Nov. 27, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/ranking-relevance/>.

34 Of course, some stories, such as science fiction, will deviate radically from reality in certain ways. To be convincing, we would argue, the characters in these stories must therefore hew that much truer to life. After all, *Harry Potter* is about three of the most common types of people. What the book sacrifices in distorting the laws of physics, it compensates for in the ordinariness of its heroes.

35 We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point. Approaching Shakespeare as we have done cannot guarantee that another political scientist would be able to reproduce our results in the same way that running a model on the same dataset would produce the same correlations. The source material and method can, however, offer the conclusions a claim to external validity that a dataset or regression might lack.

36 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.49–50.

37 Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 339–40.

38 Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 453–54. In fact, Eisenhower said that he removed Patton from the military administration of Bavaria not only because of what he said about ex-Nazis: “Actually, I’m not moving George for what he’s done—just for what he’s going to do next.” According to Ike, Patton was a master at “missing opportunities to keep his mouth shut.” Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 453–54.

39 Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 282–88.

40 Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 454.

41 Clausewitz, *On War*, 110–11, 122.

42 More typically, Shakespeare drew his heroes from ones in common use, such as Julius Caesar and Marc Antony.

43 Ackroyd, *Shakespeare*, 280–81.

44 Ackroyd, *Shakespeare*, 468–69. Shakespeare also drew on Plutarch’s *Lives of Caesar and of Brutus* for *Julius Caesar*.

45 For other potential ways in which Shakespeare altered his source to examine Machiavellian ideas, see, Patrick Thomas Ashby, “The Changing Faces of Virtue: Plutarch, Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* (2016).

46 *Coriolanus*, II. iii. 91.

soldier of “Cato’s wish:” “Thou worthiest Martius!... Flower of warriors.”⁴⁷ Martius’ valor is undeniable and Shakespeare clearly admires his sense of honor and modesty.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Roman nobles regarded him with such honor, according to Plutarch, because they considered “valor the chiefest virtue” — an opinion Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Cominius (one of the two consuls), but which he takes almost verbatim from Plutarch’s *Lives*.⁴⁹

Though the Romans praise martial education and valor, many seem not to appreciate its adverse effects on character and the future leaders of their republic.

Despite his many virtues, Coriolanus suffers a number of character flaws, flaws which at least in part stem from his overly martial education. These flaws prove fatal handicaps when he attempts to move beyond the level of military tactics to the level of grand strategy. Shakespeare would have read in Plutarch that “for lack of education, he was so choleric and impatient, that he would yield to no living creature: which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man’s conversation... they could not be acquainted with him, as one citizen useth to be with another in the city.”⁵⁰ As Menenius puts it in the play: “he has been bred i’th’wars/ Since a could draw a sword, and is ill school’d/In bolted [tactful] language.”⁵¹ Plutarch explicitly identifies the benefits Coriolanus would have received

from a more complete education: “The greatest benefit that learning bringeth men unto,” Plutarch argues, is that “it teacheth men that be rude and rough of nature, by compass and rule of reason, to be civil and courteous, and to like better the mean state, than the higher.”⁵² By nature, Coriolanus was “rough,” and his exclusively martial education enflamed rather than tamed his roughness and pride. He became willful and choleric when friend or foe pricked his sense of honor.⁵³

Coriolanus’ education made him well suited to battle, where physical strength, courage, and indomitability are key. Conversely, in the realm of domestic politics, where compromise preserves

stability and humility helps one adapt old traditions to changing balances of political power, such inflexibility can lead to disaster — not least because the enemies of such an inflexible character can manipulate it to their advantage. (In the next section, we discuss how the Tribunes did just this.)

This overly martial education is not limited to one generation. We learn that Coriolanus’ son is being educated in the same manner. As Volumnia notes, “He had rather see the sword and hear a drum, than/look upon his schoolmaster.”⁵⁴ In one anecdote, the boy chases a butterfly, seeming to admire its beauty, but then flies into a rage and “mammocked” it, tearing it to shreds.⁵⁵ The response from Volumnia and Coriolanus’ wife Virgilia is telling: Volumnia says that the boy was taken

by “One on’s father’s moods;” and Virgilia exclaims, “Indeed, la, ‘tis a noble child.”⁵⁶ Rome is imparting the same education to the son as to the father, reproducing the same choleric temperament in the next generation of Roman noblemen. Though the Romans praise martial education and valor, many seem not to appreciate its adverse effects on character and the future leaders of their republic. Here, Shakespeare presages the rise of Roman general-statesmen like Scipio, Sulla, and Caesar.

But what does this have to do with strategy and grand strategy? Strategists, as Conner recognizes, are molded by their education. Paradoxically, Coriolanus’ warlike education, and the character and skills it produced, handicap him at both the strategic and tactical levels of war.

At the strategic level, Coriolanus’ education did not prepare him to be a leader of armies. He has the talents not of a general but of a captain. He is not present when the consuls devise the Roman strategy to confront the Volscian invasion. He enters their council after the fact and is told to “follow Cominius.”⁵⁷ Once he takes the city of Corioles, his superiors redirect him toward the rest of the Volscian host. Coriolanus is a tactical leader who fights in the bloodiest engagements. While essential, such figures rarely make strategic leaders. Like an arrow in a bow, the Roman strategists nock and loose him at their targets. Coriolanus does not decide where he will be aimed.

That Shakespeare appreciated this deficiency in Coriolanus is shown in the play’s list of roles. There, Shakespeare does not include Coriolanus as one of the “generals against the Volscians,” reserving that for Cominius and Titus Lartius.⁵⁸ In the play, only when Coriolanus leads a foreign army to the gates of Rome is he called “general,”⁵⁹ and even then he is a general not of the Romans but of the Volsces. In an exchange between Menenius and the Volscian watchmen, the latter refer to Coriolanus as “general” many times, yet Menenius slips and calls him “captain” (the watchmen object and Menenius corrects himself, saying “I mean thy general”).⁶⁰ In

fact, Menenius is closer to the truth. Coriolanus is unsuited to generalship: He is a captain, a tactical leader in battle, not a general, a strategic leader in war. Though praised by his city, his education — focused on single combat and physical endurance — makes him ill suited to higher-level tasks. Instead, the consuls craft a strategy and then loose Coriolanus on the enemy. Even when Coriolanus is victorious at the head of the Volsces, Shakespeare makes it clear that Aufidius is the strategist and Coriolanus his instrument.

That Coriolanus is no strategist makes sense. More surprisingly, though, is that Coriolanus’ aggressive character also has drawbacks at the tactical level of war. Most notably, it makes him ill suited to tactical maneuvers like a fighting withdrawal. When Martius — he had not yet received his honorary name — joins Cominius’ troops, the consul has just orchestrated a fighting retreat. Such delaying actions are essential in both tactics and strategy: When facing “odds beyond arithmetic... manhood is call’d foolery when it stands/Against a falling fabric.”⁶¹ Cominius went on the defensive until troops from another Roman force could shift the odds in his favor. Martius looks on such maneuvers as cowardly, and he confronts Cominius about it when he joins the consul after the fall of Corioles:

Martius: “Are you lords o’th’field?/If not why cease you till you are so.”

Cominius: “Martius, we have at disadvantage fought,/And did retire to win our purpose.”⁶²

Such calculations appear beneath Martius’ concept of valor. He immediately asks that Cominius set him against Tullus Aufidius and his Antiades, the most powerful Volscian force.⁶³ Martius prefers the direct approach in tactics and scorns the delaying methods Cominius employs to great success. Even on the battlefield, then, Coriolanus’ martial upbringing leaves him a second-rate tactician.

Finally, although personally indomitable, Cori-

47 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.57; I.v.25; I.vi.33.

48 Given the man’s overweening pride, it is easy to overlook Coriolanus’ modesty, but Shakespeare clearly draws our attention to it. For instance, Coriolanus prefers not to advertise his scars and his deeds, as he makes plain many times. The Tribunes say he boasts (II.i.19–20), but this is simply false. At every turn, Coriolanus insists, “praise me not” (I.v.17); “pray now, no more: my mother...when she does praise me, grieves me. I have done/As you have done” (I.ix.13–15), and “I have some wounds upon me, and they smart/to hear themselves remembered” (I.ix.28–29); “No more of this, it does offend my heart” (II.i.169); “I had rather have my wounds to heal again/Than hear say how I got them” (II.ii.68–69). Volumnia and the patricians brag about Coriolanus, but the man himself does not: “You shall not be the grave of your deserving,” says Cominius, “Rome must know the value of her own...Too modest are you.” (I.ix.19–21, 54).

49 *Coriolanus*, II.ii.84. Plutarch, “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” 138.

50 Plutarch, “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” 135.

51 *Coriolanus*, III.i.318–20.

52 Plutarch, “Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus,” 138.

53 Not all who receive such a martial education exhibit the same weakness as Coriolanus. His education interacted with his nature and produced a character that is ill suited to political compromise and to the life of a citizen. Some characters in the play argue that his choleric part of his nature and cannot be helped, but they fail to perceive the role that his education had in enflaming rather than taming this part of his nature. As we discuss, other Romans, such as Cominius, clearly display the good character traits brought out by a more complete education — traits like humility, tact, and prudence.

54 *Coriolanus*, I.iii.55–56.

55 *Coriolanus*, I.iii.57–65.

56 *Coriolanus*, I.i.66–67.

57 *Coriolanus*, I.i.246.

58 Note that the title “general” here is not simply an Anglicization of the Roman title of consul: Tullus Aufidius, too, is called “general” of the Volscians.” Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1444. As well, in another place, Cominius is called “present consul and last general,” showing that Shakespeare considered these two roles distinct (II.ii.43). Finally, the stage directions that Shakespeare wrote for *Coriolanus* are famously detailed, so this omission of the title of “general” for Coriolanus was not likely an oversight on the playwright’s part.

59 *Coriolanus*, VII.5, 9, 14, 29, 36, 48, 54.

60 *Coriolanus*, VII.51–54.

61 *Coriolanus*, III.i.244–46.

62 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.47–50.

63 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.55–60.

olanus makes a poor leader of the rank and file. His contempt for the common people extends to contempt for the people in arms, the backbone of the Roman army. He derides the common foot soldiers under his command, trying to motivate them through shame and threats. At the siege of Corioles, he harangues the Roman infantry after their initial retreat, saying: “I’ll leave the foe/ And make my wars on you.”⁶⁴ Advancing on the town and trying to rouse them from their hiding place, he exclaims, “Mark me, and do the like!”⁶⁵ — but the soldiers do not follow him, and the Volsces lock Martius within the city, where he must fend for himself.⁶⁶ Only when Titus Lartius appears do the Roman soldiers assault and take the city, finding a bloodied Martius emerging at the gate after fighting alone.⁶⁷

Later, Cominius asks Martius how Corioles fell. Martius’ contempt for the common soldier resurfaces when he downplays their role in the final sacking of the city.⁶⁸ He tells Cominius that the rank and file were beaten back to their trenches and that, if not for the nobles, Corioles would not have fallen. But this is not true: Lartius led the rank and file in an assault on the city after Martius’ brief solo fight. When Cominius asks how the city was taken if the infantry did not eventually attack, Martius leaves the question unanswered and changes the subject, perhaps unwilling to recognize the role the common soldiers played.⁶⁹ As Cominius more accurately recounts later, Corioles fell due to “a sudden reinforcement” after Martius “struck Corioles like a planet.”⁷⁰

Contrast the leadership of Coriolanus with that of Cominius. On the other side of the battlefield, Cominius tells his soldiers to rest. He even calls them “friends” and “my fellows.”⁷¹ His treatment of his soldiers motivates them more effectively

than Martius’ browbeating. For example, when Cominius offers Martius volunteers from among the consuls’ men to go where the fighting is hottest, their response is overwhelming: “All: O me alone! Make you a sword of me!”⁷² He has so many volunteers, in fact, that Martius says he can only take the very best.⁷³ Whereas Martius’ shaming of the rank and file led to his entrapment in Corioles alone, Cominius’ soldiers, whose lives the general did not spend cheaply in pursuit of his own honor, are supremely motivated.

The ability of Cominius to inspire the rank and file through magnanimity recalls Henry V among his soldiers before the Battle of Agincourt. Moreover, the stark difference between Coriolanus’ elitist leadership and Henry V’s common touch might have its origin in their different educations. Coriolanus was educated among his own class. Henry was educated by Falstaff among the people. Thus, the English king could motivate his outnumbered soldiers just as Cominius did, with understanding, not with fury and derision. In both cases, the result was a better motivated and more effective army.⁷⁴

Achieving concord between the leader of an army and its common soldiery is a perennial problem for strategy. Whether in Rome, Henry V’s England, or America today, an army unites all classes in the pursuit of a national goal — especially in the age of the democratic nation-state.⁷⁵ Wartime leaders must recognize and strengthen this interdependent relationship between officers and the rank and file to achieve tactical and strategic objectives. To come full circle: Cominius and Henry V recall to mind Eisenhower among his assembled units before the D-Day invasions. In fact, knowing the role that Shakespeare had in Eisenhower’s strategic education, the supreme commander may have been

imitating Henry V before yet another crucial battle in the north of France.⁷⁶

Recognition of this interdependent relationship should inspire another character trait key to leadership and lacking in Coriolanus: humility. Earlier we described Coriolanus as modest, and he is. But he lacks self-awareness, and so his modesty never rises to true humility. His overweening love of honor and aristocracy blind him to the ways in which his martial exploits rely on the common citizens who make up the Roman rank and file. In *Coriolanus*, we see this symbolized in the “gown of humility,”⁷⁷ which Coriolanus tries to refuse,⁷⁸ though Menenius assures him that the “worthiest men have done’t.”⁷⁹ In response, Coriolanus mocks the tradition and says “Hang ‘em!”⁸⁰ He disdains the people. For Coriolanus, those who share his merits, like Aufidius, are praiseworthy, while all who do not are “beneath abhorring.”⁸¹ Because the plebeians are not like him, he sees them as unworthy to judge him. Making this consulship dependent on the will of the common people and their servants, the Tribunes, debases it. Coriolanus would “rather be their servant in [his] way/Than to sway with them in theirs.”⁸²

Coriolanus’ character also makes him incapable of understanding his opponents’ motivations and purposes. Coriolanus disdains motives other than his own, viewing as base anyone who does not possess the same virtues as himself. He sees the world in black and white: Those who reflect his virtues are bright and clear, those who do not are mere shadows of men. However, a key to strategy is the ability to put oneself in an opponent’s position. Sun Tzu argues that the key to victory is to defeat your opponent’s strategy. To achieve this, the strategist must be able to see the world as his opponents do,

if only to discover their goals and frustrate them. This understanding was a key lesson Eisenhower took from Conner. Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, a longtime aide to Eisenhower, recounts:

[Eisenhower]’s a tremendous man for analyzing the other fellow’s mind, what options are open to the other fellow, and what line he can best take to capitalize or exploit the possibilities, having figured the options open to the other man. Under Fox Conner... he became keenly interested in the command process, not just the mechanics of it so much as the analysis of what was in the commander’s mind.⁸³

Coriolanus appears incapable of this essential strategic practice at which Eisenhower excelled. As it turns out, Coriolanus’ chief political adversary shares this same flaw.

The Machiavels

*You know neither me, yourselves nor anything*⁸⁴

In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare does not engage the deeper implications of Machiavellian thinking. Unlike in the *Henry*s or *Hamlet*, there is not the slightest worry in *Coriolanus* that the world lacks moral order. Instead, Shakespeare takes aim at a practical problem with Machiavellian strategy: It doesn’t work.⁸⁵

To be sure, Shakespeare takes aim at a one-dimensional version of Machiavelli, at Machiavelli the cunning rationalist. His target is thus a simplification of the original, yet a highly relevant one to

64 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.39–40.

65 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.45.

66 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.46–61.

67 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.62–64.

68 *Coriolanus*, I.iv.30–45; I.vi.42–46.

69 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.41–47.

70 *Coriolanus*, II.ii.113–14.

71 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.1–9; I.vi.85.

72 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.76. We use here the Arden edition, as the Riverside attributes this line to Martius himself rather than the soldiers. In any case, the stage directions indicate the enthusiasm with which the Romans take up the charge. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, in *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Philip Brockbank (London: Cengage Learning, 2007).

73 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.80–81.

74 Note that Hotspur shares the same strategic deficiency as Coriolanus: Both are great soldiers, but not great generals, and their passions lead them into strategic blunders.

75 Shakespeare beautifully portrays this relationship of mutual dependence in his late comedy *Pericles Prince of Tyre*. King Pericles is shipwrecked on a foreign shore. Bereft of all his possessions, he is taken in by a group of fishermen. In an arresting image of the dependence between leaders and the common people, Shakespeare has the fishermen catch Pericles’ armor in their nets. They haul in this symbol of his nobility and Pericles goes on to use it to restore himself to his throne.

76 Later, Eisenhower observed: “you do not lead by hitting people over the head. Any damn fool can do that, but it’s usually called ‘assault’ — not ‘leadership.’” Emmet John Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 124.

77 *Coriolanus*, II.iii.40.

78 *Coriolanus*, II.ii.136–39.

79 *Coriolanus*, II.iii.49.

80 *Coriolanus*, II.iii.50–62. While not mentioned in the play, we know that Cominius and Titus Lartius donned the gown of humility to become consuls.

81 *Coriolanus*, I.i.168.

82 *Coriolanus*, II.i.203–04.

83 Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 26.

84 *Coriolanus*, II.i.67.

85 There is a substantial literature on Shakespeare and Machiavelli. Our purpose here is not to debate whether Machiavelli influenced Shakespeare. Whether or not Shakespeare had Machiavelli specifically in mind, in *Coriolanus* he does critique a Machiavellian approach to strategy, and that critique is incisive. Note that, if one does accept Shakespeare’s familiarity with Machiavelli (though perhaps not with the *Discourses*), then *Coriolanus* would come in the third and final stage of Shakespeare’s engagement with Machiavelli’s thought: *Richard III* represents his first, “lurid” engagement with Machiavelli; the *Henry*’s a more complex engagement that wrestles with Machiavelli’s philosophy, even as it ultimately rejects it; and the late Roman plays a final exploration of the tragic nature of politics, where he still rejects Machiavellian thinking but is unsure whether politics can ever escape it. See, Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43–46.

international relations scholars, for his critique implicates the foundations of neorealism.⁸⁶ Moreover, while a simplification of Machiavelli's thought, the Tribunes are not caricatures. Shakespeare clearly intends his audience to take them seriously, just as he wants us to take Gloucester seriously, for they are all dangerous enemies. Indeed, as with Coriolanus, we can guess that the Tribunes held a special interest for Shakespeare. In Plutarch, these figures are nonentities, barely mentioned at all. In the play, however, Shakespeare makes them fully fledged and significant characters, a dramatic attention that suggests the Bard wanted to explore and critique the strategy (or at least the politics) they embody.⁸⁷

Shakespeare's critique of Machiavellian strategy is not obvious. He gives his Tribunes their due: They are ruthless calculators, rational to a fault, and far more cunning than Coriolanus or even Aufidius.⁸⁸ They are not comic Machiavels like Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*. They are dangerous, highly effective operators who consistently outmaneuver their political enemies.⁸⁹ Both Tribunes perceive (accurately) that Coriolanus hates the people and would, if he could, strip them of their newfound power.⁹⁰ Unlike the senators, the Tribunes recognize that Coriolanus' talents on the battlefield will not translate to the political arena.⁹¹ They predict how his pride will react to provocation, and they engineer his exile with cynical dexterity.⁹² They also understand the mob and how to manipulate it.⁹³ The Roman aristocrats fear them.⁹⁴ They are even strategic in displaying their power: "Let us seem humbler

after it is done/Than when it was a-doing."⁹⁵

The Tribunes' weakness does not lie in their inability to connive or formulate a plan — they excel at both. Rather, they share a key strategic weakness with Coriolanus: an inability to understand what motivates their foes. In their case, the Tribunes impute to others the base motives that govern themselves. In doing so, they render their strategy ineffective.

Courses on grand strategy sometimes begin with this maxim: "Without opposition, strategy is indistinguishable from engineering." The essence of strategy, what separates it from a merely technical discipline, is interaction — the need to condition one's own behavior on that of another actor. War, writes Clausewitz, is a contest of wills. To win, it is necessary to predict how a rival will act: "I am not in control," he writes, and my enemy "dictates to me as much as I dictate to him."⁹⁶ Or, in military parlance: The enemy gets a vote. A strategy connects means with ends. If a strategist does not understand the ends an opponent pursues, he will not anticipate the plan his enemy adopts — and the strategist will fail.

From the first scene, the Tribunes misconstrue Martius's motives. They believe he has ambitions for fame, honors, and office. Risibly, they believe that, to achieve these, Martius has deviously preferred a subordinate position to Cominius in Rome's wars abroad: In this way, the general will take the blame if things go awry, while Martius will take the credit if they go well.⁹⁷ The Tribunes believe that he is boundlessly ambitious, just like them, and they persist in

86 We take no stance on whether Shakespeare had a more nuanced understanding of Machiavelli. We only argue that in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare criticizes an overly rationalistic approach to strategy. One clear piece of evidence that Machiavelli understood Rome and the motivations of the aristocracy better than Shakespeare's Tribunes is his recognition of glory as a motivating force among the aristocracy. According to Machiavelli, one of the chief achievements of the Tribunes was to crush the glory-seeking few when their ambition for renown endangered the freedom of the many. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.3–6, 2.2, 3.1.

87 Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 41, 61–64.

88 Note that Plutarch and Livy portray the Tribunes quite differently: In Livy, the Tribunes save Coriolanus from the mob. In his *Discourses*, Machiavelli lauds the Tribunes "as men of principle whose disinterested application of the law preserves universal liberty." See, John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2002), 193. Scholars debate whether Shakespeare was familiar with Livy's texts. Whatever the case, he clearly opted to explore Plutarch's depiction of the Tribunes rather than Livy's.

89 Some authors scrupulously observe a difference between the words Machiavel (a simplistic, almost stereotypical villain without a moral compass) and Machiavellian (a more complex, serious character who wrestles with the philosophy and its implications). In this essay, we have not hesitated to refer to Brutus and Sicinius as Machiavels because they seem straightforward and effective mouthpieces of the most ruthless elements of Machiavellian thinking undiluted by ethical deliberation.

90 *Coriolanus*, II.i.223,246–47.

91 *Coriolanus*, II.i.224–25.

92 *Coriolanus*, II.iii.257–58; III.iii.25–28.

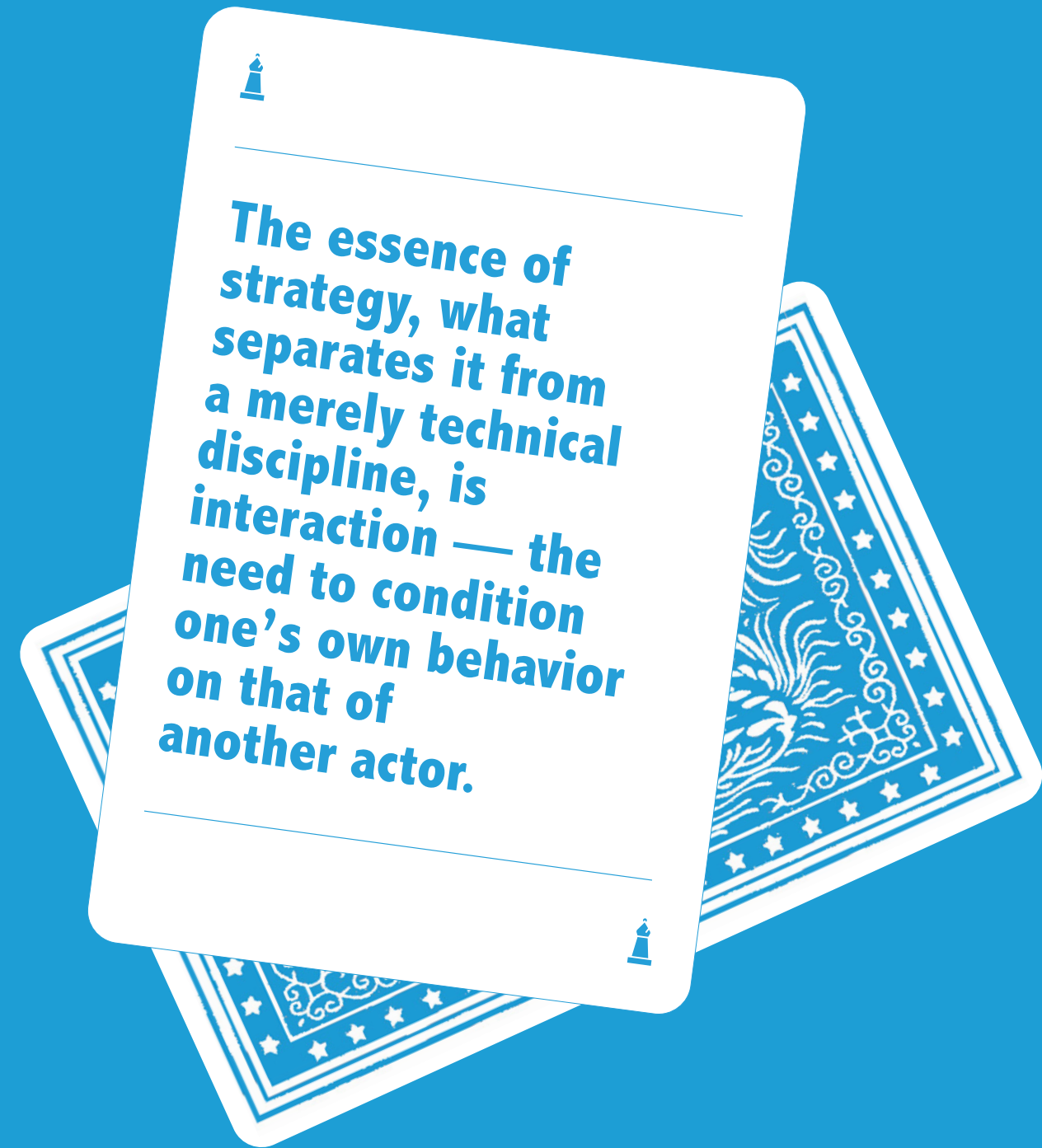
93 *Coriolanus*, II.i.245; II.iii.154–263; III.iii.12–24.

94 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.122–23.

95 *Coriolanus*, IV.ii.3–4.

96 Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.

97 *Coriolanus*, I.i.271–75. See also Cantor, who in passing remarks: "The low-minded tribunes, assuming that everyone is as duplicitous as they themselves are, see very devious motives behind Coriolanus' acquiescence in the will of the Senate." Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome*, 43.





this belief throughout the play, despite ample evidence against it.⁹⁸ They never recognize the modesty that accompanies Coriolanus' pride, that at every turn he insists "praise me not."⁹⁹ Unable to conceive of a man unlike themselves, the Tribunes even attribute his modesty about his deeds and wounds to cunning. True, at his family's urging, he seeks the consulship, but he does not want, as the Tribunes suggest, to overturn the Roman state and become a tyrant. The Tribunes even suggest that Coriolanus does not deserve his honors, a meanness of spirit that denies plain reality: Coriolanus is a proud man of many faults, but he has fought valiantly, and his honors were justly won. Had they understood the limits of his ambition better, they might not have endangered the republic.¹⁰⁰

In one jibe, Volumnia gives the sharpest précis both of the Tribunes' strengths and of their defects:

They are "Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth/As I can of those mysteries which heaven/Will not have earth to know."¹⁰¹ The Tribunes are as cunning as cats, but also as blind to human complexity and nobility as humans are of divine mysteries. Their cunning and cynicism make them capable of rousing the crowds and exploiting the weaknesses in Coriolanus' character, but these attributes also blind them to his nobility, making his subsequent behavior an enigma to them.

Their inability to understand noble motives has disastrous consequences. The Tribunes are experts at manipulating the mob, and their plan to exile Coriolanus succeeds perfectly. But after Act III, their designs come undone. The Tribunes expect that, without office or powerful friends, Coriolanus will disappear quietly into exile while the life of Rome moves on,¹⁰² that Coriolanus and Aufidius

could never reconcile,¹⁰³ and that the Volsces, beaten once, would not dare break the peace.¹⁰⁴ They do not understand honor. They do not understand what these proud men will do, untethered. In fact, when word of Coriolanus' approach at the head of a Volscian army reaches them, they assume Coriolanus was deliberately spreading a false rumor in order to return home — despite the fact that neither Coriolanus nor his family has ever displayed such guile.¹⁰⁵ They cannot understand why someone would risk his life for a principle like honor. For them, Coriolanus' use of terms like honor was a façade to disguise his self-interested quest for power, which only tyranny could satisfy.

Importantly, Coriolanus did not change: "the Coriolanus who has found a home and adulation among the Volscians remains, in this other country, the man he always was."¹⁰⁶ As Coriolanus himself foretells, "you shall/Hear from me still, and never of me aught/But what is like me formerly."¹⁰⁷ Had the Tribunes understood this man, they might have better predicted how he would spend his exile.

The Tribunes exhibit a similar shallowness in trying to turn Coriolanus' assault away from the gates of Rome. The Tribunes solicit Menenius, the only politician in the play who might match their craftiness, to entreat Coriolanus to spare Rome, thinking he will sway the man just as he swayed the people.¹⁰⁸ They do not think to ask Coriolanus' wife and mother, whom they disparage,¹⁰⁹ and who undertake their mission of their own initiative.¹¹⁰ Contrast the Tribunes with Cominius, who recognizes that Menenius will not sway Martius — "He'll never hear him" — but who also hopes that Volum-

nia and Virgilia might prevail.¹¹¹ In short, the Tribunes fail to predict how Coriolanus' character will lead him to make war on Rome. They fail to predict how the mutual respect of Coriolanus and Aufidius will allow them to ally. They fail to accept the invasion even when word of it reaches their ears. And they fail to predict what kind of character can (and cannot) sway Coriolanus from his purpose. In fact, in the whole play, the only things they seem capable of predicting are the turns of the mob and the effects of Coriolanus' pride on the citizens. But the importance of honor, nobility, or familial piety — these they never understand.¹¹²

The Tribunes fail as strategists because they fail to comprehend their opponents. They project onto others their own sordid selves, and so they fail to anticipate how others will actually behave. On their own ground, they are unbeatable. It is the variety and occasional nobility of human emotions that confound them. A modern critic might call this a failure of empathy. Whatever it is, it derives from their Machiavellian approach to strategy: They first reduce the motivations of others to a few, usually vicious desires, and then they plan their own machinations accordingly.

Machiavelli has been called, rightly or wrongly, the first rational choice theorist.¹¹³ More than any previous thinker, he stressed human motivation in order to manipulate it. Much of *The Prince* is about manipulating incentives: inflicting punishments early and once-and-for-all (making them sunk costs) while extending rewards into the future;¹¹⁴ making people dependent on the prince for their welfare;¹¹⁵ and, most famously, being feared rather

98 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.31–32.

99 *Coriolanus*, I.v.16. We have already addressed Coriolanus' modesty (see footnote 48). On the mix of nobility and pride in Coriolanus, we cannot put it better than Ackroyd: "[Shakespeare] had also become more interested in the theatrical possibilities of a particular flaw or weakness in character, whether amorousness in Antony or pride in Coriolanus. Yet as with all of Shakespeare's most important figures, Coriolanus is conceived in ambiguity." Ackroyd, *Shakespeare*, 468.

100 *Coriolanus*, I.i.274.

101 *Coriolanus*, IV.ii.34–36.

102 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.1–4. Note that the Tribunes fear Coriolanus because "our office, during his power, [will] go sleep" (II.i.223). They would be powerless without their positions, and they seem to assume that Coriolanus will be similarly impotent.

103 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.70–73, 101. To be fair to the Tribunes, Menenius also doubts that Coriolanus and Aufidius could ally (IV.vi.87–89), as two such men could not share the heights. In this, the Tribunes and Menenius are more perceptive than either Aufidius or Coriolanus. Aufidius had planned to share "one half of my commission" (IV.v.138) with Coriolanus, only to find himself "darkened in this action" when all "fly to th' Roman," who bears himself "more proudlier...than I thought he would" (IV.vii.1–10). Having failed to anticipate how Coriolanus would eclipse him, Aufidius then plots Coriolanus' death. For his part, Coriolanus is blind until the end: He never recognizes that his own excellence might drive others who seek power, or even merely honor, to become his enemies.

104 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.48.

105 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.70–71.

106 Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 156.

107 *Coriolanus*, IV.i.51–53.

108 *Coriolanus*, VI.33–59.

109 *Coriolanus*, IV.ii.44.

110 *Coriolanus*, VI.71–73.

111 *Coriolanus*, VI.62,70.

112 On the meeting of Coriolanus and Aufidius, one thinks of Kipling's "Ballad of East and West," and precisely this sentiment is what the Tribunes cannot grasp:

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!*

113 It is worth recalling that part of Machiavelli's project is to attack the humanist idea "that it is always rational to be moral...that the rational course of action for the prince to follow will always be the moral one...[in] the moral treatises of Machiavelli's contemporaries we find these arguments tirelessly reiterated." Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Brief Insight* (New York: Sterling, 2010), 57–58.

114 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), chap. 8.

115 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 9.

than loved (if one cannot be both).¹¹⁶ His advice is sweeping, and in order to draw his general conclusions he must make similarly general assumptions about what motivates human beings. A theory that allowed a panoply of motives could generate no such clear predictions.¹¹⁷ Exactly this simplification, this reduction of everyone to a common, low denominator, is what Shakespeare highlights as the grave of the Tribunes' designs.

Machiavelli is particularly relevant to debates over the realist approach to foreign policy. Structural realists frankly assume the simplicity of a Machiavellian world: States are unitary, rational actors, and they seek only one thing — power for the purpose of security.¹¹⁸ But if Shakespeare is right, then far from being clear-eyed observers, neorealists might be among the most blind strategists of all. For these sorts of cynical generalizations might lead as often to catastrophic error as to success.

Still, a strategist must simplify somewhere.¹¹⁹ In where he chooses to simplify, we suggest that Shakespeare more closely resembles Sun Tzu than Machiavelli. The Chinese general is often compared to Machiavelli, since both advocate a ruthless, seemingly amoral approach to strategy. In this case, though, the central difference between the two is instructive. Where Machiavelli stresses the manipulation of incentives, Sun Tzu stresses the manipulation of information: "Know thy enemy, and know thyself, and in a hundred battles you will never be in

danger."¹²⁰ Where Machiavelli simplifies human motivation, Sun Tzu simplifies the situations in which these motivations might play out.¹²¹

Sun Tzu stands out among ancient and modern strategists for his obsession with knowledge, and especially knowledge of an enemy's person. In fact, the best espionage for Sun Tzu is not the kind that observes enemy movements but the kind that discovers the thoughts or character of an enemy commander.¹²² Contrast this approach with that of the Tribunes, who expend no effort discovering what sort of man their rival is. And why should they? If their approach to strategy is correct, they already know him to be a self-interested man like themselves — seeking out his character would be wasted effort. Shakespeare condemns this attitude. Whatever else he must simplify, the strategist should not simplify the character of an enemy commander.

If it is possible to reconcile Shakespeare's works with a realist approach to strategy — and we believe it is — then this seems to be the answer. *Realpolitik* must begin with a careful study of other nations' motivations, not an assumption of their wretchedness. Strategy must begin with character. It is not enough to presume all states seek power, in the same way that it was not enough for the Tribunes to presume that all men are self-aggrandizing, would-be tyrants. In their critique of structural realism, neoclassical realists make exactly this point: Strategic analysis, they insist, must

begin with the character of other regimes and the situations in which they find themselves.¹²³ As one example, Randall Schweller emphasizes the need to understand a rising China's self-conception and vision for foreign policy, and how these visions will play out differently as the world transitions from unipolarity to multipolarity.¹²⁴

Where Shakespeare's character-driven approach to strategy resembles neoclassical realism, it might be closer still to the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr. In a famous distinction, Niebuhr separates the "children of light," who want to subordinate self-interest to a moral law, from the "children of darkness," who "know no law beyond their will and interest."¹²⁵ He urges the children of light to learn from the children of darkness, *but also* to retain their innocence. Quoting Jesus, he argues "the preservation of a democratic civilization requires the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove."¹²⁶ For all their cunning, there is something finally ineffective about the strategies of serpents. Machiavelli, who so often privileges what works over what is good, in the end fails on his own terms. Following Shakespeare, we might even conclude that while doves often come to grief, serpents always do.¹²⁷

Whether Niebuhrian, neoclassical, or something else, Shakespeare's realism reminds us that the theory must build on broader foundations than a narrow view of human nature. We might even say that, whoever founds on Machiavelli, founds on

mud. And in fact, when surveying structural realists' commentary on foreign policy, nothing is more common than the complaint that "Americans aren't realist enough."¹²⁸ For a theory whose supposed strength rests on its clear-eyed vision, its ability to see the world "as it is, not as we wish it to be," its theorists seem remarkably put out when human beings refuse to act as they predict. It is almost as if modern realists *wanted* people to be narrowly self-interested, power-hungry utility maximizers. While in the short run this view might lead to great success, in the end, it proves less effective than a more complete view of human nature.¹²⁹

Before concluding this section, it is worth asking why the Tribunes have such a constricted view of human nature. Are the Tribunes Machiavels because of their constrained worldview, or is their lack of imagination a consequence of their strategy? The question is impossible to answer from the play, but we observe a few points. First, the Tribunes seem to have only base motives: Often we hear them scheme for power, but we never hear them be honestly disinterested.¹³⁰ If we recall that Coriolanus gets his "valiantness" from Volumnia, but pride he owes to himself,¹³¹ then we might attribute the Tribunes' lowliness to their family upbringing and education. Second, the Tribunes are ignorant of the past: On at least one occasion, Menenius takes them to task for their ignorance of basic history.¹³² Third, the Tribunes may come from the merchant class, as later Tribunes often did, implying they had wealth but

116 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 17. The reasoning behind this famous injunction is essential: "love is secured by a bond of gratitude which men, wretched creatures that they are, break when it is to their advantage to do so; but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective." In essence, Machiavelli is arguing here that men will calculate their interests ("their advantage") and act according to them, regardless of the moral bonds they have formed.

117 If human beings could often be noble or base, fickle or faithful, Machiavelli's already short book of advice would be made even shorter. Take Machiavelli's most infamous example: Is it better to be feared or loved? Feared, the Florentine answers, for men "are fickle...when you are in danger they [will] turn away" (chap. 17). The conclusion only follows because Machiavelli assumes the premise (the ignobility of men) with such assurance. If he allows for a greater diversity of human motives, his theory would produce a far less decisive result. Note that Machiavelli explicitly depends on such a general premise about human motivation: "one can make this generalization about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit" (chap. 17).

118 "The fifth assumption is that great powers are rational actors," Mearsheimer writes. Legro and Moravcsik identify the rational actor assumption as "the first and least controversial assumption of realism." Waltz is coy about the rational actor assumption, but he still assumes a soft version of it (that systems evolve toward rationality). In all these works, the explicit purpose of the rational-choice assumption is to simplify the world in order to make clear predictions. (If anything, the motivations in structural realism are even simpler than in Machiavelli.) John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 31. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560130>.

119 "No matter what the subject, we have to bound the domain of our concern, to organize it, to simplify the materials we deal with, to concentrate on central tendencies, and to single out the strongest propelling forces." Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 68.

120 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), III.31.

121 The classic examples would be his "five fundamental forces" and his classification of "the nine varieties of ground." Note also his emphasis that generals "must create situations which will contribute to their accomplishment" — because the effects of such situations are predictable. His metaphor is music: While the number of melodies is endless, the number of notes is few. Likewise, understanding the few types of forces and terrain and their effects on armies and commanders allows a strategist to understand the infinite variety of ways these forces might combine. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, I.2–8, I.16, V.8, XI.

122 Most famously, this is seen in Sun Tzu's emphasis on secret and double agents in the last chapter of *Art of War*, book XIII. It also occurs in his stress on the *tao* of the ruler and that of his opponent. Here we observe a passage where Sun Tzu would condemn a man like Coriolanus: "the general who in advancing does not seek personal fame...but whose only purpose is to protect the people and promote the best interests of his sovereign, is the precious jewel of the state," Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, X.19.

123 Neoclassical realism first received widespread attention for its resurrection of the distinction between revisionist and satisfied states. Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72–107, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539149>.

124 Randall Schweller, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 41–72, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00044.

125 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972): 361–62. Of course, it is better to be among the latter than the former, but Niebuhr wants to drive home to his reader that "the children of [darkness] are in their generation wiser than the children of light, ... [who] are usually foolish because they do not know the power of self-will. They underestimate the peril of anarchy in both the national and the international community" (p. 362).

126 Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 378.

127 It is hard to find any Machiavellian characters in Shakespeare who enjoy long-term success. It is not just villains (such as Don John, Richard III, or Iago) whose strategies collapse, but even secondary characters like Wolsey. The only exception we can find is Philip the Bastard in *King John*. It is possible to expand our definition of Machiavellian to include figures like Henry V, as Cantor argues, but this goes too far, since these characters ultimately subordinate their designs to higher claims. Henry V might be a rake, or even a devious king, but he is also haunted by the fear of God, and he searches for a higher order than his own self will. For a reply to Cantor's classification of Henry V as Machiavellian, see, Andrew Moore, *Shakespeare Between Machiavelli and Hobbes: Dead Body Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 15.

128 For arguments in this vein, see for instance, John J. Mearsheimer, "Getting Ukraine Wrong," *New York Times*, March 13, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html>; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77–89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483306>; Stephen M. Walt, "Taming American Power," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 105–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20031709>.

129 In the early days of the Cold War, Dulles makes exactly this critique of Soviet strategy: "time and again the Soviets and satellites pick the wrong people as agents. They misjudge character. They underestimate the power of courage and honesty. Their cynical view of loyalties other than their own kind blinds them to the dominant motives of free people." Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence*, 191.

130 This is not a universally accepted statement. Some have argued that the Tribunes are public-spirited, as evidenced by the countless hours they spend adjudicating petty disputes among the plebs (II.i.62–65). The rejoinder to this points to the rest of the passage, where Menenius sneers, "all the peace [the Tribunes] make in their [the petitioners'] cause is calling both the parties knaves" (II.i.78–79).

131 *Coriolanus*, III.ii.142–43.

132 *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.50–52.

no aristocratic heritage and education.¹³³ If so, the Tribunes would embody a deadly combination for Shakespeare: power untethered by tradition, “foxship” with no sense of civic responsibility. Ultimately, Shakespeare is quiet about the origins of their narrow worldview, and we cannot say much with certainty. But we can say this: If the Tribunes had been more humanistic, more liberal in their view of human motivations, they might never have brought Rome to the brink of ruin.

The Great Man Without a Great Country

*I would I were a Roman, for I cannot/Being a Volsc, be that I am*¹³⁴

Besides the people of Rome and their representatives, Coriolanus’ chief rival is the Volscian general, Tullus Aufidius. Coriolanus admires Aufidius above all his opponents: “Were I anything but what I am,/I would wish me only he...He is a lion that I am proud to hunt.”¹³⁵ He sees in his Volscian enemy his own (dim) reflection. But unlike Coriolanus, Aufidius is the chief strategist of his country — he is not a mere tactician. Aufidius decides when to attack Rome and devises the strategy “To take in many towns, ere, almost, Rome/Should know we were afoot.”¹³⁶ He also hosts the rulers of Antium,¹³⁷ and he seems to take for granted their assent to his designs.¹³⁸ Unlike Coriolanus or the Tribunes, Aufidius is the first character we might legitimately call a *grand* strategist.

We see Aufidius’ superior grasp of strategy in his use of deception, his recognition of his own weaknesses, his integration of domestic and foreign operations, and his shrewd analysis of Coriolanus’ character. The combination of these strategic gifts makes him a formidable enemy.

At the tactical level, Coriolanus proves too much

for Aufidius, defeating him at every encounter. So Aufidius resolves to defeat him by “craft” rather than by “equal force.”¹³⁹ In the first act, we see Aufidius’ taste for deception in his use of spies before Corioles falls. These agents hunt down messengers between the Roman armies to impede enemy communication.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Coriolanus, who abhors deception of any kind, Aufidius combines martial valor with cunning, and this makes him a better strategist. (This same combination of valor and cunning also appears in Cominius, who retreats to gain his purpose, a maneuver Coriolanus considers fainthearted.) Similarly, Aufidius knows how to “temporize,” a skill Coriolanus lacks.¹⁴¹

By recognizing his need for craft instead of force, Aufidius also exhibits a humility unknown to Coriolanus. Aufidius makes no secret of his self-assessment: Even his servants observe that Coriolanus “was/ever too hard for him; I have heard him say so himself.”¹⁴² Aufidius overcomes his pride when his own Volscian soldiers “fly to” Coriolanus and worship him like a god, putting it aside to achieve his strategic objective. He would not “lame the foot/Of our design” by confronting Coriolanus while the latter’s military prowess is serving Aufidius’ ambition.¹⁴³ Aufidius, unlike Coriolanus, does not allow pride to sabotage his strategy. He is the more effective for recognizing his own limitations.

Another sign that Aufidius is a superior strategist is his ability to integrate domestic and foreign policy more deliberately than Coriolanus or the Tribunes. Coriolanus ignores the domestic side of strategy, never reconciling himself to the democratic politics of Rome. The Tribunes ignore foreign policy, instead focusing on consolidating their power within the state. By contrast, Aufidius constantly maneuvers between the national and the international. For instance, upon returning to Antium at the end of the play, Aufidius immediately meets with his political allies among the Volsces. The prompt meeting between Aufidius and “Con-

spirators of Aufidius’ faction,” as Shakespeare identifies them in the stage directions, makes clear that he put these preparations in place during Coriolanus’ rise among the Volsces: At the same time as he was conducting a foreign invasion, Aufidius was also machinating inside the state. While Coriolanus concerned himself only with gaining a military victory over Rome, Aufidius planned how he would shape the subsequent peace to his advantage.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, like the Tribunes, and unlike Coriolanus, he considers the popular mood before he acts: “We must proceed as we find the people.” Consequently, the Volscian general does not “fail,” as Coriolanus did, in the “disposing of those chances/Which he [is] lord of.”¹⁴⁵

We see Aufidius’ superior grasp of strategy in his use of deception, his recognition of his own weaknesses, his integration of domestic and foreign operations, and his shrewd analysis of Coriolanus’ character.

Most importantly, Aufidius knows his enemy. He studies Coriolanus’ character, and he uses that to his advantage. For instance, Aufidius recognizes, like Plutarch, that Coriolanus’ martial education likely made him ill suited to political office. He observes that Coriolanus is unable to move “From th’casque

to th’cushion [i.e., from the battlefield to the senate house], but commanding peace/Even with the same austerity and garb/As he controll’d the war.”¹⁴⁶ He notes, “his nature/In that’s no changeling.”¹⁴⁷ After allying with Coriolanus, Aufidius marks out pride as the chief defect of Coriolanus’ character.¹⁴⁸ His conclusion: Coriolanus is “bolder” than the devil, but “not so subtle.” Amid the flux of war and politics, Coriolanus’ inflexible character, and especially his pride, is a constant, and Aufidius manipulates this character to its ultimate destruction.

Thus Aufidius exhibits the key strategic skill that eludes both the proud Coriolanus and the overly rationalist Tribunes: He can place himself in his opponents’ shoes. “To th’vulgar eye” it appears that all is going Coriolanus’ way as he leads the Volsces against Rome, but Aufidius knows that Coriolanus “hath left undone/That which shall break his neck or hazard mine/When’er we come to our account.” Aufidius is playing a more complex game, a grander game, than his Roman rival. And, at the last, he will defeat his enemy.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that, in the end, Aufidius fails to achieve his objective. He fails to see how Coriolanus will eclipse him.¹⁴⁹ He fails to see how Volumnia will sway his erstwhile enemy. Most of all, he fails to take Rome. And so, when Coriolanus yields to his mother, Aufidius is finished. He will take his vengeance, but the play ends with the Volsces and their allies quietly absorbed into Rome — and forgotten. The key to Aufidius’ failure is his circumstance: He leads a backwater, barbarian coalition, not a complex, mixed republic. The accident of his birth prevents his talents from maturing fully. His failure corroborates a key thesis of the Greek historian Polybius: Rome’s success arose from its constitution, not its leadership.¹⁵⁰ That such an exceptional strategist as Aufidius could nonetheless fail must remind us that, in the long run, a grand strategy can be no more effective than the society behind it.¹⁵¹

133 For instance, IV.vi.158 would imply they are men of means. If Shakespeare is tapping into this mercantile background, he might be suggesting that their purely economic motives limit their understanding of honor. Nonetheless, this is speculative. Nothing is explicit in the text.

134 *Coriolanus*, I.x.4–5.

135 *Coriolanus*, I.i.231–32, 235–36.

136 *Coriolanus*, I.ii.23–24.

137 *Coriolanus*, IV.iv.8–9.

138 *Coriolanus*, IV.v.144–45.

139 Aufidius: “Mine emulation/Hath not that honour in’t it had: for where/I thought to crush him in an equal force,/True sword to sword/I’ll potch [jab, poke] at him some way,/Or wrath or craft may get him.” *Coriolanus*, I.x.12–16.

140 *Coriolanus*, I.vi.18–21.

141 As Menenius admits to the tribunes after Coriolanus’ exile: “All’s well, and might have been much better if/He could have temporiz’d.” *Coriolanus*, IV.vi.16–17.

142 *Coriolanus*, IV.v.183–84.

143 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.7–8.

144 “When, Caius, Rome is thine,/Thou art poor’st of all: then shortly art thou mine.” *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.56–57.

145 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.40–41.

146 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.43–45.

147 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.10–11.

148 *Coriolanus*, IV.vii.8–9.

149 His failure to anticipate how Coriolanus will supplant him in the Volscian imagination seems to arise, at least in part, from his failure to understand the character of his own culture. Many scholars point out that, while the Roman citizens are portrayed as complex voices in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare allows the barbarian tribes no such urbanity. Even their lords are simple characters. They worship warriors, not strategists, and so they elevate Coriolanus above their own Aufidius, for Coriolanus is, after all, the better fighter. (Here we see another strength of Rome: The Roman constitution had the good sense to exile Coriolanus, albeit after it foolishly made him consul, while the Volsces demote their best strategist.)

150 Polybius, *The Histories*: III.2, 118.

151 Some scholars argue that “only great powers can have grand strategies.” While perhaps correct, we would also note a potential exception: Lee Kuan Yew was called the “grand master” of grand strategy, despite leading one of the world’s smallest and weakest countries. That country, though, enjoys a rich, multicultural inheritance of Confucian mores and English law, not to mention its extraordinary multiethnic and multilingual diversity. Graham Allison and Robert D. Blackwill, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master’s Insights on China, the United States, and the World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

Conclusion: The Complete Man

*Go get you home, you fragments*¹⁵²

Coriolanus ends not in victory but with political compromise: “Let’s make the best of it,”¹⁵³ the Volsces conclude, and they join with Rome. War is the realm of absolutes, Clausewitz might say — and yet those absolutes must yield to political circumstances. If war is the “continuation of policy by other means,” then the strategist is the one who grips the reins of raw, absolute forces and turns them in the service of mealy policy, lesser evils, and “that naturally timid creature, man.”¹⁵⁴

In *Coriolanus*, the title character’s overly martial and incomplete education, which in many ways undergirds Rome’s success, prefigures the republic’s ultimate destruction. Menenius and Cominius show that Rome could form leaders for both political and military success. However, as Plutarch notes, Rome’s emphasis on wartime exploits undermined this political education and its moderating effects on those with a martial spirit. This martial spirit and education proved a great asset to the early republic, but also a great weakness, both to the city and to its leadership. In part through teaching him Shakespeare, Fox Conner sought to ensure that Eisenhower avoided such a narrow education and its pitfalls. That Eisenhower became supreme commander in World War II and then, doing what Coriolanus could not, ascended to the leadership of his nation, shows that Conner succeeded where the early Roman republic failed.

Like Conner, we argue that literature is a powerful tool for educating the strategist. As evidence, we might cite Coriolanus himself: He had no appreciation for culture, not even his own. As a consequence, he could not shift with circumstance or see through others’ eyes. He was an incomplete man. Worse still, his pride and lack of humility made it impossible for him to see his own incompleteness — though it did not stop his enemies from seeing and exploiting it. An education that includes literature and art can breed humility, and this humility can make strategists more aware of their own limitations.

As well, great literature exposes strategists to more character types than their narrow experience allows. Henry V is an effective king because he knows all types of English society. Coriolanus is a bad consul, for he cannot get inside the head of the average Roman. Yet, it is not just proud aristocrats

like Coriolanus who do not understand their fellow man: The populist, Machiavellian Tribunes are just as blind, though in different ways. Shakespeare makes it clear that Aufidius, though not so great a warrior as Coriolanus, is the better strategist and the more complete human being. He combines Coriolanus’ leonine qualities with the foxlike ones of the Tribunes. He understands his enemies, both their virtues and their vices. He gets inside their heads. As such, he integrates domestic and foreign politics as they cannot. He achieves a *grand* strategy.

Nonetheless, Aufidius is not the most complete character in *Coriolanus*. For all his courage, practical wisdom, and perception, he still lacks something to make him complete: a worthy polis. In many ways, Aufidius is a victim of circumstance. For all his qualities, he was born a Volscian, not a Roman, and this accident of birth limits the scope of his achievements. Among other things, he is a reminder to modern strategists to be on the lookout for those whose underprivileged circumstances might not reflect their true abilities.

All people are incomplete, are “fragments,” in the words of the play. A strategist must discern where a subordinate’s talents begin and end. Here we can again draw on the example of the relationship between Eisenhower and Patton. Eisenhower saw Patton’s strengths and placed this irreplaceable fighter where his skills would best serve an Allied victory. He also removed Patton from more political positions where his dash and audacity would prove a liability rather than an asset to Allied grand strategy. The strategist must judge how to coordinate incomplete human beings in the service of a common aim.

We worry that modern strategy cares far more about necessary skills than necessary character. An overly rationalist view of human motivations can begin to resemble engineering. It will not prepare strategists to evaluate real, fragmentary human beings, nor will a focus on the structural and institutional makeup of international relations: While these abstract levels of analysis are important, they offer an incomplete picture of the landscape a strategist must navigate. No strategic education can be complete without studying individual character.

So who is the most complete strategist in *Coriolanus*? The most successful one of all, the one who bends everyone to a single will and a single ideal, is Volumnia. She creates Coriolanus, and she conquers him. Patricians, plebs, and even enemies pay her tribute: “This Volumnia/Is worth of consuls, sena-

tors, patricians,/A city full of tribunes.”¹⁵⁵

In no one area is Volumnia the most adept strategist. Obviously, she lacks Coriolanus’ talent on the battlefield (though she might wish for it). Equally obvious is the fact that she is not as sly as Sicinius or a leader of men and nations like Aufidius. Yet, she remains the best *grand* strategist, for alone in the play she is the character who combines all these qualities in one person. She is no warrior like Coriolanus, but she has his courage and his sense of honor.¹⁵⁶ Unlike her son, she balances these virtues with prudence: “I have a heart as little apt as yours [for the mob],/ But yet a brain that leads my use of anger/To better vantage.”¹⁵⁷ She is no Machiavel like the Tribunes, but she is still cunning, and (unlike the Tribunes) she disassembles in the pursuit of honor and her city’s health: Speak “such words/That are but roted...[as if] to take in/A town with gentle words, which else would put you to your fortune and the hazard of much blood...My fortunes and my friends at stake required I should do so in honour.”¹⁵⁸

To return to Niebuhr, Volumnia understands the serpents, and she can use their devices, but she is not one of them — she retains her nobility. Here she has much in common with Aufidius and Cominius, who are loyal and brave, but who also bide their time and use deception to succeed where brute force would fail. Lastly, unlike Aufidius, Volumnia lives in Rome, and as such she has behind her a complex social machinery capable of producing warriors, farmers, merchants, statesmen — and all in abundance. Thus, even though as a woman Rome deprives her of any formal strategic authority in its society, in the end, Volumnia executes a more successful grand strategy than anyone else in the play. She understands the diversity of human character, weathers her country’s crisis, and saves the republic.

But for all that, even this formidable woman — one of the most formidable in all of Shakespeare — is incomplete. Like Rome, as a mother she has given her son all the drive and strength and sense of duty he needs to conquer. However, she has not leavened those gifts with an education that might have tem-

pered his valor with humility or even affection.¹⁵⁹ Volumnia reminds us of a Spartan mother, who instilled her son with military virtue — and little else. She knows that strategy requires cunning but does not appreciate how the soldierly education she encouraged leaves her son unable to follow her advice. And while Coriolanus’ upbringing is extreme, Shakespeare does seem to use it to show the pattern of Rome, which “deliberately fosters the opinion that the best way of life is that of the public-spirited warrior.”¹⁶⁰ As another poet wrote:

Let others better mold the running mass
Of metals, and inform the breathing brass,
And soften into flesh a marble face;
Plead better at the bar; describe the skies,
And when the stars descend, and when
they rise.
But, Rome, ‘tis thine alone, with awful sway,
To rule mankind, and make the world obey.¹⁶¹

Had Coriolanus’ education included more of these disciplines which Virgil assigns to other peoples, he might have been a better human being, and he would certainly have been a better strategist. In the end, only his devotion to his mother restrains Coriolanus from turning and devouring Rome with his gift for battle. Volumnia has made a force which Rome cannot contain. When another colossal figure would arise, one too great for the delicate compromises holding Rome together, there would be no Volumnia to hold him back. 📌

Peter Campbell is assistant professor of political science at Baylor University and author of *Military Realism: The Logic and Limits of Force and Innovation in the U.S. Army* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019).

Richard Jordan is assistant professor of political science at Baylor University.

Photo: Adam Cuerden

152 *Coriolanus*, I.i.222.

153 *Coriolanus*, V.6.146.

154 Clausewitz, *On War*, 606.

155 *Coriolanus*, V.iv.52–54.

156 “for I mock at death/With as big heart as thou,” *Coriolanus*, III.ii.127–28.

157 *Coriolanus*, III.ii.29–31.

158 *Coriolanus*, III.i.55–64. Note: Volumnia’s sense of honor leads her to fear what Coriolanus will do in exile, making her wiser than the Tribunes. She worries he will fix on some “wild exposure to each chance/That starts i’th’way before thee” (IV.i.36–37), and she tries to take the precaution of sending Cominius to travel with him, but Coriolanus declines. Immediately before, Coriolanus had mused that he may “go alone,/Like to a lonely dragon” (IV.1.29–30). His mother may have read even here, the first day of his exile, the hint of her son’s intention.

159 In one of the more shocking lines in the play, Aufidius says, “that I see thee here,/Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart/Than when I first my wedded mistress saw/Bestride my threshold” (IV.v.115–18), and it seems Coriolanus requites his passion. Certainly Coriolanus never evinces much affection for his wife, and it is his mother who moves him at the end.

160 Cantor, *Shakespeare’s Rome*, 59. See also, Shakespeare “uses his Roman plays to explore what happens when a pagan republic focuses its activity almost exclusively on political life.” Paul Cantor, “Paul Cantor on Shakespeare, the Romans, and Austrian Economics,” interview by Allen Mendenhall, the Mises Institute, March 3, 2018, <https://mises.org/wire/paul-cantor-shakespeare-romans-and-austrian-economics>.

161 Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden, VI.847–53.



THE ETHICS OF ACQUIRING DISRUPTIVE MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES

C. Anthony Pfaff



Technological innovation is proceeding at a rapid pace and is having a dramatic effect on warfare. Not only do technologies such as artificial intelligence, human enhancement, and cyber reduce risk to soldiers and civilians alike, they also expand the kinds of actors who can pursue policy goals through military means. As a result, their development can make the use of force more likely even while reducing individual risk. Moreover, by changing how soldiers fight, they change who a soldier is, which has broad implications not just for military recruitment and training, but also the military's relationship with the society it defends.

Managing this change will require not only an understanding of disruptive technologies but also the establishment of norms to govern their development. Disruptive technologies change how actors compete in a given venue, whether in a market or on a battlefield. What makes such technologies disruptive is not their novelty or complexity, but rather how their particular attributes interact with a specific community of users in a particular environment. This interaction can raise moral concerns through its impact on human autonomy, justice, well-being, and social disruption. These categories thus offer a framework for assessing the moral effect, necessity, and proportionality of disruptive technologies to determine whether and how they should be developed.

*Any scientific advance is punished by the gods...*¹

— Boris Johnson

In his September 2019 United Nations General Assembly speech, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned of a dystopian future of digital authoritarianism, the practical elimination of privacy, and “terrifying limbless

chickens,” among other possible horrors.² Highlighting artificial intelligence, human enhancement, and cyber technologies, Johnson warned that “unintended consequences” of these technologies could have dire and global effects. While at times bizarre, Johnson’s speech aptly captured the *zeitgeist* of rapid technological change. Technological innovation is not just proceeding at a rapid pace. Civilian and military innovators are combining

1 "Boris Johnson Speech Transcript: Brexit, Chickens and AI — September 24, 2019," Rev, Sept. 25, 2019, <https://www.rev.com/blog/boris-johnson-speech-transcript-brexit-chickens-and-ai-september-24-2019>.

2 Johnson, "Speech Transcript." As a side note, "Terrifying Limbless Chickens" is a great name for a band.

these disruptive technologies in ways that are difficult even for them to control. From the outside, such loss of control can be unnerving; however, when applied to military technologies, it can also be downright frightening.

Aristotle famously pointed out that if machines could operate autonomously there would be no need for human labor, thus disrupting the social relationships of the time.

The resulting uncertainty has made enthusiasm for developing these technologies at best inconsistent, especially when they are being developed for military purposes. Despite artificial intelligence's (AI) potential for improved targeting to reduce collateral harm, Google, the European Union, and the 2019 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, among many others, have called for a ban on research on machines that can decide to take a human life.³ A number of researchers have also raised concerns regarding the medical and social side effects of human enhancement technologies.⁴ While cyber technologies have been around a while, their dual-use nature raises concerns about the disruptive effect that an adversary's cyber operations can have on ci-

vilian life, something that could escalate into a very real war.⁵ In fact, whereas the previous U.S. administration was criticized for being ineffective regarding cyber operations, the current one is frequently criticized for being too aggressive.⁶ The confusion that disruptive technologies create suggests that the problem is not so much with the new capabilities themselves as with the norms that should govern their use, and by extension, their acquisition.

Because these technologies come with risk — at the very least, the risk of the unknown — a tension arises between limiting their development and employment and taking full advantage of what they can do. The problem, of course, is that there are competitors and adversaries willing to accept those risks, even if they entail unjust harms. One is therefore left with a choice: develop these technologies and risk inflicting such harm, or do not and risk being vulnerable and disadvantaged. For state actors who are bound by the social contract to see to the security and well-being of their citizens, allowing such vulnerabilities and disadvantages represents its own kind of moral failure. This does not mean that states are permitted to risk harm or violate international norms simply because adversaries do. However, it does mean that the morally correct answer is not to ignore disruptive technologies simply because such risks exist.

However, just because there may be times when states should develop disruptive technologies does not mean anything goes. When necessity is allowed to override moral commitments, the result is a normative incoherency that undermines the traditional rules of international behavior, thus increasing the likelihood of war and placing citizens' lives and well-being in jeopardy. To avoid this self-defeating dynamic, states are obligated, at a minimum, to take up the problem of disruptive technologies, even if, in the end, they determine that particular technologies are not worth the moral cost.

The question then is, under what conditions is one permitted to risk the harms that can result from disruptive technologies? Since the focus here is on military applications, it makes sense to start with norms that govern the use of military technologies. Military ethics requires one to fight for just

ends using just means. Disruptive technologies, even when developed with the best of intentions, risk the introduction of unjust means or at least their unjust application. Given the close link between ends and means, acquisition of these technologies risks putting one on the wrong side of one's moral commitments as well as undermining the cause for which one fights. Avoiding such an outcome requires not only establishing norms that govern the employment of each individual technology, but, at a deeper level, norms that govern the permissibility of risking the disruption their acquisition may result in.

Determining these norms requires an understanding of what disruption is, how technologies become disruptive, and why such disruption raises moral concerns. Disruptive technologies change how actors compete in a given venue, whether in a market or on a battlefield. What makes such technologies disruptive is not their novelty or complexity, but rather how their particular attributes interact with a specific community of users in a particular environment. To assess whether that interaction yields morally impermissible results, we must establish a basis for assessing the morality of certain outcomes. With the morality of such outcomes in mind, we can then establish the norms necessary to govern disruptive technology acquisition. In doing so, we may avoid, or at least mitigate, the "punishment of the gods" that Johnson warned about.

The Challenge of Disruptive Technologies

The idea of disruptive technology is not new. Aristotle famously pointed out that if machines could operate autonomously there would be no need for human labor, thus disrupting the social relationships of the time.⁷ In fact, the trajectory of technology development can largely be described as an effort to reduce human labor requirements, and, especially in the military context, the need for humans to take risk. There are plenty of examples, however, where such benign motivations have had disruptive, if not harmful, effects. Though funded

by the Department of Defense, the inventors of the Internet, for example, simply sought a way for researchers to collaborate.⁸ They did not anticipate the impact this technology would have on industries such as print media, whose profitability has significantly declined since the Internet's introduction.⁹ Nor did they fully anticipate the impact it would have on national security as increasing connectivity exposes military systems and information as well as critical civilian infrastructure to attack.¹⁰

Defining Technologies

For the purposes of this discussion, technology is broadly understood to include physical objects and activities and the practical knowledge about both, i.e., knowledge about the kinds of things one can do with those objects and activities.¹¹ Some technologies embody all three aspects. For example, a fully autonomous weapon system is a physical object. However, its associated targeting system, which includes things external to it such as communication systems and humans to provide instructions, is also an activity. Knowing how to conduct remote airstrikes is the practical knowledge without which the object and the activities would be useless. Any of these aspects of technology, separately or in combination, can be sources of disruption.

It is also important to specify what aspects of individual technologies are sources of moral concern. For example, not all autonomous systems are artificially intelligent and not all artificially intelligent systems are autonomous. In fact, as Wendell Wallach and Colin Allen point out, all technology fits on the dual spectrums of autonomy and ethical sensitivity. Some tools, like a hammer, have neither autonomy nor ethical sensitivity, while a rifle has no autonomy but can have some ethical sensitivity reflected in the attachment of a safety switch. A mechanical autopilot can be designed to take passenger comfort into account by limiting how steep it will climb, descend, or turn and thus has more autonomy and ethical sensitivity.¹²

While this discussion is not intended as a comprehensive survey of disruptive technology, it relies heavily on examples from AI, human enhancements,

3 Scott Shane, Cade Metz, and Daisuke Wakabayashi, "How a Pentagon Contract Became an Identity Crisis for Google," *New York Times*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/30/technology/google-project-maven-pentagon.html>. See, "Thursday Briefing: EU Calls for Ban on Autonomous Weapons of War," *Wired*, Sept. 13, 2018, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/wired-awake-130918>; Edith M. Lederer, "Nobel Laureate Jody Williams Campaigns Against Killer Robots," *Associated Press*, Oct. 21, 2019, <https://apnews.com/Oc99bd564d5f4cc585eb861adb20d28c>.

4 Thomas Douglas, "The Harms of Enhancement and the Conclusive Reasons View," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 24, no. 1 (January 2015): 23–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963180114000218>, fn. 11. See also, Francis Fukuyama, "Transhumanism," *Foreign Policy*, Oct. 23, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/23/transhumanism/>.

5 John Arquilla, "Twenty Years of Cyberwar," *Journal of Military Ethics* 12, no. 1 (2013): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2013.782632>.

6 Joseph Marks, "The Pluses and Perils of Trump's Cyber Strategy," *NextGov*, Nov. 29, 2017, <https://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2017/11/pluses-and-perils-trumps-cyber-strategy/142831/>.

7 Aristotle, *Politics, Book I, The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol 2*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1989.

8 P.W. Singer and Allan Friedman, *Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 18.

9 Amy Watson, "U.S. Print Media Industry — Statistics and Facts," *Statista*, Aug. 27, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/topics/1052/print-media/>.

10 John M. Donnelly and Gopal Ratnam, "America Is Woefully Unprepared for Cyber-Warfare," *Roll Call*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.rollcall.com/news/u-s-is-woefully-unprepared-for-cyber-warfare>.

11 Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), introduction.

12 Wallach and Allen, *Moral Machines*, 25.

and cyber technologies to illustrate key points. For the purposes of this discussion, artificially intelligent systems will refer to military systems that include both lethal autonomous weapons that can select and engage targets without human intervention and decision-support systems that facilitate complex decision-making processes, such as operational and logistics planning. What will not be discussed is the specific means — such as code or neural networks — these systems use to arrive at particular conclusions, but rather the extent to which that ability is able to replace human decision-making.

Human enhancements are any interventions to the body intended to improve a capability above normal human functioning or provide one that did not otherwise exist.¹³ As such, enhancements will refer to anything from pharmaceuticals to neural implants intended to enable human actors to control systems from a distance. They do not refer to treatments or other measures intended to restore normal functions or those that do improve or provide new capabilities but that do not involve a medical intervention, such as an exoskeleton, for example, that a soldier would simply put on.¹⁴

“Cyber” is a broad term that generally refers to technology that allows for and relies on the networking of computers and other information technology systems. This network creates an environment typically referred to as “cyberspace.” As the National Institute of Standards and Technology defines it, cyberspace refers to the “interdependent network of information technology infrastructures, and includes the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers in critical industries.”¹⁵

What is extraordinary about cyberspace is how this connectivity evolved into a domain of war, on par with air, land, sea, and space. However, it functions very differently from the physical world of the other four domains. Unlike in the physical realm, where an attack that constitutes an act of

war is violent, instrumental, and political, cyber attacks, which are directed at information, do not have to be. In fact, so far, no cyber attack has met all three of these criteria.¹⁶ However, subversion, espionage, or sabotage, which characterize a lot of cyber operations, are not adequate to describe the range of disruption such operations can create. It is in the range of cyber operations, though, to function coercively to achieve political objectives. As a result, many of these operations — and their associated effects — fall outside more traditional peacetime and wartime norms.

Understanding Disruption

Of course, not all new technologies are disruptive. For example, stealth technology, at least in its current state, may now be required for advanced combat aircraft; however, it does not fundamentally change how aircraft fight. It simply improves on a quality all aircraft already have, at least to some degree.¹⁷ T.X. Hammes makes a similar point, especially when new or improved technologies are combined. He observes that “technological breakthroughs” such as “in metallurgy, explosives, steam turbines, internal combustion engines, radio, radar, and weapons” when applied, for example, to mature platforms like the battleship, certainly and significantly improved its capabilities. However, they did not change how the battleship fought. On the other hand, when these breakthroughs were combined with an immature technology, like aircraft, which in the beginning were slow, lightly armed, and limited in range, the combination revolutionized air and naval warfare.¹⁸ The effects of convergence, it seems, are difficult to anticipate and, as a consequence, control.

As Ron Adner and Peter Zemsky observe, what makes a technology — or combination of technologies — disruptive and not merely new are the attributes it introduces into a given market, or, for

the purposes of this discussion, a community of users within the larger national security enterprise. In fact, a new technology does not necessarily have to represent an improvement over the old. Rather, what is common to disruptive technologies is the novelty of the attributes they introduce and how useful those attributes are to at least a subset of the user community.¹⁹ To the extent they sufficiently meet user requirements *and* incorporate attributes a subset of those users find attractive, they could displace the older technology over time, even if they do not perform as well.

For example, Clayton M. Christensen, in one of the first studies on disruptive technologies, observed that smaller hard drives outsold better-performing larger ones despite the fact the smaller drives were less capable in terms of memory and speed. What they did have, however, was portability. That made smaller and cheaper computers possible, which opened up a much larger market than the corporate, government, and educational institutions that made up the established market. Thus, in the early market for hard drives, customers accepted reduced capacity in terms of memory and speed as well as higher costs per megabyte to get “lighter weight, greater ruggedness, and lower power consumption” than previous hard drive options provided.²⁰ Changing how actors compete in effect changes the game, which, in turn, changes the rules. In order to effectively compete in the new environment, actors then have to establish new rules. In the case of hard drives, companies that did not produce the smaller drives eventually went out of business. As Christensen observed regarding the market for hard drives,

Generally disruptive innovations were technologically straightforward, consisting of off-the-shelf components put together in a product architecture that was often simpler than prior approaches. They offered less of what customers in established markets wanted and so could rarely be initially employed there. They offered a different package of attributes valued only in emerging markets remote from, and unimportant to, the mainstream.²¹

Since its publication, critics have pointed out that Christensen’s theory of disruptive innovation frequently fails to be as prescriptive or predictive as he had intended. In fact, Christensen managed a fund that relied on his theory to identify opportunities for investment — within a year, it was liquidated.²² Subsequent analysis has attributed that failure in part to Christensen’s selectiveness regarding cases, with some accusing him of ignoring those that did not fit his theory. Others account for the predictive inadequacy of the theory by pointing out that other factors beyond those associated with the technology — including chance — can affect a technology’s disruptive effects.²³

The claim here is not that the conditions for disruptive effects dictate any particular outcome. Nor is the point, as Christensen claimed, that disruption should be pursued for its own sake. Rather, disruption is something to be managed and pursued only when certain conditions, which will be explored later, are met. Christensen’s concern was crafting a business strategy that would increase profits by harnessing disruption to increase market share or, preferably, create new markets. In the military context, the concern is not whether one can develop a theory that predicts the overall utility of a technology. Instead, it is to identify whether a technology is likely to have the kind of disruptive effects that ought to trigger ethical concerns that require employing additional measures to manage its acquisition. For that, Christensen’s understanding of the nature of disruptive technology is extremely useful.

Christensen’s focus on technology in competitive environments suggests his description of disruptive technologies applies in military contexts. Although business and national security arguably play by different rules, competing actors in both environments will generally seize on anything that offers an advantage. What Christensen gets right is that disruptive technologies do not have to be advanced to be disruptive. Instead, their disruptive qualities emerge from the interaction of the technology with a given community of users in a given environment. This interaction is often complex and difficult to predict, much less control. Therefore, it is no wonder that businesses that embrace dis-

13 Patrick Lin, Maxwell Mehlman, and Keith Abney, “Enhanced Warfighters: Risk, Ethics, Policy,” Case Western University, Case Research Paper Series in Legal Studies, Working Paper 2013-2, January 2013, 17.

14 Tony Pfaff, “Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement,” *Pacem* 21, no. 1 (Oct. 29, 2018), 31, <http://pacem.no/2018/moral-autonomy-and-the-ethics-of-soldier-enhancement/>.

15 “Glossary,” Computer Security Resource Center, National Institute of Standards and Technology, <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/cyberspace>, accessed Dec. 23, 2019.

16 Thomas Rid, *Cyber War Will Not Take Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

17 Chester W. Richards, “Reforming the Marketplace: The Industrial Component of National Defense,” in *Spirit, Blood, and Treasure: The American Cost of Battle in the 21st Century*, ed. Donald Vandergriff (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2001), 307. See Vivek Kapur, *Stealth Technology and Its Effect on Aerial Warfare* (New Delhi: Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, 2014), 13. Kapur underscores the importance of stealth technology to an air force’s effectiveness. However, he also observes, “Stealth as a concept is not new to warfare.” I would also note that current stealth technology does not make an aircraft completely invisible to all radars. Also, aircraft do not come by whatever stealth capabilities they have all the same way. Helicopters, for example, are able to fly low and hover, which allows them to take advantage of natural cover to obscure them from radar or visual observation.

18 T.X. Hammes, “Cheap Technology Will Challenge U.S. Tactical Dominance,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 81, no. 2, (April 2016): 76, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Force-Quarterly-81/Article/702039/cheap-technology-will-challenge-us-tactical-dominance/>.

19 Ron Adner and Peter Zemsky, “Disruptive Technologies and the Emergence of Competition,” *RAND Journal of Economics* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 230, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4135240>.

20 Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), chap. 1, section title “Failure in the Face of Disruptive Technological Changes.”

21 Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, chap. 1, “Failure in the Face of Disruptive Technological Changes.”

22 Jill Lepore, “The Disruption Machine: What the Gospel of Innovation Gets Wrong,” *New Yorker* 90, no. 15 (June 23, 2014), 6. Lepore argues that Christensen was too selective in his case selection and ignored cases that did not fit his model. I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer.

23 Andrew A. King and Baljir Baartartogtokh, “How Useful Is the Theory of Disruptive Innovation?” *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Fall 2015): 84–86, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-useful-is-the-theory-of-disruptive-innovation/>. I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer.

ruption often fail. However, in the national security environment, when the conditions for disruption exist, the resulting potential for game-changing innovation forces state actors to grapple with how best to respond to that change.

Thus, the challenge for the United States in responding to the problem of disruptive technologies is best expressed this way: The U.S. way of war relies on technological superiority in order to overcome the strength of its adversaries or compensate for its own vulnerabilities. Yet, development of the technologies discussed here empowers smaller actors to develop “small, smart, and cheap” means to challenge larger, state actors — and win.²⁴ This dynamic simultaneously places a great deal of pressure on all actors to keep developing these and other technologies at an increasingly faster rate, creating ever more disruption. More disruption yields more confusion on how best to employ these technologies while maintaining moral commitments. Consider the following three examples.

First, in September 2019, Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed to have employed unmanned aerial vehicles and cruise missiles to launch a devastating attack on Saudi oil facilities, leading to an immediate 20 percent increase in global oil prices and prompting the United States to move additional military forces to the Middle East.²⁵ To make matters more complicated, there is evidence that the Houthis were not in fact responsible for the attacks, but that they were launched by Iranian proxies in Iraq. This use of autonomous technologies enabled the Iranians to obscure responsibility, which in turn constrained the political options the United States and its allies had to effectively respond.²⁶

Second, the Islamic State frequently provides its followers with Captagon, now known as the “Jihadist pill,” which is an amphetamine that keeps users awake, dulls pain, and creates a sense of euphoria. They do so in order to motivate fighters, in the words of one Islamic State member, to go to battle

“not caring whether you lived or died.”²⁷ It is this ability to enhance fighter capabilities that enabled the Islamic State to fight outnumbered and win against Iraqi, Syrian, and Kurdish forces, especially in 2014, when it rapidly expanded its presence in Iraq and Syria.

Third, in 2015, Iranian hackers introduced malware in a Turkish power station that created a massive power outage, leaving approximately 40 million people without power, reportedly as payback for its support for Saudi operations against Houthis.²⁸ While perhaps one of the more dramatic Iranian-sponsored attacks, there have been numerous others: Iran is suspected of conducting a number of directed, denial-of-service attacks as well as other attacks against Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and the United States.²⁹

None of the technologies in these examples is terribly advanced and most are available commercially in some form. Despite that fact, the targets of the attacks were caught by surprise. Moreover, even though the technologies described above have been around for several years, no one has developed an effective response yet. This suggests that as states and corporations continue to develop and promulgate these technologies, the potential for further disruptive effects will significantly increase. Furthermore, those effects will disrupt more than just the military. As Rudi Volti observes, “technological change is often a subversive process that results in the modification or destruction of established social roles, relationships, and values.”³⁰

Challenging the Norms of Warfighting

The question here is not *whether* such technologies as described above will challenge the norms of warfighting, but *how* they will. Take an example from the last century: the submarine. Its ability to move and shoot underwater introduced a novel attribute to naval combat operations. However, its

slow speed and light armor made it vulnerable and ineffective against the large surface warfare ships of the day.³¹ As a result, it was initially used against unarmed merchant ships, which, even at the time, was in violation of international law.³²

What is ironic about the introduction of the submarine is that its disruptive effects were foreseen. In fact, the anti-submarine measures developed by Britain’s first sea lord, Sir John Jellicoe, were so successful that the British lost no dreadnoughts to German submarines during World War I. Nonetheless, the attacks against British merchant vessels were so devastating he was forced to resign.³³ In fact, unrestricted submarine warfare traumatized Britain such that after the war it tried to build an international consensus to ban submarine warfare altogether.³⁴ When that failed, Britain and the United States backed another effort to prohibit unrestricted submarine warfare and in 1936 signed a “procès-verbal” to the 1930 London Naval Treaty, which required naval vessels, whether surface or submarine, to ensure the safety of merchant ship crews and passengers before sinking them.³⁵ Later, to encourage more states to sign onto the ban, that prohibition was modified to permit the sinking of a merchant ship if it was “in a convoy, defended itself, or was a troop transport.”³⁶

Despite this agreement, both Germany and the United States engaged in unrestricted submarine warfare again in World War II. German Adm. Karl Donitz was tried and convicted at Nuremberg for his role in the unrestricted use of German submarines, among other things. His sentence, however, did not take that conviction into account given that Adm. Chester W. Nimitz admitted to the court that the United States had largely done the same in the Pacific.³⁷ So while certainly a case of mitigated victor’s justice, this muddled example also illustrates two things: the normative incoherency that arises with the introduction of new technologies as well as the pressure of necessity to override established norms.

The subsequent evolution of submarine warfare also illustrates how norms and technology can interact. First, as noted above, state actors tried to impose the existing norm, though with little meaningful effect. Later, to accommodate at least some of the advantages the submarine provided, they modified the norm by assimilating noncombatant merchant seamen into the class of combatants by providing them with some kind of defense.³⁸ In doing so, they accepted that the submarine placed an obligation on them to defend merchant vessels rather than maintain a prohibition against attacking them, at least under certain conditions.

Eventually, however, submarine technology improved to the point it could more effectively compete in more established naval roles and challenge surface warfare ships, which, along with naval aviation and missile technologies, not only helped make the battleship obsolete, it brought the submarine’s use more in line with established norms. Thus, in this case, while the technology eventually caught up to the norms, it also forced the norms to accommodate the innovation that it represented, even if in a restricted way. In fact, submarine use continues to evolve, challenging surface ships for their role in launching strikes on land.³⁹

Of course, disruption, by itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. Thus, even on utilitarian grounds, there will typically be a moral case for acquiring disruptive technologies. However, utility is seldom the final word in ethics. As Melvin Kranzberg wrote in 1986, “Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.”⁴⁰ Kranzberg’s point is not simply that technologies can have unexpected and negative second- and third-order effects. Rather, it is that the introduction of new technologies changes the “social ecology” in ways that have a cost. For example, advances in medical science and improved water and sewer services have increased the average human life span. While these developments were welcome, over time they contributed to population increases

24 George M. Dougherty, “Promoting Disruptive Military Innovation: Best Practices for DOD Experimentation and Prototyping Programs,” *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* 25, no. 1 (January 2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.22594/dau.17-782.25.01>. See, T.X. Hammes, “Melians’ Revenge: How Emerging Tech Can Fortify NATO’s Eastern Flank,” *Defense One*, June 28, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/06/melians-revenge-how-emerging-tech-can-fortify-natos-eastern-flank/158083/>.

25 Shawn Snow, “Drone and Missile Attacks Against Saudi Arabia Underscore Need for More Robust Air Defense Measures,” *Military Times*, Oct. 25, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2019/10/25/drone-and-missile-attacks-against-saudi-arabia-underscore-need-for-more-robust-air-defenses/>.

26 C. Anthony Pfaff, “The Saudi-Oil Attacks Aren’t Game-Changing. They Show How the Game Has Changed,” *Defense One*, Sept. 17, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/09/saudi-oil-attacks-arent-game-changing-they-show-how-game-has-changed/159947/>.

27 Mirren Gidda, “Drugs in War: What Is Captagon, the ‘Jihad Pill’ Used by the Islamic State Militants,” *Newsweek*, May 12, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/drugs-captagon-islamic-state-jihad-war-amphetamines-saudi-arabia-608233>.

28 Micah Halpern, “Iran Flexes Its Power by Transporting Turkey to the Stone Age,” *Observer*, April 22, 2015, <http://observer.com/2015/04/iran-flexes-its-power-by-transporting-turkey-to-the-stone-ages/>.

29 Masood Farivar, “U.S. Charges 9 Iranians with Massive Cyber Attack,” *Voice of America*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-charges-iranians-for-global-cyber-attacks-on-behalf-of-iran/4313154.html>.

30 Rudi Volti, *Society and Technological Change* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2006), 18.

31 Gautam Mukunda, “We Cannot Go On: Disruptive Innovation and the First World War Royal Navy,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903546731>.

32 Adam Roberts and Richard Guelff, eds., *Documents on the Laws of War*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 147.

33 Mukunda, “We Cannot Go On,” 125.

34 Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Atrocity, Deviance, and Submarine Warfare: Norms and Practices During the World Wars* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 84.

35 Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 147. Ben-Yehuda, *Atrocity, Deviance, and Submarine Warfare*, 86.

36 Ben-Yehuda, *Atrocity, Deviance, and Submarine Warfare*, 86.

37 Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 148. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 150.

38 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 150.

39 David B. Larter, “Submarines Are Poised to Take on a Major Role in Strike Warfare, but Is that a Good Idea?” *Defense News*, Oct. 28, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/10/28/submarines-are-poised-to-take-on-a-major-role-in-strike-warfare-but-is-that-a-good-idea/>.

40 Melvin Kranzberg, “Technology and History: ‘Kranzberg’s Laws,’” *Technology and Culture* 27, no. 3 (July 1986): 545, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3105385>. I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer.

that strain the economy and lead to overcrowding.⁴¹ This dynamic is especially true for disruptive technologies whose attributes often interact with their environment in ways their designers may not have anticipated, but which users find beneficial.

Acknowledging the importance of consent in determining specific moral obligations does not mean treating others in the way they would prefer.

However, this dynamic invites a “give and take” of reasons and interests regarding both which technologies to develop as well as the rules to govern their use that is not unlike John Rawls’ conception of reflective equilibrium, where, in the narrow version, one revises one’s moral beliefs until arriving at a level of coherency where not only are all beliefs compatible, but in some cases, they explain other beliefs.⁴² While likely a good descriptive account of what happens in the formation of moral beliefs, such a process will not necessarily give an account of what those beliefs *should* be. For that, we need an assessment of what should be of moral concern — in this case, regarding disruptive technologies.

Assessing Disruption

So far, I have described disruption in terms of its effect on competition and the norms that govern it. However, simply challenging traditional norms is not by itself unethical. For example, the introduction of long-range weaponry eventually displaced chivalric norms of warfighting, which were really more about personal honor than the kinds of humanitarian con-

cerns that motivated the just war tradition.⁴³

In the military context, norms for warfighting are more broadly captured in what Michael Walzer refers to as the “war convention,” which is “the set of articulated norms, customs, professional codes,

legal precepts, religious and philosophical principles, and reciprocal arrangements that shape our judgments of military conduct,” which includes choices regarding how to fight

wars and with what means.⁴⁴ The war convention includes the just war tradition, which evolved to govern when states are permitted to go to war and how they can fight in them. In general, the purpose of the just war tradition is to prevent war and, should that fail, limit the harms caused by war. Many theories fall under this tradition, some more restrictive than others. For the purposes of this discussion, it makes sense to set a reasonably high standard, which, if met, should provide a sense of confidence that developing certain technologies is permissible, if not obligated. Thus, I employ an understanding of just war that draws largely on Walzer’s work, *Just and Unjust Wars*, except where otherwise noted.

Walzer’s conception of *jus ad bellum* demands wars only be fought by a legitimate authority for a just cause and even then only if it can be done so proportionally, with a reasonable chance for success, and only as a last resort.⁴⁵ When it comes to fighting wars, *jus in bello* further requires force be used discriminately to avoid harm to noncombatants and in proportion to the value of the military objective.⁴⁶ These conditions suggest that any technology that makes war more likely, less discrimi-

nate, or less proportional is going to be problematic, if not prohibited.

These norms only govern the initiation and conduct of war. The acquisition of technology, however, impacts much more than just how wars are fought. It also impacts soldiers and the societies they serve in ways that Walzer’s war convention does not address. To assess those impacts requires a broader framework to fully account for the range of moral commitments that these technologies challenge. Establishing such a framework naturally requires a review of those commitments.

From a Kantian perspective, moral commitment begins with moral autonomy, as it is the ability to make moral choices that allows for morality in the first place.⁴⁷ Thus, anything that undermines moral autonomy will either be prohibited or there will have to be some account given why compromises to it should be permitted. Concerns regarding moral autonomy in turn give rise to concerns regarding fairness. As Rawls observed, people act autonomously when they choose the principles of their action as “the most adequate possible expression” of their nature as “free and equal” rational beings.⁴⁸ Because people are free and equal in this way, they are entitled to equal treatment by others. This requirement of fairness, which Rawls saw as synonymous with justice, is reflected in the universality of moral principles: They apply to all, regardless of contingencies such as desire and interest.⁴⁹

Any discussion of fairness, of course, will require answering the question, “Fairness about what?” For Rawls, it is fairness over the distribution of a broad range of social goods. However, in a military context, one can narrow those goods down to reward and risk. When it comes to warfighting, soldiers in general seek victory while minimizing the cost, both in terms of personnel, equipment, and other resources associated with achieving that victory.

As with the concept of reflective equilibrium, it is not necessary to ignore the critiques and limitations of Rawls’ broader political theories in order to accept a commitment to moral and legal universalism that upholds the equality and dignity of persons.⁵⁰ At a minimum, that commitment means

treating others in a manner to which they have consented. Acknowledging the importance of consent in determining specific moral obligations does not mean treating others in the way they would prefer. Kant acknowledged that people consent to treatment by virtue of their actions, not their desires. In this way, consent enables imprisoning thieves, killing enemies, and ordering soldiers to take risks.

Of course some sentences, killings, and risks are not acceptable even if they are fairly distributed. Human life and well-being has its own intrinsic value. As Kant also argued, the fact that people can exercise moral autonomy gives them an inherent dignity that entitles them to be treated as ends and not merely as means to some other end.⁵¹ As a result, all people have a duty “to promote according to one’s means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return.”⁵² A consequence of that duty is to care not just for the lives of others but for the quality of that life as well. In the military context, this duty extends to both soldiers and civilians who may be affected by the acquisition of a new technology.

Disruptive technologies do not just impact individuals, but also have an effect on the groups to which individuals belong. Thus, it is necessary to take into account the effect these technologies have on the military profession as well as the society a military serves. To the extent these technologies change the way soldiers experience reward and risk, they change how the profession serves its role and in so doing changes soldiers’ professional identity. Moreover, these technologies can also change how members of the military profession hold themselves accountable. Reliance on autonomous systems, for example, may mitigate human responsibility in ways that lead to impermissible acts for which no one is accountable. Similarly, enhancements could impair cognitive functioning in ways that make it impossible to attribute praise or blame to individuals.⁵³ Together, these developments could change the professional identity of the military, which in turn will change the way society views and values the service the profession provides.

41 Kranzberg, “Technology and History,” 547.

42 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 48–51. Employing reflective equilibrium in this context does not require one to accept the entirety of Rawls’ political theories. However, in the context of policymaking, this process requires one to account for how all of one’s moral beliefs and commitments fit together and then how that fit relates to others’ beliefs and commitments. Thus, it is more a strategy of giving and taking of reasons with the point of developing a stable consensus regarding what, in any given context, counts as morally good.

43 Peter Olsthoorn, *Military Ethics and Virtues: An Interdisciplinary Approach for the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2011), 19–20.

44 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 44.

45 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 51–124. See, Eric Patterson, *Just War Thinking: Morality and Pragmatism in the Struggle Against Contemporary Threats* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 22–23. Patterson provides a more concise list of *jus ad bellum* conditions that is largely in line with Walzer’s view but that draws on ancient, medieval, as well as contemporary sources. He lists just cause, comparative justice, legitimate authority, right intention, probability of success, proportionality, and last resort as conditions for a just war. It is the case that there is some variation on the conditions of just war among different theories and approaches. The ones listed in the text, however, are generally common to most theories, most of which address the same categories as Walzer, if not also with the same conclusions.

46 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 127–59. See also, Patterson, *Just War Thinking*, 23.

47 Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1983), 9.

48 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 252.

49 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 253.

50 Seyla Benhabib, “High Liberalism: John Rawls and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy,” *The Nation*, Oct. 29, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/john-rawls-liberal-philosophy-review/>. Benhabib provides an excellent and accessible critique of Rawls’ theory that correctly points out not just its limitations, but how it can be misapplied.

51 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49.

52 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 247.

53 I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer, Dec. 11, 2019.

Society's relationship to the military profession is, of course, complex. In general, society values the profession not just in terms of the service it provides, but also because of the risks required to provide that service. The unmanned aerial vehicle operator may provide as good a service as the infantry soldier on the ground. However, their service is valued differently, as evidenced by the controversy over awarding unmanned aerial vehicle operators a medal superior to the Bronze Star, which is normally reserved for those serving in combat zones.⁵⁴ While such reevaluation may not affect the relationship between political and military leaders, it can change how military service is regarded, how it is rewarded, and perhaps most importantly, who joins. Army Cyber Command is already discussing ways to alter physical requirements in order to get individuals with cyber skills into the service.⁵⁵

Society can also be affected more directly by the kinds of technology the military acquires. Aircraft technology, for example, benefited from military investment, which paved the way for today's mass airline travel. The technologies under discussion here could have a similar impact. For example, human enhancements could result in enhanced veterans entering the civilian workforce, possibly putting unenhanced civilians at a disadvantage. This could then force society to accept enhancements for civilians it might not have otherwise, so that civilians can remain competitive. This last point is speculative, but it does suggest that the disruptive effects of military technologies are not confined to the military.

The above analysis establishes the following categories with which to make a moral assessment of the disruptive effects of technology: autonomy, justice, well-being, and social disruption. In what follows, I will describe in more detail how disruptive technologies challenge moral commitments within each category. The point here is not that these concerns cannot be addressed but rather to highlight the need to do so.

Moral Autonomy

Moral autonomy is required for moral accountability. The reason is fairly straightforward: If one's choices are determined by factors independent of one's will, then one cannot be fully responsible for the choices one makes. Exercising that will requires a certain cognitive capacity to appropriately collect and assess information that is relevant to moral choices and act on that information.⁵⁶ It is not hard to see how new technologies could impact those abilities.

Take, for example, artificial intelligence, which can displace humans in the decision-making process, thus removing moral agency from life and death decisions. With conventional systems, when something goes wrong, accountability, in principle at least, can be assigned to the operator, the manufacturer, the designer, or another human involved in the design, acquisition, and employment process. AI-systems, on the other hand, can be a "black box," where it is not always clear why or even how the machine decides on a particular outcome or behavior. Because of this, it is impossible not only to determine who may have erred, but whether there was an error in the first place. As Hin-Yan Liu points out regarding lethal uses of artificial intelligence, unjust harms can arise not just from bad intent and negligence, but from everyone doing a "job well done."⁵⁷

This point is more intuitive than it sounds. Take, for example, noncombatant deaths. If soldiers intentionally kill noncombatants, they have committed a war crime. Others, like their commanders, who may have ordered or encouraged them to do so, would thus share responsibility. Even without such malicious intent, weapon systems can be used improperly or malfunction, also leading to noncombatant deaths. For example, the 2016 airstrike against a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Afghanistan that killed 42 people was the result of multiple human errors. While no one involved intended to strike a hospital, bad instructions, poor procedures, communication and targeting-system malfunctions, and possibly some recklessness all

contributed to the incident. Whether one agrees with the severity of the punishment or not, those individuals were held accountable.⁵⁸

With AI, such tragedies can occur without their being a function of chance or human error and thus no one can be held accountable. For example, AI systems associated with hiring, security, and the criminal justice system have demonstrated biases that have led to unjust outcomes independent of any biases developers or users might have.⁵⁹ It is not hard to imagine similar biases creeping in to AI-driven targeting systems. Of course, developers, commanders, and operators can make mistakes in the development and employment of AI technology for which they *can* be held responsible. However, there is little precedent for holding persons, including commanders, responsible for legal or moral violations when there is no action or failure to act that contributed to the violation.⁶⁰

For example, despite Staff Sgt. Robert Bales' being found guilty of murdering 16 Afghan civilians in 2016, no one in the chain of command was held accountable for those murders.⁶¹ This is, in part, because, even under the idea of command responsibility, there has to be some wrongful act or negligence for which to hold the commander responsible.⁶² It also arises because one *can* hold Bales' responsible. With AI, there may be no mediating morally autonomous agent between commanders, operators, or developers and the violation. Thus, an "accountability gap" arises from there being no one to whom one can assign moral fault when moral harm has been done.⁶³

Such a gap threatens to undermine the application of the war convention. Norms are the means by which people hold each other accountable. However, when norms are not upheld, they die.⁶⁴ It is not hard to understand how: If one person violates a norm without being held accountable, others will be incentivized to do so as well. Over time, with

enough violations, everyone feels free to violate the norm and it ceases to exist. That is not necessarily a bad thing. The civil rights movement, for example, succeeded by violating segregationist norms to the point that those who tried to impose them were themselves sanctioned. However, if violations of the war conventions committed by machines are attributed as mere accidents, soldiers may be incentivized to use them even when not entirely necessary. Over time, holding humans accountable would seem pointless, if not impossible.⁶⁵

One could just restrict the use of AI systems but that ignores the problem of disruptive technologies and exacerbates the tension between effectively using a technology, which can have its own moral force, and risking moral harm. On the other hand, one could just adopt a policy whereby commanders and operators are held accountable for violations committed by autonomous machines under their supervision or control, whether there is any wrongful act or negligence on their part or not. Doing so, however, will disincentivize their use, defeating the purpose of introducing them in the first place. Thus, such policies, rather than resolving concerns regarding accountability, simply are alternate means to banning autonomous machines. As a result, they do not solve the problem, they merely ignore it.

Certainly, there are remedies to the accountability gap. Nevertheless, when acquiring technologies where this gap — or others like it — exists, one has a moral obligation to seek such remedies or restrict their use, a point I will return to later. Otherwise, to the extent these technologies can absolve humans of accountability for at least some violations, it will establish an incentive to employ them more often and find ways to blame them when something goes wrong, even when a human is actually responsible. It is not hard to imagine that, over time, there would be enough unaccountable violations that the rules themselves would be rarely applied, even to humans.

54 Andrew Tilghman, "DOD Rejects 'Nintendo Medal' for Drone Pilots and Cyber Warriors," *Military Times*, Jan. 6, 2016, <https://www.militarytimes.com/2016/01/06/dod-rejects-nintendo-medal-for-drone-pilots-and-cyber-warriors/>.

55 Crispin Burke, "The Pentagon Should Adjust Standards for Cyber Soldiers — As It Has Always Done," *War on the Rocks*, Jan. 24, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/pentagon-adjust-standards-cyber-soldiers-always-done/>. Army Cyber Command currently offers the possibility of a direct commission for STEM-educated persons to join the command, something previously reserved for medical, legal, and religious fields. See, "Cyber Direct Commissioning Program," Department of the Army, Army Cyber, accessed Oct. 29, 2019, <https://www.goarmy.com/army-cyber/cyber-direct-commissioning-program.html>.

56 Wallach and Allen, *Moral Machines*, 16.

57 Hin-Yan Liu, "Refining Responsibility: Differentiating Two Types of Responsibility Issues Raised by Autonomous Weapons Systems," in *Autonomous Weapon Systems: Law, Ethics, Policy*, ed. Nehal Bhuta et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 340.

58 Matthew Rosenberg, "Pentagon Details Chain of Errors in Strike on Afghan Hospital," *New York Times*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/30/world/asia/afghanistan-doctors-without-borders-hospital-strike.html>. According to CENTCOM, all punishments were administrative as opposed to criminal *because* there was no intent to commit a war crime by anyone involved.

59 Karen Hao, "This Is How AI Bias Really Happens — and Why It's So Hard to Fix," *MIT Technology Review*, Feb. 4, 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/612876/this-is-how-ai-bias-really-happens-and-why-its-so-hard-to-fix/>. Often, the bias is introduced because of the nature of the data collected, though that bias is not apparent at the time of its collection.

60 For a more complete discussion of AI and its implications for moral autonomy, see, C. Anthony Pfaff, "The Ethics of Acquiring Disruptive Technologies: Artificial Intelligence, Autonomous Weapons, and Decision Support Systems," in *Special Report: Ethical Implications of Large Scale Combat Operations* (Leavenworth, KS: Simons Center, 2019), 140–41, <http://thesimonscenter.org/special-report-ethical-implications-of-lsco/>.

61 Richard Sisk, "US Army Leaders Cleared of Wrongdoing in Soldier's Killing Spree," *Military.com*, Aug. 18, 2015, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/08/18/us-army-leaders-cleared-of-wrongdoing-in-soldiers-killing-spree.html>.

62 Sanford Levinson, "Responsibility for Crimes of War," in *War and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 117–18.

63 Heather M. Roff, "Killing in War: Responsibility, Liability, and Lethal Autonomous Robots," in *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics in War: Just War Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Fritz Allhoff, Nicholas G. Evans, and Adam Henschke (New York: Routledge, 2013), 355.

64 Geoffrey Brennan et al., *Explaining Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35–39.

65 Pfaff, "The Ethics of Acquiring Disruptive Technologies," 133–34.

Moreover, AI systems are not the only technologies that threaten moral autonomy. To the extent that enhancements or other medical interventions suppress fear or enhance aggression they mitigate the responsibility of an agent under their influence.

Human enhancements can also pose a challenge to the exercise of moral autonomy in terms of the role that consent, which is an expression of moral autonomy, should play when authorizing medical interventions intended to improve soldier resilience or lethality. One could simply adopt a policy requiring consent. However, necessity will impose a great deal of pressure to override that requirement not only in cases where consent is not possible to obtain, but when it simply is not likely to be forthcoming. The U.S. military, for example, sought and received a consent waiver to provide pyridostigmine bromide to counteract the effects of nerve agent by arguing a combination of military necessity, benefit to soldiers, inability to obtain informed consent, and lack of effective alternatives that did not require informed consent.⁶⁶

Faced with a choice of risking some negative side effects to soldiers or significant casualties and possible mission failure, the Department of Defense conformed to Rawls' condition that goods — in this case the right to consent — should only be sacrificed to obtain more of the same good. Assuming the vaccine was effective, had the Iraqis used nerve agent arguably more soldiers' lives would have been spared than those affected by symptoms later on.

I will say more regarding whether the Defense Department's decision was justified later. For now, it is important to note that part of the department's justification was that there was not sufficient time to test the safety of the drug. While it had been shown to be safe for patients with a certain autoimmune disease, there was insufficient testing on healthy populations to understand the range of effects the drug could have. However, the Defense Department had been stockpiling pyridostigmine bromide for use as a nerve agent vaccine since 1986, but had not taken any steps to collect the data necessary to determine the safety of the drug.⁶⁷ Thus, as Ross M. Boyce points out, the department's claim that obtaining consent was not feasible was really "code" for "non-consent is not acceptable."⁶⁸

This point simply underscores the importance of addressing one's moral commitments regarding new technology early in the development and acquisition process.

Enhancements also have a coercive side that can render consent pointless. To the extent an enhancement improves soldiers' short-term survivability, there can be significant pressure to accept the enhancement despite the possibility of long-term side effects. Depending on the severity and likelihood of the side effects and the degree to which the enhancement improves chances of survivability, accepting the enhancement and risking the side effects will typically make sense. Placing persons in such a situation, where they must choose between undesirable options, is a form of coercion.⁶⁹

Justice

In the context of military ethics, most concerns of justice are captured in the just war tradition, which, as described above, is a subset of the war convention. The principles associated with both the ends of war (*jus ad bellum*) and the means of war (*jus in bello*) in the war convention are intended to apply universally, regardless of which side one is on. Embedded in the tradition is a conception of human dignity that allows for holding others accountable for their actions, but not using them as mere means. One is permitted to kill an enemy, for example, because the enemy is a threat. When an enemy is no longer a threat, either due to surrender or injuries, that permission goes away. In this way, the just war tradition recognizes the equality of all the actors without having to recognize the moral equality of their respective causes.

Technology can impact justice at both these levels. Any technology that distances soldiers from the violence they do or decreases harm to civilians will lower the political risks associated with using that technology.⁷⁰ The ethical concern here is to ensure that decreased risk does not result in increased willingness to use force. By decreasing risk, these technologies can incentivize disregarding costlier, but nonviolent, alternatives, possibly violating the condition of last resort. Thus, one risks offsetting the moral advantage gained from

greater precision and distance.

The question of adhering to just war norms, however, does not exhaust the justice concerns associated with disruptive technologies in the military context. The accountability gap also raises such issues. One could, for example, adopt a general policy holding operators and commanders responsible for the actions of the machines they employ. However, as noted above, those operators and commanders could do everything right *and* their machines could be functioning appropriately and moral harm could still be done. It seems unjust to place soldiers in such a position.

Human enhancement technologies similarly raise fairness concerns. It might seem unfair to provide some soldiers enhancements while denying it to others. However, one can always compensate non-enhanced soldiers by reducing their risk. But to the extent those enhancements make the soldier more lethal, they also make it more likely enhanced soldiers will see combat and thus be exposed to more risk. Thus, in the military context, inequality can accrue to the enhanced rather than the non-enhanced. What may matter more is not who *gets* to receive an enhancement as much as it is who *must* receive one.

Cyber technologies also raise concerns regarding justice, most notably when it comes to privacy. Edward Snowden's revelations that the U.S. government collected information on its citizens' private communications elicited protests as well as legal challenges about the constitutionality of the data collection.⁷¹ While these revelations mostly raised civil rights concerns, the fact that other state and nonstate actors can conduct similar data collection also raises national security concerns. Maj. Gen. Charles Dunlap observed back in 2014 that U.S. adversaries, both state and nonstate, could identify, target, and threaten family members of servicemembers in combat overseas, in a way that could violate international law.⁷²

In what Dunlap refers to as the "hyper-personalization" of war, adversaries could use cyber technologies to threaten or facilitate acts of violence against

combatants' family members unless the combatant ceases to participate in hostilities.⁷³ Adversaries could also disrupt family members' access to banking, financial, government, or social services in ways that significantly disrupt their life. Such operations would violate the principle of discrimination as well as expand the kinds of intentional and collateral harm civilians can suffer in wartime.

Well-Being

Well-being takes into account not only physical safety and health, but also mental health and quality of life. So far, this discussion has provided numerous examples where disruptive technologies have placed all those concerns at risk. Pervitin, for example, caused circulatory and cognitive disorders.⁷⁴ Pyridostigmine bromide use is also closely associated with a number of long-term side effects including "fatigue, headaches, cognitive dysfunction, musculoskeletal pain, and respiratory, gastrointestinal and dermatologic complaints."⁷⁵ As noted above, the likelihood of these side effects was not fully taken into account due to inadequate testing at the time.

Human enhancement technologies are not the only technologies that pose a risk to the well-being of soldiers. Risk-reducing technologies, such as autonomous weapon systems or cyber operations conducted from positions of relative safety, have been associated with both desensitization and trauma on the part of operators. In fact, use of these technologies has resulted in a complex variety of mental injuries among soldiers who employ remote systems. For example, a 2017 study catalogued a number of mental trauma, including moral disengagement as well as intensified feelings of guilt resulting from riskless killing among drone operators.⁷⁶ Making matters even more complex, a 2019 study of British drone operators suggested that environmental factors, such as work hours and shift patterns, contributed as much, if not more so, to the experience of men-

66 Patrick Lin, Maxwell Mehlman, and Keith Abney, *Enhanced Warfighters: Risk, Ethics, Policy* (Cleveland, OH: Case Western University, 2013), 47; and Efthimios Parasidis, "Human Enhancement and Experimental Research in the Military," *Connecticut Law Review* 44 no. 4 (April 2012): 1125, in Pfaff, "Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement," 31.

67 Boyce, "Waiver of Consent," 14.

68 Boyce, "Waiver of Consent," 10.

69 Pfaff, "Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement," 33–34.

70 Of course, decreasing risk to soldiers often comes at the expense of increasing risk to civilians and vice versa. The point here is that committing to one over the other does not necessarily bring about better moral outcomes.

71 Patrick Toomey, "The NSA Continues to Violate Americans' Internet Privacy Rights," *The American Civil Liberties Union*, Aug. 22, 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/nsa-continues-violate-americans-internet-privacy>.

72 Charles J. Dunlap Jr., "The Hyper-Personalization of War: Cyber, Big Data, and the Changing Face of Conflict," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (2014): 115, https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty_scholarship/3381/.

73 Dunlap, "The Hyper-Personalization of War," 115.

74 Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany* (London: Allen Lane, 2016). See also, Andreas Ulrich, "The Nazi Death Machine: Hitler's Drugged Soldiers," *Der Spiegel*, May 6, 2005, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/the-nazi-death-machine-hitler-s-drugged-soldiers-a-354606.html>.

75 Roberta F. White, et al., "Recent Research on Gulf War Illness and Other Health Problems in Veterans of the 1991 Gulf War: Effects of Toxicant Exposures During Deployment," *Cortex*, no. 74, (January 2016): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2015.08.022>.

76 Alaa Hijazi et al., "Psychological Dimensions of Drone Warfare," *Current Psychology* 38, no. 5, (October 2019): 1285–96, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12144-017-9684-7>.

tal injury as visually traumatic events associated with the strikes themselves.⁷⁷

Social Disruption

Social disruption in this context has two components. The first is the civilian-military relationship, which is expressed not only in terms of control, but also in terms of how that relationship reflects how a military organizes for war and performs in combat.⁷⁸ Risk-reducing technologies, for example, not only alter how society rewards military service, it can alter who serves. As P.W. Singer observed a decade ago, multiple technologies are driving the military demographic toward being both older and smarter — the average age of the soldier in Vietnam was 22, whereas in Iraq it was 27.⁷⁹ Further complicating the picture is the fact that those younger soldiers may be better suited to using emerging military technologies than those who are older and in charge.⁸⁰

Not only could this pressure the military to reconsider how it distributes command responsibilities, it also pressures it to reconsider whom it recruits, as mentioned above.

Singer also notes, however, that contractors and civilians, who are not subject to physical or other requirements associated with active military service, may be better positioned to use these autonomous and semi-autonomous technologies.⁸¹ Doing so, especially in the case of contractors, could allow the military to engage in armed conflict while displacing health care and other costs to the private sector. If, as discussed above, remote warfare comes with its own harms, or if operators in the future require enhancements to operate the equipment, there could be a significant population of physically and mentally injured people who do

not have adequate health care. Consider: 80 percent of contractors who deployed to Iraq reported having health insurance for the time they were deployed, but that insurance was not available if they experienced symptoms after their return.⁸²

In addition, these trends could affect the professional status of the military. If the expert knowledge required to defend the nation is predominantly employed by civilians, it is possible that the military will not retain its professional status. Instead, it could devolve into a technocratic bureaucracy that manages civilian skills and capabilities, while relatively few soldiers bear the burden of risk.⁸³ Such a bureaucracy will not be up to the task of the ethical management of disruptive technologies.

It is this reduction of risk, which is arguably the point of military innovation in general, that will have the most disruptive impact on the civilian-military relationship. Society rewards soldiers precisely because they expose themselves to risks and hardships on society's behalf. If soldiers experience neither risk nor sacrifice, they are not really soldiers as currently conceived and are likely better thought of as technicians than warriors. While enhancing soldier survivability and lethality always makes moral sense, enhancing it to the point of near-invulnerability (or even the perception of invulnerability) will profoundly alter the warrior identity. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but militaries need to be prepared for such disruptive effects.⁸⁴

The second concern, of course, is the transfer of technology — or its effects — to civil society. Of course, such a transfer is not always a bad thing. Perhaps the most beneficial technology of all, duct tape, was developed by Johnson and Johnson to seal ammunition boxes so they could be opened quickly.⁸⁵ Missile technologies for military use, another example, paved the way for space explo-

ration. However, not all transfers of military innovation are as helpful as these. Cocaine use, for example, became widespread in Europe during and after World War I as addicted troops returned home.⁸⁶ Of course, military technologies would not transfer to civilian use unless there is a perceived benefit. However, even when there is such a benefit, there can also be a downside to those transfers. One major concern is the way military research often can distort research priorities and direct technology development in a way that reduces the efficiency of civilian applications. For example, the U.S. Navy's dominant role in the development of nuclear reactors led to design choices that were less efficient and came with greater risk than alternative designs.⁸⁷

There is, of course, a lot more one can say regarding the potential disruptive effects of these technologies. Perhaps more to the point, there is not much more to say regarding whether the United States should develop these technologies for military purposes. As long as adversaries are willing to do so, as noted earlier, the pressure to develop such technologies will be overwhelming. What we now need is an ethic governing that development.

Permissibility and Disruptive Technologies

Military ethics employs a certain logic. This logic begins with a just cause, understood as a response to an act of aggression. In response to that aggression, soldiers will seek means that maximize the harm done to the enemy while minimizing risk to themselves. Such means are justified by virtue of the fact that if one is fighting for a just cause, one maximizes the good by winning. While such justification does preclude gratuitous acts of violence, it precludes little else. Military necessity will justify

whatever means are more likely to lead to victory with the least expenditure of time, resources, and human lives. Since enemy lives — both combatant and noncombatant — stand in the way of that victory, they are discounted relative to those defending against an aggression. Thus, if one left the justification for military measures to utilitarian calculations, then no technologies — including weapons of mass destruction — would be prohib-

If soldiers experience neither risk nor sacrifice, they are not really soldiers as currently conceived and are likely better thought of as technicians than warriors.

ited as long as one could make a reasonable case that harm to the enemy was maximized and risk to one's own soldiers minimized.

However, as Walzer notes, while “the limits of utility and proportionality are very important, they do not exhaust the war convention.”⁸⁸ That is because, even in war, people have rights, and those who do not pose a threat, whatever side of the conflict they are on, have a right not to be intentionally killed.⁸⁹ As Arthur Isak Applbaum puts it, utility theory “fails to recognize that how you treat people, and not merely how people are treated, morally matters.”⁹⁰

Thus, while aggression permits a response, it does not permit any response. Just as an act of aggression represents a violation of rights, any response should respect rights, which is to say it should be discriminate, necessary, and proportional. To be morally permissible, the effect of the means used has to not only conform to *jus in bello* norms associated with international humanitarian law and, more broadly, the just war tradition, but also to the obligations one owes members of one's community — both soldiers and civilians alike. To be necessary, there must not be any effective alternative that results in less harm. To be proportional, the good achieved must outweigh

77 A. Phillips, D. Sherwood, N. Greenberg, and N. Jones, “Occupational Stress in Remotely Piloted Aircraft System Operators,” *Occupational Medicine* 69, no. 4 (June 2019): 244–50, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqz054>.

78 Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 42. Martin Shaw describes a way of war as a “particular way of organizing for war adopted by an actor or group of actors.”

79 Kim Parker, Anthony Cilluffo, and Renee Stepler, “6 facts About the U.S. Military and Its Changing Demographics,” *Pew Research Center*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/>. According to this report, in 2017, the average age of enlisted soldiers was 27 years old. The survey also notes that 92 percent of enlisted have completed high school or some college, compared to 60 percent for civilians of similar ages. However, 19 percent of civilians in the same age range have bachelor's degrees compared to 7 percent of enlisted.

80 P.W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 368–71.

81 Singer, *Wired for War*, 372.

82 Molly Dunigan et al., *Out of the Shadows: The Health and Well-Being of Private Contractors Working in Conflict Environments* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 2013), xvii–xviii.

83 Don M. Snider, “The U.S. Army as Profession,” in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 13.

84 Pfaff, “Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement,” 32–33. See also, Nick Bostrom, “Dignity and Enhancement,” in *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, March 2008), https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/human_dignity/chapter8.html. Bostrom writes more generally on how enhancements impact human dignity and affect how humans assess the value of the actions of others.

85 “The Long History of Duct Tape,” PPM Industries, Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.ppmindustries.com/en/news/long-history-duct-tape>.

86 Lukasz Kamienski, *Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 96–97.

87 Mario Pianta, *New Technologies Across the Atlantic: US Leadership or European Autonomy?* (Tokyo: The United Nations University Press, 1988), section 4.3, <https://unu.edu/publications/books/new-technologies-across-the-atlantic-us-leadership-or-european-autonomy.html>.

88 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 130.

89 Thomas Nagel, “War and Massacre,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1972): 123–44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264967>.

90 Arthur Isak Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries: The Morality of Roles in Public and Professional Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 173.



the harm. These conditions apply not just to the technologies themselves, but to the disruption they cause.

In what follows, I will discuss each of these conditions and how they apply to disruptive technologies to arrive at a general framework for their acquisition.

Moral Effect

Moral effect refers to the potential that employing a weapon, or any means of warfare, has for conforming to or violating moral norms. Conforming to these norms is one of the conditions required to determine the moral permissibility of developing a disruptive technology. Moral effect not only concerns a technology's effect on noncombatants or other prohibited targets but also on the soldiers who would employ them and the society they defend. There are, of course, already rules in place governing the acquisition of new military technology. International law prohibits the development and acquisition of weapons that intentionally cause unnecessary suffering, are indiscriminate in nature, or cause widespread, long-term and severe

damage to the natural environment or entail a modification to the natural environment that results in consequences prohibited by the war convention.⁹¹ It goes without saying that these rules would apply to disruptive technologies.

To the extent new technologies would violate these rules, they would be characterized *mala in se*, or "evil in themselves." Acquiring such technologies would be prohibited. In fact, Article 36 of the Geneva Conventions' Additional Protocol I specifically states,

In the study, development, acquisition or adoption of a new weapon, means or method of warfare, a High Contracting Party is under an obligation to determine whether its employment would, in some or all circumstances, be prohibited by this Protocol or by any other rule of international law applicable to the High Contracting Party.⁹²

The protocol, like the rest of the war convention, only addresses obligations to adversaries. Unsurprisingly, it says little about what one owes one's own citizens and soldiers. Here, Kant's imperative

to avoid treating people as mere means applies. In general, complying with this imperative means governments and military commanders should avoid deceptive and coercive policies when it comes to new technology acquisition and employment. Having said that, respecting someone as an end does not always entail taking into account individual preference. By taking on their particular role, soldiers have agreed to take on certain risks and make certain sacrifices in service to their country. These risks and sacrifices require, sometimes at least, subordinating their autonomy to military necessity. While I will discuss necessity in more detail later, the question here is, when is such subordination permissible?

Boyce, in his discussion regarding the use of pyridostigmine bromide in the Gulf War, acknowledges the government's claim that soldiers may be subjected to some risk of harm if it "promotes protection of the overall force and the accomplishment of the mission."⁹³ As noted above, such a utilitarian limit is helpful, in that it does restrict what counts as permissible by aligning it with the needs of other soldiers and citizens. As is true regarding most utilitarian constraints, however, this limit still seems to permit too much. In this case, it allowed the government to force soldiers to take a drug that had not been adequately tested and which caused subsequent harm.

The problem with following a general policy that soldier autonomy should be subordinated to the greater good is that such calculations pit individual interests against often ill-defined conceptions of the good or insufficient understandings of how a particular act works to realize the good. The fact that no soldiers were exposed to nerve agent in the Gulf War underscores this point. The difficulty here is that these calculations are typically plagued by uncertainty and imprecision not only in causes and effects but also in weighing a particular good against a particular harm, points I will return to later in the discussion on proportionality. More importantly, as noted above, they also place few limits on the kinds of harm soldiers must endure as long as the government can make a plausible case that enough others benefit. So, just as moral effect places additional limits on how one treats an enemy, it should place similar limits on how one treats one's own citizens, including those who agreed to serve.

Thus, when questions of utility arise, we need a

way to ensure that whatever one does, one takes into account the interests of all the individuals affected by that decision. Sven Ove Hansson argues that permissions to expose others to risk should be based on one of the following justifications: self-interest, desert, compensation, and reciprocity.⁹⁴ Since the concern here is coercively assigning risk, self-interest and reciprocity do not really apply, though, as the discussion on autonomy showed, the conditions governing self and mutual interest can shape interests in a way that is essentially coercive. This does not mean that one should never permit individuals to take on such risks. It does, however, require considering the conditions under which such decisions are made and removing any unjust coercive elements.

Desert refers to the extent someone has done something to warrant involuntary exposure to risk. This category also does not apply to soldiers. Desert used in this sense is a function of justice: One's virtuous actions can entitle one to some benefit while one's vicious actions can entitle one to some punishment.⁹⁵ Becoming a soldier, by itself, is neither virtuous nor vicious. Individual motivations for joining the military range from the admirable, to the self-interested, to the pathological. One might admire the individual who foregoes a more lucrative civilian career to take on the burden of soldiering. But in such cases what one admires is the sacrifice more than the particular choice. One might also condemn the individual who joins because he or she enjoys the prospect of killing. But again, in general, it is the motivation we condemn, not the activity of soldiering. Since soldiering does not really factor into what one thinks either individual deserves, it cannot be the basis for coercively assigning risk based on desert.

A better basis for assigning risk that accounts for fairness is compensation. There are two forms of compensating for risk: One in which an individual accepts risk but is not harmed, and the other in which an individual is actually harmed.⁹⁶ In the former, one is compensated simply for taking risk and in the latter one is compensated only if harm occurs.

In general, society confers benefits on individuals who accept the risks associated with soldiering. In addition to pay and benefits, soldiers have opportunities for education and social recognition not available to civilians. To the extent soldiers are harmed while serving, they may accrue additional benefits

91 William H. Boothby, ed., *New Technologies and the Law in War and Peace* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 37.

92 Yoram Dinstein, *The Conduct of Hostilities Under the Law of International Armed Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87.

93 Boyce, "Waiver of Consent," 2.

94 Sven Ove Hansson, "Ethical Risk Analysis," in *The Ethics of Technology: Methods and Approaches*, ed. Sven Ove Hansson (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 162.

95 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 314–15.

96 Hansson, "Ethical Risk Analysis," 163.

such as pensions and long-term medical care. Because soldiers consent to receive such benefits in exchange for their willingness to take risks, they may be ordered by their commanders into harm's way, even though there is the possibility they will die. More to the point, they may be ordered to do so despite their immediate preference otherwise.

There is, of course, an asymmetry in risk and compensation that suggests any compensation that the service or society offers is not going to be entirely commensurate with the sacrifices some soldiers will make. Soldiers take on an unlimited liability to harm because they have answered the call to serve and that is what service demands. However, there are limits on the sources of harm to which soldiers may be exposed. Soldiers are expected to risk being killed by the enemy. They are not expected to risk being killed by their leadership. That fact places a limit on the kinds of risks leaders can require soldiers to accept when assimilating new technologies, especially when the risks associated with those technologies are neither well understood nor thoroughly researched.

The role leadership plays, of course, obligates leaders to take extra measures to ensure soldier safety and well-being. It also obligates them to ensure that other less risky alternatives are taken into consideration. However, the uncertainty associated with these technologies means that such measures cannot fully guarantee that safety and well-being. The question then arises, should soldier consent be required when employing new technologies or are there conditions where it may be overridden?

As Applbaum also argues, in general, it is "fair" to act without someone's consent when it results in no one being worse off and at least some being better off. As he notes, "If a general principle sometimes is to a person's advantage and never is to that person's disadvantage (at least relative to the alternatives available), then actors who are guided by that principle can be understood to act for the sake of that person."⁹⁷ To illustrate, Applbaum draws on Bernard Williams' thought experiment where an evil army officer who has taken 20 pris-

oners offers a visitor named "Jim" the choice of killing one person in order to save the remaining 19 or killing no one, which will result in the evil actor killing all 20.⁹⁸

From the perspective of individual rights, Jim should not kill anyone. However, in this case, not violating one person's rights does not prevent the right from being violated. It just prevents additional violations. To the extent Jim presents each prisoner with an equal chance of being killed, the prisoners can understand that he is giving them a chance for survival and that he is doing so for their own sake, even though one person will be killed.⁹⁹ Thus, acting on the principle that it is fair to override consent in cases where no one is worse off and at least someone is better off seems a plausible justification for coercively assigning risk.¹⁰⁰

This rationale, in fact, was a factor in the Federal Drug Administration's (FDA) decision to grant the Department of Defense the pyridostigmine bromide waiver.¹⁰¹ Given equal chances of exposure to a nerve agent, everyone was in a better position to survive and since the expected side effects were not lethal, no one was in a worse position. Of course, given those side effects, granting the waiver is not a perfect application of this principle. Since there was no use of nerve agent, some were, in fact, worse off than if they had not taken the drug. However, what matters here is what soldiers would have chosen not knowing in advance what their individual chances were. Given the severe effects of the nerve agent and the relatively less severe possible side effects, it would be rational to take the drug. It is worth noting that the Defense Department agreed to follow up with those who took the drug to address any adverse effects.¹⁰² To date, these requirements have not been completely fulfilled.¹⁰³ That failure, however, does not undermine the principle. It does suggest an obligation to further minimize risk and harm even if the principle is fulfilled, but that is more a matter regarding appropriate compensation to soldiers exposed to the drug.

The remaining question is how to respond when adversaries persist in developing technologies

Thus, acting on the principle that it is fair to override consent in cases where no one is worse off and at least someone is better off seems a plausible justification for coercively assigning risk.

97 Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries*, 151.

98 Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries*, 150–51. For the original discussion of "Jim's Scenario," see, J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 98–100. I discuss this scenario in Pfaff, "Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement," 39–40.

99 Applbaum, *Ethics for Adversaries*, 151.

100 Of course, if Jim did not kill any of the civilians, it does not follow that their deaths are his fault. However, the point here is not to establish that killing the one individual is the best response to Williams' dilemma. It is just to highlight that utilitarian calculations are not the only justifications for shooting the one person. Rather one can choose to kill the one individual in a manner that maintains respect for people in a way that utilitarianism does not.

101 Lin, Mehlman, and Abney, *Enhanced Warfighters*, 37.

102 Pfaff, "Moral Autonomy and the Ethics of Soldier Enhancement," 39–40.

103 Parasidis, "Human Enhancement and Experimental Research in the Military," 1125–26.

that would otherwise be prohibited. Would that fact justify developing such technologies as well? The rationale behind the 1868 Declaration of St. Petersburg serves as a possible justification for doing so. In the mid-1860s, the Russian Imperial Army acquired exploding bullets that shattered on contact with soft surfaces and whose intended use was to blow up ammunition wagons. Even at the time, the imperial war minister considered it improper to use these bullets against troops because it caused suffering that was unnecessary to the purpose of military force, which is destroying enemy combat capability. In 1868, Russia convened a conference in St. Petersburg with 16 states, which resulted in an agreement to ban exploding projectiles under 400 grams, due to the unnecessary suffering they cause. At the conference, Prussia requested that the scope be broadened to deal with any scientific discoveries that had military applications, but Britain and France opposed and the request was not adopted.¹⁰⁴

The Russians did not develop exploding bullets with the intent to ban them. However, once the technology found an application that would have rendered them *mala in se*, they used the bullets as leverage to put a ban in place. This point suggests that there may be conditions where developing a prohibited technology — even if one does not field it — for its deterrent or counter-proliferation effect makes sense. Of course, pursuing a general policy that permits such development comes with a great deal of risk. Once technologies are developed, their use and proliferation can be difficult to control. For example, while bans on chemical weapons held in Europe during World War II, they have been used extensively in other conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq War, where thousands were killed.

Therefore, there need to be conditions for when deterrence and counter-proliferation can justify the development and use of prohibited technologies. Since the point of developing prohibited technologies is to control such technologies, establishing control measures should occur concurrently. Moreover, there is a difference between developing a technology and fielding it. Either should only be pursued to the extent it offers the necessary leverage to get the relevant bans or control measures put in place. Finally, even if

these conditions were met, a further condition of last resort would also have to apply. If there were alternate means to prevent or counter the development of prohibited technology, they should be considered first.

Necessity

Albert Einstein reportedly said, “I made one great mistake in my life — when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that atom bombs be made; but there was some justification — the danger that the Germans would make them.”¹⁰⁵ Einstein conditioned his support for the bomb not by the fact that it conferred a military advantage or that it could hasten an end to the war, but rather by the concern that the Germans might build one as well. The atomic bomb was not simply destructive. It was *inherently* indiscriminate. As such, its development — much less its use — violated the war convention.

However, Einstein’s other concern, that the Germans would develop it first, carried greater weight for him. A German bomb would very likely ensure a German victory. That fact does not change the moral permissibility of its use by any side. However, it does entail the *necessity* of developing the bomb first or finding some other means to neutralize the advantage the Germans would gain. It is worth noting that the fact that the bomb did not turn out to be necessary to defeating the Germans was a cause for Einstein’s regret.

Einstein’s experience underscores the important role necessity plays in assessing the permissibility of developing disruptive technologies. However, as his experience also suggests, what counts as necessary can be a little difficult to nail down. In the military context, Walzer describes necessity in terms of not only a capability’s efficacy in achieving military objectives, but also in terms of the expenditure of time, life, and money. Thus, something can only be necessary in relation to the available alternatives, including the alternative to do nothing.¹⁰⁶ It is not enough that something works — it must work at the lowest cost.¹⁰⁷ Under this view, any technology could be necessary as long as it provided some military advantage *and* there was no less costly means to obtain that advantage. For example, alertness-enhancing amphetamines would be considered necessary as long as other means to achieve that alertness,

such as adequate rest, were not available.¹⁰⁸

Conceived this way, necessity is more a reason for violating norms rather than a norm itself.¹⁰⁹ Invoking it when it comes to a disruptive technology gives permission to set aside concerns regarding moral permissibility and proceed with the technology’s introduction and use. Take, for example, two alternatives that both achieve the same legitimate military purpose, but one does it with less cost and risk while violating a norm while the other entails slightly higher but bearable costs and risks while not violating any norms.¹¹⁰ Returning to the amphetamine example above, if it were possible to achieve the same number of sorties by training more aircrews or placing bases closer to targets, then on what basis would drugging pilots be *necessary*? Clearly it would not be. Depending on what the violation entails and what the costs actually are, one could find oneself invoking necessity *unnecessarily*.

This view of necessity conflates effectiveness and efficiency, making efficiency the criterion that really determines what counts as necessary. When considering alternatives, one would only consider those of equal effectiveness. If a more effective option were available, it would be the one under consideration and the less effective ones would be disregarded. If the options under consideration are all equally effective, efficiency is the only way to distinguish between them. The problem with efficiency, however, is that it discounts the costs of violating the norm. Put simply, to the extent a norm reflects the values one holds, violating it risks those values.

Of course, it is not possible, except in the simplest of cases, to effectively weigh the value of a norm against expenditures in funds, material, and lives. How would one assess what level of risk to pilots is worth how many additional pilots, aircraft, or bases that would offset those risks? Fortunately, doing so is not really necessary. What matters is how the norm is accounted for in the conception of necessity itself. This is done by determining which less effective but norm-conforming actions should be considered alongside the more efficient action. Considering all possible actions would be self-defeating because it would include actions whose costs may be difficult to sustain. This would elim-

inate efficiency as a condition of necessity, leaving only efficacy, which, as discussed above, could justify too much by reducing the moral component of decision-making to an “ends-means” calculation.

By considering options that are sustainable, even if less effective, one can both account for the norm in question as well as preserve the value of efficiency in determining necessity. Here, sustainability refers to the adequacy of the technology to offset an adversary’s advantage, though it might not be the “best” option for doing so. Thus, when determining necessity, one should consider the sustainable options. When deciding between an efficient, norm-violating option and a less efficient but sustainable and non-norm-violating option, one should consider the latter as “necessary” instead of the former since it better accounts for the moral costs the option entails.

Doing so, of course, will not solve all of the problems associated with establishing the necessity of a given technology. There will still be cases, especially when it comes to technology acquisition, where there are no sustainable, non-norm-violating options. Yet, necessity will nevertheless place pressure on those who govern to act. As Walzer observes in his discussion on “dirty hands,” great goods are often accompanied by great harms. In fact, he argues, to govern is to give up one’s innocence since governing innocently is not just impossible, it is *irresponsible*.¹¹¹ This demand for “great goods” is acutely felt regarding matters of war. As David Luban notes, “if it is technically impossible to win the war under a given prohibition, the prohibition has no force.”¹¹²

The point is *not* that the ends of warfighting justify the means, but that the imperative of defense and avoiding moral harm are in tension. That tension, however, does not mean both choices are equally valid. Instead, it means one must find a way to preserve both norms. As noted earlier, frequent disregard of a norm, for whatever reason, is a good way to kill it. However, that fact does not necessitate absolutism. Sometimes, there are grounds for violating a moral commitment. The measure of the norm, then, is found in the other moral concerns those grounds represent.

For example, Walzer argues that when defeat is

104 Roberts and Guelff, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 29–30.

105 Alice Calaprice, *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 284.

106 Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150.

107 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 144.

108 Lin, Mehlman, and Abney, *Enhanced Warfighters*, 67.

109 Robert D. Sloane, “On the Use and Abuse of Necessity in the Law of State Responsibility,” *American Journal of International Law* 106, no. 3 (July 2012): 452, <https://doi.org/10.5305/amerjintlaw.106.3.0447>.

110 David Luban, “Military Necessity and the Cultures of Military Law,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 26, no. 2 (June 2013): 341–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S092215651300006X>.

111 Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” in *War and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 63.

112 Luban, “Military Necessity and the Cultures of Military Law,” 341.

not only imminent, but represents a grave harm — such as the enslavement of a people that would have resulted from a Nazi victory in World War II — then one is justified in setting aside *jus in bello* norms if there is no other way to carry on a defense. This is known as “supreme emergency.” Once defeat is no longer imminent, the permission to violate those norms would no longer apply.¹¹³ Of course, supreme emergency cannot be used as a justification in the context of disruptive technologies. Decisions about technology acquisition often take place long before wars start. So, while a future threat may be grave, it is not imminent. Nevertheless, one can construct a similar kind of threshold for disruptive technologies.

This is where Einstein’s condition regarding atomic weapons offers a helpful insight. Atomic weapons may have been the most efficient way to defeat Germany, but they were clearly norm-violating. Moreover, there were equally effective, if more costly, ways of winning. Had the Germans obtained atomic weapons before the Allies, however, those alternatives would have lost their effectiveness. This suggests another condition on necessity: It is not enough that an option provide an advantage — it must also prevent a disadvantage. Otherwise, it is difficult to make moral sense of the potential suffering such technologies can produce.

Einstein was right: The development of the atomic bomb, and I would argue any disruptive technology, should be conditioned on whether it avoids a disadvantage for one’s side that an adversary would likely be able to exploit. In this context, it is worth asking if it matters whether that disadvantage arises because of the adversary’s pursuit of the same technology or from some other capability. For example, would the pursuit of a disruptive technology be permissible to offset an adversary’s conventional advantage, such as superior numbers and equipment?

Answering that question would, naturally, depend on the alternatives available. For example, the United States deployed nuclear weapons in Europe as a way of compensating for the Soviet Union’s superiority in terms of personnel and equipment.¹¹⁴ In doing so, it threatened what would arguably be an immoral, if not also unlawful, means to counter an enemy advantage as a result of a lawful military capability. That would only be permissible if there were no other permissible options available, such

as matching Soviet forces conventionally. Even then, the use of nuclear weapons, if they could be justified at all, could only be justified in terms of a supreme emergency, which requires that a threat be grave and imminent.¹¹⁵

Arguably, the Soviet conquest of Western Europe would have met such a threshold, though in retrospect it is worth asking how likely it was that the Soviets would have attempted it. Nonetheless, threatening the use of these weapons had some deterrent value and to the extent there was no other equally effective but permissible option, it would have been acceptable to possess them for their deterrent effect, even if their actual employment would only have been permitted under very extreme circumstances.

Of course, the disruptive technologies considered here do not have an inherently impermissible effect. Still, because of concern over their potential disruptive effects, it is still the case that there would have to be some disadvantage that is being avoided as well as no reasonable, non-disruptive alternative in order to permit their use. However, having a moral effect and avoiding a disadvantage are not sufficient to assure the moral permissibility of a particular technology. As discussed, disruptive military technologies risk some harm and thus raise the question whether such harms, even if morally permissible themselves, are worth it.

Proportionality

The fact that a new technology may have a positive moral effect and also be necessary does not imply that its introduction is morally worth the cost. For example, the NATO allies could have chosen to initiate a draft and increase defense spending, rather than rely on nuclear weapons to achieve parity with Soviet forces. However, the cost not just in terms of resources, but also in social disruption, likely made that option, while possible, too costly to be worthwhile. Such situations suggest another criterion for determining whether it is worth pursuing a disruptive technology: proportionality.

In general, proportionality is a utilitarian constraint that requires an actor to compare the goods and harms associated with an act and ensure that the harm done does not exceed the good.¹¹⁶ In this way, proportionality is closely connected with necessity: For something to be necessary, it must al-

ready represent the most effective choice for pursuing the good in question. If there were a more effective option, then, as already mentioned, the less effective ones would no longer be necessary, unless they were sustainable and more humane.

This does not mean that proportionality and necessity are indistinguishable. Necessity refers to the alternatives available while proportionality refers to the scope of the response.¹¹⁷ This link between proportionality and necessity applies to the acquisition of new technologies. There has to be a reason to risk the possible disruption of a new technology, which is typically expressed in terms of the benefit it is expected to bring. Whatever that reason, part of what will make it a *good* reason is that, on balance, it represents more benefit and less harm than any alternative.

Though simple in form, applying the principle of proportionality can be difficult in practice. To do so, one needs to determine what goods and harms count as relevant and then determine how they weigh against each other.¹¹⁸ In the context of national security, necessity defines a good as deterrence, and failing that, victory, while it defines a harm as aggression or defeat. The pursuit of deterrence and victory in turn points to additional goods and harms, which include human lives and the environment. Technology acquisition would specifically include autonomy, justice, well-being, and social stability as goods. This list is not exhaustive of course. However, anything that promotes or strengthens these goods would count positively toward the proportionality of introducing a new technology. Anything that leads to a loss or degradation of these goods would count as a harm.

It should be clear however, that such a comparison is hardly straightforward. A technology that results in fewer deaths, both combatant and non-combatant, would be more proportionate than a technology that does not. However, as Walzer notes, “proportionality turns out to be a hard criterion to apply, for there is no ready way to establish an independent or stable view of the values against which the destruction of war is to be measured.”¹¹⁹ Even in conventional situations, it is not clear how many noncombatant lives are worth any particular military objective. The decision to conduct air at-

tacks against civilian population centers like Dresden was typically justified by the belief that doing so would incite terror and break German morale, ending the war sooner and saving more lives than the attack cost. That conclusion, as it turned out, was false. While morale may have suffered, German resolve did not.¹²⁰ But even if it had hastened an end to the war, one still has to consider how many civilian lives that is worth. That is not a question anyone can really answer.

Fortunately, one does not have to answer that question, or questions like it, in order to apply proportionality to moral decision-making. If proportionality is conceived of as a limit on action rather than a permission, then what matters is not whether an act is proportionate but rather whether an act is disproportionate. For example, one does not need a precise quantification to know that threatening divorce over a disagreement about what to have for dinner is disproportionate. Moreover, assessing the disproportionality of such an act does not require committing to what would be a proportionate response.¹²¹ But it does mean that after all disproportionate actions are rejected, then whatever ones are leftover are permissible, even if there is some uncertainty regarding the balance of the cost and benefit of implementing them.

Nor does assessing disproportionality mean that assessment is hopeless in more marginal cases. Take, for example, when Iran shut down electricity for approximately 40 million Turks because the Turkish government criticized its support for Houthi rebels in Yemen. Since the Turkish government’s criticism did not have a similar effect on Iranian civilians and civil life, imposing a massive blackout would count as disproportionate, even if there were no equally effective and less disruptive alternatives.

And yet, it would be extremely unsatisfying to leave it to intuition to determine disproportionality: One still has to determine how to weigh alternatives, even if one cannot precisely weigh specific goods against specific harms. The use of atomic weapons against Japan provides a useful illustration. Though clearly indiscriminate, those advocating for the bomb’s use argued persuasively that it was proportionate relative to the alternative of

113 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 251–68.

114 Donald A. Wells, ed., *An Encyclopedia of War and Ethics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 337.

115 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 259–60.

116 Thomas Hurka, “Proportionality in the Morality of War,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3557942>.

117 Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force*, 150.

118 Hurka, “Proportionality and the Morality of War,” 38.

119 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 129.

120 Barrie Paskins and Michael Dockrill, *The Ethics of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 45.

121 Brian Orend, *The Morality of War* (Ontario, CA: Broadview Press, 2006), 60.

invading Japan, both in terms of Allied and Japanese lives lost.¹²² They were probably correct: If one considered only this factor, then dropping the two atomic bombs was arguably proportionate. The fact that dropping the bombs remains morally

Thus, intending to kill someone with a low probability of success is proportionally equal to intending a lesser harm even though it comes with the same low probability that it will result in death.

questionable is due to their indiscriminate nature.

What this example shows is that when it comes to a new technology, it is not sufficient to simply consider discrete instances of its employment, even if one does so cumulatively. Given that two bombs were sufficient to bring the war to an end, one might concede the proportionality of proceeding with dropping them.¹²³ However, it is difficult to take back a technology once it is introduced. Thus, when considered more broadly, the introduction of nuclear weapons technology could reasonably be expected to lead to proliferation and an arms race as actors adjust to the new rules of competition these weapons bring with them. In fact, these issues were raised during the deliberations on their use, but apparently were discounted.¹²⁴

Even if one could come up with a way to commensurately measure goods and harms, there are deeper problems with simple comparisons, especially under conditions of uncertainty. In military contexts, proportionality is typically measured by comparing the intended good of achieving a particular military objective against the foreseen, but unintended, harms associated with achieving that objective. Under conditions of certainty, such a calculation would be relatively simple, if not straightforward. If the amount of collateral harm associated with accomplishing a military mission is known, then one has a basis on which to judge, on balance, whether a particular act is proportional. Moreover, this does not require precision. If one knows that an objective is of low value but that a significant amount of civilians or friendly combatants will die, one can judge it to be disproportionate. It just does not make moral sense to destroy a village to save it.

Under conditions of uncertainty, however, probabilities associated with any expected harm would seem to matter. As Patrick Tomlin points out, however, by taking probabilities into account one can end up with the result that intending a larger harm with a low probability of success could be just as proportionate as intending to inflict a much smaller harm but with an equally low probability of resulting in the larger harm. Thus, intending to kill someone with a low probability of success is proportionally equal to intending a lesser harm even though it comes with the same low probability that it will result in death.¹²⁵ It seems counterintuitive, however, that killing could, under any circumstances, be as proportionate as breaking a finger, assuming both resulted in a successful defense.

What Tomlin is underscoring here is that intent matters. As he writes, “It matters what the defensive agent is aiming for, and the significance of that cannot be fully accounted for in a calculation which discounts that significance according to the likelihood of occurring.”¹²⁶ A cyber operation to shut down an air traffic control system to force fatal aircraft collisions, even if it is unlikely to be successful, would be less proportionate than a cyber operation that disrupts an adversary’s electric grid, as Iran did to Turkey, even if there was similar loss of life. In the former, loss of life is intended, but unlikely. In the

latter, loss of life is unintended, but, depending on the scope of the outage and the resiliency of back-up power systems, could have the same probability of causing loss of life as the air traffic control example. The widespread disruption of electric power could affect life-sustaining systems in hospitals and care facilities as well as cause traffic accidents due to inoperable traffic lights.

Thus, what matters is not just a collective assessment of goods and harms, but how they pair up. If the intended harm pairs with a disproportionate outcome, then the act is disproportionate, even if the chances of the outcome occurring are low. Thus, under conditions of uncertainty, proportionality calculations should give greater weight to the intended harm, independent of its likelihood, and in so doing amplify the weight given to unintended harms.¹²⁷

It is not enough to account for intended consequences and unintended, albeit foreseen, consequences. One must take into account unforeseen consequences as well. Of course, specific unforeseen consequences cannot be taken into account since they are, by definition, unforeseen. But one could imagine that while the designers of the atomic bomb were aware of its destructive effects, they may not have fully foreseen the evolution of that technology into the fusion bomb, whose destructive capabilities risked global annihilation. Given that “ought implies can,” one cannot be morally faulted for a failure of the imagination. But what a person can be faulted for is not taking into account that failure of imagination.

This suggests that proportionality requires actors to consider how to manage the proliferation and evolution of any technology in advance of introducing it, not because they have an idea of what the negative effects will be, but because they do not. One may not know how a technology will affect matters of autonomy, justice, well-being, and social stability, but the fact that it could affect these things suggests that identifying measures to control the technology as well as minimize any disruptive impacts is morally required.

There are therefore three conditions that must be met when calculating the proportionality of developing and employing disruptive technologies. First, there is an obligation to demonstrate that the intended outcome is not disproportionate, calculated in terms of the intended disruptive effects. Second, one must consider foreseen but unintended harms independent of how likely they are to occur. Doing so forces the question, “If the harm were to occur, would introducing the technology still have been

worth it?” It also requires considering measures to prevent the foreseen harm from occurring, or at least minimizing its impact. Finally, it is necessary to ensure there are controls on the technology so that when *unforeseen* harms arise, there are tools available to minimize their impact.

Conclusion

The development of military technologies does not occur in isolation. Eventually, their unique attributes will find a civilian use and they will find their way into civilian markets. Of course, each disruptive technology will come with its own challenges. However, the fact that they are disruptive raises a common set of ethical concerns that should be addressed in advance of their acquisition and employment.

The first concern is identifying which technologies are disruptive. What matters is not how advanced or new a particular technology is, but rather how its attributes find utility among a community of users. What makes those attributes disruptive is that they change the way actors compete. This change can be both revolutionary and evolutionary. The advantage represented by a disruptive technology places pressure on actors to use the technology in non-normative ways, much like the submarine in World War I and II. To the extent that the community of users accepts that use at the expense of the norm it violates, its introduction is revolutionary.

That revolution can have far-reaching consequences. Had the international community simply accepted that merchant vessels were legitimate targets for submarines, it could have opened up other defenseless targets to attack, at least by weapon systems that shared similar vulnerabilities as the submarine. The fact that did not happen suggests that some norms, such as prohibitions on attacking the defenseless, are resilient. However, the utility of the submarine forced an evolution in norms that made room for its use. In so doing, it set conditions for the evolution of the submarine itself to make it more compatible with established norms.

The submarine is not the only disruptive technology whose introduction caused considerable harm before it and the norms that govern it found equilibrium. The most obvious takeaway is that one should not develop technologies that are inherently norm-violating. Having said that, however, it can be difficult to predict how a technology’s various attributes will find utility. So one must be prepared for such harms to occur and have taken measures and

122 Henry Stimson, “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” *Harper’s Weekly* 194, no. 1161 (February 1947), quoted in, Stephen Coleman, *Military Ethics: An Introduction with Case Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15–16. See, Michael Kort, *The Columbia Guide to Hiroshima and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 102.

123 Kort, *The Columbia Guide to Hiroshima and the Bomb*, 87. Kort points out that a number of U.S. officials involved in the decision to employ the atomic bombs believed that it would take at least three, if not more, bombs to force a Japanese surrender.

124 Kort, *The Columbia Guide to Hiroshima and the Bomb*, 96.

125 Patrick Tomlin, “Subjective Proportionality,” *Ethics* 129, no. 2 (January 2019): 265–66, <https://doi.org/10.1086/700031>.

126 Tomlin, “Subjective Proportionality,” 267.

127 Tomlin, “Subjective Proportionality,” 271.

adopted policies in advance to mitigate them.

Because the benefits of these technologies are associated with national security, there is a *prima facie* imperative to develop them. As previously discussed, the social contract obligates states to provide security for their citizens. Even if we only recognize, as Thomas Hobbes did, the right to self-preservation, entrusting that right to the state obligates it to defend its citizens from internal and external threat.¹²⁸ That obligation has to fall to someone, so states raise police forces and armies to provide security. Those who take up that task are further obligated to make decisions about how best to see to that defense. As Samuel Huntington argued, the military officer has a responsibility to the state, and by extension to the people it governs, to provide expert advice on national defense.¹²⁹ That means advising not only on *when* to wage war, but also *how* to wage it.

That responsibility entails two imperatives. First, decisions about whether to develop disruptive technologies cannot be abandoned without incurring a moral failure. Second, there will be times when developing disruptive technologies is not only permissible, but obligatory.

Avoiding Moral Failure

Regarding the first point, as discussed, there are conditions that should hold when developing disruptive technologies. Moreover, there are a number of measures and policies that should be adopted to maintain those conditions as the technology is developed and implemented:

First, it is necessary to allow for soldier consent to the extent possible when employing and integrating new technologies. This involves avoiding inherently coercive situations where soldiers bear significant costs should they not consent to a particular technology's use. When consent is not possible, it is necessary to ensure no one is worse off and at least some are better off than if the technology had not been developed or employed.

Second, one must ensure measures are put in place when beginning research on potentially disruptive technologies to manage proliferation.

Third, soldier well-being must be taken into account throughout the acquisition process and the

technology's effect on operators must be tested for all possible expected uses.

Fourth, it is required to pay attention to how the introduction of a new technology affects the distribution of reward and risk. This includes avoiding the establishment of a class of soldiers who bear most of the risk and a class that bears little. This outcome can be avoided by ensuring that, in general, soldiers rotate through assignments that involve varying degrees of risk such that over an enlistment or career risk and rewards are evenly distributed. This could require significant changes in career-field management. For example, individual servicemembers may need a range of physical and mental attributes to take on a variety of assignments new technologies make possible. It could also require servicemembers to acquire multiple skills to ensure they are capable of handling that range of possible assignments.

Fifth, it is necessary to manage the transfer of technology to society. This involves considering how technological attributes will be utilized in civilian markets and ensuring that military research is not conducted in a way that eliminates technology that is better suited for civilian use.

Sixth, all sustainable alternatives to the development and employment of a new technology must be considered, not just the most efficient ones.

Seventh, one must calculate disproportionality to take into account any intended harm independent of its likelihood, and in so doing amplify the weight given to unintended, but foreseen, harms.

Eighth, norm-violating technologies are to be developed only as a means to promote their ban or deter their proliferation and use. Efforts to ban or restrict such a technology must occur simultaneously with its development.¹³⁰

Obligation

Regarding the second point, there are two conditions that must hold to obligate developing disruptive technologies. The first condition is that, where the expected disruption promotes better moral outcomes, whatever form that may take, one arguably should pursue it. As mentioned earlier, changing the way actors compete is not necessarily a bad thing. If artificial intelligence, for example, re-

ally can make war more humane and any negative effects can be mitigated to the extent that at least some are better off and no one is worse off, then one *should* develop that technology. This last point is important. Simply having a moral benefit is not sufficient to obligate the development of disruptive technologies. On the other hand, simply having a morally negative effect is not sufficient to prevent such obligation. Nor is this simply a matter of utility. What matters is how the technology promotes the good, understood broadly here to include a range of moral concerns including rights, principles, virtues, and other universally held moral commitments that shape our sense of justice.

The second condition follows from the conjunction of the social contract and necessity. To the extent a disruptive technology avoids a disadvantage relative to an adversary, the pressure to develop it will be directly proportional to the disadvantage it avoids. This suggests that while not every disadvantage will entail obligation, some will. Technologies that meet this criterion are those whose possession by an adversary would undermine the state's ability to fulfill the social contract. Weapons of mass destruction serve as one obvious example. To the extent their possession allows an adversary to coerce concessions affecting the security and well-being of a state's citizens, then that state has an obligation to resist that coercion.

More needs to be said regarding what counts as security and well-being. As disruptive as the 2007 Russian cyber operations directed at Estonia were, it is not clear they would justify developing a prohibited technology in response.¹³¹ However, to the extent possession of a technology enables that resistance, and there is no other less morally risky alternative, then arguably the state *should* develop that technology. However, developing that technology brings with it a further obligation to work toward preventing its proliferation and use. Otherwise, one risks an "arms race" that, like last century's nuclear arms race, can increase the risk of the technology's use. The fact that nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945, however, suggests that if the consequences are severe enough, even the most self-interested actors can be persuaded to forego a technology's use.

The preceding account is not intended to be comprehensive. However, it does serve as a starting point to avoid Boris Johnson's nightmare scenarios of technology run amok. While much of what concerned him is extremely unlikely to occur, it is the case that these technologies will not only change

how we fight and who we fight, but what counts as fighting as well. This uncertainty is unresolvable. It is also inevitable. The advantages of such technologies frequently impose pressures that ensure their development. Thus the challenge is not to prevent their development, but to manage it to the extent possible, and to avoid the moral harms that their introduction invariably brings.

Dr. C. Anthony Pfaff is a research professor for strategy, the military profession, and ethics at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute and a senior non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council. The views represented here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States government.

Photo: [Maj. Penny Zamora](#)

128 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89–91 in *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Begby (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 445–47.

129 Samuel P. Huntington, "Officership as Profession," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 3031.

130 For example, the use of lasers to blind pilots led to an international agreement to ban such use as early as 1995. "Annex A: Protocol on Blinding Laser Weapons (Protocol IV)," in "Additional Protocol "Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects," United Nations, 1996, https://treaties.un.org/doc/source/docs/CCW_CONF.I_16_Part%20I-E.pdf.

131 George R. Lucas, "Emerging Norms for Cyber Warfare," in *Binary Bullets: The Ethics of Cyberwarfare*, ed. George R. Lucas et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 26–27.



WHITHER THE "CITY UPON A HILL"? DONALD TRUMP, AMERICA FIRST, AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Hilde Eliassen Restad



In order to understand Donald Trump's "America First" agenda, we must examine the master narrative that underpins it. Trump breaks with all modern presidents not just because he challenges the postwar "liberal international order," but because he rejects its underlying master narrative — American exceptionalism. America First relies instead on the narrative of Jacksonian nationalism. What makes America great, according to this narrative, is not a diverse nation unified in its adherence to certain liberal ideals, but rather ethnocultural homogeneity, material wealth, and military prowess. In this view, the United States is unexceptional, and therefore has no mission to pursue abroad. By shedding light on this alternative master narrative, we can better understand Trump's presidency, his grand strategy, and why a return to the status quo ante after Trump is unlikely.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world — and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.

— Harry Truman, 1947¹

We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.

— Donald Trump, 2017²

I. Introduction

While there has been ample scholarly debate on the Trump administration's grand strategy, there is one factor that deserves far more attention than it has received: Donald Trump's rejection of American exceptionalism.³ Trump breaks with all U.S. presidents since 1945 not just because he challenges the postwar "liberal international order," as many scholars have argued,⁴ but because he rejects its underlying master narrative. A master narrative is the enduring narrative of a nation, which, according to Ronald Krebs, constitutes the discursive playing field upon which voters and policymakers debate more discrete national security

1 "President Harry S. Truman's Address before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp; also known as the "Truman Doctrine."

2 Donald J. Trump "The Inaugural Address," The White House, Jan. 20, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>.

3 Peter Feaver, "What Is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?" *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/>.

4 See, e.g., the special issue on the liberal order by *Foreign Affairs*: "Out of Order? The Future of the International System," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January/February 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2017/96/1>; Doug Stokes, "Trump, American Hegemony, and the Future of the Liberal International Order," *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 2018): 133–50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix238>; and Robert L. Jervis, Francis Gavin, Joshua Rovner, and Diane Labrosse, eds., *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

narratives.⁵ Whether it was to promote "the four freedoms," to be "a shining city on a hill," or to be an "indispensable nation," presidents of both parties have based their arguments for U.S. leadership on a belief in American exceptionalism.⁶

Significantly, this master narrative has influenced not only presidential statements and rhetoric, but also actual foreign policy. Constructivist and liberal scholars of U.S. foreign policy argue that there exists a powerful national agreement on what role the United States is supposed to play in world history *because of what kind of nation the United States is believed to be*.⁷ This is not to say there has not been disagreement over U.S. foreign policy since 1945 — take, for example, the profound disagreement over the Vietnam War. But there has been a fundamental agreement that the United States should have a leading role in the international institutions it set up in the 1940s. One important reason for this was the powerful meta-narrative of American exceptionalism. Ironically, realist scholars have repeatedly confirmed

the importance of exceptionalism by lamenting its effect on American politics.⁸ Unlike the disagreement over *how* ideas of American exceptionalism influenced earlier U.S. foreign policy, then, scholars actually agree that, since World War II, the makers of U.S. foreign policy have operated under the assumption that the world needs U.S. leadership not just because of American military might or the dollar, but because the United States is exceptional.⁹ This elite agreement deepened, rather than weakened, after the end of the Cold War. In fact, Barack Obama invoked American exceptionalism in 31 percent more speeches than the average of all other presidents combined since 1945.¹⁰

The contrast with Obama's successor is stark. While Trump's attack on the "liberal world order" has received ample attention from scholars of U.S. foreign policy,¹¹ the analysis of Trump's puzzling rejection of American exceptionalism has only just begun.¹² Perhaps this is because Trump is often incoherent and self-contradictory and frequently tells lies and falsehoods,¹³ making an analysis of

his statements and policies challenging.¹⁴ Yet, as Charlie Laderman and Brandon Simms show, there are important consistencies in Trump's worldview, such as his critiques of NATO and China, as well as the general critique of U.S. leaders as fools taken advantage of by "wily foreigners."¹⁵ Another such consistency is the glaring absence of the narrative of American exceptionalism from his worldview. Indeed, Trump's rate of invoking American exceptionalism in his first year as president was less than half of the overall average across all presidents since World War II.¹⁶

Of course, in arguing that putting "America First" would make America "great again," one might think that Trump, in fact, is promoting American exceptionalism. The idea of American exceptionalism is certainly connected to "greatness." Republican voters might think Trump is embracing exceptionalism — understood as American superiority and even a sense of national mission — because the "America First" agenda is, to some degree, reminiscent of the Republican Party's foreign policy agenda.¹⁷

This article argues against this view. Trump's grand strategy is different *in kind*, and not just *in degree*, from U.S. postwar foreign policy because it rejects the underlying master narrative of American exceptionalism.¹⁸ The competing narrative Trump has adopted underscores this: The United States is not morally or ideationally superior to other countries — it is *not* an "exemplar."¹⁹ In fact, according to Trump's worldview, it is remarkably similar to countries that define themselves by materialist national interests and an ethnic national identity. Specifically, Trump's embrace of an "America First" foreign policy entails a rejection of the moral mission that has been central to modern U.S. foreign policy: promoting (in theory, anyway) liberal internationalism through democratization, free-market economics, and hu-

Trump's grand strategy is different in kind, and not just in degree, from U.S. postwar foreign policy because it rejects the underlying master narrative of American exceptionalism.

man rights.²⁰ Trump's master narrative views the world somewhat similarly to realists: as a competitive, anarchic place where it is every state for itself, where alliances are temporary, and only the fittest survive.²¹ In this worldview, making America "great" means making America economically wealthy, militarily powerful, and safeguarding the white, Christian cultural heritage of the United States. In other words, Trump's America First foreign policy platform is grounded in a master narrative perhaps best thought of as what Walter Russell Mead calls "Jacksonian" nationalism.²²

At the heart of Trump's rejection of the U.S. post-World War II grand strategy of international leadership, therefore, is a confrontation between two

5 See, Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13–15.

6 Jason A. Edwards and David Weiss, eds., *The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2011).

7 See, e.g., John Gerard Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue? Interests, Identity, and American Foreign Policy," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 89–125, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.21.4.89>; G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Karl K. Schonberg, *Constructing 21st Century U.S. Foreign Policy: Identity, Ideology, and America's World Role in a New Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Michael C. Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security* 32 no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 7–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30130517>; Krebs, *Narratives and the Making of US National Security*; and Hilde Eliassen Restad, *American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2015).

8 See, for instance, Robert Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1953/1964); Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

9 For the ongoing debate over the scope and nature of the "liberal international order," see, for example, James Goldgeier, "The Misunderstood Roots of International Order — and Why They Matter Again," *Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2018): 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1519339>; Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal World: The Resilient Order," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (July/August 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/liberal-world>; Patrick Porter, "A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order," *CATO Institute, Policy Analysis* No. 843, June 5, 2018, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/world-imagined-nostalgia-liberal-order>.

10 Jason Gilmore, Penelope Sheets, and Charles Rowling, "Make No Exception, Save One: American Exceptionalism, the American Presidency, and the Age of Obama," *Communication Monographs* 83, no. 4 (2016): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2016.1182638>.

11 Walter Russell Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (March/April 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2017-01-20/jacksonian-revolt>. For a counterargument, see, Elliot Abrams, "Trump the Traditionalist: A Surprisingly Standard Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 4 (July/August 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2017-06-13/trump-traditionalist>.

12 Media attention has so far been more attuned to this than scholars have. Some journalists laud this development, such as Janan Ganesh, who argues Trump has merely dropped the "pretense" in favor of "interest-driven statecraft." See, "Donald Trump Drops the Pretense on American Exceptionalism," *Financial Times*, Nov. 28, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/e292150a-f270-11e8-ae55-df4bf40f9d0d>. Daniel Sargent, on the other hand, laments that Trump has ended American exceptionalism by suggesting it is no better than Russia. See, "RIP American Exceptionalism, 1776–2018," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/23/rip-american-exceptionalism-1776-2018/>. Scholarship on how American exceptionalism, understood as a narrative, influences Trump's foreign policy approach has so far been scarce, but see, Stephen Wertheim, "Trump and American Exceptionalism: Why a Crippled America Is Something New," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 3, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2017-01-03/trump-and-american-exceptionalism>; Stephen Wertheim "Policy Series: Donald Trump Versus American Exceptionalism: Toward the Sources of Trumpian Conduct," *H-Diplo/ISSF Policy Series: America and the World – 2017 and Beyond*, Feb. 1, 2017, <https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5k-trump-exceptionalism>. For an early article, published before the presidential election, see, Anatol Lieven, "Clinton and Trump: Two Faces of American Nationalism," *Survival* 58, no. 5 (2016): 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1231526>. For scholarly work examining Trump's rhetoric on American exceptionalism, see, Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Doron Taussig, "Disruption, Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction: The Rhetorical Signature of Donald J. Trump," *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 4 (Winter 2017–2018): 619–50; Jason A. Edwards, "Make America Great Again: Donald Trump and Redefining the U.S. Role in the World," *Communication Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2018): 176–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2018.1438485>.

13 Pete Vernon, "Lie? Falsehood? What to Call the President's Words," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 29, 2018, https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trump-lie-falsehood.php.

14 Glenn Kessler, Salvador Rizzo, and Meg Kelly, "President Trump Has Made 10, 796 False or Misleading Claims Over 869 Days," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/10/president-trump-has-made-false-or-misleading-claims-over-days/>.

15 Charlie Laderman and Brandon Simms, *Donald Trump: The Making of a World View*, rev. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 98–99. See also, Colin Kahl and Hal Brands, "Trump's Grand Strategic Train Wreck," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 31, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/trumps-grand-strategic-train-wreck/>.

16 See, Jason Gilmore and Charles M. Rowling, "Partisan Patriotism in the American Presidency: American Exceptionalism, Issue Ownership, and the Age of Trump," *Mass Communication and Society* 22, no. 3 (2019): 389–416, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1559334>.

17 I thank Reviewer 1 for pointing this out. General skepticism of international institutions and multilateralism is as American as apple pie in both parties, but has been more pronounced in the Republican party since Woodrow Wilson. However, economic protectionism has never before in the post-World War II era been promoted by a Republican president to the extent seen with Trump. See also, Part III of this article.

18 David Corn, "Donald Trump Says He Doesn't Believe in 'American Exceptionalism,'" *Mother Jones*, June 7, 2016, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/06/donald-trump-american-exceptionalism/>. For a different view, see, Edwards, "Make America Great Again," 177.

19 See Part II for a discussion of what "exemplar" means in regard to U.S. foreign policy and American exceptionalism.

20 Donald Trump, "The Inaugural Address."

21 I am indebted to Melvyn P. Leffler for discussing this with me.

22 See Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt." See also, Taesuh Cha, "The Return of Jacksonianism: The International Implications of the Trump Phenomenon," *Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2016): 83–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2016.1261562>.

master narratives: that of American exceptionalism and Jacksonian nationalism. American exceptionalism is an ideational master narrative. It is a story about an ethnically and religiously diverse nation united in adherence to liberal ideas and institutions both at home and abroad. In contrast, the Trump administration's story of America is *ascriptive*: It is the story of a white, Christian race with materialist interests to pursue abroad.²³ To be clear: In labeling the two narratives ideational and ascriptive (or even materialist), I am not making an ontological distinction between the world of ideas and the world of matter. Rather, I am analyzing two different narratives that stress different ideas. It is, as such, an analysis based in constructivist theory. Furthermore, I am *not* arguing that the exceptionalist narrative has only led to good foreign policy outcomes and that America therefore ought to return to the pre-Trump era. In fact, the sense of moral superiority inherent in the exceptionalist narrative has demonstrably led the United States astray numerous times.²⁴ Rather than endorse one narrative over the other, this article analyzes the current foreign policy debate as a conflict between two master narratives, and contributes to a better understanding of what is at stake at this pivotal moment in American history: the meaning of "America" in the world.²⁵

This article is structured as follows: In section two, I define American exceptionalism and discuss its influence throughout U.S. history. In section three, I examine the political history of America First and Jacksonian nationalism, and compare each to Trump's own version of America First. I argue that Trump's America First platform is closely related to its historical predecessors in the 1940s

and the 1990s, especially its focus on economic and cultural protectionism. However, Trump's America First breaks with the historic focus on non-interventionism as Trump's version is more militaristic and interventionist. In the final section, I conclude by posing two questions: Can the United States simply "snap back" after Trump, and, if not, have we finally arrived at the "end of American exceptionalism"?

II. American Exceptionalism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Superiority, Mission, and Resisting the Laws of History

American exceptionalism is a set of ideas, not a set of observable facts.²⁶ As Richard Hofstadter famously observed, the United States does not have an ideology, rather, it *is* one.²⁷ These ideas define the United States as "an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but also superior among nations."²⁸ The belief in American exceptionalism is an "enduring identity narrative" in the United States,²⁹ and sets the parameters for how political leaders can and will narrate the story of "America" and its place in the world.³⁰ It is a narrative with a long pedigree. In the colonial era, British ideas of exceptionalism, which included a religious as well as a racial component, contributed to what would later become American exceptionalism, with specific claims to political exceptionalism made during the founding era.³¹

Today, this narrative defines the United States not as a country like many others, built on a blood-and-soil identity, but rather as an exceptional Enlightenment invention built on liberal ideas and ideals.³² It is a narrative so strong and so pervasive

it would be fitting to argue, as Anatol Lieven does, that "American exceptionalism' is just another way of saying American civic nationalism without using the word nationalism."³³ Significantly, historians as well as constructivist and liberal scholars of international relations see this narrative as not only influencing rhetoric, but also having played an important role in influencing U.S. foreign policy throughout U.S. history.³⁴

American exceptionalism, however, is a malleable concept and has been taken to mean different things throughout its history.³⁵ This is especially clear when considering the role race has played in the definitional struggle over the meaning of "America." There are three ideas that contribute to the master narrative of American exceptionalism.³⁶ The first is that the United States is superior to the rest of the world. The second is that, because of this superiority, the United States has a special role to play in world history — it has a moral mission to pursue abroad. The third is that where other great nations and indeed empires have risen to power only to fall, the United States will *not* — it will resist this law of history.

American Exceptionalism: Superiority and Mission

Below, I discuss how superiority and mission have manifested themselves throughout U.S. history. I will show, among other things, that American exceptionalism has been a rather malleable con-

cept, used to advocate for almost opposite foreign policy approaches.

Superiority

"America" has a long tradition of being seen as "superior" by its own people. This idea does not connote mere difference or uniqueness. Rather, the distinction is hierarchical: It classifies the United States as superior in both ideas and institutions and therefore it promotes an idea that America has a mission to fulfill.³⁷ This is different from patriotism,³⁸ as it implies more than just love of country. The belief that America is superior has had a first-order effect on how the United States views itself and its role in the world: Because it is superior, it has a mission to pursue, and in this mission, it shall not fail because its superiority enables the circumventing of the laws of history. The idea of superiority has also influenced the framing of American foreign policy.

U.S. presidents often use exceptionalist rhetoric in their speeches both at home and abroad, setting the country apart from or above its international counterparts.³⁹ This indicates a broad and deep acceptance of the idea of American exceptionalism among the American public.⁴⁰ A typical expression of this broad acceptance can be found in an article by commentators Richard Lowry and Ramesh Ponuru, who write that the United States "is freer, more individualistic, more democratic, and more open and dynamic than any other nation on earth."

23 For a discussion of the ascriptive tradition, see, Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); and see also, Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

24 Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

25 A note on terminology: Any study of national identity in the United States has to deal with the issue of what to call the United States of America. Americans themselves often refer to their country as "America." This terminology is problematic, however, especially to inhabitants of other countries located in the Americas. When writing on American exceptionalism, however, the term "America" has specific meaning. It is an expression of the national tendency to elevate the United States above others (such as those neighboring countries in the Americas). I thank Trevor McCrisken for these insights.

26 See, Hilde Eliassen Restad, "American Exceptionalism," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*, ed. Fathali M. Moghaddam (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017), 24–27. For a contrary view, see, Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

27 Quoted in, Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretative Essay* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 13.

28 Trevor McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1974* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 1.

29 See, Krebs, *Narratives and the Making of US National Security*, 13–15.

30 Krebs, *Narratives and the Making of US National Security*. See also, Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Deborah Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1998); and Nadim Khoury, "Plotting Stories After War: Toward a Methodology for Negotiating Identity," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 2 (2018), 367–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354066117711743>.

31 See, for instance, Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

32 Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

33 Lieven, "Clinton and Trump," 11.

34 Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*; McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam*; Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

35 The Puritans are often credited with an early version of an exceptionalist narrative. See, for instance, Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, and Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Typology of America's Mission," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 135–55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2712320>. That is not to say they created a kind of homogeneous, constant national identity seamlessly kept through history. See, Richard M. Gamble, *In Search for the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (New York: Continuum Books, 2012). The exceptionalist narrative was, however, present throughout the 1800s. When Alexis de Tocqueville observed that, "[t]he position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one," he pointed back to their "strictly Puritanical origin," as the first factor explaining this exceptionalism. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, volume II, chapter IX, "The Example of the Americans Does Not Prove that A Democratic People Can Have No Aptitude and No Taste for Science, Literature, Or Art." Access at, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html. See also, Rahul Sharma, *American Civil Religion and the Puritan Antecedents of American Foreign Policy*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (2019).

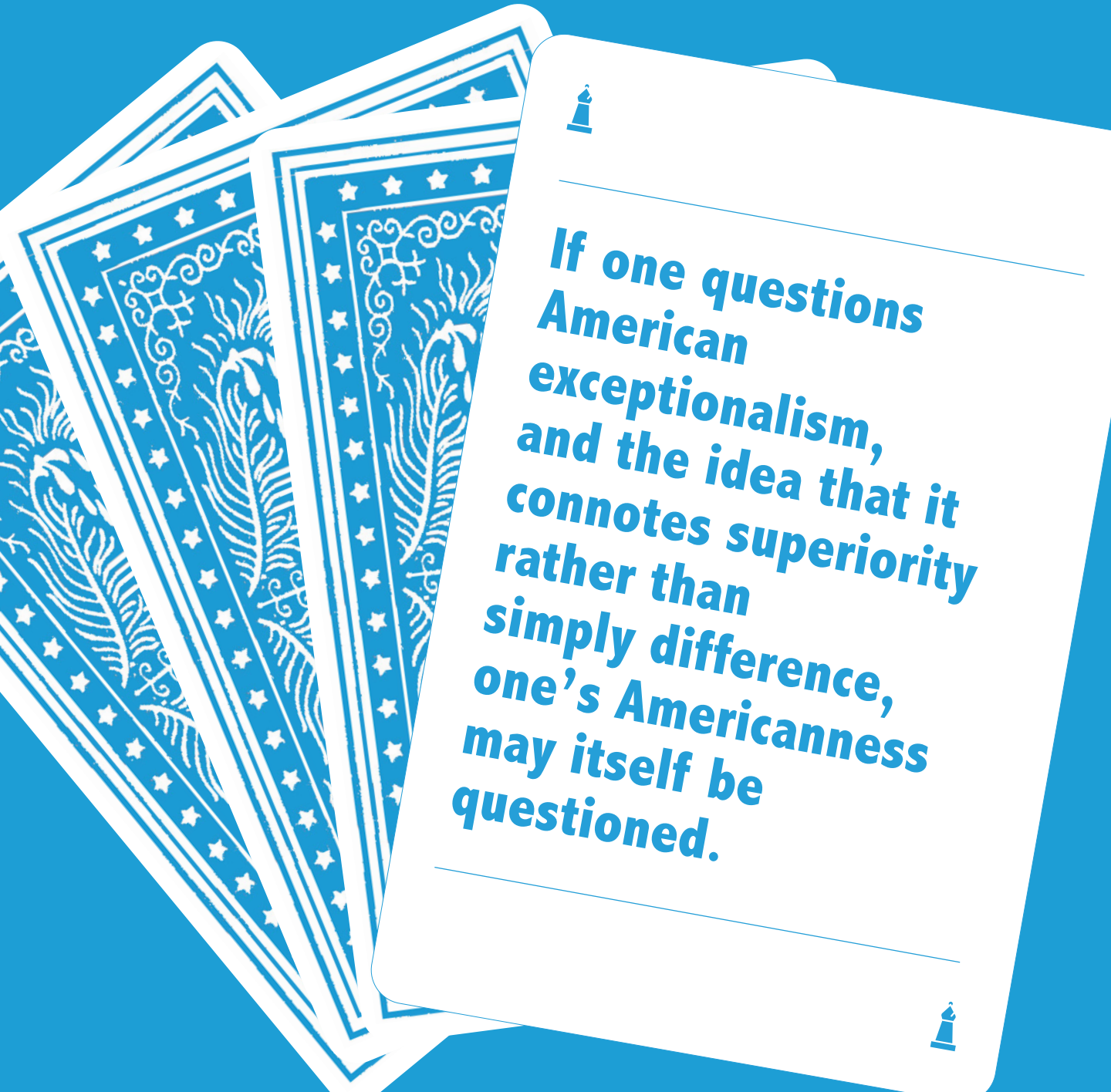
36 This definition builds on McCrisken, "Exceptionalism," in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy Vol. 2*, 2nd ed., ed. Alexander DeConde et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002), 64–65. I develop this more in detail in, Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

37 McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam*; Daniel T. Rodgers, "American Exceptionalism Revisited," *Raritan Review* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 21–47; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

38 See, Tom W. Smith and Seokho Kim, "National Pride in Comparative Perspective: 1995/96 and 2003/04," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 127–36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edk007>.

39 Jason A. Edwards, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World: President Clinton's Foreign Policy Rhetoric* (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2008); Gilmore and Rowling, "Lighting the Beacon"; Rico Neumann and Kevin Coe, "The Rhetoric in Modern Presidency: A Quantitative Assessment," 11–31, in *The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism*.

40 Jason Gilmore, "American Exceptionalism in the American Mind: Presidential Discourse, National Identity, and U.S. Public Opinion," *Communication Studies* 66, no. 3 (2015): 301–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2014.991044>.



If one questions American exceptionalism, and the idea that it connotes superiority rather than simply difference, one's Americanness may itself be questioned.

This they attribute to “our Founding and our cultural heritage.”⁴¹ This is, of course, not something that one can ascertain objectively. If one tried to measure levels of freedom and dynamism, one might find that the United States did not, in fact, top these rankings.⁴² This is immaterial, however. What matters are not the rankings, but rather the *belief* Lowry and Ponnuru (and most Americans with them) hold. American exceptionalism is the *master narrative* of the United States, not a fact to be measured.

The belief that the United States is superior to the rest of the world because of its ideals and institutions has been powerful, persistent, and pervasive throughout U.S. history. In fact, this self-perception is so well established in U.S. political discourse that American polling firms such as Gallup and the Pew Research Center actually poll Americans on their belief in American exceptionalism. Defined in various manners in such polls, American exceptionalism can be operationalized as a belief that the United States is the “greatest country in the world because of its history and Constitution” or that “American culture is superior to others.” In 2010, Gallup reported that a huge majority of Americans (80 percent) agreed with the statement, “The United States has a unique character because of its history and Constitution that sets it apart from other nations as the greatest in the world.” The fact that U.S. polling bureaus regularly ask Americans such questions speaks volumes about the pervasive belief in American exceptionalism (and, relatedly, the persistent fear that it is dwindling).⁴³ While the poll numbers vary, the exceptionalist master narrative has held for over two centuries.⁴⁴

If one questions American exceptionalism, and the idea that it connotes *superiority* rather than simply *difference*, one's Americanness may itself be questioned. It means one does not sufficiently believe in the idea of “America,” which is inherently suspicious. This became clear amid the harsh

criticism of Obama's answer to a question posed to him in Strasbourg, France in 2009 on whether he believed in American exceptionalism or not. Obama's answer seemed to convey an understanding of American exceptionalism as a relative phenomenon — a narrative, if you will. Contrasting American exceptionalism with narratives found in other nations such as Britain and Greece, Obama's answer — “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism” — was seen as rejecting the idea that American exceptionalism implies moral superiority. It set off a heated debate in the American media,⁴⁵ possibly because reports ignored the rest of Obama's answer. Obama, in the tradition of previous presidents, went on to say that he was enormously proud of his country “and its role and history in the world.”⁴⁶

Research on social and national identity indicates why Obama's initial qualifier would upset many Americans. As Jason Gilmore and Charles M. Rowling argue, messages that enhance the “standing of one's own national group” feed citizens' self-esteem and pride “because their own personal identity is tied to the image of that national group.”⁴⁷ Messages that counter this source of self-esteem naturally meet with resistance, as Obama's comments did.⁴⁸ Constantly invoking American exceptionalism is therefore not only a proven way that American presidents can bolster their community's feelings of self-esteem, but in fact is a vital part of nation-building in a country made up of many different ethnicities and religions.

Of course, the idea that America is exceptional because of its superior civic ideals rather than its ascriptive characteristics is not something there has been agreement about in American history. If seen as a battle between civic and ethnic nationalism, American exceptionalism has represented both at various times, again testifying to the malleability

41 Ramesh Ponnuru and Rich Lowry, “An Exceptional Debate: The Obama Administration's Assault on American Identity,” *National Review*, March 8, 2010, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2010/03/08/exceptional-debate/>.

42 See, for example, Ian Vásquez and Tania Porčnik, “The Human Freedom Index 2017: A Global Measurement of Personal, Civil, and Economic Freedom,” Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/2017-human-freedom-index-2.pdf>.

43 See, Restad, “Conclusion,” in *American Exceptionalism*.

44 Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America*.

45 Monica Crowley, “American Exceptionalism...” *Washington Times*, July 1, 2009, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jul/1/american-exceptionalism/>.

46 Robert Schlesinger, “Obama Has Mentioned ‘American Exceptionalism’ More than Bush,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 31, 2011, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/robert-schlesinger/2011/01/31/obama-has-mentioned-american-exceptionalism-more-than-bush>.

47 From, Gilmore and Rowling, “Lighting the Beacon,” 275. Also see, Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

48 Crowley, “American Exceptionalism”; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 1.

of the concept itself.⁴⁹ Originally, American exceptionalism stemmed from British exceptionalism, which entailed the promotion of a white, Protestant civilizational mission against the Catholic colonialism of the Spanish empire, as they competed over territory and influence in the “New World.”⁵⁰ Up until the American Civil War and the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, it was not clear whether a racialized definition of American exceptionalism or a civic kind of nationalism would prevail. While the civic nationalism of the “last, best hope on earth” won the Civil War, what civic nationalism actually meant was still under development. Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, allowed for a kind of melting-pot definition of the nation, but one that only included “races” from Europe, entirely excluding black Americans.⁵¹

Liberal ideals have been an important — yet contested — part of modern, post-Civil War, U.S. nation-building, but they have not been the only ones.⁵² Rogers Smith divides American identity into three equal strands: a “liberal” strand composed of classical liberal rights and liberties; a “democratic republican” strand composed of civic-minded participation by citizens who are motivated by a defense of the common good; and an “ascriptive inegalitarian” strand composed of nativist, xenophobic, and racial hierarchies. The contestation between ascriptive and civic definitions of “America” is why the narrative of American exceptionalism has been useful in the ongoing effort to create a nation out of an ethnically and religiously diverse population.⁵³

The Mission

In addition to being viewed as a “superior” republic, the United States is also on a world historical “mission” according to the narrative of American exceptionalism. What this mission consists of has been the source of constant and fierce debate throughout U.S. history, and has evolved over time.⁵⁴ What is clear is that this belief in a mission has influenced not just the framing, but also the content of U.S. foreign policy. Throughout American history, prominent groups have used exceptionalism to argue for both an interventionist foreign policy (i.e., a “missionary” version of exceptionalism) and a non-interventionist foreign policy (i.e., an “exemplarist” version of exceptionalism), attesting to how ideas of exceptionalism can be used for different — indeed contravening — political purposes.⁵⁵ Proponents of an exemplarist worldview have often defined the United States’ role as “standing apart from the world and serving merely as a model of social and political possibility.”⁵⁶ Creating a “more perfect union” is the meaning of the United States, which is why “meddling in the affairs of other states could cause irreparable harm to the U.S. body politic.”⁵⁷ Summarizing the exemplarist sentiment, H. W. Brands warned, “in attempting to save the world, and probably failing, America could risk losing its democratic soul.”⁵⁸

For a long time, most historians of U.S. foreign policy argued that as American exceptionalism cycled between exemplarism and missionary expressions, U.S. foreign policy was concomitantly isolationist or internationalist.⁵⁹ But this view was

highly problematic, as it required categorizing U.S. foreign policy before World War II — or at least up until 1898 — as isolationist.⁶⁰ Viewing early U.S. foreign policy up through the 1800s as an expression of exemplarism required categorizing “manifest destiny” as a form of domestic politics. The manifest destiny of the United States, as journalist John O’Sullivan wrote in 1845, was “to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”⁶¹ Testifying to the strength of the American self-conception as superior to the Old World, historians did not begin to compare “westward expansion” to European colonialism until the early 20th century.⁶² And yet, much like European great powers, U.S. foreign policy in the 19th century often consisted of wars of aggression and “civilizing” “inferior” races. Indeed, a constant feature of the U.S. debate over expansion and territorial conquest — whether on the continent or across the seas — was marked by the problem of race: who could be part of “America” and whether non-whites could truly become Americans.⁶³ For example, Thomas Jefferson associated Native Americans with the “earliest stages of civilization” and expected them to civilize or perish. This was certainly a “self-serving logic” that “provided the ideological rationale for an expansive republican empire,” as Peter Onuf writes.⁶⁴ Later, Andrew Jackson engineered the forcible removal of Native Americans from their lands southeast of the Mississippi River in order to make way for white settlers. While the tensions leading up to the Civil War slowed down U.S. settlement of the

western part of the continent,⁶⁵ its potential as a civilizing power was finally reached when the United States entered the Spanish-American War in order to, in the words of President William McKinley, “uplift and civilize” the savages languishing in the Spanish empire in Cuba and the Philippines.⁶⁶ William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt made similar arguments for the superiority of the nation, encouraging it to take upon itself the “white man’s burden” of civilizing “backwards” peoples.⁶⁷ The mission in U.S. foreign policy — whether directed at Mexicans, Native Americans, the Spanish Empire, or Prussian militarism — historically mixed elements of ethno-nationalism with Enlightenment ideals of democracy and capitalism, executed with religious zeal. Various presidents as different as Jefferson, Jackson, James Polk, McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson have endeavored to teach the world what to do and how to do it — to execute the “white man’s burden.”⁶⁸

While it is correct to divide the narrative of American exceptionalism into two foreign policy *articulations* — one missionary and one exemplarist — it is wholly inaccurate to argue these two articulations have been reflected in actual U.S. foreign policy history. In fact, while the missionary foreign policy — which is active, international, and sometimes aggressive — appears throughout U.S. history, there is very little evidence of an exemplarist foreign policy being employed. This is a common misconception, and, one might add, a consequence of having bought into the manifest destiny narrative of U.S. expansion in the 19th century, which

49 The seminal work here is Gerstle’s *American Crucible*.

50 Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America’s Foreign Policy from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20th Century* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 12.

51 Because of Roosevelt’s understanding of European nations as themselves mixed, and of (white) Americans as a result of this mix, Gerstle did not label Roosevelt’s view “ethnic nationalism,” because Gerstle defined this as a European-style ethnic nationalism viewing a *Volk* as “pure biological entities” as with the Ku Klux Klan. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 14–43, 44–45.

52 See, Rogers Brubaker, “The Manichean Myth: Rethinking the Distinction Between ‘Civic’ and ‘Ethnic’ Nationalism,” in *Nation and National Identity: The European Experience in Perspective*, ed. Hanspeter Kriesel et al. (Zurich: Ruegger, 1999), 55–73.

53 Smith, *Civic Ideals*; Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 59.

54 For a detailed discussion of this debate in various eras in U.S. history, see, Restad, *American Exceptionalism*. For an overview of the debates at the turn of the century, when the United States is widely seen to have become a world power, see, Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

55 Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 3.

56 Paul T. McCartney, “Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism” *Communication Quarterly*, no. 191 (2006): 401, quoted in, Jason A. Edwards, “Make America Great Again: Donald Trump and Redefining the U.S. Role in the World,” *Communication Quarterly* 66, no. 2, (2018): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2018.1438485>.

57 Edwards, “Make America Great Again,” 178.

58 H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), viii, quoted in, Edwards, “Make America Great Again,” 178.

59 See, Dexter Perkins, *The American Approach to Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver’s Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968); Frank L. Klingberg, *Cyclical Trends in American Foreign Policy Moods* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Ruggie, “The Past as Prologue?”

60 Some scholars might ask why use the term at all in this article. I agree that it is an unfortunate term that serves to confuse rather than enlighten debates over U.S. foreign policy. Because it is still — despite much scholarly effort — ubiquitous in popular and scholarly works on U.S. foreign policy, and has been used specifically about Trump, however, I use it in this article. Substituting it for other terms like “nationalism” does not quite work, since nationalism is an ideology and isolationism is a (mythical) foreign policy tradition. I thank Reviewer 1 for asking me to address this. Michael Hunt, “Isolationism: Behind the Myth, a Usable Past,” *UNC Press Blog*, June 29, 2011, <https://uncpressblog.com/2011/06/29/michael-hunt-isolationism-behind-the-myth-a-usable-past/>. But see also, Nichols, *Promise and Peril*.

61 Albert Katz Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny. A Study in Nationalist Expansionism in American History*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1935), 122.

62 William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Pub. Co., 1959); Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy Under George Washington* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1958). For more recent works, see, Peter Onuf and Nicholas G. Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Indianapolis, IN: Madison House, 1993); McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*; Manfred Jonas, “Isolationism,” in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy, Vol. II*, 2nd ed., ed. Alexander DeConde et al. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2002).

63 See, for example, Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and, Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

64 Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 13–14, also chap. 1.

65 Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Ernest N. Paolino, *The Foundations of the American Empire: William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992); and William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

66 Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1950), 520, cited in, Edward McNall Burns, *America’s Idea of Mission: Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 8.

67 “The White Man’s Burden” was a poem written by Rudyard Kipling originally published in the popular magazine *McClure’s* in 1899, with the subtitle “The United States and the Philippine Islands.”

68 See, Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, esp. chaps. 1, 2, and 4.

argues that the United States was simply taking control of territory God always meant for them.⁶⁹ Arguing that the United States was exemplarist during its first century because it was "geographically isolated,"⁷⁰ when it competed with European imperial powers for territory, ethnically cleansed Native Americans, and indeed fought a war of aggression against Mexico, renders the term "isolationist" meaningless.⁷¹

In fact, as revisionist historians of the Wisconsin School, led by William Appleman Williams, began arguing in the mid-20th century, rather than a cyclical U.S. foreign policy (where U.S. foreign policy was seen as "cycling" between internationalism and isolationism), the United States has *always* been interventionist.⁷² The territories not already owned by the United States in 1783 were not some mythical region waiting to be "civilized" by the United States. Rather, "westward expansion" was itself a settler colonial project.⁷³ Indeed, how could a supposedly isolationist country go from 13 colonies to controlling an entire continent *without* an interventionist foreign policy? Unfortunately, the isolationist thesis is still argued today.⁷⁴

As the United States grew in size and diversity, its impending great power status led to fierce debates over the white, Christian emphasis of its foreign policy mission. The racial aspect of "America" was toned down. Following World War II, U.S. presidents focused on the liberal ideas of exceptionalism, rather than the civilizational aspect of the "white man's burden," as the source of America's uniqueness and the reason for its mission in the world. Thus, American exceptionalism separated out its earlier racial components. Obama's understanding of American exceptionalism can be seen as the culmination of this evolving civic version of the concept: "Obama offered an inclusive vision of patriotism," writes Greg Gardin, "using

his own success to celebrate the country's meritocracy and as proof that racial division could be overcome through the gradual extension of liberal political equality."⁷⁵ As Obama said in 2007 as a presidential candidate, "Our exceptionalism must be based on our Constitution, our principles, our values, and our ideals."⁷⁶ It is with this modern, post-World War II master narrative that Trump has broken.

Resisting the Laws of History: Exceptionalism and Modern Foreign Policy from 1945 to 2015

With each historical era, the United States has proven itself resistant to the laws of history. Rather than rise and fall, it has only risen — vanquishing powerful enemies along the way.⁷⁷ After conquering an entire continent, the United States went about conquering the seas, and ultimately defeated two iterations of the worst the Old World had to offer: German militarism and fascism. Significantly, upon defining itself in contravention to Soviet Communism, the promotion of American exceptionalism became an important tool for U.S. presidents, especially in the era of what Jeffrey Tulis has labeled the "rhetorical presidency."⁷⁸ Against these ideologies American exceptionalism, understood as the adherence to liberal ideals, flourished. In foreign policy, the narrative of American exceptionalism has been used by presidents to communicate the purpose of U.S. foreign policy and therein garner support for their preferred policies, because what "America" means conditions what it can and should do in the world. In fact, argue Gilmore and Rowling, "The concept of American exceptionalism has become one of the most common features in U.S. political discourse."⁷⁹

The assumption that the United States has a "uniquely moral national mission has shaped de-



bates over foreign affairs since the nation's founding."⁸⁰ The narratives American presidents communicate about foreign policy exist on different levels: Any discrete national security narrative — such as that of "primacy" in the 1990s or the "Global War on Terror" in the 2000s — must operate within and adhere to the discursive landscape of the master narrative of exceptionalism.⁸¹ Over the years, presidents and political parties have disagreed on discrete national security narratives but not on the exceptionalist master narrative that has underpinned U.S. foreign policy since 1945, and which builds on a story about an exceptional America that dates to before the founding. Until Trump became president, this story constrained not only how U.S. presidential candidates and presidents framed the discourse on the United States and its role in the world, but policies themselves.

All U.S. presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt have taken pains to narrate foreign policy as a mor-

al mission based in American exceptionalism, understood as an adherence to "superior" liberal ideals.⁸² Since then, the United States has presented itself as a beacon to the world, standing for "a vibrant, forward-looking Americanism that presented itself as the highest expression of liberal universalism."⁸³ Many studies show how and why the idea of American exceptionalism has come to be so prominent in American politics, whether from the field of communications,⁸⁴ presidential studies,⁸⁵ or, more recently, international relations.⁸⁶ By promoting the idea of American exceptionalism, U.S. presidents have justified why the United States should play such an active role in international politics: because the world needs this exceptional nation and its benevolent influence. From this perspective, it was quite natural to conclude that what was right for America was right for the world.

An eloquent example of how presidents have framed U.S. foreign policy as a moral mission

69 Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*.

70 Charles A. Kupchan, "The Clash of Exceptionalisms: A New Fight Over an Old Idea," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March/April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2018-02-13/clash-exceptionalisms>.

71 Bear F. Braumoeller, "The Myth of American Isolationism," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (October 2010): 349–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00117.x>; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 3.

72 Williams, *The Tragedy of American Foreign Policy*; DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*.

73 In addition to the classic revisionist historians, see also, Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965); Paolino, *The Foundations of the American Empire*; Hietala, *Manifest Design*.

74 See, for example, Charles Kupchan, who argues that the only exception to the isolationism of the 1800s was 1898, when the United States "did experiment" with "broader imperialism," which then supposedly caused an isolationist backlash. Kupchan, "The Clash of Exceptionalisms."

75 Greg Grandin, "The Strange Career of American Exceptionalism," *The Nation*, Dec. 6, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-strange-career-of-american-exceptionalism/>.

76 Roger Cohen, "Obama's American Idea," *New York Times*, Dec. 10, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/10/opinion/10cohen.html>.

77 Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 6.

78 Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Rob P. Saldin, "William McKinley and the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 2011): 119–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2010.03833.x>.

79 Gilmore and Rowling, "Lighting the Beacon," 273.

80 Krebs, *Narratives and the Making of US National Security*, 14.

81 Krebs, *Narratives and the Making of US National Security*.

82 Neumann and Coe, "The Rhetoric in Modern Presidency," 18.

83 Gardin, "The Strange Career of American Exceptionalism."

84 Edwards, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World*; Edwards and Weiss, *The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism*; Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*; Megan D. McFarlane, "Visualizing the Rhetorical Presidency: Barack Obama in the Situation Room," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2016): 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2015.1105105>; Gilmore and Rowling, "Lighting the Beacon."

85 James W. Ceaser, Glen E. Thuerow, Jeffrey K. Tulis, and Joseph M. Bessette, "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 158–71; Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*; Saldin, "William McKinley and the Rhetorical Presidency."

86 McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*; Nau, *At Home Abroad*; Legro, *Rethinking the World*; Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

comes from John F. Kennedy, whose rhetoric frequently played on American exceptionalism. Indeed, as president-elect he gave a speech simply referred to as the “city upon a hill” speech:

I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier. “We must always consider,” he said, “that we shall be as a city upon a hill — the eyes of all people are upon us.” Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us — and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill — constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities.⁸⁷

Using American exceptionalism to frame U.S. grand strategy has not been a partisan phenomenon, even though the Republican Party associates itself more with overt statements of patriotic sentiment.⁸⁸ In fact, Gilmore and Rowling find that Democratic presidents have been more fervent in their invocation of American exceptionalism in global contexts (44 percent of speeches given by Democrats versus 17 percent given by Republicans).⁸⁹

This is not to say that presidents have agreed on *how* the United States should best advance its moral mission, but there has been a post-World War II consensus on *whether* the United States is so obligated. There has also been bipartisan agreement on the reason why — namely that the United States has a special role to play in world history.⁹⁰ As scholars have shown, U.S. presidents since 1945 have repeatedly turned to the reliable rhetorical strategy of emphasizing American exceptionalism to “reinforce mythic notions of America as the un-

questioned leader of a stable world order.”⁹¹ Indeed, the superiority of the United States and the special role it is supposed to play as a leader of other nations has been ubiquitous in modern presidential rhetoric. A quantitative content analysis of State of the Union addresses from 1934 to 2008 found only *three* mentions of other countries as worthy of serving as examples for the United States to follow.⁹² The United States has always been the shining city on the hill, as no other country can be.

Post-Cold War Triumphalism

The influence of American exceptionalism on the framing and content of U.S. foreign policy took on a new force after the Cold War ended.⁹³ Indeed, Americans interpreted the Cold War’s end as a reaffirmation of American exceptionalism: “By the grace of *God*,” President George H. W. Bush said in his State of the Union speech in 1992, “we have *won* the Cold War.”⁹⁴ Whatever the questions had been — what were the best political systems, economic theories, or civic ideals? — the only answer left in international politics was the United States and its example to the world. The end of ideological history was here, comfortably parked in an oversized American driveway.⁹⁵ This exceptionalist interpretation of why the Cold War had ended set the stage for a triumphalist decade, or a “holiday from history,” as George Will called it.⁹⁶ In arguing for why the United States should continue its deep involvement in world affairs even without a clear enemy, President Bill Clinton and his secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, looked inward to the peculiar genius of the American body politic for the answer. The United States was “the indispensable nation,” Clinton stated in 1996 while defending the U.S. intervention in Bosnia.⁹⁷ That became the Clinton administration’s go-to phrase for conveying American exceptionalism in an age of primacy. In making the case for a

possible strike against Saddam Hussein in 1998 on “The Today Show” Albright said,

[I]f we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us. I know that the American men and women in uniform are always prepared to sacrifice for freedom, democracy and the American way of life.⁹⁸

And yet, Republicans viewed Clinton’s vision as too timid. In 2000, future George W. Bush speechwriter Marc Thiessen wrote in the *Weekly Standard* that there were two competing visions of internationalism in the 21st century: the “‘global multilateralism’ of the Clinton-Gore Democrats” versus the “‘American exceptionalism’ of the Reagan-Bush Republicans.”⁹⁹ Nevertheless, this disagreement belied a fundamental foreign policy *agreement*: All post-Cold War presidents have promoted a strategy of primacy, which essentially argued that the United States should seek world hegemony because of its exceptional mission.¹⁰⁰ Although they all used the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, this was not merely a discursive tactic. There was strong bipartisan belief in American exceptionalism and America’s mission: to convince the rest of the world to join in the “end of history” with the one nation that had already reached history’s destination. The Republican and Democratic views on the international order in the 1990s — and America’s role in it — were more similar than perhaps many recognized at the time. Indeed, Hans Morgenthau’s description of Wilsonian liberals at the beginning of the 20th century applies equally to neoconservatives and liberal internationalists at its end — they all believed that a new world order of peace would eventually “end” history once all countries adopted liberal democracy.¹⁰¹

After 9/11, President George W. Bush’s communication of a clear, black-and-white story of good versus evil was a natural extension of the triumphalism of the 1990s and fit perfectly within the

master narrative of American exceptionalism. This became what Krebs calls “the national security narrative” of the post-9/11 era — the “Global War on Terror.”¹⁰² This narrative organized how

The influence of American exceptionalism on the framing and content of U.S. foreign policy took on a new force after the Cold War ended. Indeed, Americans interpreted the Cold War’s end as a reaffirmation of American exceptionalism.

the administration promoted its policies, how the media framed these policies, and how the American public thought about the new “war” they were now in.¹⁰³ As Krebs writes, “The War on Terror was more than a slogan: it was shorthand for a post-9/11 narrative that not only placed that day’s horrific events in a meaningful context, but also set the terms of national security debate in the United States for the next decade.”¹⁰⁴ This narrative would not have resonated or received such widespread bipartisan acceptance from the American public had it not overlapped with the master narrative of U.S. foreign policy: that the United States is an exceptional nation with moral intentions, bound to make the world a better place. The Bush administration’s story of what had happened and why cast the United States as the innocent victim, attacked out of the blue not for its policies in the Middle East, but for its very exceptional nature: “Why do they hate us? They hate us because of what they see in this very Chamber,” Bush told Congress on Sept. 20,

87 “The City Upon a Hill Speech,” Address of President-Elect John F. Kennedy Delivered to a Joint Convention of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The State House, Boston, Jan. 9, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/OYhUZE2Qo0-ogdV7ok900A.aspx>.

88 Neumann and Coe, “The Rhetoric in Modern Presidency,” 18.

89 Gilmore and Rowling, “Lighting the Beacon,” 288.

90 Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*, 14.

91 Neumann and Coe, “The Rhetoric in Modern Presidency,” 26.

92 Neumann and Coe, “The Rhetoric in Modern Presidency,” 23.

93 See, for example, Heather Hulbert, “More Diplomacy, Less Intervention, But for What? Making Sense of the Grand Strategy Debate,” *Lawfare*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/more-diplomacy-less-intervention-what-making-sense-grand-strategy-debate>.

94 George H.W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” Jan. 28, 1992, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-0>, emphasis mine.

95 Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>.

96 George F. Will, “The End of Our Holiday from History,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 12, 2001, <https://wapo.st/2BkTVIb>.

97 Uri Friedman, “Democratic Platform Swaps ‘American Exceptionalism’ for ‘Indispensable Nation,’” Sept. 4, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/04/democratic-platform-swaps-american-exceptionalism-for-indispensable-nation/>.

98 Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, “Interview on NBC-TV ‘The Today Show’ with Matt Lauer, Columbus, Ohio,” U.S. Department of State, Feb. 19, 1998, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>.

99 Quoted in, Uri Friedman, “American Exceptionalism: A Short History,” *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/18/american_exceptionalism.

100 Hal Brands, “Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era,” *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (February 2018): 8–33, <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/63941>; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 7.

101 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), cited in, Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 16.

102 Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*, 13.

103 Goddard and Krebs, “Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy.”

104 Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*, 3.

2001. “They hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”¹⁰⁵ In his second inaugural, Bush essentially argued that fighting the “war on terror” was a continuation of the eternal American mission:

From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth. Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. *Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation.*¹⁰⁶

Returning to the question of whether Obama rejected American exceptionalism, as his critics charged, this article builds on the theoretical assumption that there is a meaningful and important distinction between a nation’s master narrative and its various foreign policies. One can have a variety of grand strategies all based in the exceptionalist master narrative, but one must distinguish, as Krebs does, between master narratives and discrete national security narratives. One could argue about whether Obama’s counter-terrorism policies diverged more in rhetoric than in practice from his predecessor, or about whether Obama actually moved in a non-interventionist direction. However, his discrete national security narrative of modest retrenchment did not reject the master narrative of American exceptionalism. Indeed, at Strasbourg, Obama said,

If you think about the site of this summit [Strasbourg] and what it means, I don’t think America should be embarrassed to see evidence of the sacrifices of our troops, the enormous amount of resources that were put into Europe postwar, and our leadership

in crafting an alliance that ultimately led to the unification of Europe. We should take great pride in that... . And I think that we have a core set of values that are enshrined in our Constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality that, though imperfect, *are exceptional.*¹⁰⁷

Lest one think this was pandering to the press, this was a belief Obama had long held. As he said in his speech to the Democratic national convention in 2004,

I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, *in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.*¹⁰⁸

III. Donald Trump, American Exceptionalism, and America First

Prior to Trump winning the Republican presidential nomination, the Republican Party promoted a grand strategy of leading the liberal international order, grounded in the master narrative of American exceptionalism. This had been the case since Dwight D. Eisenhower won the foreign policy battle inside the Republican Party in 1952, defeating non-interventionist proponent Robert Taft. With Eisenhower, the GOP embraced the view “that America had a moral obligation as well as a national interest in transforming the victory of World War II into a lasting global peace by building strong alliances and expanding military readiness around the world to counter the Communist threat.”¹⁰⁹ It was, in David Farber’s words, the “Willkie-Dewey-Eisenhower — and then Goldwater-Reagan-Bush-Bush — wing of the Republican Party” that won out in the GOP in the post-World War II era.¹¹⁰

The American exceptionalist narrative constitut-

ed the foundation of U.S. foreign policy debate in both political parties, influencing their views on foreign policy and constraining presidential candidates’ rhetorical choices.¹¹¹ The 2012 presidential campaign of Mitt Romney arguably built its foreign policy platform on this very idea.¹¹² That same year, the Republican Party included the concept in its party platform, stating that American exceptionalism is “the conviction that our country holds a unique place in human history.”¹¹³ In 2016, all Republican presidential candidates save one took pains to use exceptionalist rhetoric.¹¹⁴

In April 2015, two months before he announced his candidacy for president, Trump broke with the Republican Party and stated that he did “not like” the term American exceptionalism.¹¹⁵ He ironically said this at an event called “Celebrating the American Dream,” hosted in Houston by the Texas Patriots PAC. At the event, Trump was asked to define American exceptionalism, whether it still existed, and what should be done to help grow it. Trump answered,

Look, if I’m a Russian, or I’m a German, or I’m a person we do business with, why, you know, I don’t think it’s a very nice term. We’re exceptional; you’re not. First of all, Germany is eating our lunch. So they say, ‘Why are you exceptional. We’re doing a lot better than you.’¹¹⁶

Trump stated that those who refer to American exceptionalism were “insulting the world” and offending people in other countries, such as Russia, China, Germany, and Japan. Contravening common talking points for any presidential candidate regardless of party, Trump said, rather, that it is

“not a nice term,” showing unusual foreign policy flair. He did suggest that were he to become president, he would make the United States exceptional, but even then Trump said he would not use the term because he would not want to “rub it in.”¹¹⁷

But Trump has not only rejected American exceptionalism in his rhetoric — that is, when he talks about it at all — he has also rejected it in his policies.¹¹⁸ His America First platform shows that he rejects American exceptionalism on two fronts: He does not view the United States as morally superior to other countries and, therefore, he does not view the United States as having a mission to pursue abroad. Trump’s definition of American “greatness” is ascriptive and material, rather than ideational and aspirational.

In this section, I examine Trump’s views on American exceptionalism along with his grand strategy in order to show how Trump rejects both the American exceptionalism master narrative and its policy implications. In so doing, I argue that Trump relies on a competing master narrative, Jacksonian nationalism. Trump’s grounding in Jacksonian nationalism leads him to embrace parts of the traditional America First platform, which in its two previous iterations has promoted ethnic nationalism and economic protectionism. However, Trump rejects non-interventionism, opting instead for unilateral militarism abroad. Here, Trump is more in line with original Jacksonianism than with America First.

America First in U.S. History

What does “America First” mean? Is it a concept, a slogan, or a foreign policy agenda? Or perhaps just a refreshingly honest brand of realism?¹¹⁹

105 “President George W. Bush Addressed a Joint Session of Congress on the Subject of the War on Terrorism,” History, Art, and Archives of the United States House of Representatives, Sept. 20, 2001, <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/2000-/President-George-W-Bush-addressed-a-Joint-Session-of-Congress-on-the-subject-of-the-war-on-terrorism/>.

106 “President George W. Bush’s Second Inaugural Address,” Jan. 20, 2005, emphasis added, quoted in, Daniel W. Drezner, “The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (March 2008): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592708080067>.

107 Quoted in, Schlesinger, “Obama Has Mentioned ‘American Exceptionalism’ More than Bush.” See, for example, Trevor McCrisken, “Obama’s Drone War,” *Survival* 55, no. 2 (2013): 97–122, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2013.784469>.

108 “Barack Obama’s Remarks to the Democratic National Convention,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/27/politics/campaign/barack-obamas-remarks-to-the-democratic-national.html>, emphasis mine.

109 William I. Hitchcock, “How the GOP Embraced the World — and then Turned Away,” *Politico Magazine*, July 13, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/07/13/gop-isolationism-trump-eisenhower-219003>; David Farber, “America First and International Trade Policy in the Cold War Era,” in “America First: The Past and Future of an Idea,” ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and William Hitchcock, *Passport* (September 2018): 39–41, <https://shafr.org/sites/default/files/passport-09-2018-america-first-essays.pdf>.

110 Farber, “America First and International Trade Policy in the Cold War Era,” 40.

111 I would like to thank Reviewer 1 for pointing this out.

112 See, Mitt Romney, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010); Ashley Parker, “Romney Makes His Pitch to Social Conservatives and Attacks Obama,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2012, <https://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/31/romney-makes-his-pitch-to-social-conservatives-and-attacks-obama/>.

113 “2012 Republican Party Platform,” Aug. 27, 2012, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/2012-republican-party-platform#american>.

114 For more on this, and how Trump diverges, see, Gilmore and Rowling, “Partisan Patriotism in the American Presidency.”

115 Corn, “Donald Trump Says He Doesn’t Believe in ‘American Exceptionalism.’”

116 Corn, “Donald Trump Says He Doesn’t Believe in ‘American Exceptionalism.’”

117 Corn, “Donald Trump Says He Doesn’t Believe in ‘American Exceptionalism.’”

118 According to Stewart M. Patrick, Trump “has undermined Western solidarity with repeated assaults on NATO and the G-7 and repudiation of the international agreement limiting Iran’s nuclear weapons program. He has threatened to leave the World Trade Organization and blocked judicial appointments to its appellate body. He has repudiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership, forced the renegotiation of NAFTA into a more closed deal, slapped aluminum and steel tariffs on U.S. allies on dubious national security grounds, and launched an all-out trade war with China... . Most disconcerting, the president himself has embraced a rogues’ gallery of authoritarian thugs, from Kim Jong Un to Xi Jinping, Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Rodrigo Duterte.” In other words, by going much further than previous presidents in his critiques of NATO (not simply stating that allies must raise their defense budgets, but embracing NATO’s main adversary — Putin’s Russia — while aggressively attacking NATO allies such as Germany) and by embracing authoritarian leaders instead of liberal democratic allies, Trump has rejected the values underpinning the liberal world order. See, Patrick, “The Liberal World Order Is Dying. What Comes Next?” *World Politics Review*, Jan. 15, 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/27192/the-liberal-world-order-is-dying-what-comes-next>.

119 Thanks to my colleague Chris White for this phrase.

"America First" is in fact several things. It was most famously the name of an organization founded in 1940 in order to lobby against U.S. intervention in World War II. As historian Melvyn P. Leffler writes, "For me, America First was associated with the insularity, isolationism, unilateralism, nativism, anti-Semitism, and appeasement policies that President Franklin D. Roosevelt struggled to overcome in 1940 and 1941."¹²⁰ It was also a slogan used by Pat Buchanan in the 1990s to argue against free trade, immigration, military alliances, and interventions.¹²¹ Today, it is the shorthand for Trump's foreign policy platform. Let us examine each in turn, their connections, and the master narrative on which they all rely.

students at Yale at the time, founded the "Committee to Defend America First." Its establishment in 1940 was "in direct opposition to progressive journalist William Allen White's Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies."¹²² It grew quickly from a group started by anti-war students to a large movement with hundreds of chapters and almost a million members. Some notable members were Walt Disney, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Gore Vidal. The committee would come to be associated with fascists and anti-Semites, and most famously, Charles Lindbergh. Lindbergh argued in 1940, during the blitzkrieg in Europe, that the United States should not interfere because "the white race" was not under threat.¹²⁴ Lindbergh joined America First in April 1941, drawing big crowds at its rallies. Despite the varied membership and commendable aim of avoiding yet another war, the committee's main historical legacy has been that of a disgraced organization that was on the wrong side of history both in terms of advocating against intervention

With the attack on Pearl Harbor and eventual Allied victory in World War II, "America First" became synonymous with having been on the wrong side of history.

America First Before World War II

The phrase "America First" is most strongly associated with its use during World War II. According to Susan Dunn, America First was the name of the "isolationist, defeatist, anti-Semitic national organization that urged the United States to appease Adolf Hitler."¹²² This summary is somewhat unfair to the organization's varied membership. The interwar America First was composed of all kinds of people who were skeptical of America entering into another European war. They included future president Gerald Ford, future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stewart Potter, and Sargent Shriver, who would go on to lead the U.S. Peace Corps. Ford and Potter,

in World War II and in terms of anti-Semitism.

The phrase "America First" predates 1940, however. It was a Republican campaign slogan in the 1880s.¹²⁵ As Christopher McKnight Nichols writes, "the cry of America First emerged in the nineteenth century's era of rapid industrialization, modernization, and urbanization," and its foreign policy agenda was "non-entanglement, nonintervention, neutrality, and unilateralism."¹²⁶ It was the latest discussion in a historic debate on why, how much, and in what ways the United States should be involved outside its borders.¹²⁷

The slogan did not quite catch on until Wilson popularized it in a speech in 1915, however, declaring, "Our whole duty for the present, at any rate,

is summed up in the motto: America First."¹²⁸ Although he was arguing for U.S. *neutrality* in the Great War, not *isolationism*, the phrase nonetheless became the motto of those who wanted the United States to stay out of European politics and indeed stay isolated from it. Wilson's goal was to keep a diverse nation with people whose heritage stemmed from all over the world firmly pro-American. This topic would become tense as the patriotism of "hyphenated" Americans of Irish, German, and Italian descent became increasingly questioned. Indeed, at this time, the U.S. Bureau of Education was mounting an America First campaign in order to promote the assimilation of immigrants. The purpose was to encourage immigrants to put America first, before their old countries, all the while signaling that immigrants did not need to reject their culture, language, or history of origin.¹²⁹

After Wilson, the motto caught on. As presidential candidates in 1916, both Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes used America First as part of their election slogans.¹³⁰ After the debate over the League of Nations and the future role of the United States in the world, Warren G. Harding, the Republican presidential nominee of 1920, similarly thought it useful to employ America First as part of his campaign:

Call it the selfishness of nationality if you will, I think it an inspiration to patriotic devotion — To safeguard America first, to stabilize America first, to prosper America first, to think of America first, to exalt America first, to live for and revere America first.¹³¹

The second iteration of the Ku Klux Klan, which reasserted itself in the early 20th century, taking aim at Catholics and Jews in addition to African-Americans, also used "America First" as a motto.¹³² In evidence submitted to Congress, at a hearing on the activities on the Klan in 1921, the Klan's "Imperial Proclamation" was entered into

the record. Here, it said: "[The Klan] stands for America first — first in thought, first in affections, and first in the galaxy of nations."¹³³

With the attack on Pearl Harbor and eventual Allied victory in World War II, "America First" became synonymous with having been on the wrong side of history. The disbandment of the Committee to Defend America First four days after Pearl Harbor conceded the point.

The 1990s: Pat Buchanan's Revival of "America First"

When Pat Buchanan resurrected the motto "America First" in the 1990s, the *New York Times* labeled his agenda "fearful isolationism, nativism and protectionism."¹³⁴ His version of America First was focused on the economy and culture. In the post-Cold War era, this meant making "America first again in manufacturing," including proposing deep tax cuts in order to prevent U.S. industries from moving abroad.¹³⁵ Buchanan's economic platform was nationalist and protectionist, as was his cultural platform: He wanted to keep the United States a white, Christian country. Arguing against the effects of globalization, Buchanan said that "our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped onto some landfill called multiculturalism." He argued for "a new patriotism, where Americans begin to put the needs of Americans first."¹³⁶

This was "a new nationalism" meant to divide and conquer.¹³⁷ Campaigning in Georgia in 1992, Buchanan argued that the Voting Rights Act was "an act of regional discrimination against the South," and told unemployed (presumably white) Georgians that, "anti-discrimination laws caused their jobs to be given to blacks."¹³⁸ In his famous "culture war" speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, Buchanan said, "There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is

120 Leffler, "America First: Introduction," in "America First: The Past and Future of an Idea," ed. Leffler and Hitchcock, 33.

121 See, Nicole Hemmer, "America First, a Second Time," in "America First: The Past and Future of an Idea," ed. Leffler and Hitchcock, 47.

122 Susan Dunn, "Trump's 'America First' Has Ugly Echoes from American History," *CNN*, April 28, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/27/opinions/trump-america-first-ugly-echoes-dunn/>.

123 Christopher Nichols, "America First, American Isolationism, and the Coming of World War II," in "America First: The Past and Future of an Idea," ed. Leffler and Hitchcock, 35.

124 Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 258.

125 Sean Illing, "How 'America First' Ruined the 'American Dream,'" *Vox*, Oct. 22, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/22/17940964/america-first-trump-sarah-churchwell-american-dream>.

126 Nichols, "America First, American Isolationism, and the Coming of World War II," 35.

127 Nichols, *Promise and Peril*, chap. 1. See also, Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 3.

128 Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 43.

129 Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 45.

130 Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 48.

131 Quoted in, Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 84. See also, Laderman and Simms, *Donald Trump: The Making of a World View*, 10–11.

132 Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 91.

133 "The Ku-Klux Klan," Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, Oct. 11, 1921, 120, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hj1i8v>. See also, Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 288–89.

134 "Bush, Buchanan, and No One at All," *New York Times*, March 4, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/04/opinion/bush-buchanan-and-no-one-at-all.html>

135 "Pat Buchanan in 1992: Make America First Again," *Face the Nation* (1992), available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBm7SZ_WjYY. The appearance on *Face the Nation* was prior to the New Hampshire primary.

136 Jeff Greenfield, "Trump Is Pat Buchanan with Better Timing," *Politico Magazine* (September/October 2016), <https://politi.co/2S7NFx1>.

137 Greenfield, "Trump Is Pat Buchanan with Better Timing."

138 Greenfield, "Trump Is Pat Buchanan with Better Timing."

a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself.” He labeled Bill Clinton’s agenda “radical feminism,” and accused the Democratic Party of not respecting the “Judeo-Christian values” the country was founded upon.¹³⁹ His speech ended by recounting his visit to the Army compound in south Los Angeles, from which law enforcement had been dispatched to quell the riots. “And as they took back the streets of LA, block by block, so we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.”¹⁴⁰

Buchanan ran for the Republican nomination again in 1996, this time against Bob Dole, then for the Reform Party nomination in 2000. In 2000, he revived “America First” as a campaign slogan. Interestingly, Trump, who was also seeking the Reform Party nomination at the time, called Buchanan “a Hitler lover,” alluding to the controversy about Buchanan’s view that Adolf Hitler had initially presented no serious threat to the United States, a view that was consistent with the original America First Committee’s stance in 1940.¹⁴¹

Jacksonian Nationalism

“America First” is a slogan that would resonate with what Walter Russell Mead calls the “Jacksonian tradition” in U.S. foreign policy. This populist tradition is one of four traditions found in U.S. history, according to Mead: the “American realist” or Hamiltonian tradition; the exemplary Jeffersonian tradition; and missionary Wilsonianism.¹⁴²

Named after President Andrew Jackson (1829–1837) the Jacksonian tradition refers to a populist foreign policy outlook originating in the era of white, male mass politics that Jackson brought forth. Prior to the era of Jackson, politics — wheth-

er foreign or domestic — belonged to “silk stocking”-wearing statesmen like Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson.¹⁴³ Jackson, however, was a Revolutionary War veteran and the heroic victor of the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812.¹⁴⁴ When the “elite establishment” — in the form of John Quincy Adams, son of second president John Adams — entered into a “corrupt bargain” and stole the election from Jackson in 1824, Jackson’s persona as a man of the people standing up to the entitled elite was cemented.¹⁴⁵ His *revanche* over Adams in the 1828 presidential election inaugurated the era of “the people’s president” where Jackson “spoke in plain and powerful language to the people at large.”¹⁴⁶

Jacksonian political philosophy is an instinct, rather than an ideology.¹⁴⁷ Because it is “less an intellectual movement than it is an expression of the social, cultural, and religious values of a large portion of the American public,” Mead argues Jacksonianism is “obscure” to academics and the media.¹⁴⁸ In other words: In true populist fashion, Jacksonians and the elite have mutual disregard for one another.¹⁴⁹ Jacksonians are suspicious of what the elites might do with their tax money both at home and abroad. They worry about “untrammelled federal power” and are “skeptical about the prospects of domestic and foreign do-gooding.”¹⁵⁰ When it comes to the military, though, Jacksonians are looser with the purse strings and are more trusting of the military establishment. “For Jacksonians, spending money on the military is one of the best things government can do,” Mead argues.¹⁵¹

So far, Jacksonians and America Firsters can agree — elites should not be trusted with one’s tax dollars, but military preparedness is important and is worth paying for. Were Jacksonians an early

expression of the non-interventionism of America First, then? Not at all, according to Mead. Indeed, Jacksonians were consistently the most *hawkish* during the Cold War. Mead argues the Jacksonian tradition does *not* embrace isolationism. Rather, it is an interest-based foreign policy.¹⁵² Jacksonians are not eager to sit at home if there is a worthy fight to be fought. But for what cause are Jacksonians willing to go abroad and fight? According to Mead, Jacksonians are not that concerned with defending American values across the globe, but rather are focused on “national honor” on behalf of their community:

Jacksonians see American exceptionalism not as a function of the universal appeal of American ideas, or even as a function of a unique American vocation to transform the world, but rather as rooted in the country’s singular commitment to the equality and dignity of individual American citizens.¹⁵³

How does the Jacksonian tradition define the American community, on whose behalf it conducts foreign policy? Is it defined by adherence to liberal ideals, or by ethno-cultural boundaries? In fact, the answer to the question, “who counts as an American citizen” in the quote above unites Jacksonians, traditional America Firsters, and Trump. Jacksonians are historically associated with “white Protestant males of the lower and middle classes”¹⁵⁴ whom Mead refers to as making up a “folk community.” This is a “folk” that is “Christian in religious background, if not always in practice. They are European in origin — but largely without strong ties to a specific country other than the United States — and self-identify with American society from the colonial era until today.”¹⁵⁵ Mead contrasts this group with “believers in a multicultural United States” who define the United States as a “nation based on ideology

rather than ethnicity.”¹⁵⁶ These are two very different things: Jacksonianism is based on the community values and sense of identity that stem from the British colonizers, specifically a subgroup whom historian David Hackett Fischer defined as the Scotch-Irish settlers.¹⁵⁷ The Scotch-Irish Americans were “formed by centuries of bitter warfare before they came to the United States,” an experience that informed their warrior ethos and non-isolationist attitudes in foreign policy.¹⁵⁸ This ethno-cultural definition of the American nation is distinctly different from the other three foreign policy traditions Mead identifies — Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, and Wilsonian — as they all identify the United States as built on an idea, not a people.¹⁵⁹ Thus, ethnic nationalism is where Jacksonianism diverges fundamentally from the other three foreign policy traditions.

Jackson was the first populist president, commencing a tradition carried on by presidential candidates in both political parties such as William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁶⁰ Mead identifies Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan as modern presidents who managed to connect with Jacksonian voters. He also lists George Wallace, Ross Perot, Jesse Ventura, Pat Buchanan, and John McCain as political figures that have successfully tapped into this populist energy.¹⁶¹ Of course, these politicians advocated quite different grand strategies, with Buchanan overtly promoting non-interventionism. Further complicating the picture, the Jacksonian “folk community” is no longer ethnically homogeneous. Rather, Jacksonianism is a tradition with a long, bipartisan pedigree in U.S. history that attracts those Americans who feel unrepresented by the “elites.”

Because Jacksonianism is more of an “instinct” than a political ideology, and no longer exclusively represents a specific ethno-cultural group in U.S. society, general arguments and comparisons — such as the one I am making in this article — are

139 Patrick J. Buchanan, “1992 Republican National Convention Speech,” Patrick J. Buchanan Official Website, Aug. 17, 1992, <http://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148>.

140 Buchanan, “1992 Republican National Convention Speech.”

141 Krishnadev Calamur, “A Short History of ‘America First,’” *The Atlantic*, Jan. 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/trump-america-first/514037/>.

142 Mead, *Special Providence*.

143 Mead, *Special Providence*, 223.

144 The battle of New Orleans took place after the war was formally over, but the participants in New Orleans were unaware. The battle nevertheless cemented the image of Jackson as a heroic warrior. From the Jackson presidential library: “Jackson’s string of military success, despite the obstacles he faced, the poor results of other military leaders during the War of 1812 and his stunning victory at New Orleans made him a celebrated national hero, revered above all others except George Washington.” See, “War Hero,” Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage, <https://thehermitage.com/learn/andrew-jackson/general/war-hero/>.

145 Daniel Fellner, “Andrew Jackson: Campaigns and Elections,” Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/president/jackson/campaigns-and-elections>.

146 Daniel Fellner, “Andrew Jackson: Impact and Legacy,” Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/president/jackson/impact-and-legacy>.

147 Mead, *Special Providence*, 244.

148 Mead, *Special Providence*, 226.

149 Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism*, April 29, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12522>.

150 Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” 224.

151 Mead, *Special Providence*, 240.

152 Mead, *Special Providence*, 246.

153 Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt.”

154 Mead, *Special Providence*, 244.

155 Mead, *Special Providence*, 226.

156 Mead, *Special Providence*, 227.

157 Mead, *Special Providence*, 227. See, David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

158 Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, “Donald Trump and American Foreign Policy: The Return of the Jacksonian Tradition,” *Comparative Strategy* 36, no. 4 (2017): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2017.1361210>.

159 Mead, *Special Providence*, 226–27.

160 Terri Bimes and Quinn Mulroy, “The Rise and Decline of Presidential Populism,” *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (October 2004): 136–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X04000082>.

161 Mead, *Special Providence*, 230.

inherently imperfect.¹⁶² The point is not to argue that Trump is a perfect replica of Andrew Jackson the president, but rather that there are important similarities between the Jacksonian tradition and Trump's worldview.

Donald Trump's America First

That Trump would choose "America First" as his foreign policy slogan was quite a shock, at least to historians familiar with its historical connotations.¹⁶³ Of course, it is possible that Trump was not aware of the term's historical significance and instead borrowed the phrase directly from Buchanan. Regardless, all of the versions of America First have promoted economic protectionism, ethnic nationalism, and anti-interventionism. It is concerning this final feature that Trump breaks with previous iterations of the term, hewing instead to the Jacksonian tradition. I will examine each in turn.

Economic Protectionism

In Trump's first inaugural speech, he accused the world of having swindled the United States: "We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon."¹⁶⁴ Trump added, "We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength."¹⁶⁵ The speech was, as Jim Goldgeier has noted, "a far cry from Morgenthau's articulation of the purpose of Bretton Woods."¹⁶⁶

Upon entering office, Trump pulled out of the

Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement that had taken seven years to negotiate, in favor of bilateral deals that he argued would "promote American industry, protect American workers, and raise American wages."¹⁶⁷ He also renegotiated the North America Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada, an agreement he had repeatedly criticized on the campaign trail.¹⁶⁸ The hallmark of Trump's protectionist agenda, however, has been commencing a trade war with China. Many economic experts share his complaints — that China engages in unfair trade practices and theft of intellectual property.¹⁶⁹ Trump's remedy is highly controversial, however: Trump has increased tariffs on Chinese exports to the United States in several rounds since 2018.¹⁷⁰ Former Bank of England governor Mervyn King has argued that the trade war with China threatens to undermine global economic growth, causing a "great stagnation."¹⁷¹

In wanting to "protect" American consumers, Trump is echoing one of the most familiar aspects of the nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s (on which America First relied) — economic protectionism.¹⁷² This motto resonated with the protectionist Republicans in Congress after the Great War, who in the 1920s passed "two of the most protectionist tariff bills in history," the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922 and the Smoot-Hawley Tariff in 1930. Although, as Thomas W. Zeiler writes, the United States should have learned from the "Smoot-Hawley debacle" in the 1930s what "America First demagoguery" can lead to,¹⁷³ Trump has revived economic protectionism. During the presidential campaign of 2016, he presented trade as a zero-sum game. Trump, argues Zeiler, "went Hoover."¹⁷⁴ Here, Trump is in line with the original America First

Committee, which also questioned whether foreign trade was all that important to the United States.¹⁷⁵

Since World War II, both the Republican and Democratic parties have argued that being a responsible leader of the liberal world order involves not only enforcing the rules of an open international economy but also participating fully in it.¹⁷⁶ Trump essentially rejects the economic pillar of the "liberal world order" and has repeatedly argued for a much more conditional role for America, insisting that the United States is being taken advantage of by other countries.¹⁷⁷ This assumes that being the leader of the liberal international order is not currently economically beneficial to the United States, and leaves out entirely the ideational aspect. Returning to Trump's discussion of what makes America exceptional, the United States is not exceptional as long as it is losing money to trading competitors such as China and Germany. It can only regain its exceptional status by renegotiating its trade deals to give the United States a higher return.¹⁷⁸ In other words, there is nothing about the United States that is inherently exceptional, rather, exceptionalism is a function of being the richest country in the world. In 2015, according to Trump, the United States was less exceptional than other countries because other countries were "eating" its "lunch."¹⁷⁹

To be sure, past presidents have communicated the idea of American exceptionalism in different ways, sometimes taking pains to be sensitive to the interests and identities of foreign actors. Indeed, American presidents face a dilemma when speaking to foreign audiences. According to Gilmore and Rowling, "[T]hey must be ever mindful of a domestic audience that expects its leaders to champion American exceptionalism on the world stage but also sensitive to the interests and identities of other global actors."¹⁸⁰ As a result, some presi-

dents have framed American exceptionalism in a more diplomatic manner when speaking in different foreign contexts. Perhaps this is what Obama was attempting to do in Strasbourg in 2009, and what Trump has been doing — taking pains not to insult foreign leaders, as he hinted at in his 2015 interview. However, Trump's comments were not made on foreign soil or directed at a foreign audience. Rather, they were made in a domestic, even local, context.

The absence of a values-based definition of American exceptionalism in Trump's rhetoric is as striking as it is unprecedented.¹⁸¹ To be clear, Trump does believe in some kind of American superiority — that is what his slogan "Make America Great Again" seems to be all about. However, he does not define greatness in terms of exceptional ideals and values, but in terms of economic wealth, military strength, and cultural identity. Echoing Buchanan, who started his 2000 presidential run for the Reform Party by championing West Virginia steel workers, Trump's economic definition of what would make America great entails a revival of the U.S. industrial economy: "buy American; hire American."¹⁸²

Ethnic Nationalism

The second important component of Trump's America First platform is ethnic nationalism. This worldview builds on the tradition Smith and Gerstle have documented extensively in their work.¹⁸³ This kind of ethnic nationalism represents a commonality between the Jacksonian tradition and the America First Committee, as well as Buchanan's revival of the America First political brand.

Ethnic nationalism is foundational to Trump's worldview, and that of his administration. Trump has called for fewer immigrants from "shithole coun-

162 Mark R. Cheatham, "Donald Trump Is Not a Twenty-First Century Andrew Jackson," *The American Historian* (2017), <https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2017/february/donald-trump-is-not-a-twenty-first-century-andrew-jackson/>.

163 John Torpey, "The End of the World as We Know It? American Exceptionalism in an Age of Disruption," *Sociological Forum* 32, no. 4 (December 2017): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12372>.

164 Trump, "Inaugural Address."

165 Trump, "Inaugural Address."

166 Goldgeier, "The Misunderstood Roots of International Order," 11.

167 Hasan Dudar and Deirdre Shesgreen, "Trump's Long List of Global Trade Deals, Agreements Exited or Renegotiated," *USA Today*, Nov. 21, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/11/21/donald-trump-foreign-policy-iran-nafta-russia-mexico-canada-trade/1732952002/>.

168 Patrick Gillespie, "Trump Hammers 'America's Worst Trade Deal,'" *CNN Money*, Sept. 27, 2016, <https://money.cnn.com/2016/09/27/news/economy/donald-trump-nafta-hillary-clinton-debate/>.

169 Ryan Hass, "Trump's Focus on China Trade: Right Target, Wrong Approach," *Order from Chaos Blog*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/14/trumps-focus-on-china-trade-right-target-wrong-approach/>.

170 Martha C. White, "Top Economists Blame Trump's Protectionist Policies for Global 'Stagnation,'" *NBC News*, Oct. 22, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/top-economists-blame-trump-s-protectionist-policies-global-stagnation-n1070036>.

171 White, "Top Economists Blame Trump's Protectionist Policies."

172 Indeed, as Frank Ninkovich points out, it is similar to President William McKinley's 1896 campaign slogan, "Patriotism, protection, and prosperity." Ninkovich, "Trumpism, History, and the Future of US Foreign Relations," in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Jervis et al., 396.

173 Zeiler, "This Is What Nationalism Looks Like," in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Jervis et al., 143.

174 Zeiler, "This Is What Nationalism Looks Like," 143.

175 Zeiler, "This Is What Nationalism Looks Like," 146.

176 Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

177 Indeed, his protectionism has been one of his most consistently held policy positions. See, Laderman and Simms, *Donald Trump: The Making of a World View*.

178 In a campaign speech on trade in Pennsylvania on June 28, 2016, Trump said, "Today, we import nearly \$800 billion more in goods than we export. We can't continue to do that. This is not some natural disaster, it's a political and politician-made disaster. ... It is the consequence of a leadership class that worships globalism over Americanism. This is a direct affront to our founding fathers, who — America wanted to be strong. They wanted this country to be strong. They wanted to be independent and they wanted it to be free." "Read Donald Trump's Speech on Trade," *Time*, June 28, 2016, <https://time.com/4386335/donald-trump-trade-speech-transcript/>. See also, Dudar and Shesgreen, "Trump's Long List of Global Trade Deals."

179 Corn, "Donald Trump Says He Doesn't Believe in 'American Exceptionalism.'"

180 Gilmore and Rowling, "Lighting the Beacon," 272.

181 Barry R. Posen, "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March/April, 2018), <https://fam.ag/2FYj1QY>.

182 I thank Melvyn P. Leffler for pointing this out.

183 See Smith, *Civic Ideals*; and Gerstle, *American Crucible*.

tries¹⁸⁴ and a ban on Muslims entering the United States¹⁸⁵ in order to preserve its white, Christian cul-

der to bring on board more voters.¹⁹⁰ Rather than broaden his appeal in an increasingly diverse coun-

This kind of ethnic nationalism represents a commonality between the Jacksonian tradition and the America First Committee, as well as Buchanan's revival of the America First political brand.

ture. From promoting the "birther" conspiracy theory (which accused the first black president of not being American partly because he was accused of not being Christian),¹⁸⁶ to launching his presidential campaign by accusing Mexican immigrants of being rapists and drug-dealers,¹⁸⁷ to telling members of the House of Representatives to "go back" to their supposed homelands,¹⁸⁸ the list of exclusionary rhetoric based on race, ethnicity, and religion is long.

Implicitly endorsing the thesis that Trump's campaign was built on ethnic nationalism, some observers argued in 2016 that his appeal to non-white voters would be historically low, thereby dooming his chances at the ballot box.¹⁸⁹ When Trump did win, some assumed his presidency would pivot to more inclusive rhetoric (and perhaps even policies) in or-

ponents), the third iteration of which was found legal by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018.¹⁹² It excludes immigrants from seven countries, five of them Muslim-majority countries.¹⁹³ The second notable signal was when the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the federal agency responsible for issuing visas and green cards and for naturalizing immigrants as U.S. citizens, released its new mission statement. As of February 2018 that statement no longer contains references to immigrants themselves — including taking out a line that called the United States a "nation of immigrants."¹⁹⁴

In fact, the Trump administration has racialized the issue of immigration.¹⁹⁵ Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II, the acting director of USCIS, has argued that the famous Emma Lazarus poem "The New Colos-

184 Josh Dawsey, "Trump Derides Protections for Immigrants from 'Shithole Countries,'" *Washington Post*, Jan. 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-attacks-protections-for-immigrants-from-shithole-countries-in-oval-office-meeting/2018/01/11/bfc0725c-f711-11e7-91af-31ac729add94_story.html.

185 In December 2015, Trump issued a statement saying, "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on." Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, "I Think Islam Hates Us: A Timeline of Trump's Comments About Islam and Muslims," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/>.

186 Chris Moody and Kristen Holmes, "Donald Trump's History of Suggesting Obama Is a Muslim," *CNN*, Sept. 19, 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/18/politics/trump-obama-muslim-birther/index.html>.

187 "Donald Trump Presidential Announcement," *C-Span*, June 16, 2015, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?326473-1/donald-trump-presidential-campaign-announcement>.

188 Donald Trump (@realdonaldtrump), "Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came." Twitter, June 14, 2019, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1150381394234941448?s=20>.

189 Stuart Rothenberg, "Will There Be Enough White Voters to Elect Donald Trump?" *Washington Post*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/06/07/will-there-be-enough-white-voters-to-elect-donald-trump/>.

190 Mike Allen, "Trump's Next Move: Stick It to Immigration Hardliners," *Axios*, Sept. 8, 2017, <https://www.axios.com/trumps-next-move-stick-it-to-immigration-hardliners-1513305364-d0631aae-f7bc-4cef-880a-62db9fe42091.html>

191 Despite a few exceptions, such as his first inaugural address containing the phrase, "whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots," Trump has largely continued his exclusionary rhetoric while in office. See, Trump, "Inaugural Address," (2017).

192 Tucker Higgins, "Supreme Court Rules that Trump's Travel Ban Is Constitutional," *CNBC*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/26/supreme-court-rules-in-trump-muslim-travel-ban-case.html>.

193 The countries are Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia, along with North Korea and Venezuela. Vahid Niayesh, "Trump's Travel Ban Really Was a Muslim Ban, Data Suggests," *Washington Post*, Sept. 26, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/26/trumps-muslim-ban-really-was-muslim-ban-thats-what-data-suggest/>.

194 Dara Lind, "America's Immigration Agency Removes 'Nation of Immigrants' from Its Mission Statement," *Vox*, Feb. 22, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/2/22/17041862/uscis-removes-nation-of-immigrants-from-mission-statement>.

195 Jayashri Srikantiah and Shirin Sinnar, "White Nationalism as Immigration Policy," *Stanford Law Review*, no. 71 (March 2019), <https://www.stanfordlawreview.org/online/white-nationalism-as-immigration-policy/>.

sus," which appears on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, refers to "people coming from Europe,"¹⁹⁶ while Trump himself has expressed hope of more immigrants from countries like Norway.¹⁹⁷ Trump's comment, which included the "shithole" remark, prompted U.N. High Commissioner on Human Rights, Rupert Colville, to call Trump's remarks "racist."¹⁹⁸ Most prominently, however, might be the symbolism — presumably intended — of wanting to build a physical wall along the southern border of the United States, but not along its northern border.¹⁹⁹ The public announcement by Trump in the fall of 2018 — just before the midterm elections — that he would seek to end birthright citizenship (as defined in the 14th amendment) showed that rather than pivot toward inclusion, Trump would embrace ethnic nationalism, which was indeed an important part of his political platform.

This is why it is not quite right when Abram van Engen writes,

Trump never talks about Americans as descendants from those who came here long ago. He offers no story. There is no rise from immigration, no fleeing from oppression in the American past, no historical movement from one land to another. There is only the present day, only sovereignty and self-interest here and now.²⁰⁰

On the contrary, Trump does offer a narrative of the United States, but it is not the familiar story of a "nation of immigrants." Rather, it is that of white, Christian America, a narrative compatible with Gerstle's "racial nationalism," Smith's ascriptive tradition, and Mead's Jacksonian nationalism.²⁰¹ It explicitly rejects the inclusive narrative of a diverse nation unified by civic ideals. It builds, as this article has

shown, on an important competing strand in American political history in which Americans have identified membership in their political community not with adherence to a set of classically liberal ideas and ideals, but rather with ethno-cultural origins and customs "strongly linked to North European ancestry, Protestantism, belief in the superiority of the 'white race,' and patriarchal familial leadership."²⁰²

Mead, writing in 2002, acknowledged the "deeply regrettable Jacksonian record of racism," but argued that Jacksonian America was evolving rapidly.²⁰³ Here, Mead might have been mistaken. In November 2019, the Southern Poverty Law Center published leaked emails from Stephen Miller, one of Trump's most important advisers on immigration, showing his support for and utilization of white nationalist literature and websites.²⁰⁴

Non-Intervention Abroad?

Does Trump's "America First" imply a resurrection of an older U.S. foreign policy tradition labeled non-interventionism, exemplarism, or even "isolationism"? Or, is he simply a more extreme version of previous Republican presidents, many of whom were strong critics of the constraints emanating from international alliances, institutions, and traditions? I argue that when it comes to military intervention abroad, Trump differs from both historic America First positions as well as Republican presidents since World War II.

Previous America Firsters argued for non-intervention on exceptionalist grounds. Trump, however, rejects the non-interventionist view that the United States is too special to get involved in the "corrupt old world." Rather, Trump's grand strategy is more similar to the classical realist tradition in international relations, in sharp contrast to the ideational

196 Michael Luo, "America's Exclusionary Past and Present and the Judgment of History," *New Yorker*, Aug. 17, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/americas-exclusionary-past-and-present-and-the-judgment-of-history>.

197 Norway is generally viewed as a white, Christian country. This is largely correct, although the demographics are changing. As of 2018, Norway consisted of 85.9 percent native Norwegians (this includes a small Sami population as well as 3.2 percent born to non-native parents). The largest immigrant community in Norway is Polish. See, "Fjorten prosent av befolkningen er innvandrere," Statistics Norway (SSB), March 5, 2018, <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/14-present-av-befolkningen-er-innvandrere>.

198 Robin Wright, "The 'Shithole Countries' — and the Rest of the World — Respond to President Trump," *New Yorker*, Jan. 12, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-shithole-countries-and-the-rest-of-the-world-respond-to-president-trump>.

199 Susannah Crockford, "Why Building a Wall on the US-Mexico Border Is a Symbolic Monument, not Sensible Immigration Policy," *London School of Economics US Centre Blog*, Feb. 21, 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/02/21/why-building-a-wall-on-the-us-mexico-border-is-a-symbolic-monument-not-sensible-immigration-policy/h>.

200 Abram Van Engen, "American Exceptionalism and America First," *Religion and Politics*, Jan. 9, 2018, <http://religionandpolitics.org/2018/01/09/american-exceptionalism-and-america-first>.

201 See, Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 418–26.

202 Clarke and Ricketts, "Donald Trump and American Foreign Policy," 368.

203 Mead, *Special Providence*, 260–61.

204 Michael Edison Hayden, "Stephen Miller's Affinity for White Nationalism Revealed in Leaked Emails," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Nov. 12, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/11/12/stephen-millers-affinity-white-nationalism-revealed-leaked-emails>.

tradition of exceptionalism.²⁰⁵ Indeed, in the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, the administration labels its strategy one “of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology.”²⁰⁶ Trump’s version of America First strips out all the focus on ideals and norms, something realists often argue U.S. foreign policy focuses too much on.

Nor is Trump simply a more extreme version of existing Republican foreign policy. Previous Republican presidents such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush argued that the United States was *too exceptional* to be constrained by the rules of the liberal world order.²⁰⁷ Rather than principled exemplarism (America First) or exceptional unilateralism (Reagan and George W. Bush), then, Trump’s grand strategy is a “contradictory combination of hawkish militarism and strategic retrenchment,”²⁰⁸ relying on unilateralism, militarism, aggressive threats, and the strategic support from authoritarian leaders abroad.

Trump’s record is evidence that he is an interventionist.²⁰⁹ After promising to end the war in Afghanistan on the campaign trail, Trump increased the number of U.S. troops on the ground as president.²¹⁰ President Trump dramatically increased the number of lethal drone strikes compared to the number launched during the Obama administration.²¹¹ He also sanctioned cruise missile strikes against targets controlled by President Bashar al-Assad in Syria in April 2017 as a response to a chemical weapons attack against the inhabitants of Idlib province earlier that month.²¹² Similarly, in April 2017, Trump declared he

had ordered an aircraft carrier into the Sea of Japan to serve as a deterrent to North Korean aggression. “We’re sending an armada,” Trump told Fox News.²¹³ A year later, the United States, in cooperation with Great Britain and France, again carried out strikes against Syrian government targets in response to a chemical weapons attack in Douma.²¹⁴ Former Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Brett McGurk, sees Trump’s national security policy as not one of retrenchment, but rather as “revisionist and interventionist” because it seeks regime change in Syria, Iran, and Venezuela.²¹⁵

Scholars such as Charles A. Kupchan and Graham Allison therefore gravely misunderstand not just the history of U.S. foreign relations but Trump’s foreign policy when they assert that Trump’s America First is a revival of isolationism. Prior to World War II, Kupchan argues,

American exceptionalism meant insulating the American experiment from foreign threats, shunning international entanglements, spreading democracy through example rather than intrusion, embracing protectionism and fair (not free) trade, and preserving a relatively homogeneous citizenry through racist and anti-immigrant policies. In short, it was about America first.²¹⁶

Not only is Kupchan wrong that Trump is embracing isolationism, he is also mistaken in thinking that

America has a history of isolationism to revive.²¹⁷ As this article has shown, isolationism as a 19th century U.S. foreign policy tradition is a myth.²¹⁸ It certainly does not have anything in common with Mead’s Jacksonianism, as seen earlier.

Historical accuracy aside, Kupchan’s argument also gets Trump’s contemporary policies wrong when he argues that, “Trump has cloaked himself in isolationist garb, repeatedly questioning the value of core U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia.”²¹⁹ Trump did seemingly promise retrenchment — if not isolationism — on the campaign trail.²²⁰ Rather than retrench however, President Trump has increased troop deployments in Afghanistan, threatened war with North Korea, supported the Saudi-led war in Yemen, threatened war with Iran, and consistently promoted a military power build-up including the modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and the launching of a “Space Force.”²²¹ While Trump’s strategy for the use of U.S. military power is *unilateral* — e.g., his strike against Syria in 2017 and his general approach to North Korea and Iran — it is not *isolationist* nor a strategy of retrenchment.²²²

What separates Trump from those in U.S. history who are often labeled isolationists is the same thing that separates him from the foreign policy establishment in general: his material, as opposed to ideational, definition of “American exceptionalism.”²²³ As Trump put it on Twitter, “I will make our Military so big, powerful & strong that no one will mess with us.”²²⁴ Trump’s foreign policy represents the Jacksonian skepticism “about the United States’ policy of global engagement and liberal order building,” a skepticism that comes “more from a lack of trust in the people shaping foreign policy than from a desire for a specific alternative vision.”²²⁵ It is not principled non-interventionism,

rather it is a rejection of the liberal part of the world order. It is a materialist, militarist, unilateral kind of internationalism, not isolationism.

IV. Conclusion: “The End of American Exceptionalism”?

Trump’s foreign policy approach raises important questions about the future of American exceptionalism as a national narrative and its role in U.S. foreign policy. First, regarding foreign policy: Does the Trump era really matter all that much, if the next president can simply reverse course? In other words, is it possible for the next U.S. administration to snap back to a pre-Trump era when there was bipartisan consensus that the United States should play a leadership role in the liberal international order, even if there were disagreements about what that leadership style should look like? Second, regarding the American national narrative: If a snap-back is not possible, does that mean we have finally arrived at the “end of American exceptionalism”?²²⁶ I argue that a snap-back is unlikely because it is increasingly unwanted by important voices in both parties. Ultimately, the future of U.S. foreign policy depends on how thoughtfully American politicians approach this fork in the road. Rethinking U.S. grand strategy in the post-Trump era will require a more nuanced reflection about what American exceptionalism means than has been the norm in American political history up until this point.

Trump and the Liberal International Order: Can the United States Snap Back?

Is it possible for the first post-Trump president

205 Robert Kagan argues that Trump’s grand strategy is classically realist. Personal conversation, April 26, 2018. Robert Jervis argues Trump’s foreign policy does not quite square with realism, whereas Randall Schweller argues that it does. See, Jervis, “President Trump and International Relations Theory,” in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Jervis et al., 5; Schweller, “Why Trump Now,” in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Jervis et al., 23, 35.

206 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House (December 2017), 1, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. To be sure, it is not clear that the *National Security Strategy* reflects Trump’s personal foreign policy vision. Mostly, it reads like the national security strategy of any Republican administration, or, as Barry R. Posen calls it, “a word salad of a document.” One might even question whether Trump has read it. This is why this article mostly focuses on Trump’s own statements and foreign policy actions. See, Posen, “The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony.”

207 See, Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chaps. 7 and 8.

208 Micah Zenko, “Trump Is America’s First Contradiction-in-Chief,” *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 12, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/12/trump-is-americas-first-narcissist-in-chief/>.

209 Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, “Trump Didn’t Shrink U.S. Military Commitments Abroad—He Expanded Them,” *Foreign Affairs*, Dec. 3, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-12-03/trump-didnt-shrink-us-military-commitments-abroad-he-expanded-them>.

210 Daniel Byman and Steve Simon, “Trump’s Surge in Afghanistan: Why We Can’t Seem to End the War,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sept. 18, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-09-18/trumps-surge-afghanistan>.

211 Micah Zenko, “The (Not-So) Peaceful Transition of Power: Trump’s Drone Strikes Outpace Obama,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 2, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/not-so-peaceful-transition-power-trumps-drone-strikes-outpace-obama>.

212 Michael R. Gordon, Helene Cooper, and Michael D. Shear, “Dozens of U.S. Missiles Hit Air Base in Syria,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/world/middleeast/us-said-to-weigh-military-responses-to-syrian-chemical-attack.html>.

213 This later turned out to be incorrect, as the aircraft carrier was sailing in the opposite direction to take part in joint exercises with the Australian navy. Of course, the original diplomatic signal sent by this statement by the U.S. president was still significant. Mark Landler and Eric Schmitt, “Aircraft Carrier Wasn’t Sailing to Deter North Korea, as U.S. Suggested,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/world/asia/aircraft-carrier-north-korea-carl-vinson.html>.

214 W. J. Hennigan, “Trump Orders Strikes on Syria Over Chemical Weapons,” *Time Magazine*, April 13, 2018, <https://time.com/5240164/syria-missile-strikes-donald-trump-chemical-weapons/>.

215 Brett McGurk, “American Foreign Policy Adrift,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 5, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-05/american-foreign-policy-adrift>.

216 Kupchan, “The Clash of Exceptionalisms.”

217 Diplomatic historians realized this was an outdated paradigm long before political scientists. See, Emily S. Rosenberg, “A Call to Revolution: A Roundtable on Early U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (January 1998): 63–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00101>.

218 Braumoeller, “The Myth of American Isolationism”; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 3.

219 Kupchan, “The Clash of Exceptionalisms.”

220 Yochi Dreazen, “Candidate Trump Promised to Stay Out of Foreign Wars. President Trump Is Escalating Them,” *Vox*, Aug. 25, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/8/25/16185936/trump-america-first-afghanistan-war-troops-iraq-generals>.

221 MacDonald and Parent, “Trump Didn’t Shrink U.S. Military Commitments Abroad”; Scot Paltrow, “Special Report: In Modernizing Nuclear Arsenal, U.S. Stokes New Arms Race,” *Reuters*, Nov. 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear-modernize-specialreport/special-report-in-modernizing-nuclear-arsenal-u-s-stokes-new-arms-race-idUSKBN1DL1AH>; Lara Seligman, “One Small Step for Trump’s Space Force,” *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 29, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/29/one-small-step-for-trump-space-force-space-command/h>.

222 On this, see, Braumoeller, “The Myth of American Isolationism”; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, chap. 3. John A. Thompson, “The Appeal of ‘America First,’” in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Jervis et al., 153. Frank Ninkovich disagrees, labeling it isolationist. See, Ninkovich, “Trumpism, History, and the Future of US Foreign Relations,” 396.

223 On Trump’s non-isolationism, see also, Wertheim, “Donald Trump Versus American Exceptionalism.”

224 Quoted in, Posen, “The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony.”

225 Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt.”

226 Daniel Bell, “The End of American Exceptionalism,” *National Affairs*, 41 (Fall 1975): 197, https://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/the-end-of-american-exceptionalism.

to “snap back” to the status quo ante” and pretend that the Trump presidency never happened?²²⁷ Given all of the benefits the United States has accrued from its hegemonic position in the world, it would be natural to assume American elites in both parties will try. In terms of the Republican Party, I argue that Trump’s wholesale rejection of the master narrative underlying the U.S. commitment to the liberal international order makes this a difficult task. Having embraced America First — despite some important policy disagreements on issues such as Syria²²⁸ — any attempt at a snap back from the Trump presidency by the GOP faces the risk of being seen as non-credible by both domestic and foreign audiences.²²⁹ Furthermore, because of the growing dissatisfaction in *both* parties with the prior foreign policy consensus,²³⁰ it is entirely possible that another populist nationalist — perhaps next time from the left — will win an election in the future and further remove the United States from its leadership role abroad. For allies, therefore, the United States is a less reliable partner, and will continue to be so unless it produces a new and credible internationalist foreign policy alternative to Trumpism that appeals to important actors in both parties.²³¹ This alternative must be rooted in a credible and unifying national narrative.

Trump vs. American Exceptionalism: A Republican Walk-Over?

According to Leffler, America First means

minimizing obligations to allies, treating everyone as a competitor, freeing the Unit-

ed States from the restrictions imposed by multilateral institutions, seeking trade advantages through bilateral negotiations, building up military power, befriending dictators if they support him, and acting unilaterally in a zero-sum framework of international politics.²³²

The goal is to get ahead, and getting ahead means leaving others behind. This means America First is, in important respects, a significant departure from neoconservatism, the heretofore paradigmatic Republican ideals-based foreign policy as defined in the post-Cold War years, particularly those of George W. Bush. More than anything else, the America First agenda and its rejection of American exceptionalism was why neoconservatives rebelled against the Trump candidacy and formed the NeverTrump movement.²³³ Given what we know of Bush’s faith and his strong belief in American exceptionalism, his view of the missionary role the United States could and should play in world history arguably influenced how he viewed Iraq and the “Global War on Terror.”²³⁴ As the invasion of Iraq was underway, in a televised address, Bush said, “To all the men and women of the United States armed forces now in the Middle East, the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you.”²³⁵ That is not to say that material factors such as oil have not been an important goal of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East since before World War II, or that such concerns have not eclipsed liberal democratic goals on many occasions. But, allowing for a complex interplay of material interests and liberal ideals guiding

U.S. foreign policy, there is still quite a distance between the rhetoric and policy of Bush, and Trump’s statement that “we want to keep the oil” in Iraq “to reimburse ourselves.”²³⁶

Rex Tillerson made explicit the divorcing of ideals from interests in his second speech as secretary of state: “I think it is really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values... . Our values around freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated — those are our values. Those are not our policies.”²³⁷ The late Sen. John McCain immediately criticized the speech in an op-ed, defending the traditional bipartisan consensus on U.S. foreign policy: “Our values are our strength and greatest treasure. We are distinguished from other countries because we are not made from a land or tribe or particular race or creed, but from an ideal that liberty is the inalienable right of mankind and in accord with nature and nature’s Creator.”²³⁸

Allies appreciated McCain’s efforts.²³⁹ Indeed, McCain seemed at times to serve as “shadow secretary of state” when he disagreed with the president’s foreign policies.²⁴⁰ Yet although there are Republican Party members who disagree with Trump’s foreign policy,²⁴¹ McCain’s vocal opposition to Trump was rather unique in his party. Those Republican lawmakers who disagree with Trumpism either stay quiet and vote with the party, or find

themselves retiring — whether willingly or not.²⁴² Thus, despite a few internationalist voices, allies are having a hard time recognizing the Republican Party they thought they knew.²⁴³

The explanation for all this might be that the Republican Party itself has changed. Indeed, despite many Republicans disagreeing with Trump, he has still managed to successfully take over the party: First, by attaining its nomination, and second by winning over many important conservatives who initially were skeptical.²⁴⁴ The Republican journey from condemning Buchanan’s radical rhetoric in the 1990s to first, tacitly accepting and then, mainstreaming Trump is an important part of this development. “Over the last two and a half decades,” write Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “the GOP has mutated from a traditional conservative party into an insurgent force that threatens the norms and institutions of American democracy.”²⁴⁵ Trump did not cause this populist, nationalist moment as much as reap the benefits of the long-term trajectory of the GOP and its narrowing voter base. As Lilliana Mason shows, the Republican Party has increasingly come to represent “the white, Christian, male and rural elements of the U.S. electorate.”²⁴⁶

Trump’s version of “America First” is devoid of historic mission or religious election, but it is not “primacy without a purpose,” as Barry Posen has

227 Doug Stokes, “Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 2018): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix238>.

228 Patricia Zengerle and Makini Brice, “Breaking with Trump, U.S. Republicans Press for Response to Turkey Over Syria,” *Reuters*, Oct. 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-usa-graham/breaking-with-trump-u-s-republicans-press-for-response-to-turkey-over-syria-idUSKBN1WO1ZK>.

229 Not to say there have not been internal disagreements, for instance, over Trump’s policy toward Kurdish allies in Syria. See, Catie Edmondson, “In Bipartisan Rebuke, House Majority Condemns Trump for Syria Withdrawal,” *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/16/us/politics/house-vote-trump-syria.html>.

230 Van Jackson, Heather Hurlburt, Adam Mount, Loren DeJonge Schulman, and Thomas Wright, “Policy Roundtable: The Future of Progressive Foreign Policy,” *Texas National Security Review*, Dec. 4, 2018, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-the-future-of-progressive-foreign-policy/>.

231 Megan Trimble, “America Perceived Less Trustworthy in Trump Era,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 23, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2019-01-23/america-falls-in-trustworthy-countries-ranking-under-trump>.

232 Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Strategic Thinking that Made America Great,” *Foreign Affairs*, Aug. 10, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-08-10/strategic-thinking-made-america-great>.

233 Which is, admittedly, not a movement so much as a few political advisers and writers (a group that has dwindled in numbers since Trump’s election). Contrast the special edition of the *National Review* — “Conservatives Against Trump,” *National Review*, Jan. 22, 2016, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/01/donald-trump-conservatives-oppose-nomination/> — with where its contributors are today on the president. See, Jeremy W. Peters, “The ‘Never Trump’ Coalition that Decided Eh, Never Mind, He’s Fine,” *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/05/us/politics/never-trumper-republicans.html>.

234 I am *not* arguing that Bush’s highly ideological approach to counter-terrorism was an example to follow. I am merely pointing out the radical differences between neoconservatism and Trump’s America First.

235 George W. Bush, “President Bush Addresses the Nation,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19, 2003, <https://georgew-bush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>.

236 James G. Stewart, “Trump Keeps Talking About ‘Keeping’ Middle East Oil. That Would Be Illegal,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 5, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/11/05/trump-keeps-talking-about-keeping-middle-east-oil-that-would-be-illegal/>.

237 Julian Borger, “Rex Tillerson: ‘America First’ Means Divorcing Our Policies from Our Values,” *The Guardian*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/03/rex-tillerson-america-first-speech-trump-policy>.

238 John McCain, “John McCain: Why We Must Support Human Rights,” *New York Times* May 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/08/opinion/john-mccain-rex-tillerson-human-rights.html>. For more on this, see also the leaked memo Tillerson’s adviser Brian Hook wrote on Trump’s “realist” foreign policy: “Balancing Interests and Values,” *Politico*, May 17, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000160-6c37-da3c-a371-ec3f13380001>.

239 Indeed, after McCain’s passing, NATO reportedly considered naming its new headquarters after him. Amanda Macias, “NATO Is Considering Naming Its Headquarters After Sen. John McCain,” *CNBC*, Aug. 29, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/29/nato-considers-naming-headquarters-after-sen-john-mccain.html>.

240 Tina Nguyen, “John McCain Takes Over as Shadow Secretary of State,” *Vanity Fair*, Feb. 2, 2017, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/02/donald-trump-australia-call-john-mccain>.

241 Peter Baker, “A Growing Chorus of Republican Critics for Trump’s Foreign Policy,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/29/us/politics/trump-foreign-policy.html>. Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) has stated that Trump’s requests to Ukraine and China to investigate Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. are “wrong and appalling.” This issue could be seen as both a domestic and a foreign policy issue. See, Carl Hulse, “For Once, Republicans Break with Trump, but Not on Impeachment,” *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/us/politics/republicans-trump-syria.html>.

242 Rachael Bade, “Trump’s Takeover of GOP Forces Many House Republicans to Head for the Exits,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-takeover-of-gop-forces-many-house-republicans-to-head-for-the-exits/2019/09/22/d89f99fc-d4bd-11e9-ab26-e6dbbec45d3_story.html.

243 Henry Farrell, “Thanks to Trump, Germany Says It Can’t Rely on the United States. What Does that Mean?” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/28/thanks-to-trump-germany-says-it-cant-rely-on-america-what-does-that-mean/>; Steven Erlanger, “Macron Says NATO Is Experiencing ‘Brain Death’ Because of Trump,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/07/world/europe/macron-nato-brain-death.html>.

244 Rich Lowry, “The Fantasy of Republicans Ditching Trump,” *Politico Magazine*, Oct. 24, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/24/the-fantasy-of-republicans-ditching-trump-229879>.

245 Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “The Republican Devolution: Partisanship and the Decline of American Governance,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-11/republican-devolution>.

246 “Both the Democrats and Republicans Were Once White Majority Parties. Now, Race Divides Them,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 2, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/02/both-democrats-republicans-were-once-white-majority-parties-now-race-divides-them/>.

labeled it.²⁴⁷ Rather, it has a nationalist, protectionist, and populist purpose, rooted in an ascriptive master narrative. Future paeans to American exceptionalism of the sort that Marco Rubio made in the 2016 campaign would ironically be a rebuke of Trump's presidency.²⁴⁸ At best, the current Republican Party is unsure of what "America" should mean at home and abroad. At worst, it has changed its mind entirely. In short, while the GOP may try to return to the status quo ante in a post-Trump future, they still have to fill a significant credibility gap in order to do so successfully.

Bipartisan Re-evaluation of "The Blob"

Significantly, both political parties are rethinking what the United States' role in the world should be, which is why it is unlikely that there will be a wholesale return to the previous bipartisan consensus regarding U.S. primacy and leadership in the international order, no matter who wins the next presidential election.²⁴⁹ Trump is not the only person who is severely dissatisfied with America's post-Cold War foreign policy.²⁵⁰ Nor is he the only one who thinks "exceptionalism is not a nice term."²⁵¹ Obama's answer to the Strasbourg question in 2009 was a clear rebuke of his predecessor's moralistic exceptionalism. Trump's less eloquent response in April 2015 was, in a way, communicating the same idea as Obama: It is offensive to say to the world, "we are superior to you."

Obama's struggle with American power and ideals was an early sign of the re-evaluation and recalibration of U.S. grand strategy that was underway. Obama consciously distanced himself from the D.C. foreign-policy elites his adviser Ben Rhodes derisively nicknamed "the Blob."²⁵² In the end,

many liberals were disappointed in the limited amount of "change," but the Obama era was a sign of a dissolving foreign policy consensus.²⁵³ This was especially evident in the complex and tragic case of Syria, where reasonable people could disagree on whether and how much the United States should have intervened. After Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons on the people of Ghouta in August 2013, Obama stated,

America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong, but when with modest effort and risk we can stop children from being gassed to death and thereby make our own children safer in the long run, I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional.²⁵⁴

To many European allies, this was refreshingly different from the perceived moralism and arrogance of the George W. Bush administration. Obama's more constrained view of what the United States should represent in the world signaled a growing internal debate in the Democratic Party that somewhat mirrors the one found in the Republican Party.²⁵⁵ Does American exceptionalism entail endless U.S. military engagement around the world? Americans — and many others — are understandably skeptical about such a proposition. According to a national survey by the Eurasia Group Foundation,

A plurality of Republicans and Independents believe America's focus should be on building a healthy democracy at home and

avoiding foreign conflicts. Democrats believe peace is best achieved through economic integration and free trade. "Peace through military strength," associated with neoconservative hawks, and the "democracy promotion" approach associated with liberal interventionism received significantly less support.²⁵⁶

There is an important generational profile to this debate. In the 2017 Chicago Council Survey on generational attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy, Millennials were less inclined than Generation X-ers, Boomers, and the Silent Generation to embrace the idea that the United States is "the greatest country in the world." Only one-quarter of Millennials saw the need for the United States to be "the dominant world leader."²⁵⁷ In other words, no matter who wins the presidency in 2020, an attempt at a snap-back might be unwanted by significant groups of voters in *both* parties.

Does This Mean the End of American Exceptionalism?

When Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell argued for the "end" of American exceptionalism after the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War in 1975, he did so because he found that the "belief in American exceptionalism has vanished with the end of empire, the weakening of power, the loss of faith in the nation's future."²⁵⁸ As it happens, this sentiment is strikingly similar to the disillusionment Peter Beinart finds when reviewing the memoirs of three Obama-era foreign policy officials. Indeed, writes Beinart, "it's possible to read their books not only as tales of tempered idealism but also as chronicles of America's declining exceptionalism."²⁵⁹ Could it be that after several exaggerated reports of its death, the end of American exceptionalism is here? Let us look at what happened last time: Bell failed to predict the rise of Reagan and the strong comeback of American exceptionalism. If history is any guide, perhaps the next president will restore America's sense of exceptionalism and purpose in the world like Reagan did in the 1980s.

The counterpoint is that this time it might actually be different — and that it *should* be different. Jimmy Carter — the president Reagan was reacting to — never *negated* American exceptionalism. He instead rebuked previous American for-

In short, while the GOP may try to return to the status quo ante in a post-Trump future, they still have to fill a significant credibility gap in order to do so successfully.

ign policy from the viewpoint of exceptionalism itself: "we can be better, if we try." It was a familiar American rhetorical tradition — the lament of having fallen short of American exceptional ideals. No president or presidential candidate between 1945 and 2012 argued that the United States is unexceptional and has no role to play in the fight for liberal values around the globe. That powerful national agreement on what role the United States is supposed to play in world history *because of what kind of nation the United States is believed to be held*, in the end, for a rather short American century.

The United States has thus arrived at a fork in the road. There is still strong support for continued international engagement among Amer-

247 Posen, "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony."

248 Benjamin Hardy, "In Little Rock, Marco Rubio Sells American Exceptionalism," *Arkansas Times*, Feb. 22, 2016, <https://arktimes.com/arkansas-blog/2016/02/22/in-little-rock-marco-rubio-sells-american-exceptionalism>. For an analysis of what Republican rhetoric on American exceptionalism looked like right before Trump, see, Jason A. Edwards, "Contemporary Conservative Constructions of American Exceptionalism," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 1, no. 2 (2011): 40–54, http://contemporaryrhetoric.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/edwards1_5.pdf.

249 Chris Murphy, "How to Make a Progressive Foreign Policy Actually Work," *The Atlantic*, Oct. 7, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/10/senator-chris-murphy-progressive-foreign-policy/599470/>.

250 A rather remarkable sign of the times is that the conservative Charles Koch Foundation has teamed up with the liberal Open Society Foundation in order to fund a bipartisan foreign policy think tank aiming to end the "forever wars" called the Quincy Institute. See, Bryan Bender, "George Soros and Charles Koch Take On the 'Endless Wars,'" *Politico*, Dec. 2, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/02/george-soros-and-charles-koch-take-on-the-endless-wars-074737>.

251 Corn, "Donald Trump Says He Doesn't Believe in 'American Exceptionalism.'"

252 David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru," *New York Times*, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html>; Trevor McCrisken, "Ten Years On: Obama's War on Terrorism in Rhetoric and Practice," *International Affairs* 87, no. 4 (July 2011): 781–801, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.01004.x>.

253 Nicholas Kitchen, "Ending 'Permanent War': Security and Economy Under Obama," in *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy?* ed. Michelle Bentley and Jack Holland (Oxon: Routledge 2016), 9–25.

254 "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Sept. 10, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>.

255 For the current debate in the Democratic party, see, for example, Thomas Wright, "The Problem at the Core of Progressive Foreign Policy," *The Atlantic*, Sept. 12, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/progressives-foreign-policy-dilemma/597823/>.

256 Mark Hannah and Caroline Gray, "Indispensable No More? How the American Public Sees U.S. Foreign Policy," Eurasia Group Foundation (November 2019), <https://egfound.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Indispensable-no-more.pdf>.

257 Bruce Jentleson, "Millennials Are So Over U.S. Domination of World Affairs," *The Conversation*, July 26, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/millennials-are-so-over-us-domination-of-world-affairs-99167>.

258 Daniel Bell, "The End of American Exceptionalism," 197.

259 Peter Beinart, "Obama's Idealists: American Power in Theory and Practice," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 6 (November/December 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2019-10-07/obamas-idealists>.

icans,²⁶⁰ but there is also an undeniable weakening of the U.S. foreign policy consensus. This dissolving consensus “reflects a failure to adjust effectively to changes at home and abroad, with resulting confusion and dismay about the nation’s direction and role.”²⁶¹

At the heart of this moment of confusion and dismay is the confrontation between two master narratives: that of American exceptionalism and Jacksonian nationalism. American exceptionalism is an ideational master narrative. It is a story about an ethnically and religiously diverse nation united in adherence to liberal ideas and institutions both at home and abroad. In contrast, the Trump administration’s story of America is *ascriptive*: It is the story of a white, Christian folk community with materialist interests to pursue abroad. Yet, Trump did not create this moment. Before Trump’s presidential campaign, in 2014, the American National Election Study found that only 45 percent of Millennials “consider their American identity as extremely important.”²⁶² The narrative contestation currently underway must be addressed properly because the United States — and its foreign policy — needs a master narrative. Americans need a story about who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. American exceptionalism has proven to be a very useful civic narrative for a nation that cannot unite around shared ethnicity or religion. Indeed, it might be the only possible narrative going forward for a country whose ethnic and cultural identities are increasingly diverse, yet increasingly divided along party lines.²⁶³

Leadership based on liberal ideals and institutions — rather than ascriptive characteristics — is also still the most attractive vision any great power in history has had to offer. According to Bell, American exceptionalism in foreign policy was supposed to be about the belief that the United States would be different from previous world empires in the exercise of power because it was

democratic.²⁶⁴ Given the imperfect execution of the liberal part of the order in the past,²⁶⁵ however, if the United States wants to reclaim the leadership position Trump is currently forfeiting, it will need more than formulaic invocations of America as a “city upon a hill” or nostalgic paeans to a liberal world order that never quite was.²⁶⁶ It will need an updated story of “America” in the world, a story that acknowledges the problems with the “liberal world order” to address the concerns of the next generation of Americans, allies, and adversaries.²⁶⁷ A fresh discussion of what the United States can contribute to the world would entail leaving behind exceptionalist ideas of U.S. superiority and rather focus on securing a future that global advocates of liberal democracy can work together to achieve.²⁶⁸ After Trump comes a moment of opportunity: not to simply put the U.S. ship in reverse, but rather, to plot out a new course. 

Hilde Eliassen Restad is associate professor of international studies at Bjørknes University College in Oslo, Norway. A Fulbright alumna, she has a Ph.D. in foreign affairs from the University of Virginia and is the author of *American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World* (Routledge, 2015).

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the following colleagues for their valuable feedback on the various stages of this manuscript: Melvyn P. Lefler, Nadim Houry, Stephen Pampinella, panelists at the 2018 ISSS-IS conference, panelists at the 2018 BISA U.S. Foreign Policy Working Group Conference, Chris White and my colleagues at Bjørknes University College. A sincere thank you to the thorough and highly efficient editors Galen Jackson, Doyle Hodges, and Megan Oprea at TNSR as well as to the anonymous reviewers.

Photo: Patrick Kelley

260 Dina Smeltz, et al., “Rejecting Retreat,” The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Sept. 6, 2019, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/rejecting-retreat>.

261 Kathleen Hicks, “Now What? The American Citizen, World Order, and Building a New Foreign Policy Consensus,” *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 1 (November 2017): 109, <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/63936>.

262 See Jentleson, “Millennials Are So Over U.S. Domination of World Affairs.”

263 Michael Tesler, *Post-Racial or Most-Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

264 Bell, “The End of American Exceptionalism.”

265 Paul Staniland, “Misreading the ‘Liberal Order’: Why We Need New Thinking in American Foreign Policy,” *Lawfare*, July 29, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/misreading-liberal-order-why-we-need-new-thinking-american-foreign-policy>.

266 Porter, “A World Imagined. Nostalgia and the Liberal Order.”

267 Jentleson, “Millennials Are So Over U.S. Domination of World Affairs.”

268 Rebecca Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “The Day After Trump: American Strategy for a New International Order,” *Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2018): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445353>.





The Strategist

This section is dedicated to publishing the work of current and former senior policymakers, members of the military, and civilian national security practitioners.



WHAT IS A MORAL FOREIGN POLICY?

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.



How should we judge the morality of a president's foreign policy? Joseph Nye suggests a rubric that is based on a three-dimensional ethics of intentions, means, and consequences and that draws from realism, cosmopolitanism, and liberalism.

While historians write about American exceptionalism and moralism, diplomats and theorists like George Kennan have often warned about the negative consequences of the American moralist-legalist tradition. According to this line of thinking, international relations is anarchic and there is no world government to provide order. States must provide for their own defense and when survival is at stake, the ends justify the means. Where there is no meaningful choice there can be no ethics. Thus, in judging a president's foreign policy, we should simply ask whether it worked, not whether it was moral. However, in my experience as a scholar and sometime practitioner of foreign policy, morals do matter.

The skeptics duck the hard questions by oversimplifying things. The absence of world government does not, in fact, mean the absence of all order. And while some foreign policy issues do relate to America's survival as a nation, most do not. Since World War II, the United States has been involved in several wars but none were necessary to ensure its survival. Many important foreign policy choices having to do with human rights or climate change or internet freedom do not involve war at all. Instead, most foreign policy issues involve making trade-offs between values — something that requires making choices — not the application of a rigid formula of "raison d'état." A cynical French official once told me, "I define good as what is good for the interests of France. Morals are irrelevant." He seemed unaware that his statement was a moral judgment.

It is tautological, or at best trivial, to say that all states try to act in their national interest. The important question is how leaders choose to define and pursue that national interest under different circumstances. Access to oil, sales of military equipment, and regional stability are all national interests, but so too are values and principles that are attractive to others. How can these two categories of interests be combined?

Moreover, whether practitioners like it or not, Americans continuously make moral judgments about presidents and foreign policies.¹ The election of Donald Trump has revived interest in what is a moral foreign policy, shifting it from a theoretical question to front page news. For example, after the 2018 killing of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Arabia consulate in Istanbul, Trump was criticized for ignoring clear evidence of a brutal crime in order to maintain good relations with the Saudi crown prince. The *New York Times* labelled Trump's statement about Khashoggi "remorselessly transactional, heedless of the facts," while the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that "we are aware of no President, not even such ruthless pragmatists as Richard Nixon or Lyndon Johnson, who would have written a public statement like this without so much as a grace note about America's abiding values and principles."²

Unfortunately, many judgments about ethics and foreign policy are haphazard or poorly thought through, and too much of the current debate focuses on Trump's personality. Americans are seldom clear about the criteria by which they judge a moral foreign policy. They praise a president like Ronald Reagan for the moral clarity of his statements, as though rhetorical good intentions are sufficient in making ethical judgments. However, Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush showed that good intentions without adequate means to achieve them can lead to ethically bad consequences, such as the failure of Wilson's Treaty of Versailles or Bush's invasion of Iraq. Or they judge a president simply on results. Some observers have praised Richard Nixon for ending the Vietnam War, but was he right to sacrifice 21,000 American lives just to create a reputational "decent interval" that turned out to be an ephemeral pause on the road to defeat?

In this essay, I suggest an approach to comparing different moral foreign policies. I first argue that good moral reasoning should be three dimen-

¹ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Realism, Liberalism and the Iraq War," *Survival* 59, no. 4 (August-September 2017): 7–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1349757>.

² Mark Landler, "Trump Stands with Saudis Over Murder of Khashoggi," *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/20/world/middleeast/trump-saudi-khashoggi.html>; "Trump's Crude Realpolitik," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 21, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trumps-crude-realpolitik-1542763629>.

sional: weighing and balancing the intentions, the means, and the consequences of a president's decisions. Determining a moral foreign policy is not a matter of intentions versus consequences but must include both as well as the means that were used. I then examine and compare the elements of three common mental maps of world politics — realism, cosmopolitanism, and liberalism.

Presidents often combine these three mental maps in different ways that shape the intentions, means, and assessment of consequences of their foreign policy. I illustrate this process with a discussion of the problem of intervention. Finally, I develop a scoring system that allows us to compare their policies, and then apply it to three presidents. Given the different cultural backgrounds, political views, and religious beliefs of Americans, moral reasoning about foreign policy is hotly contested both by politicians and analysts, but it is inescapable.³ This article aims not to solve but to bring structure to these arguments.

Three-Dimensional Ethics

In their daily lives, most people make moral judgments along three dimensions: intentions, means, and consequences. Intentions are more than just goals. They include both stated values and personal motives (as in, “her motives were well meant”). Most leaders publicly express goals that sound noble and worthy, even though their personal motives, such as ego and self-interest, may subtly corrupt those goals. Moreover, good goals must not only satisfy one's values, they also have to pass a feasibility test. Otherwise, the best of intentions can have disastrous moral consequences, often providing the proverbial pavement for the road to hell. Johnson may have had good intentions when he sent American troops to Vietnam, but a leader's good intentions are not proof of what is sometimes misleadingly called “moral clarity.” Judgments based on good intentions alone are simply one-dimensional ethics. For example, Ari Fleischer, the press secretary for George W. Bush, praised his boss for the “moral clarity” of his intentions, but more than that is needed for a sound moral evaluation of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁴

The second important dimension of moral

judgment is means. Means are spoken of as being *effective* if they achieve one's goals, but *ethical* means also depend upon their quality as well as their efficacy. How do leaders treat others? A moral leader must likewise consider the soft power of attraction and the importance of developing the trust of other countries. When it comes to means, leaders must decide how to combine the hard power of inducements and threats with the soft power of values, culture, diplomacy, and policies that attract people to their goals.⁵ Using hard power when soft power will do or using soft power alone when hard power is necessary to protect values raises serious ethical questions about means.

As for consequences, effectiveness is crucial and involves achieving the country's goals, but ethical consequences must also be good not merely for Americans, but for others as well. “America first” must be tempered by what the Declaration of Independence called “a proper consideration for the opinions of mankind.” In practice, effectiveness and ethical means are often closely related. A leader who pursues moral but unrealistic goals or uses ineffective means can produce terrible moral consequences at home and abroad. Leaders with good intentions but weak contextual intelligence and reckless reality-testing sometimes produce bad consequences and lead to ethical failure.

Given the complexity of foreign policy, prudence is more than just an instrumental virtue. Recklessness in assessing what just war theorists call “a reasonable prospect of success” can become culpable negligence in moral terms. Good moral reasoning about consequences must also consider maintaining an institutional order that encourages moral interests as well as particular newsworthy actions, such as helping a human rights dissident. It is also important to include the ethical consequences of “non-actions,” such as President Harry Truman's willingness to accept stalemate and domestic political punishment during the Korean War rather than follow Gen. Douglas MacArthur's recommendation to use nuclear weapons.

Good moral reasoning does not judge presidential choices based on stated intentions or outcomes alone, but on all three dimensions of intentions, means, and consequences.⁶



Mental Maps of the World and Moral Foreign Policy

What is an accurate picture of world politics? Is it so harsh that leaders must abandon their morals at the border? Do they have any duties to those who are not fellow citizens? Cynics might say, “No, because foreigners don't vote.” Total skeptics argue that the entire notion of a “world community” is a myth, and that where there is no community, there are no moral rights and duties. Nonetheless, moral discourse in the realm of foreign policy persists, and leaders use three prevailing mental maps of world politics to offer different answers to these questions.

Realism

While there are various strands of realism, realists all portray a world of anarchy where a state's survival depends upon it helping itself — international morals and institutions provide little succor. Unlike total skeptics, realists accept some moral obligations but see them as limited primarily to

practicing the virtue of prudence in the harsh environment of world politics. John Bolton argues for “defending American interests as vigorously as possible and seeing yourself as an advocate for the US rather than a guardian of the world itself.”⁷ Hans Morgenthau wrote that “the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation...get in the way of successful political survival. ... Realism, then, considers prudence...to be the supreme virtue in politics.”⁸ In the words of John Mearsheimer, “States operate in a self-help world in which the best way to survive is to be as powerful as possible, even if that requires pursuing ruthless policies. That is not a pretty story, but there is no better alternative if survival is a country's paramount goal.”⁹

In dire situations of survival, consequences may indeed justify what appear to be immoral acts. Robert D. Kaplan argues that “the rare individuals who have recognized the necessity of violating such morality, acted accordingly, and taken responsibility for their actions are among the most necessary leaders for their countries.”¹⁰ A frequently cited example is when Winston Churchill attacked the French fleet in

3 Owen Harries, “Power and Morals,” *Prospect*, April 17, 2005, 26, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/powerandmorals>.

4 Ari Fleischer, “What I Will Miss About President Bush,” *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/opinion/02bush.html>.

5 Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

6 Tom L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982), 179. In his view, virtue ethicists emphasize intentions, deontologists focus more on means, and utilitarians are most concerned with consequences.

7 Caroline Daniel, “Hard Man Who Sits at the Heart of US Foreign Policy,” *Financial Times*, Dec. 19, 2002, 14.

8 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 9.

9 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 216.

10 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 2018), 146.

Borders are arbitrary and sometimes unjust, but nations are communities that similarly engender additional roles, rights, and responsibilities.

1940, killing some 1,300 Frenchmen, rather than let the fleet fall into Hitler's hands. Churchill referred to that crisis of British survival as a "supreme emergency," and Michael Walzer argues that in such rare instances moral rules can be overridden even though "there are no moments in human history that are not governed by moral rules."¹¹

For instance, some ethicists have justified Churchill's bombing of German civilian targets in the early days of World War II when Britain's survival was at stake, but condemned his later support for the fire-bombing of Dresden in February 1945 when victory in Europe was already assured.¹² In the early days of the war, Churchill could claim the necessity of "dirty hands" as his justification for overriding the moral rules, but he was wrong to continue to do so in the later days of the war when he had more leeway. In general, such dire straits of supreme emergency are rare and leaders often exaggerate dangers and threats to justify their actions. For example, Trump justified his mild reaction to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi with, "America First! The world is a dangerous place!"¹³

But realists who describe the world in a way that pretends moral choices do not exist are, in fact, making a moral choice and then merely disguising that choice. Survival comes first, but that is not the end of the list of values. Most of international politics is *not* about survival.

A smart realist also knows different types of power exist. No president can lead without power, at home or abroad, but power is more than bombs, bullets, or resources. You can get others to do what you want by coercion (sticks), payment (carrots), and attraction (soft power), and a full understanding of power encompasses all three of these behaviors. Because soft power is rarely sufficient by itself and takes longer to accomplish its effects, leaders find the hard power of coercion or payment more appealing. But when wielded alone, hard power can exact higher costs than when it is combined with the soft power of attraction. The Roman empire rested not only on its legions, but also on the attraction of Roman culture. The Berlin Wall came down not under an artillery barrage, but from hammers and bulldozers wielded by people who had lost faith in communism. A nation's soft power rests upon its culture, its values, and its policies (when the latter are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others). It can be reinforced by the narratives that a president uses to explain his foreign policy. John F. Kennedy, Reagan, and Barack Obama, for example, framed their policies in ways that attracted support both at home and abroad. Nixon and Trump were less successful in attracting those outside the United States. There is a moral difference between a broad, long-term definition of national interest that can include citizens of other nations and a myopic definition that excludes others.

Cosmopolitanism

Another important mental map of the world involves viewing the world through a lens of common humanity, known as cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitans see all humans as of equal moral worth regardless of borders. While it may be weak, some degree of international human community exists. As neural science has shown, moral intuition about other humans is evolutionarily hard-wired into people.¹⁴ Most Americans respond with empathy

to pictures of starving or drowned children even if not all Americans would allow them to cross the U.S. border or would take them into their homes, although some would.

The cosmopolitan mental map rests on the belief that basic human rights are universal. David Luban argues that rights "are not respecters of political boundaries and require a universalist politics to implement them; even if this means breaching the wall of state sovereignty."¹⁵ Many Americans hold multiple loyalties to several communities at the same time in a series of widening concentric circles that extend beyond national boundaries. One can simultaneously feel part of a town, a state, a region, a profession, a transnational ethnic group, and humanity at large. However, loyalty to the outer circles tends to be weaker and generate weaker moral duties than cosmopolitans often assume. One can be a stout inclusive nationalist and a moderate globalist at the same time, but the community of nationality is usually stronger.

I often used to ask my students to test their moral intuitions about the existence and limits of cosmopolitanism with the following thought experiment. Suppose you are a good swimmer reading at the beach and you notice a child drowning in the surf. Would you put down your book and rescue her? Most would say yes. Would it matter whether she called, "Help!" or cried out in a foreign language? Most would say the foreign language would make no difference. If she were somewhat further out and you were not a strong swimmer, how much risk would you take? Answers would range from the prudent to the heroic. If there were two children, one of which was yours, and you could rescue only one, would it matter whether it was yours? Most would say yes.

In other words, one's role as parent adds moral rights and duties beyond the common humanitarian duty that would prompt one to rescue an anonymous drowning child. Borders are arbitrary and sometimes unjust, but nations are communities that similarly engender additional roles, rights, and responsibilities. As Stanley Hoffmann pointed out, "States may be no more than a collection of individuals and borders may be mere facts, but a moral significance is attached to them."¹⁶ A cosmopolitan who ignores the moral, legal, and institutional significance of borders fails to do justice to the difficult job of balancing rights in the international realm as much as the blinkered realist who sees everything as

a matter of national survival. A humanitarian duty to rescue can coexist with a preference for prioritizing the protection of one's fellow citizens.¹⁷ The devil is in the details of how far and how much.

Liberalism

There are various strands of liberalism including economic liberalism, which stresses the pacific benefits of trade; social liberalism, which emphasizes contacts among people; and institutional liberalism, which argues that institutions can create a society of states that mitigates the negative effects of anarchy. International politics is often called anarchic, but anarchy simply means "without government," and does not necessarily mean chaos. Liberals argue that rudimentary practices and institutions such as the balance of power, international law, norms, and international organizations can create enough order to establish a framework for making meaningful moral choices in most cases. Institutions shape expectations of future behavior, which allows leaders to go beyond simple transactionalism.

Institutions of international law and morality play a role even in war. The just war doctrine originated in the early Christian church as Saint Augustine and others wrestled with the paradox that if the good did not fight back, they would perish and the evil would inherit the earth. That doctrine of just self-defense became secularized after the 17th century and today it provides a broad normative structure that encompasses all three moral dimensions discussed above: good intentions represented by a just cause; forceful means that are proportional to the situation and which discriminate between military and civilian targets; and good consequences that emerge from a prudent regard for the probability of success. Just war doctrine is more than theoretical. It is enshrined both in international humanitarian law (e.g., the Geneva Conventions) and the American military's Uniform Code of Military Justice. Soldiers who violated the moral principles that are enshrined in the law of armed conflict have been jailed in many countries including the United States.

Different mental maps of the world portray anarchy differently, and that affects the way leaders frame their moral choices. Writing in 1651 after the bloody English civil war in which the king was decapitated, the realist Thomas Hobbes thought

11 See, Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1973): 160–80. See also, Gerald F. Gaus, "Dirty Hands," in *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, ed. R.G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 167–79.

12 Cathal J. Nolan, "Bodyguard of Lies: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Defensible Deceit in World War II," in *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimensions of International Affairs*, ed. Cathal J. Nolan, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 35–58.

13 "Statement from President Donald J. Trump on Standing with Saudi Arabia," The White House, Nov. 20, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-standing-saudi-arabia/>.

14 Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Random House, 2012).

15 David Luban, "The Romance of the Nation State," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 392, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265007>.

16 Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 155.

17 Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Rethinking Refugee Policy in a Changing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 125.

of anarchy as chaotic and imagined a state of nature without government as a war of all against all where life was “nasty, brutish, and short.” In contrast, writing in a somewhat more peaceful period a few decades later, the liberal John Locke thought of anarchy as the absence of government, but imagined that such a state of nature would involve social contracts that permitted the successful pursuit of life, liberty, and property. Modern liberals follow the Lockean approach to international anarchy and believe that institutions stabilize expectations in ways that permit reciprocity and morality to enter into policy decisions. They help create a “long shadow of the future,” that is a means to escape zero-sum calculations.¹⁸

Liberals argue that while there is no world government, there is a degree of world *governance*. They argue that anarchy therefore has limits. At the same time, they recognize that the state is a key institution of world politics both as a reality and as a moral community. Even a renowned liberal philosopher like John Rawls believed that the conditions for his theory of justice applied only to domestic society.¹⁹ At the same time, Rawls argued that a liberal society’s duties went beyond its borders: These should include mutual aid in dire circumstances and respect for laws and institutions that ensure basic human rights while allowing people in a diverse world to determine their own affairs as much as possible.²⁰

The rise of human rights law after World War II, particularly in reaction to the horror of genocide, has complicated presidential choices. The American public wants some response to genocide, but it is divided over how much. For example, in retrospect, Bill Clinton criticized his own failure to respond to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.²¹ Yet, after the death of American soldiers in an earlier humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1993, had Clinton tried to send American troops to Rwanda he would have encountered stiff resistance in parts of his administration, the Congress, and the public. Clinton has acknowledged that he could have done more to help the United Nations and other countries to save some of the lives that were lost in Rwanda, but this example is a reminder that good leaders today are often caught between their cosmopolitan inclinations and their more traditional democratic obligations to the people who elected them.

Mixing Mental Maps

These three mental maps of world politics are not mutually exclusive — in practice, leaders mix them in inconsistent ways in different contexts to shape the stated intent, means, and consequences of their foreign policies. In a detailed comparison of the 14 American presidents since 1945, I found that most have turned out to be “liberal realists with a touch of cosmopolitanism.”²² Realism is the default position that most presidents use to chart their course in foreign policy. Given a world of sovereign states, in my personal policy experience, realism is the best map to start with. For example, at the end of the Cold War when I participated in formulating an East Asia policy in the Clinton administration, we wanted to integrate a rising China into liberal international institutions, but we started with a realist policy of reaffirming the U.S.-Japan security relationship, which was, at that point, in disarray. By reaffirming America’s position in the regional balance of power, we were taking out a realist insurance policy in case our policy of liberal integration failed. The two approaches were complementary to one another.

Realism is the right place to start, but too many realists stop where they start without realizing that realism is a necessary but not sufficient condition for crafting good policy. They fail to recognize that cosmopolitanism and liberalism often have something important to contribute to forming an accurate moral map. When survival is in jeopardy, realism is a necessary basis for a moral foreign policy, but it is not sufficient for all foreign policy scenarios. The question again is one of degree. Since no state can attain perfect security, the moral issue is what degree of security must be assured before other values such as welfare, identity, or rights become part of a president’s foreign policy? Most foreign policy choices involve questions about authorizing arms sales to authoritarian allies or criticizing the human rights behavior of another country. When some realists treat such issues as similar to Churchill’s decision to attack the French fleet, they are simply ducking hard moral issues. It is not enough to say that security comes first or that justice presupposes some degree of order. Presidents have to assess how closely a situation fits a Hobbesian or Lockean mental map, or where an action

lies on a continuum between ensuring security and pursuing other important values.

Public opinion also shows a similar pattern of mixing mental maps. Because the American people are usually more concerned with domestic issues than foreign policy, they tend toward a basic form of realism. Security from attack and economic security generally rank highest in opinion polls. Because elite opinion is often more interventionist than the public, some critics argue that the elite is more liberal than the public.²³ However, patterns of “strong, widespread public support for international organizations, multilateral agreements and actions, and collective international decision making suggest that most Americans are...‘neo liberals,’” while support for humanitarian assistance shows strands of cosmopolitanism.²⁴

The Example of Intervention

Intervention has been a fraught issue in recent foreign policy debates, prompting questions about when the United States should take actions that involve extending its reach beyond its own borders. Since 1945, the liberal Charter of the United Nations has limited the use of force to self-defense or actions authorized by the Security Council (where the United States and four other countries have veto power). Realists argue that intervention can be justified if it prevents disruption of the balance of power upon which order depends. Cosmopolitans prioritize justice and individual human rights to justify humanitarian intervention. Liberals argue that nations are groups of people with a sovereign right — enshrined in the U.N. Charter — to determine their own fate. Intervention can only be justified to counter a prior intervention or to prevent a massacre that would make a mockery of self-determination.²⁵

In practice, these principles often get combined in odd ways. In Vietnam, Kennedy and Johnson argued that America was countering a North Vietnamese intervention in the South, but the Vi-

etnamese saw themselves as one nation that had been artificially divided for realist, Cold War balance-of-power purposes. In the first Gulf War, George H.W. Bush used force to expel Iraq’s forces from Kuwait in order to preserve the regional balance of power, but he did so using the liberal mechanism of a U.N. collective security resolution and a broad coalition to enhance American legitimacy and soft power. Bush considered himself a realist and refused to intervene to stop the shelling of civilians in Sarajevo, but after devastating pictures of starving Somalis were shown on American television in December 1992, he sent American troops on a cosmopolitan humanitarian intervention in Mogadishu, which subsequently became a problem for his successor.²⁶

In the second Gulf War, American motives for intervention were mixed. Theorists have sparred over whether the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a realist or a liberal intervention.²⁷ Some key figures in the George W. Bush administration, such as Richard Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, were realists concerned about Saddam Hussein’s possession of weapons of mass destruction and the local balance of power. The “neo-conservatives” in the administration (many of whom were former liberals) stressed promoting democracy as well as maintaining American hegemony. Outside the administration, some liberals supported the war because of Hussein’s abominable human rights record, while others opposed Bush for failing to obtain the institutional support of the U.N. Security Council as his father had in the first Gulf War. Stephen Walt, a realist skeptic about intervention, argues that “had realists been at the helm of US foreign policy over the past 20 years, it is likely that a number of costly debacles would have been avoided.”²⁸ Perhaps he is right, but his case is far from clear, for there are many variants of realism as well as of liberalism. Realism is a broad tendency, not a precise category with clear implications for policy. Certainly Cheney and Rumsfeld considered themselves realists. In the 2016 presidential debate, both Trump and Hillary Clinton said the United

18 See, Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Robert O. Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 40, no. 1 (Winter, 1986): 1–27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706740>.

19 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

20 John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

21 Barbara Kellerman, *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), chap. 9.

22 Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

23 Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

24 See, Daniel W. Drezner, “The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (March 2008): 63. See also, Benjamin I. Page and Marshall M. Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want from Our Leaders but Don’t Get* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 241.

25 Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 35–36.

26 Humanitarian intervention is not a new or uniquely American foreign policy problem. Victorian Britain had debates about using force to end slavery, Belgian atrocities in the Congo, and Ottoman repression of Balkan minorities long before Woodrow Wilson became the American president. Gary J. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York, Random House, 2008), 4.

27 Deudney and Ikenberry, “Realism, Liberalism and the Iraq War.”

28 Stephen M. Walt, “What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?” *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 8, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/08/what-would-a-realist-world-have-looked-like-iraq-syria-iran-obama-bush-clinton/>.



No one of the mental maps of the world provides presidents with an easy answer or substitutes for their good judgment and contextual intelligence when deciding whether to intervene or not.



States had a responsibility to prevent mass casualties in Syria, but neither advocated major military intervention. While some commentators argue that liberal interventionism to promote democracy has “grown into ‘America’s self-designation as a special nation,’” there is an enormous difference between democracy promotion by coercive and non-coercive means.²⁹ Voice of America broadcasts and the National Endowment for Democracy cross international borders in a very different manner than does the 82nd Airborne Division. In terms of consequences, the means are as important as the ends. No one of the mental maps of the world provides presidents with an easy answer or substitutes for their good judgment and contextual intelligence when deciding whether to intervene or not.

In its broadest definition, intervention refers to external actions that influence the domestic affairs of another sovereign state, and they can range from broadcasts, economic aid, and support for opposition parties at the low-coercion end of the spectrum, to blockades, cyber attacks, drone strikes, and military invasion at the high-coercive end. From a moral point of view, the degree of coercion involved is very important in terms of restricting local choice and rights. Moreover, military intervention is a dangerous instrument to use. It looks deceptively simple, but rarely is. Prudence warns against unintended consequences.

“The Best Moral Choice in the Context”: A Presidential Scorecard

How then should we judge the morality of a foreign policy? Presidents have their own values and convictions but they are also leaders living in what Max Weber described as a political world of non-perfectionist ethics.³⁰ Arnold Wolfers, a sophisticated and subtle Swiss-American realist, argued after World War II that “the interpretation of what constitutes a vital national interest and how much value should be attached to it is a moral question. It cannot be answered by reference to alleged amoral necessities inherent in international politics.” At the same time, leaders cannot always

follow a simple formula. The best one can hope for in judging the ethics of foreign policy leaders, Wolfers concluded, is determining whether they made “the best moral choices that circumstances permit.”³¹ While this is true, it is not completely helpful. It is a necessary but certainly not a sufficient standard. As mentioned above, prudence is a virtue in an anarchic world, but such a broad rule of prudence can easily be abused.

How, then, can Americans decide whether their presidents did indeed make “the best moral choices” under the circumstances? They can start by making sure to judge them in terms of three-dimensional ethics, deriving criteria for each dimension from the wisdom of all three mental maps of realism, liberalism, and cosmopolitanism (in that order). When looking at the foreign policy goals that presidents have sought, one should not expect them to have pursued justice at the international level similar to what they aspired to in their domestic policies. In the August 1941 Atlantic Charter, one of the founding documents of the liberal international order, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Churchill declared their devotion to ensuring freedom from want and from fear (though they disagreed about the British empire),³² but Roosevelt did not try to transfer his domestic New Deal to the international stage.

As mentioned earlier, survival comes first, but liberals and cosmopolitans argue that America has duties abroad that include humanitarian assistance and respect for basic human rights. Beyond that, Rawlsian liberals want to allow peoples in a diverse world to determine their own affairs as much as possible.³³ Thus, Americans should ask whether a president’s goals include a vision that expresses widely attractive values both at home and abroad, but also prudently balances those values and assesses risks so that there is a reasonable prospect of success. It is not enough to articulate noble goals — feasibility also matters. This means a president should be judged not only on his or her character and intentions, but also on contextual intelligence when it comes to promoting values.

Regarding ethical means, presidents can be judged by the well-established just war criteria of

29 Quoted in, Max Fisher and Amanda Taub, “Syria Provokes an American Anxiety: Is U.S. Power Really So Special?” *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/world/middleeast/syria-provokes-an-american-anxiety-is-us-power-really-so-special.html>. See also, Sean Lynn-Jones, “Why the United States Should Spread Democracy,” Discussion Paper 98-07, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, March 1998.

30 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 126.

31 Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 47–65.

32 See, Michael Fullilove, *Rendezvous with Destiny: How Franklin D. Roosevelt and Five Extraordinary Men Took America Into the War and Into the World* (New York: Penguin, 2013), chap. 7.

33 Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*.

proportional and discriminate use of force that are the law of the land in the United States. They can also be judged by Rawls' liberal concern for minimal degrees of intervention in order to respect the rights and institutions of other peoples.

As for ethical consequences, Americans can ask whether a president succeeded in promoting the country's long-term national interests, but also whether he respected cosmopolitan values regarding human life by avoiding extreme insularity that totally discounts harm to foreigners. The example that leaders set also has important moral consequences, as does whether they are promoting truth and trust that broadens moral discourse at home and abroad.

These criteria are modest and derived from insights from realism, liberalism, and cosmopolitanism. The resulting "scorecard" below is by no means complete. Others might select other criteria from the different mental maps and weight them differently. Nevertheless, this scorecard provides some basic guidance to determine what constitutes a moral foreign policy that goes beyond Wolfers' simple generality about prudence:

Intentions: Goals and Motives

1. Moral vision: Did the president express attractive values, and did those values determine his motives? Did he have the "emotional IQ" to avoid contradicting those values because of his personal needs?³⁴
2. Prudence: Did he have the contextual intelligence to wisely balance the values he pursued and the risks he imposed on others?

Means

3. Use of force: Did he use force while paying attention to necessity, discrimination in the treatment of civilians, and the proportionality of benefits and harm?
4. Liberal concerns: Did he try to respect and use institutions at home and abroad? To what extent did he consider the rights of other peoples?

Consequences

5. Fiduciary: Was he a good trustee of America's long-term interests?
6. Cosmopolitan: Did he consider the interests

of other peoples and minimize causing them unnecessary harm?

7. Educational: Did he respect the truth and build credibility? Did he respect facts? Did he try to create and broaden moral discourse at home and abroad?

Three Illustrations

This three-dimensional scorecard hardly solves all problems of judgment, but it encourages looking at all dimensions of a president's actions when comparing the morality of different foreign policy leadership. Consider the example of Reagan and the two Bushes. When people sometimes call for a "Reaganite foreign policy," they tend to mean the moral clarity that went with Reagan's simplification of complex issues and his effective rhetoric in the presentation of his values. Not only is this type of morality inadequate and one-dimensional for reasons explained above, but it also mistakes the success of Reagan's moral leadership, which included the ability to bargain and compromise as he pursued his policies. Nonetheless, clear and clearly stated objectives can educate and motivate the public. The key question is whether Reagan was prudent in balancing his aspirations and the risks of trying to achieve his objectives. Reagan's initial rhetoric in his first term created a dangerous degree of tension and distrust in U.S.-Soviet relations that increased the prospect of a miscalculation or accident leading to war, but it also created incentives to bargain which Reagan later put to good advantage when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Reagan's second term. In terms of consequences, Reagan undoubtedly advanced the national interests of the United States, though most of the credit for ending the Cold War and the Soviet Union belongs to Gorbachev. In any event, Reagan took good advantage of the opportunity in a manner that did not exclusively benefit insular American interests. He ranks near the top of the second quartile.

By his own account, George H.W. Bush did not have a transformational vision for the world, but was interested in avoiding disaster in a world that was changing dramatically at the end of the Cold War. While he referred to a "new world order" he never spelled out what this would look like. As Bush and his team responded to the forces that were largely outside of his control, he set goals that balanced opportunities and prudence. In each instance, Bush limited his short-term aims in order to pursue long-term stability, prompting some critics to com-

plain that Bush did not set more transformational objectives.³⁵ In ethical terms, although Bush did not express a strong moral vision, it is difficult to make the case that he should have been less prudent and taken more risks. In terms of consequences, Bush was a worthy fiduciary in accomplishing national goals and managed to do so in a manner that was not unduly insular and did minimal damage to the interests of foreigners. He was careful not to humiliate Gorbachev and to manage Boris Yeltsin's transition to power in Russia. At the same time, not all foreigners were adequately protected; for example, Bush assigned a lower priority to Kurds in northern Iraq, to dissidents in China, or to Bosnians who were embroiled in a civil war in the former Yugoslavia. In that sense, Bush's realist approach limited his cosmopolitan impulses. With better communication skills, Bush might also have been able to do more to educate the American public about the changing nature of the world they faced after the Cold War. But given the uncertainties of history, and the potential for disaster as the Cold War era came to a close, Bush had one of the best foreign policies of the period after 1945. He allowed America to benefit from a rising tide and his skills avoided shipwreck during tempest. He ranks in the top quartile (along with Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower.)³⁶

In contrast, George W. Bush started his first term in office as a limited realist with little interest in foreign policy, but his objectives became transformational after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Like Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman, Bush became concerned about security but turned to the rhetoric of democracy to rally his followers in a time of crisis. His 2002 national security strategy, which came to be called the Bush Doctrine, proclaimed that the United States would "identify and eliminate terrorists wherever they are, together with the regimes that sustain them."³⁷ In this new game, there were no rules. The solution to the terrorist problem was to spread democracy everywhere, and a freedom agenda thus became the basis of his 2006 national security strategy.³⁸ But the removal of Hussein did not accomplish the mission, and inadequate understanding of the context plus poor planning and management undercut Bush's grand objectives. As

a result, I rank him in the bottom quartile of presidents since World War II.

Conclusion

A perpetual problem in American foreign policy is the complexity of the context, and that is why contextual intelligence is such an important skill for presidents to have in framing an ethical foreign policy. Contextual intelligence is the ability to understand an evolving environment and capitalize on trends.³⁹ Sometimes prudence is dismissed as mere strategic self-interest and contrasted with moral conviction. But in three-dimensional ethics, both are essential. As Max Weber famously pointed out, conviction is important but in a complex political environment like foreign policy, the president is a trustee who must follow an ethic of responsibility.⁴⁰ In that context, weak contextual intelligence that produces negligent assessment and reckless risk-taking leads to immoral consequences. In legal terms, irresponsible assessment is termed "culpable negligence." In assessing foreign policy, Trump's rejection of intelligence and reliance on television sources raises serious moral as well as practical questions.

We live in a world of diverse cultures and still know very little about social engineering and how to "build nations." When one cannot be sure how to improve the world, prudence becomes an important virtue in an ethic of responsibility, while hubristic visions can do serious damage. Prudence usually requires emotional intelligence and the ability to manage one's emotions and turn them to constructive purposes rather than to be dominated by them.

That returns us to the role of institutions, public goods, and how broadly a president defines America's national interest. The overall assessment of a president's foreign policy depends not just on specific actions but also on how a pattern of actions shapes the environment of world politics. A president may have a broad and long-term vision but be unable to convince the public — witness Wilson in 1919. The disastrous 1930s were caused when the United States replaced Britain as the largest

35 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

36 For a full discussion, see, Nye, *Do Morals Matter?* chap. 9.

37 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, White House, September 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>.

38 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, March 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.

39 Anthony J. Mayo and Nitin Nohria, *In Their Time: The Greatest Business Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005). See also, Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Powers to Lead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chap. 4.

40 Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 126.

34 The masculine pronoun used in the list reflects presidential history, not preferences for the future.

global power but failed to take on Britain's role in providing global public goods. The result was the collapse of the global system into depression, genocide, and world war. In the domestic realm, governments produce public goods such as policing or clean water from which all citizens can benefit and none are excluded. At the anarchic global level, where there is no government, public goods — such as managing climate change, ensuring financial stability, or guaranteeing freedom of the seas — are provided by coalitions led by the largest power. Small countries have little incentive to pay for such global public goods: Because their small contributions make little difference to whether they benefit or not from these goods, it is rational for them to ride for free. But the largest powers can see the effect and feel the benefit of their own contributions. Thus, it is rational and in the long-term national interest of the largest countries to lead. Part of American exceptionalism is America's disproportionate size. Leadership by the largest country in the production of global public goods is consistent with "America First" but it rests on a broader historical and institutional understanding of the current context than Trump has shown when he uses that term.

As Henry Kissinger has argued,

to strike a balance between the two aspects of world order — power and legitimacy — is the essence of statesmanship. Calculations of power without a moral dimension will turn every disagreement into a test of strength. ... Moral prescriptions without concern for equilibrium, on the other hand, tend toward either crusades or an impotent policy tempting challenges; either extreme risks endangering the coherence of the international order itself.⁴¹

Well-meaning interventions that are not based on good contextual intelligence can alter millions of lives for the worse.

For presidents, prudence is a necessary virtue for a good foreign policy, but it is not sufficient. American presidents in the inter-war period were prudent when they instead needed to embrace a broader institutional vision. Wilson had such a vision, but without adequate contextual intelligence. Roosevelt began his presidency without a foreign policy vision but developed one on the job. In the future, a sense of vision and strategy that correctly understands and responds to new technological and environmental changes, such as cyber threats

and climate change, will be crucial. In judging a president's record of pursuing a moral foreign policy that makes Americans safer but also makes the world a better place, it is important to look at the full range of his or her leadership skills, to look at both actions and institutions, commissions and omissions, and to make three-dimensional moral judgments. Even then, we will often wind up with mixed verdicts — but that is the nature of foreign policy. We cannot responsibly banish moral discourse from foreign policy, but we can try to be more disciplined in how we structure our moral reasoning about it. 📌

Joseph S. Nye Jr. is University Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus and former dean of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. He received his bachelor's degree summa cum laude from Princeton University, won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University, and earned a PhD in political science from Harvard. He has served as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, chair of the National Intelligence Council, and deputy under secretary of state for security assistance, science, and technology. His most recent books include *Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era*, *Is the American Century Over?*, and *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy, and the American Academy of Diplomacy. In a recent survey of international relations scholars, he was ranked as the most influential scholar on American foreign policy, and in 2011, Foreign Policy named him one of the top 100 Global Thinkers.

Photo: Sgt. Bryan Lewis



41 Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 367.

SENSE AND INDISPENSABILITY: AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

Azita Raji



Former ambassador to Sweden Azita Raji proposes a way forward for a renewed and sustainable American foreign policy. This would require a re-examination of America's interests, institutional reforms, and a revival of American ideals. To wit: reflection, reform, and renewal.

Like many people of a certain age, I vividly remember the landing of Apollo 11 on the moon more than 50 years ago. I held my breath as the lunar module approached the moon's surface, and when the camera showed the American flag standing on the surface of another world, I was filled with pride, like millions of Americans. But I wasn't an American yet. I was an Iranian citizen, a young girl watching television in our house in Tehran. And although I wouldn't move to the United States until several years later, I knew from an early age that America was the place for me.

The America I admired as a young girl was the America that put a man on the moon, the America that stood for democracy in the face of the Soviet monolith, the America that struggled righteously and courageously to bring justice to all, regardless of color or creed.

Over the past century, the United States has served as the world's premier example and defender of freedom and human rights. Most people on this planet admired America's foundational values — perhaps not universally, but broadly and deeply.¹ I saw this when I studied in Switzerland. I saw it when I worked as an investment banker in Japan. And I especially saw it when I served as the U.S. ambassador to Sweden. Even when they disagreed with American policies, people abroad had faith in the American people and, by and large, believed that the United States would ultimately do the right thing and lead by example.

It is true that, from America's beginning, a certain distance has separated its ideals from its practices, particularly in issues related to race, such as slavery and segregation. The great comfort is that,

over time, this disparity has shrunk as America's practices have approached its ideals. For example, many young people like me, viewing the United States from the outside, saw the achievements of the Civil Rights movement as a historical catharsis that righted old wrongs and helped America purge itself of the Jim Crow era.

But now the distance between America's ideals and practices seems not to be shrinking, but widening. Countries around the world take note when the United States abandons desperate friends, shrugs when dictatorial partners murder critics, or appears to politicize the prosecution of domestic political opponents.² Their observations will have consequences. They may partner less often with the United States, and more often with America's more dictatorial geopolitical competitors. Already some European allies, faced with chaotic and contradictory U.S. policies, are thinking about a possible accommodation with Russia over Crimea.³

This suddenly widening gap between what America stands for and what it does grates deeply against the grain of the country's overwhelmingly beneficial role in post-World War II global history. The United States was instrumental in designing the post-war architecture of international cooperation that created the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and other institutions.⁴ It created the conditions, space, and security that led from the European Coal and Steel Community to the European Union, conditions that transformed Europe from a driver of global conflict twice in one century into one of the world's most remarkable economic and political successes. That security was underwritten by NATO — the world's

¹ See, for example, Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Idea that Is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

² On abandoning friends, see, Peter Baker and Catie Edmondson, "Trump Lashes Out on Syria as Republicans Rebuke Him in House Vote," *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/16/world/middleeast/trump-erdogan-turkey-syria-kurds.html>. On minimizing the murder of American-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, see, Michael D. Shear, "Trump Shrugs Off Khashoggi Killing by Ally Saudi Arabia," *New York Times*, June 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/23/us/politics/trump-khashoggi-killing-saudi-arabia.html>. On politicizing the prosecution of political opponents, see, Katie Benner and Adam Goldman, "Justice Dep't Is Said to Open Criminal Inquiry Into Its Own Russia Investigation," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/us/politics/john-durham-criminal-investigation.html>.

³ See, for example, David Chazan, "France Says 'Time Has Come' to Ease Tensions with Russia," *The Telegraph*, Sept. 9, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/09/france-says-time-has-come-ease-tensions-russia/>.

⁴ See, G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

most effective military alliance — which successfully deterred the Soviet Union for decades until what Ronald Reagan aptly called the “evil empire” was consigned to the dustbin of history.

All of these institutions were created to tame international anarchy and promote global cooperation that would enable the spread of free political systems and free markets. Given the violence endemic to human affairs, they were enormously successful, particularly in Europe. But these global institutions require an engaged, productive United States, no less so nearly 30 years after the end of the Cold War. For example, NATO without the United States is less than the sum of its parts. The question isn't simply one of power, but of legitimacy and leadership. An America that leads NATO in the pursuit of legitimate goals turns a summation of military forces into a multiplier of both hard power and soft power.⁵ A United Nations without the United States is a debate club, barren of ideals or purpose, overwhelmed by disinformation and autocratic bluster. The G7 relies on active leadership from Washington for its success.

But in a few short years, the Trump administration has taken an axe to these institutions by praising and partnering with authoritarians, railing against longtime democratic allies, and straining or breaking international alliances and agreements.⁶ As many voices predicted, “America First,” is mostly “America Alone,” with only the occasional bad company of faithless autocrats and noxious hyper-nationalists.

America occupies a privileged, but assailable position, rivaled by revisionist powers. If it continues on its current course of disengaging from global leadership and adopting “America First” policies, those of us who watched in wonder the landing on the moon may live to see a darker, more terrifying era set in. Arguably this era has already begun, given that Turkey's intervention in Syria — made possible by President Donald Trump's decision to pull back U.S. troops — could lead to an even more

unpredictable downward spiral of that conflict, and the president is demanding dramatically increased monetary contributions to defense from stalwart Asian allies, such as Japan and South Korea.⁷

As the country prepares for what is sure to be a contentious and tense electoral season, presidential aspirants and analysts of all stripes are offering their visions for America's role in the world in the forthcoming era. Many of these visions are inspiring. Too many, however, lack a process for identifying specific policies. The “vision thing” is surely important for guiding the country forward, but the devil is in the details, and a way to create these details is needed in order to find the devil inside them. Pivotal moments in history hinge on the hard cases, and these tend to defy high-minded principles.

Surviving Contact with Reality

A durable vision for foreign policy that can survive contact with hard cases must grapple with the following inter-related realities.

First, the post-Cold War era, defined by America's “unipolar moment,” is ending.⁸ That would be true regardless of who is in the White House. But the global distribution of power that will define the next world order is still up for grabs. Whoever wins the 2020 presidential election will have the unenviable task of reaffirming alliances and rebuilding trust with partners made skeptical that America can make promises that last from one administration to another. The task is essential in order to preserve and promote America's values in a multipolar world. Rather than America First, the country should strive to be *America primus inter pares* — first among equals, or leader by general acclamation rather than by proclamation.

Second, while the international institutions that America built over the last 70 years — military, economic, and beyond — remain critical, they are no longer as fit-for-purpose as they once were. Ris-

5 Alexandra Gheciu, “Security Institutions as Agents of Socialization? NATO and the ‘New Europe,’” *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (October 2005): 973–1012, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050332>.

6 For praising and partnering with authoritarians, see, for example, Domenico Montanaro, “6 Strongmen Trump Has Praised — and the Conflicts It Presents,” *NPR*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/02/526520042/6-strongmen-trumps-praised-and-the-conflicts-it-presents>; and “The Strange Love-In Between Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdogan,” *The Economist*, Nov. 14, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2019/11/14/the-strange-love-in-between-donald-trump-and-recep-tayyip-erdogan>. For railing against longtime democratic allies, see, for example, Paul D. Shinkman, “Trump Attacks France, Germany while Praising Turkey at NATO Summit,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Dec. 3, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2019-12-03/trump-attacks-france-germany-while-praising-turkey-at-nato-summit>. For straining or breaking international alliances and agreements, see, for example, “Donald Trump: European Union Is a Foe on Trade,” *BBC*, July 15, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44837311>; Lisa Friedman, “Trump Serves Notice to Quit Paris Climate Agreement,” *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/climate/trump-paris-agreement-climate.html>; and Mark Landler, “Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

7 See, Lara Seligman and Robbie Gramer, “Trump Asks Tokyo to Quadruple Payments for U.S. Troops in Japan,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 15, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/15/trump-asks-tokyo-quadruple-payments-us-troops-japan/>.

8 The phrase “unipolar moment” was popularized by Charles Krauthammer in an influential essay in *Foreign Affairs*. Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sept. 18, 1990, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1991-02-01/unipolar-moment>.



ing competitors may offer compelling alternatives such as China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Old institutions are also increasingly challenged from within as governments in countries like Hungary, Poland, and Turkey develop autocratic characteristics. And America's own foreign policy institutions are also in need of modernization, recapitalization, and reform.

Third, the American people have been disengaged from foreign policy for far too long. This is not necessarily a question of public ignorance. As Emma Ashford recently wrote, "[A]fter almost two decades of an unwinnable 'War on Terror,' it's somewhat condescending to assume that the problem is with the American people, not with the foreign policy itself."⁹ It may be true that there are aspects of U.S. foreign policy that demand better explanations to some segments of the electorate, such as the value of multilateral agreements and military alliances. But it is also time for America's foreign policy elite to listen to the American people. While Trump's visceral hostility to NATO is wrong, for example, his antagonism has shined a light on legitimate questions regarding burden-sharing that deserve fair debate. Rather than just pivoting to Asia, America will need to balance itself carefully in the east and the west to counter terrorist threats and an emerging Sino-Russian bloc that supports autocratic practices and policies. For this job, America's allies — particularly in Europe — must be better invested both ideologically and financially in their own defense.

Toward a Sustainable American Foreign Policy

How do we restore U.S. leadership in a sustainable way that advances American interests without overextension? It's a big question, but difficult times call for ambitious thinking. As John F. Kennedy said when he announced America's intention to go to the moon, we do these things "not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

I propose three groups of priorities for a renewed and sustainable American foreign policy. They consist of a period of public deliberation and debate to re-examine, clarify, and perhaps redefine assumptions about America's interests; wide-ranging institutional reforms as a result of those deliberations;

and a corresponding revival of American ideals and the hard and soft power behind them. To sum up, America needs to begin the process for reflection, reform, and renewal.

First, reflection. America needs a national conversation about how to rekindle the power of its ideals. The 1945 Joint Congressional Committee on the Organization of Congress, and subsequent iter-



If America stays true to its core values, it will continue to attract the sympathies and support of right-thinking people around the world.



ations in 1965 and 1991, offers a model.¹⁰ A new Joint Committee for a Renewed American Foreign Policy would serve a useful political purpose, showing the public that both parties can come together again for the country's greater good. It would also inject needed congressional oversight into foreign policy formulation during a time when it is dangerously concentrated in the executive branch.

The problem is party polarization. I assume, perhaps optimistically, that following the next election cycle policymakers from both sides of the aisle will crave a period of relative political peace, irrespective of the victor. After every presidential election, a period of good feelings — mixed with exhaustion — invariably settles upon Washington. Politicians

from both parties pledge to work on a bipartisan basis and the newly elected president is toasted at an inaugural luncheon hosted by the bipartisan Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. All the rancor of the 2016 election did not stop President Barack Obama from graciously welcoming President-elect Trump to the White House while making a call for national unity.¹¹ Perhaps those good feelings could be channeled into a Joint Committee for a Renewed American Foreign Policy, with all the appeal to political independents that such high-minded bipartisanship would hold. They could use that time to rebuild bridges and ponder ways to ensure that America's policies are consonant with its ideals.

The United States is the oldest democracy in the world: a self-perfecting nation based on the ideals of equality. If it is again to become Reagan's "shining city on a hill," America must remember that all eyes are upon it.¹² It must also be willing to recognize and correct its mistakes. If America stays true to its core values, it will continue to attract the sympathies and support of right-thinking people around the world. This is a subtle kind of power, but it extends wherever people demand freedom and justice, which is to say everywhere.

In that vein, perhaps the greatest failure of the current administration is the perception, widely held abroad and sometimes at home, that U.S. foreign policy has ceased to defend democratic rules, ideals, and norms, and instead has become an instrument that American elites use to pursue their own corrupt interests — or like many other countries whose foreign policies are extensions of autocratic agendas.

Therein lies the fundamental contradiction of "America First." Eisenhower once said, "America is great because she is good." But an America that uses all means to place herself first cannot be great because she is just like everyone else, throwing around sharp elbows to grab whatever scraps lie on the geopolitical table. And if America's great-

ness is measured only by the size of its economy or the strength of its military, rather than the appeal of its ideals, then it will eventually likely be overtaken by a country like China, which has a larger population and more natural resources. Where such a country can never overtake America is in its commitment to universal ideals that respect and enable the fundamental potential and goodness of all people. When I was a young girl watching Apollo 11 descend onto the lunar surface, I did not think of the United States as advancing a narrow and self-interested agenda while fighting with others at the geopolitical table. America was the only table worth sitting at, and all of us wanted a seat. Apollo 11 represented the vanguard of humanity's desire to transcend its limits, and the stunning accomplishment of putting a man on the Moon had a seismic foreign policy impact far beyond our ability to measure. It was freedom's ultimate success story: Dare to be free, and you could reach for the stars.

Second, reform. The outcome of this national conversation would serve as the basis for wide-ranging institutional reform.

America must invest in and modernize its diplomacy. As U.S. ambassador to Sweden, I had the privilege of leading a team of career diplomats, military officers, and civil servants from numerous government agencies and departments as we worked together to advance American interests abroad. Those people remain some of the most capable professionals I have had the pleasure to work with in my career. Diplomats testifying in the ongoing House impeachment hearings have demonstrated for the American people the high standards of professionalism in the Foreign Service, as well as the seriousness and consequential nature of U.S. diplomacy. They are not exceptions, but the rule.

But even the most capable individuals need adequate resources to do their jobs, and in his 2020 budget, the president proposed a 23 percent cut in State Department and USAID funding.¹³ Gen. Jim Mattis famously said in 2013, "If you don't fund the

⁹ Emma Ashford, "The Gentleman from Nebraska Misfires on America's Foreign Policy Debate," *War on the Rocks*, May 6, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/the-gentleman-from-nebraska-misfires-on-americas-foreign-policy-debate/>.

¹⁰ For a useful overview of these committees, see, Donald R. Wolfensberger's "A Brief History of Congressional Reform Efforts," The Bipartisan Policy Center and The Woodrow Wilson Center, Feb. 22, 2013, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/brief_history_congressional_reform_efforts.pdf. Wolfensberger concludes that such committees have had, at best, mixed results. But a new joint committee could be a useful way to begin a conversation about how to rebalance power between the legislative and executive branches, particularly in areas of foreign policy and defense. It could also help lead the way to reforming legislation.

¹¹ David Nakamura and Juliet Eilperin, "Trump Meets with Obama at the White House as Whirlwind Transition Starts," *Washington Post*, Nov. 10, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/11/10/obama-to-welcome-trump-to-white-house-for-first-meeting-since-election/>.

¹² In Reagan's election eve address, he said, "I know I have told before of the moment in 1630 when the tiny ship *Arabella* bearing settlers to the New World lay off the Massachusetts coast. To the little bank of settlers gathered on the deck John Winthrop said: 'we shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.' Well, America became more than 'a story,' or a 'byword' — more than a sterile footnote in history. I have quoted John Winthrop's words more than once on the campaign trail this year — for I believe that Americans in 1980 are every bit as committed to that vision of a shining 'city on a hill,' as were those long ago settlers." Ronald Reagan, "Election Eve Address: 'A Vision for America,'" American Presidency Project, Nov. 3, 1980, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/election-eve-address-vision-for-america>.

¹³ "A Budget for a Better America: Promises Kept. Taxpayers First," The White House, March 11, 2019, 71, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/budget-fy2020.pdf>.

State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition.”¹⁴ His meaning was that the hard daily work of diplomacy, rarely acknowledged in public, defuses disputes before they break out into military conflicts. Both of Trump’s secretaries of state, however, have driven junior and senior members of the Foreign Service out of the department at a time when U.S. foreign policy is in tatters across the globe.¹⁵ As former Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, the damage now being done to the State Department “will likely prove to be more severe to both diplomatic tradecraft and U.S. foreign policy” than any previous political assault on the institution.¹⁶

All that said, it is not enough to simply provide more funding. The State Department’s challenges have become more complex, from the rise of China to the impact of artificial intelligence on foreign policy. The way that it does its work must be fundamentally re-imagined. I cannot claim to know exactly how the department should be reformed. Ideally, the results of a Joint Committee for a Renewed American Foreign Policy, informed by career staffers and specialist academics, would help to provide more specific prescriptions. But I can say that while diplomacy cannot achieve everything, it is the most cost-effective way to build support for America’s priorities abroad and promote the mutual understanding so necessary for international cooperation.

Part and parcel of reforming U.S. diplomacy is communicating its necessity and value to Americans who are often skeptical of what taxpayer dollars purchase at the State Department. America seems more willing to fund what it can count. To borrow Mattis’ words, ammunition is easy to quantify, but soft power is not. It is important to help people understand that America’s military forces aren’t based in Europe out of altruism; they are there to keep the peace in a continent that has spawned two world wars that killed tens of millions, including hundreds of thousands of Americans. America isn’t in the United Nations because it likes getting harangued by its adversaries; it is there to push back against their hostile policies, and to help ensure that conflicts get resolved before they flame out of control and become armed

conflicts that drag America in.

American primacy in international affairs has allowed the United States to set standards and reach markets in a way that a less engaged nation never could.¹⁷ And American consumers have gained enormously from trade, with access to affordable goods undreamt of when Neil Armstrong was taking big steps on the moon. The benefits to average Americans are real. Policymakers need to work harder to communicate these benefits, while not dismissing concerns about trade out of hand.

Finally, out of reform would come renewal. With faith in America’s ideals renewed, the country would have a newfound confidence in supporting those ideals without hypocrisy, using both hard and soft power. U.S. foreign policy works best when American ideals and aspirations are at its core. But the country would also have to stop turning a blind eye to behaviors that contradict its fundamental values. A “transactional” foreign policy leaves America short-changed because autocracies inevitably gain more from it, and rules-based democracies gain less. If American leaders shrug when autocrats murder journalists or repress their own people, America’s natural allies are repelled, and by acquiescing to authoritarianism the country helps corrode the international order. Friend or competitor, ally or enemy, the United States must hold other nations to account when they step over the line. This can take the form of quiet diplomacy and arm-twisting behind the scenes, public rebuke and peer pressure, or even bilateral or multilateral sanctions. But the message should be clear: Autocratic regimes cannot enjoy the benefits of the West while taking actions that undermine it.

Perhaps the first goal for an American foreign policy revival would be to try again on international trade accords. The Obama administration began to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership, signed the Paris Climate Agreement, and advocated for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, while the Trump administration withdrew the United States from the climate accord and suspended negotiations on the two trade agreements. But all these agreements had real benefits for the United States, from setting the “rules of the game”

for global trade before China can do so itself, to tackling the existential threat of climate change, to forming the world’s largest free trade zone with wealthy nations eager to buy American goods. It’s not too late to resurrect all these agreements or negotiate new ones. Doing so would lay the foundation for years of mutually beneficial economic exchange that would do much to lower the chances of great power warfare.

In the past, America has thrown open its doors to refugees, kept the peace in war-racked regions, stemmed the tide of AIDS in Africa, and kept the light of freedom alive in hopeless corners of the world. After the unbelievable horror of World War II, the United States helped build an international system that has prevented another global catastrophe. It has become the richest country in the world through trade and helped bring unimaginable levels of prosperity to the rest of the globe.

The United States may have hit a rough patch in its history. But for me, it will always be that gutsy country that dared to dream that a person could walk on the moon. A momentary crisis of confidence doesn’t change the fact that America is a positive force for good in the world.

That’s what America is: a place where hope compels us to believe that great things can still be done. That’s who Americans are. And if Americans are true to their values, then the United States will once again be a guiding light in the night for the world. 🇺🇸

Azita Raji served as U.S. ambassador to Sweden from 2016 to 2017. She is a senior fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Photo: CGP Grey

14 Mattis frequently reprised this theme, even while serving as secretary of defense. See, for example, his remarks of Oct. 30, 2018: “I was frustrated enough with some aspects of State Department’s budget that, in my testimony, I said if you don’t fully fund up on Capitol Hill, my testimony, if you don’t fully fund the State Department, please buy a little more ammunition for me because I’m going to need it.” “Secretary Mattis Remarks on the National Defense Strategy in Conversation with the United States Institute for Peace,” Department of Defense, Oct 30, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1678512/secretary-mattis-remarks-on-the-national-defense-strategy-in-conversation-with/>.

15 Max Greenwood, “State Dept. Saw 12 percent Drop in Foreign Affairs Workers in First 8 Months of 2017,” *The Hill*, Feb. 10, 2018, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/373299-state-dept-saw-12-percent-drop-in-foreign-affairs-workers-in-first-9>.

16 William J. Burns, “The Demolition of U.S. Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 14, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-10-14/demolition-us-diplomacy>.

17 See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, “Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 17–29, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679418000072>.

WHAT WENT WRONG? U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS FROM TIANANMEN TO TRUMP

James B. Steinberg

James Steinberg looks back at the relationship between the United States and China over the last 30 years and asks whether a better outcome could have been produced had different decisions been made.

This essay is adapted from the Ernest May Lecture delivered on Aug. 3, 2019, at the Aspen Strategy Group.

There are few things that Democrats and Republicans in Washington agree on these days — but policymakers from both parties are virtually unanimous in the view that Sino-American relations have taken a dramatic turn for the worse in recent years. In the span of just about one decade, we have seen what was once hailed as a budding strategic “partnership” transformed into “a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order.”¹ This dark view of the bilateral relationship spans the political spectrum from the Trump administration to the president’s Democratic challengers on the left. Consider, for example, this statement from Sen. Elizabeth Warren regarding America’s engagement with China: “The whole policy was misdirected. We told ourselves a happy-face story that never fit with the facts.”² As journalist Mark Landler recently observed, “From the White House to the boardroom, from academia to the news media, American attitudes toward China have soured to an extent unseen since Mr. Kissinger’s historic trip.”³

What went wrong? How did a relationship that appeared to hold such promise turn into a rivalry that more and more resembles the challenges of

the Cold War? And, since this is an election year, the question quickly morphs into the all too familiar, “Who is to blame?”⁴

For some, this trajectory of Sino-American relations is not surprising. Scholars such as John Mearsheimer have long argued that conflict between the United States and China is unavoidable — a product of the inherent tensions between an established and rising power.⁵ If we accept this view, then the policy question — both with regard to the past and to the future — is not how to improve Sino-American relations but rather how to prevail in the foreordained contest. Taken at face value, this view suggests that if anything “went wrong” it was the failure to understand from the outset that China and the United States were destined for what the National Bureau of Asian Research has called the “U.S.-China Competition for Global Influence” — the title of the latest in its *Strategic Asia* series.⁶ If any mistakes were made, they were mistakes that came from wrongly believing that a better, more cooperative relationship was possible.

This is a pretty bleak assessment about the future. Even if military conflict is not inevitable, it’s hard to see how this view produces anything except a prolonged, costly, and potentially dangerous struggle between two militarily and economically powerful states across the full range of policy issues. It’s “game on” in the battle for primacy in which each side has the determination to prevail rather than submit.

1 See, “U.S.-China Joint Statement,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Nov. 17, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>. “The two sides reiterated that they are committed to building a positive, cooperative and comprehensive U.S.-China relationship for the 21st century, and will take concrete actions to steadily build a partnership to address common challenges.”

2 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, December 2017, 45 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

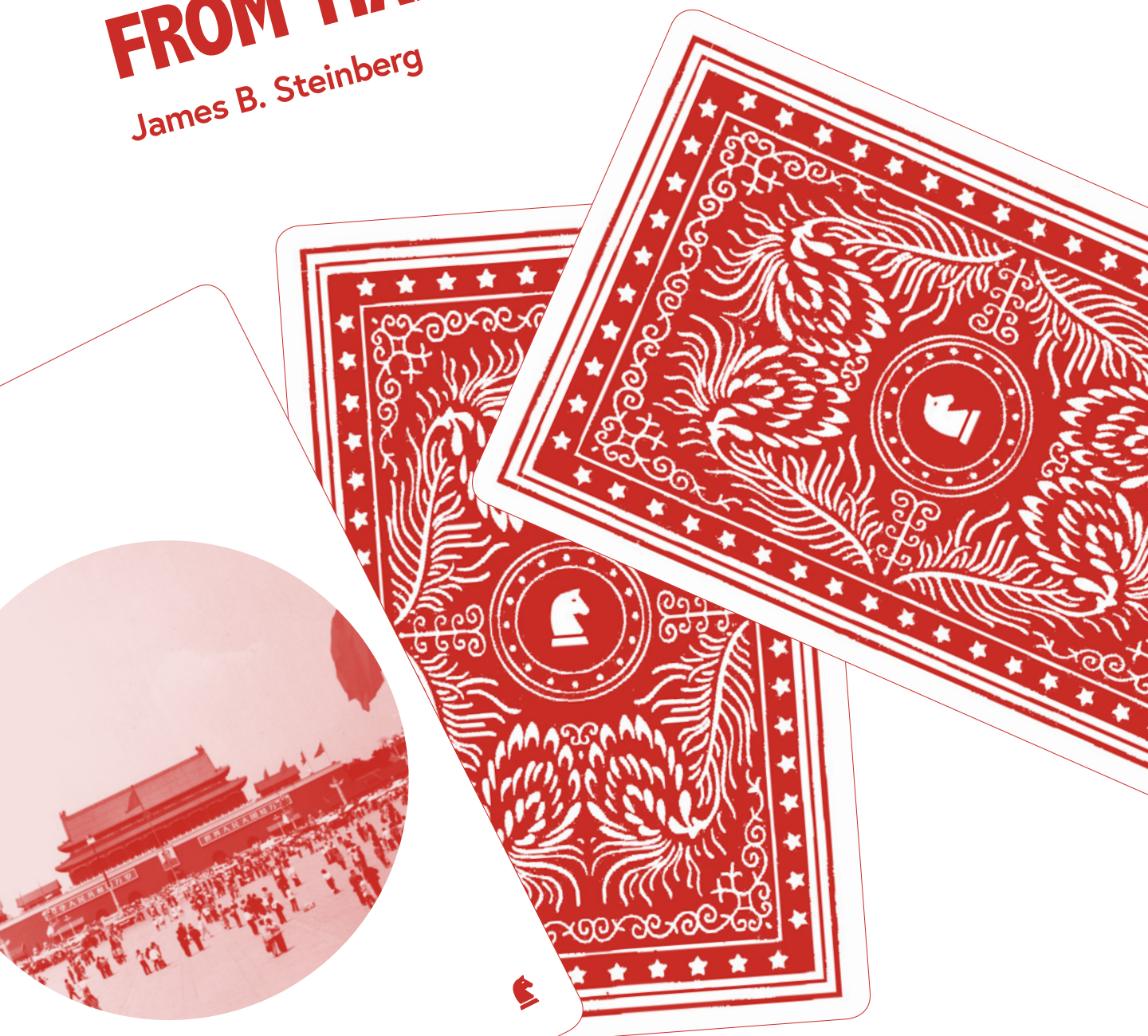
3 Michael Martina, “Senator Warren, in Beijing, Says U.S. Is Waking Up to Chinese Abuses,” *Reuters*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-warren/senator-warren-in-beijing-says-u-s-is-waking-up-to-chinese-abuses-idUSKCN1H80X2>.

4 Mark Landler “The Road to Confrontation,” *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/25/world/asia/china-us-confrontation.html>. Public opinion on U.S.-Chinese relations has also recently turned more negative, although positive attitudes remain higher today than in the aftermath of Tiananmen or even the late 1990s. See, Dina Smeltz et al., “Rejecting Retreat: Americans Support U.S. Engagement in Global Affairs,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Sept. 6, 2019, 29–30, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/rejecting-retreat>. According to the Pew Research Center, unfavorable U.S. attitudes toward China increased by 13 percent from 2018 to 2019. See, Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions,” Pew Research Center, Aug. 13, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/13/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions/>.

5 As such, the contemporary debate is beginning to take on a resemblance to the pernicious “Who lost China?” debate following the communist victory in 1949. See, for example, Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the “Loss” of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

6 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), chap. 2; Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

7 Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia 2020: US-China Competition for Global Influence* (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020), <https://www.nbr.org/publication/strategic-asia-2020-u-s-china-competition-for-global-influence/>.



But for those of us who question the premise, there is a heavy burden to show that an alternative path was possible in the past and may still be possible in the future. In this essay, I focus on the past to see whether different choices might have produced a better outcome, thus suggesting, though not guaranteeing, that choices in the future might similarly lead to a more optimistic result.

Framing the question this way naturally leads to a counterfactual exercise. If we can't construct a plausible counterfactual story that would have led to a better outcome, then the result of the exploration will lead us back to the alternative hypothesis — namely that the current state of affairs was either inevitable or, perhaps, is even better than it might otherwise have been. This is no small challenge. Counterfactual assertions are easy to make and are often resorted to, not just in the academy, but in the world of politics. But they are inherently impossible to prove. Yet, despite the formidable methodological challenges, counterfactual analysis is an indispensable tool in the analytic tool kit. Near the end of *Strange Victory*, Ernest May's magisterial study of the fall of France in 1940, he observes, "though many historians raise eyebrows at counterfactual speculation, I think it integral to any historical reconstruction. ... I simply choose to say explicitly that if condition x had not obtained, the actual events probably would not have gone as they did."⁸

There are few tools available to assess the validity of counterfactuals. May himself often confidently offered rather definitive conclusions that might startle a political scientist: In *Strange Victory*, he asserted, for example, that "intelligence analysis was an integral part of German operational planning; without it the odds against Germany adopting anything like the final version of Plan Yellow would have been at least two to one."⁹ However, a number of insightful political scientists, including Jack Levy, Richard Ned Lebow, Steve Weber, Philip Tetlock, and Aaron Belkin have offered valuable suggestions on better and worse ways to apply

counterfactual analysis to international relations.¹⁰

What different decisions might the United States and China have made over the past 30 years that would have produced a better outcome in Sino-American relations today? Before delving into that question, first I'll clarify two things: One, by "better," I mean a relationship that featured more cooperation across a range of issues — including security, economic, and political issues — and less risk of conflict, especially military conflict. Two, I chose 30 years because this past summer marks the 30th anniversary of the Chinese government's suppression of the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square. China's actions — and the George H.W. Bush administration's response — represent one of the most important decisions that shaped the course of Sino-American relations and one that I will return to in detail shortly. Moreover, the end of the Cold War arguably represents a significant inflection point in Sino-U.S. relations, as the relationship became less instrumental and more centrally focused on bilateral concerns.

My initial approach to answering the question of what might have been done differently was to look at key decisions made by each side over the past 30 years, to see whether a different choice in any of these cases might have had a significant impact on the trajectory of the relationship. Borrowing from the political science literature, the question is sometimes phrased in terms of "critical junctures" — moments in time where specific decisions have a consequential, and potentially irreversible, impact on the course of events.¹¹ But further reflection suggests that it was at least as likely that the "path" of U.S.-Chinese relations was the product of a sequence of accumulated decisions rather than one decisive moment. For Robert Frost, two roads might diverge in ways that have irreversible consequences, but, as critics of the critical junctures approach have pointed out, international relations are not so binary.¹² In the case of Sino-American relations, each of the individual, specific choices re-

flected a broader underlying policy approach that informed that choice — a policy approach sometimes called a policy of "engagement," which was relatively consistent across the four administrations from George H.W. Bush to Barack Obama. After looking at some of the key decisions that were made and the alternative decisions that *could* have been made, I will turn to the question of whether a different strategy based on a different set of assumptions would have produced a better result.

In this essay, I examine three decisions that many commentators have identified as the key "mistakes" of the past 30 years: the U.S. response to Tiananmen; the decision to support China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and grant China Permanent Normal Trade Relations; and the U.S. effort to broker a resolution of the Scarborough Shoal crisis in 2012. I've picked these three decisions for several reasons. First, at the time of each decision, some were pushing for a different approach. Although there is debate in the political science community about whether this is a necessary condition for a plausible counterfactual, it certainly helps the credibility of the analysis.¹³ Second, the decisions occurred under three different administrations, one Republican and two Democratic. Finally, these decisions cover the three main areas of contention in the U.S.-Chinese relationship: values, economics, and security, respectively. Although I focus in this essay only on U.S. decisions, a more complete analysis would give comparable attention to Chinese decision-making as well, a point I'll come back to in the conclusion.

Decision 1: Tiananmen

First, let's consider the decisions made in Washington after China's 1989 actions against the democracy protests in Tiananmen Square. The story of the U.S. debate on how to respond is a familiar one, although the recent publication of "The New

Tiananmen Papers" in *Foreign Affairs* revealing the deliberations of the Communist Party of China, and the Asia Society's re-publication of key documents from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library help revive a sense of the contemporary debate in both countries.¹⁴ Both in its direct diplomacy with China, as well as its executive actions and negotiations over sanctions legislation, the Bush administration sought to moderate the U.S. response to limit the overall disruption in Sino-U.S. relations. There were calls at the time for tougher sanctions, including revoking China's most favored nation status, while candidate Bill Clinton vehemently attacked the policy in his 1992 presidential campaign.¹⁵ Nor was the critique of Bush's policy response limited to Bush's Democratic opponents. Writing in the *World Policy Journal* shortly after Tiananmen, Marie Gottschalk, the associate editor, argued,

The time for a reassessment of Sino-American relations is long overdue. China's domestic and international conditions have changed enormously since President Nixon's visit in 1972. ... Yet US policy has remained surprisingly constant, driven by outdated sentiments and questionable assumptions. By failing to rethink this approach, the so-called realists have pursued a surreal path in Sino-American relations that has not only hurt the cause of political reform and human rights in the People's Republic, but also America's long-term interests in the region.¹⁶

The Bush administration's decision to try to sustain U.S.-Chinese ties, rather than to adopt more punitive measures, was not based exclusively on either the strategic or the economic value of the Sino-American relationship. Bush himself argued that continued engagement with China, including through trade, would foster the *values* agenda as well: "As people have commercial incentives, whether it's in China or in other totalitarian countries, the

8 Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 452–53.

9 May, *Strange Victory*, 456.

10 See, e.g., Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, "Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological and Psychological Perspectives," in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, ed. Tetlock and Belkin; Steven Weber, "Counterfactuals, Past and Future," in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, ed. Tetlock and Belkin; Jack S. Levy, "Counterfactuals, Causal Inference, and Historical Analysis," *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (2015): 378–402, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1070602>; and, Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also, Daniel Nolan, "Why Historians (and Everyone Else) Should Care About Counterfactuals," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 163, no. 2 (March 2013): 317–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41932671>.

11 On critical junctures and path dependency, see, Giovanni Capocchia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (April 2007): 341–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100020852>.

12 There are several dimensions to the critique. First is the issue of causality: Just because a sequence of events followed a decision does not in itself imply causation; the outcome might have occurred in any event. The second is the question of "irreversibility" — the possibility that a subsequent decision might have restored events back on to the path that would have occurred had the initial decision been different. See works cited in note 11.

13 See, for example, Niall Ferguson, "Introduction," in *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, ed. Niall Ferguson (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

14 Andrew J. Nathan, "The New Tiananmen Papers: Inside the Secret Meeting that Changed China," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019); "The Other Tiananmen Papers," Asia Society China File, July 8, 2019, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/other-tiananmen-papers>.

15 For a detailed account of the Bush administration actions and the congressional response, see, David Skidmore and William Gates, "After Tiananmen: The Struggle Over US Policy Toward China in the Bush Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 514–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27551766>.

16 Marie Gottschalk, "The Failure of American Policy," *World Policy Journal* 6, no. 4 (Fall, 1989): 668, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40209129>. Gottschalk's argument prefigures many of the subsequent critiques of U.S. policy, for example: "To enable China to project power in the Pacific more effectively, Deng's military modernization has favored the Chinese Navy. China has built new naval bases and up to date warships and missiles... Beijing also intends to enhance its submarine fleet... [it has] beefed up its capability for long distance troop deployments and conducted naval exercises further and further afield from China." See, page 676.

move to democracy becomes inexorable.”¹⁷

How might things have been different had Bush adopted his critics’ approach? One could conceive of three scenarios. First, under the economic pressure of losing most favored nation status, and the political pressure of diplomatic isolation, China’s leaders might have opted to move toward political reform. This, of course, was the argument made by contemporary critics. Second, China might have resisted U.S. pressure, but at the cost of slowed or even reversed economic growth, which, over time, might have eroded support for the Communist Party of China and ultimately led to a change of regime. Third, China might have adopted a more hostile attitude toward the United States and developed a strategy to confront America more directly.

The first scenario seems quite implausible. A look at the deliberations of the party leadership in “The New Tiananmen Papers” published in *Foreign Affairs* suggests that Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues saw political reform as an existential threat to their leadership, and their statements evinced a clear willingness to risk economic and political isolation to retain control. That conclusion is buttressed by the Chinese leaders’ strong resistance to the Clinton administration’s subsequent effort to condition most favored nation status on improving human rights. Of course, it can be argued that in the latter case, China’s leaders may have doubted Clinton’s willingness to go through with the threats. However, given the earlier congressional votes withdrawing that status in 1991 and 1992, Beijing certainly could not take that for granted.¹⁸

The second scenario is somewhat more plausible but is also questionable. A case can be made that the technology and arms sanctions that the United States and others imposed in the aftermath of Tiananmen did impact China’s economic growth and the pace of its military modernization. At the same time, one could argue that the technology sanctions ultimately persuaded China that it would need to focus on developing its own indigenous capability, thus becoming a more formidable competitor in the long run.

For the strategy of “strangulation” to have succeeded, the United States would have had to close its markets to China (overcoming opposition from

U.S. businesses) and persuade China’s other key economic partners in East Asia and Europe to follow suit. Although U.S. allies generally adopted the limited sanctions imposed by the Bush administration at the time, it would have been a heavy lift to get them to willingly hurt their own economies through broader trade sanctions. And even if they had been willing, it is a further stretch to conclude that the economic pain would have undermined a communist leadership that had survived the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, one can imagine that economic sanctions might have triggered a nationalist backlash that would have reinforced the image of the Communist Party as the defender of China’s sovereignty — a development even more likely under the third scenario, which seems the most plausible of the three alternatives. This scenario would have led to much earlier confrontation between the United States and China and a much tenser East Asia during the first two decades following the end of the Cold War, with all the associated economic and political ramifications. One can imagine, for example, that in this case China might have actively supported North Korea’s and Iran’s nuclear ambitions, not to mention have taken a tougher line on Taiwan.

Decision 2: Admission to the World Trade Organization

The second case study is the Clinton administration’s decision to support China’s admission to the WTO and to grant China Permanent Normal Trade Relations.¹⁹ Of all the China policy decisions of the last three decades, this has attracted the most criticism, both at the time and especially in hindsight. In fact, a cottage industry of sorts has emerged, epitomized by U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer’s assertion in his 2017 report to Congress: “It seems clear that the United States erred in supporting China’s entry into the WTO on terms that have proven ineffective in securing China’s embrace of an open, market-oriented trade regime.”²⁰ In a piece for the *Atlantic* in August 2018, author Gabe Lipton asserted, “By letting [China] into the World Trade Organiza-

tion back in 2001, Washington laid the groundwork for the tensions roiling relations with Beijing today.”²¹

Before considering the counterfactual, it is useful to recall the arguments made in favor of the decision to support China’s entry into the WTO.²² On the economic front, the Clinton administration argued that the agreement would enhance access for U.S. exports by reducing tariffs and eliminating barriers to investment. It also asserted that the need for China to meet WTO standards would lead to economic reform in China, including privatization and the decline of state-owned enterprises. The administration contended that subjecting China to the WTO settlement mechanisms offered a greater chance of gaining compliance with trade agreements. More broadly, it argued that admission to the WTO would make China more prosperous and stable, and that a weak China was at least as likely to be a threat as a strong China.

Clinton further asserted that by supporting China’s entry to the WTO, the United States would increase its influence over Chinese decision-making: “[E]verything I have learned about human nature in over a half-century of living now convinces me that we have a far greater chance of having a positive influence on China’s actions if we welcome China into the world community instead of shutting it out.”²³ Some have suggested that the Clinton administration also thought that WTO membership would lead to political reform and human rights improvements in China. I’ll come back to this point below, but for now I will simply quote Clinton’s own words: “Membership in the W.T.O., of course, will not create a free

society in China overnight or guarantee that China will play by global rules. But over time, I believe it will move China faster and further in the right direction, and certainly will do that more than rejection would.”²⁴

Critics of the WTO decision have offered a number of complementary arguments for why the decision was a mistake. First, on the economic front, they contend that China’s entry into the WTO — at

Indeed, one can imagine that economic sanctions might have triggered a nationalist backlash that would have reinforced the image of the Communist Party as the defender of China’s sovereignty.

least on the terms agreed to by the United States and other WTO members — destroyed millions of jobs in America, decimated the U.S. manufacturing industry in key sectors, and created a massive trade deficit, which, at least in the view of some, had wider adverse consequences. Lighthizer, for example, has stated that “our trade deficit with China played a major role in creating the financial bubble that exploded in 2008.”²⁵ At the same time, China failed to open its markets to U.S. firms and U.S. exports, denying the United States the reciprocal benefits of more open trade. For some, this was a product of the specific terms of the deal — the United States did not demand enough. For others, the problem lay in insufficient enforcement.²⁶ And for a third group, the problem was inherent in the WTO itself. Again quoting Lighthizer: “[T]he WTO settlement system is simply not designed to deal with a legal and political system so at odds with basic premises on which

17 Skidmore and Gates, “After Tiananmen,” 519. This view was echoed in Bush’s subsequent veto message with respect to the 1992 legislation withdrawing China’s most favored nation status: “my administration shares the goals and objectives of HR 2212...My objection lies strictly with the methods proposed to achieve these aims.” George H.W. Bush, “Veto Message on China MFN Status” *Congressional Quarterly*, March 7, 1992, 582.

18 See, Skidmore and Gates, “After Tiananmen,” 530–34.

19 Granting China permanent normal trade relations was required if the United States wanted to gain the trade benefits associated with China joining the WTO.

20 *2017 Report to Congress on China’s WTO Compliance*, United States Trade Representative, January 2018, 2, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/Press/Reports/China%202017%20WTO%20Report.pdf>.

21 Gabe Lipton, “The Elusive ‘Better Deal’ with China,” *Atlantic*, Aug. 14, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/china-trump-trade-united-states/567526/>.

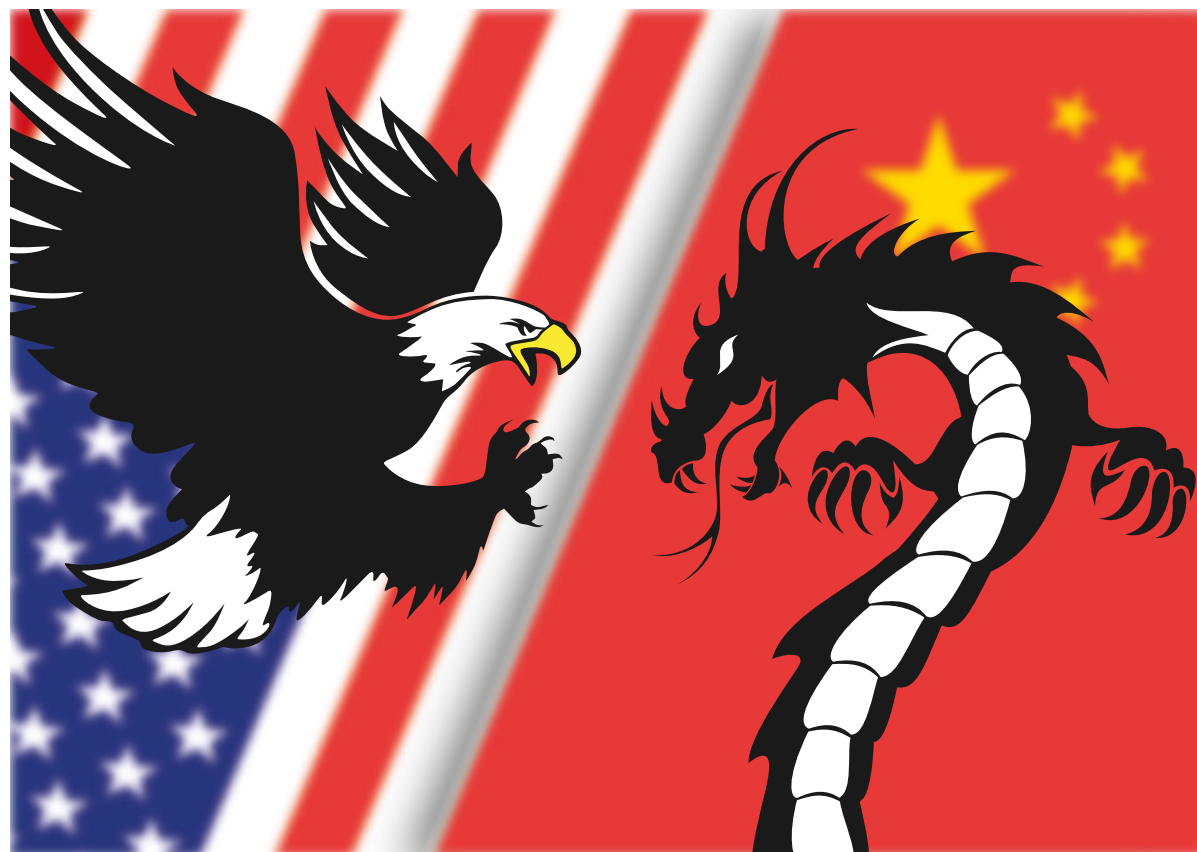
22 For a contemporary account of the Clinton’s arguments in favor of China’s WTO accession, see, Ted Osius, “The Legacy of the Clinton-Gore Administration’s China Policy,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 125–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927670109601490>.

23 See, “Full Text of Clinton’s Speech on China Trade Bill,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2000, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/030900clinton-china-text.html>.

24 “Full Text of Clinton’s Speech on China Trade Bill.”

25 Robert E. Lighthizer, “Testimony Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Evaluating China’s Role in the World Trade Organization Over the Past Decade,” June 9, 2010, 15. <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/6.9.10Lighthizer.pdf>. Lighthizer cites Ferguson’s earlier testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee in support of this assertion. Niall Ferguson, “The End of Chimerica: Amicable Divorce or Currency War,” Testimony before the Committee on Ways and Means of the U.S. House of Representatives, March 24, 2010, 4.

26 See, James Bacchus, Simon Lester, and Huan Zhu, “Disciplining China’s Trade Practices at the WTO: How WTO Complaints Can Help Make China More Market-Oriented,” *Cato Institute, Policy Analysis* no. 856, Nov. 15, 2018, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/disciplining-chinas-trade-practices-wto-how-wto-complaints-can-help>.



the WTO was founded.”²⁷ James McGregor argues that “Chinese policymakers are masters of creative initiatives that slide through the loopholes of WTO and other international trade rules,”²⁸ including currency manipulation and forcing companies to relocate to China rather than export from domestic sources. Moreover, to the extent that WTO membership contributed to China’s economic success, it reduced the pressure for political reform, since the leadership could point to the success of its authoritarian mode of governance in producing prosperity. And the wealth generated helped underwrite China’s rapid military modernization and technological progress, both of which challenge U.S. security interests in East Asia and beyond.

Many of these arguments were advanced at the time of Clinton’s decision, including by leaders in his own party. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, for example, argued, “China’s pattern of violating trade agreements behooves the US Congress to retain its authority for

annual review of China’s trade record.”²⁹

There is no doubt that many of the more hopeful predictions — or perhaps the better word is aspirations — were unrealized. U.S. job losses to China in the past two decades have been well documented.³⁰ Similarly, the downward trend in political reform, political rights, and the rule of law seems incontestable, while U.S. influence over China in a range of areas is waning. But the fact that bad things happened following China’s entry into the WTO does not, by itself, prove that they were *caused* by that decision. Or perhaps even more important, it doesn’t prove that things would have been better had the United States blocked China’s entry into the WTO or held out for a better deal.

In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Philip Levy explores some of the counterfactual scenarios.³¹ One option would have been for the United States to acquiesce in China’s membership but to deny China either annual or permanent status as a most favored

nation.³² Critics at the time and subsequently have argued that denying permanent normal trade relations would have had several positive consequences. First, requiring annual renewal of China’s most favored nation status would have provided the United States leverage over China’s actions, and in the meantime the United States would have retained the right to impose higher tariffs against Chinese exporters. Second, it would have created substantial uncertainty for U.S. and other foreign manufacturers considering outsourcing production to China, reducing their willingness to relocate and thus limiting job losses in the United States.³³

Some of these critiques are unpersuasive. As the Clinton administration argued at the time, were America not to extend most favored nation status it would primarily harm the United States, since other countries’ exporters would gain greater access to China than America, and, of course, it would also raise costs for U.S. consumers and businesses for products where China formed part of the supply chain.³⁴ Moreover, imposing higher barriers against Chinese imports might simply displace U.S. job losses to other low-cost producing countries that had already joined the WTO. There is certainly evidence to support this view, based on the impact of Obama’s 2012 tariffs on Chinese tires, which largely appear to have led to more imports from other countries at higher prices, rather than a substantial increase in U.S. jobs.³⁵

A second option would have been to try to block China’s admission to the WTO. Under the organization’s rules, new members are admitted by a two-thirds majority vote. Thus, this strategy would have required the United States to rally significant outside support to block China’s entry. However, many

countries, especially U.S. allies like Japan and Germany, had a large stake in expanding their access to China. To be fair, in the past, most new admissions to the WTO have been by consensus, so it could be argued that the United States had a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, veto, although this is quite speculative.³⁶

What would have happened if China had not joined the WTO in 2001? This option offers some theoretical advantages over the first counterfactual scenario presented above. In this scenario, the United States would not be at a competitive disadvantage to other countries. Like in the previous scenario, the United States could continue annual reviews of China’s most favored nation status with the option of imposing new protections. But whether this alternative would have made a difference is debatable, since this scenario would have simply continued the status quo in U.S.-Chinese trade. Although the United States, in theory, would have had additional leverage, the experience of the previous 20 years suggests that China would not likely have made significant concessions based on the mere threat of denying it status as a most favored nation. Of course, America could have broken with previous practice and demonstrated its resolve by making good on that threat and imposing new barriers against Chinese exports. This scenario bears considerable similarity to the current U.S.-Chinese “trade war”: China has made some new concessions but at least through the fall 2019 “interim agreement” has refused dramatic change. Would China have been more willing to compromise at an earlier stage of its economic development when it was even more dependent on export-led growth? Perhaps, although many — including President Donald Trump — believe that China’s current economic difficulties make

27 Lighthizer, “Testimony Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” 16–17. See similarly, Mark Wu, “The ‘China Inc’ Challenge to Global Trade Governance,” *Harvard International Law Review* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 261–324.

28 Cited in, Lighthizer, “Testimony Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” 20.

29 See, for example, “Statement by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi on the Democratic Leader’s Decision to Oppose Permanent NTR for China,” April 19, 2000, <https://pelosi.house.gov/sites/pelosi.house.gov/files/pressarchives/releases/prleader.htm>.

30 See, David H. Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon Hanson, “The China Shock: Learning from Labor-Market Adjustment to Large Changes in Trade,” *Annual Review of Economics*, no. 8 (2016): 205–40, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080315-015041>.

31 Philip Levy, “Was Letting China Into the WTO a Mistake?” *Foreign Affairs*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-04-02/was-letting-china-wto-mistake>.

32 The Jackson-Vanik Amendment, Sec 401 of the Trade Act of 1974, prohibits the United States from granting most favored nation status to certain countries, except by annual presidential waiver. For this reason, Congress was required to amend Sec 401 in order to grant China permanent most favored nation status in order for the United States to gain the benefits associated with China’s accession to the WTO. If the United States had failed to grant China permanent normal trade relations following China’s accession to the WTO, the WTO’s “non-application clause would allow either party to refuse to apply WTO commitments to the other.” JayEtta Z. Hecker, “China Trade: WTO Membership and Most-Favored Nation Status,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Trade, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, GAO/T-NSIAD-98-209, June 17, 1998, 10.

33 China viewed achieving permanent normal trade relations (and thus escaping the uncertainties of annual review) an important benefit of U.S. support for China’s WTO accession. Hongyi Harry Lai, “Behind China’s World Trade Organization Agreement with the USA,” *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): 248, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590120037054>.

34 “An important consequence of the United States invoking WTO non-application is that if China becomes a member, it does not have to grant the United States all the trade commitments it makes to other WTO members, both in the negotiated accession package or in the underlying WTO agreements. Because U.S. businesses compete with business from other WTO members for China’s markets, this could potentially put U.S. business interests at a considerable competitive disadvantage. For example, the United States may not benefit from Chinese concessions regarding services, such as the right to establish distribution channels in China. While the United States would continue to benefit from Chinese commitments made in bilateral agreements concluded with the United States, the commitments are not as extensive as those in the WTO agreements.” JayEtta Z. Hecker, “China Trade: WTO Membership and Most-Favored Nation Status,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Trade, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, GAO/T-NSIAD-98-209, June 17, 1998, 11, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/90/81304.pdf>.

35 “The big winners from the 2009 safeguard tariffs were alternative foreign exporters, primarily located in Asia and Mexico, selling low-end tires to the United States. Domestic tire producers were secondary beneficiaries.” Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Sean Lowry, “US Tire Tariffs: Saving Few Jobs at High Cost,” Peterson Institute of International Economics, no. PB12-9, April 2012, <https://www.piie.com/system/files/documents/pb12-9.pdf>. See also, Levy, “Was Letting China Into the WTO a Mistake?”

36 See Hecker, “China Trade,” 7.

the country more susceptible to trade “hardball.”³⁷

Even assuming that the United States might have derived some economic benefit from denying China’s entry to the WTO in 2001, there would have been non-economic costs as well. For example, had the United States blocked China’s WTO membership in 2001, it would have also lost its leverage to insist on the simultaneous entry of Taiwan in the WTO, something that has played an important role in shoring up Taiwan’s economy as well as providing it the international stature that comes from participation in a major international institution.³⁸

Would the costs of blocking China’s membership have been worth it if exclusion had slowed or even halted China’s economic and military rise? It certainly would have crystallized a more adversarial relationship between China and America, since China would have seen such a decision as evidence of a broad containment strategy. As Joseph Fewsmith argued at the time, “if negotiators had failed to reach agreement [during the second round, in November 1999] Jiang would likely have been forced to play the nationalist card to defend himself.”³⁹

The third counterfactual scenario would have been to hold out for a better deal. This option — assuming it was possible — would appear to avoid all the downsides of the two previous scenarios, and would offer the benefit of wresting additional concessions from China. It seems almost incontrovertible that the United States might have gotten at least a somewhat better deal if it had held out for more.⁴⁰ It’s hard to make the case that Beijing had truly reached the end of its rope and would have preferred to walk away rather than continue to negotiate. This conclusion is buttressed by the fact that the United States backed off from the initial deal negotiated with Zhu Rongji in

April 1999: Despite the rather public humiliation associated with the rebuff, China returned to the table.⁴¹ China’s willingness to put new offers on the table in response to the recent Trump tariffs also suggests that China is not averse to making new concessions under pressure.

Would a better trade deal in 2000 have made a significant impact on subsequent relations between the two countries? A key question is whether America could have gained enough additional concessions to alter significantly the adverse impact on U.S. jobs and manufacturing other than at the margins. Critics have argued, for example, that the United States could have negotiated strong safeguards against China’s violations of its commitments,⁴² or insisted on more thorough reform of state-owned enterprises and China’s intellectual property rights practices.

The “but-for” in this case is complex. U.S. manufacturing employment was already declining precipitously even before China’s entry into the WTO. There is considerable debate about whether the WTO agreement by itself had any impact on that trend.⁴³ Indeed, it is possible to argue that manufacturing in the United States might have been even worse off if the United States had successfully insisted on more thorough-going reforms, since it is arguably the process of reform itself that has helped stimulate China’s emergence as an economic powerhouse.⁴⁴ In the end, the question of impact of the WTO decision goes to the broader question of how the United States responded to the process of globalization, and whether other policies — either more protectionist ones, or those more focused on retraining and retooling workers and industries — would have been more effective in addressing the economic and social costs of deepening global economic integration.⁴⁵

Decision 3: Scarborough Shoal

The third example is the confrontation between China and the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Critics of America’s China policy have argued that the United States has failed to respond effectively to what is seen as increasingly assertive Chinese behavior in the South and East China Seas that endanger the security of the United States and its East Asian partners and puts at risk freedom of navigation in these vital waterways.⁴⁶ The Scarborough Shoal incident is an interesting case, since U.S. policymakers were focused on defusing the crisis, rather than pursuing a policy of confronting and challenging Chinese aggressive actions. Although the story is complex and some of the facts are disputed by the participants, the basic outlines are reasonably clear.⁴⁷

In April 2012, a Philippine warship boarded several Chinese fishing boats in the waters close to Scarborough Shoal, a landform long occupied by the Philippines but claimed by China under its expansive “nine-dash line.” China dispatched two marine surveillance ships in response, blocking efforts by the Philippines to arrest the fishermen and confiscate their catch. A tense standoff ensued with both Chinese and Filipino officials insisting that the other side had to withdraw its vessels from the area. The Philippines announced that it would take the matter to international arbitration, called on ASEAN to support the Philippines, and appealed to the United States to clarify that the Scarborough Shoal fell within the terms of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty. In response to the crisis, the United States and the Philippines conveyed their first “2+2” meeting (involving both countries’ foreign and defense ministers), during which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta broadly reaffirmed the treaty without making specific reference to Scarborough Shoal, and agreed to enhance support for Philippine maritime forces. China, in turn, im-

posed what amounted to economic sanctions on the Philippines. In June, the United States helped broker an understanding for a mutual withdrawal of naval vessels. In the end, the Philippines withdrew its ships and China did not, leading to China’s de facto control over Scarborough Shoal.

At the time, there appears to have been little debate within the U.S. government over what course to take and a broad consensus emerged in favor of the U.S. effort to defuse the crisis. But China’s actions following the U.S. mediation effort had a profound impact on both participants and observers of the crisis that has colored the U.S.-Chinese policy debate ever since and has led to a vigorous debate about America’s approach to the crisis.⁴⁸

What might the United States have done differently? On the political level, Washington could have more clearly endorsed the Philippines’ sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal and the associated maritime rights that flow to that claim under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁴⁹ It could have provided more direct support to the Philippine navy and coast guard, including dispatching U.S. vessels to the area. Finally, it could have declined to mediate the crisis at all.

Critics of the decision to mediate argue that if the United States had adopted a more assertive approach, China would have backed off, given the relatively dubious nature of its claim, as well as the risks of a direct confrontation with the United States. It’s hard to test this assertion, although in other cases where China has sought to assert questionable claims over international commons — for example, in declaring an Air Defense Identification Zone over the East China Sea, or contesting U.S. freedom of navigation operations — China has, up until now, refrained from direct confrontation (although there have been close calls).⁵⁰ Assume, for the purpose of argument, that a U.S. show of resolve would have been successful in causing China to back off: The key question is whether this would have led to an improvement in relations between

37 See, Sylvan Lane, “Trump Faces Dwindling Leverage with China,” *The Hill*, Sept. 15, 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/461357-trump-faces-dwindling-leverage-with-china>. Others argue that the leverage is overstated, and that Xi’s need to appear strong domestically is a more important factor than the impact on the Chinese economy.

38 See, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “The Taiwan Factor in the Vote on PNTR for China and its WTO Accession,” *NBR Analysis* 11, no. 2 (July 2000): 33–45, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-taiwan-factor-in-the-vote-on-pntr-for-china-and-its-wto-accession/>.

39 See, Joseph Fewsmith, “China and the WTO: The Politics Behind the Agreement,” *NBR Analysis* 10, no. 5 (December 1999): 227, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/china-and-the-wto-the-politics-behind-the-agreement/>. Fewsmith’s article provides a valuable account of the Chinese deliberations over the negotiations with the United States in connection with the WTO.

40 There is some support for the belief that China would have to make even greater concessions if it had waited to conclude the WTO negotiations rather than agreeing in 1999. See, Lai, “Behind China’s World Trade Organization Agreement with the USA,” 249.

41 See, Fewsmith, “China and the WTO,” 218–27.

42 For example, Lighthizer argues that the United States effectively gave up the option of section 301 actions in favor of the WTO dispute resolution mechanism. “By contrast to Section 301 — which was a powerful tool with which to influence our trading partners — the dispute settlement process is simply not designed to deal with a country like China.” Lighthizer, “Testimony Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” 23–24.

43 See, for example, Bob Davis, “When the World Opened the Gates of China,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/when-the-world-opened-the-gates-of-china-1532701482>. Indeed, in the 15 years before China’s entry into the WTO, U.S. imports from China grew at a faster rate than in the 15 years after, albeit from a much lower base.

44 The desire to accelerate reform was a major impetus for Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongzhi’s determination to get a WTO agreement. See, Lai, “Behind China’s World Trade Organization Agreement with the USA,” 249–50.

45 For this reason, former Democratic Congressman David Bonior, a strong critic of the WTO agreement, later stated: “I don’t know that [a defeat for the WTO agreement] would have made a difference.” Davis, “When the World Opened the Gates of China.”

46 See, for example, Hal Brands and Zack Cooper, “Getting Serious About Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 1 (2018): 17, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss1/3/>: “there was a growing perception in the region—and even among some senior American policy makers—that the [Obama] administration had drawn redlines that it ultimately had not upheld, and that too often it had failed to slow, let alone halt, China’s drive for primacy.” See also, Mira Rapp-Hooper and Charles Edel, “Adrift in the South China Sea,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 18, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2017-05-18/adrift-south-china-sea>.

47 For a detailed account of the crisis, as well as background on the competing claims, see, “Case 3: Scarborough Shoal Standoff (2012),” in Michael Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017) https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170505_GreenM_CounteringCoercionAsia_Web.pdf.

48 See, for example, Greg Poling and Eric Sayers, “Time to Make Good on the U.S.-Philippine Alliance,” *War on the Rocks*, Jan. 21, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/time-to-make-good-on-the-u-s-philippine-alliance/>.

49 In this case, like all of the disputed sovereignty claims in the area, the United States has declined to take sides, while insisting on a peaceful resolution of the disputes and upholding freedom of navigation under applicable international law.

50 Most recently, the Chinese Luyang destroyer sailed within 45 yards of the USS *Decatur* on Sept. 30, 2018. See, John Power and Catherine Wong, “Exclusive Details and Footage Emerge of Near Collision Between Warships in South China Sea,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 4, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2171596/exclusive-details-and-footage-emerge-near-collision-between>.

China and America over the longer term.

Advocates of this more assertive approach would argue yes — establishing clear and enforceable red lines would have tamed China's ambitions and moderated its policies. According to this logic, China simply has too much at stake in its own process of economic development to risk a war with the United States over its claims in the South and East China Seas.

There is a certain plausibility to this argument. Consider the 1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis, which bears some similarity to the Scarborough case. There, the Clinton administration dispatched two aircraft carriers to the waters off Taiwan following a series of Chinese missile firings which landed in the waters near Taiwan. The U.S. action appeared to persuade China to abandon the intimidating practice. The United States clearly won that “battle,” and for an extended period China refrained from provocative shows of force against Taiwan. But what about its impact on the broader “war,” i.e., the long-term relationship between America and China? Some people, such as Michael Cole, have argued that, while China backed off in 1996, the experience led the People's Liberation Army, as well as China's political leaders, to deepen their determination to match the United States militarily, so as to be in a better position to prevail in the future.⁵¹

Similarly, in the case of Scarborough Shoal, it can be argued that even if a more assertive U.S. response had led to China backing down in the near term, the experience might have reinforced China's conviction that the United States was and remains determined to side with China's adversaries, thus hastening the deterioration of relations and increasing the likelihood of conflict between the United States and China.

What lessons can we learn from these three decisions? First, it's hard to make a powerful case that things would clearly have been better had different policies been in place. Second, the possibility of a better outcome seems greatest in the case of economic relations, weakest in the case of human

rights and political reform in China, with the security realm lying somewhere in the middle. Third, even when there might have been short-term gains from taking a different decision, the long-term consequences might have been much different and conceivably even worse than the reality today.

Reexamining America's China Policy

As I suggested earlier, perhaps the answer to the question “What went wrong?” is not so much bad individual decisions, but rather a misguided overall strategy. Put differently, the individual decisions were flawed because they were the product of a flawed strategy. To explore this hypothesis, we need to be a bit clearer about what the strategy was, and what the alternatives were.

Many commentators have noted the broad consistency of U.S. policy toward China beginning with the Richard Nixon administration.⁵² Although presidential challengers from Ronald Reagan to Clinton to George W. Bush often criticized the incumbent's strategy, in the end, most observers have argued that the similarities in each administration's China policy were greater than the differences.⁵³ So, what were the core assumptions underlying the U.S. approach? Although many have adopted the short-hand phrase “engagement,” the term is too amorphous and procedural to capture the essence of the policy. At its core, America's China policy was based on the belief that a stable, prosperous China would serve the interests of the United States, while a weak and insecure China was at least as likely to pose risks for the United States and its allies. Therefore, the United States should welcome, rather than resist, China's rise.⁵⁴ Implicit in this policy was a belief that a rising China would not inherently threaten the United States.

Some have argued that there was also a second belief underlying the policy — that as China became more prosperous it would come to resemble the United States and increasingly share America's values with regard to domestic governance and the

international order.⁵⁵ This convergence would then facilitate increased cooperation between the two countries. Iain Johnston's thorough look at the historical record suggests that while most advocates for the policy hoped that liberalization would occur, the decision to support rather than oppose China's rise was not premised on this hope.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis, the assumptions behind the policy are less important than whether a different strategy would have produced a better result.

What alternative strategies were available to U.S. presidents from H.W. Bush to Obama, and how might adopting them have changed the course of Sino-American relations? At the risk of oversimplification, we can draw on the familiar Goldilocks paradigm. One school has argued that the strategy was too soft; another that it was too tough. However, by choosing this analytic framework, it is not my purpose to stack the deck in favor of the actual policy as “just right.”

First, the “too soft” school. As the three case studies above demonstrate, critics have argued that a tougher line would serve U.S. interests by one of three mechanisms — by slowing China's rise, by forcing the Communist Party of China to adapt its policies to meet U.S. demands, or by fostering regime change. They cite a long list of misguided accommodations that America has made for China that include, among others, the Clinton administration's decision to drop human rights conditionality for most favored nation status in 1994 and George W. Bush's reversal on enhancing support for Taiwan following the EP-3/Hainan Island incident.

In the late 1990s, this viewpoint was pressed by the “Blue Team” — members and staff of Congress, think tanks, journalists, and others who challenged the prevailing policy of the Clinton administration.⁵⁷ Individuals associated with the Blue Team argued that the United States was un-

derestimating the “China Threat” — the title of a 2000 book by *Washington Times* reporter Bill Gertz — and they advocated a range of alternative strategies, including an explicit commitment to regime change.⁵⁸ More recently, this view has been picked up by the reincarnated “Committee on the Present Danger,” now called the “Committee on the Present Danger: China,” which contends that “there is no hope of coexistence with China as long as the Communist Party governs the country” and therefore the United States should adopt “a determination to reverse decades of American miscalculation, inaction and appeasement.”⁵⁹

Of course, these views represent the most extreme wing of a broader spectrum of views advocating for a policy that more forcefully challenges China. In one form or another, there is a growing conviction among U.S. politicians and policy analysts that the relationship between America and China should be seen as a zero-sum competition in which the United States should seek to “prevail” over China. For example, Ambassador Bob Blackwill and Ashley Tellis have argued that “preserving US primacy in the global system ought to remain the central objective of U.S. grand strategy in the twenty-first century.”⁶⁰

An alternative strategy is offered by the “too hard” school, which argues that the difficulties in the Sino-U.S. relationship stem from America's reluctance to accommodate China's rise.⁶¹ In this view, had the United States been more accommodating, China would have felt less threatened and more willing to cooperate with America on shared economic and security interests like non-proliferation and counter-terrorism, rather than compete with the United States.⁶² Proponents of this view argue that while the rhetoric of America's China policy over the past several decades has supported China's rise, the reality has been much more confrontational. These critics point to a long list of

51 See, J. Michael Cole, “The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis: The Forgotten Showdown Between China and America,” *National Interest*, March 10, 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-third-taiwan-strait-crisis-the-forgotten-showdown-19742>. “[I]njury to Chinese pride...convinced Beijing of the need to modernize its military. The result was an intensive program of double-digit investment, foreign acquisitions...and indigenous resourcing to turn the PLA into a force capable of imposing Beijing's will within its immediate neighborhood and eventually beyond.”

52 See, for example, Jeffrey Bader, “U.S.-China Relations: Is It Time to End the Engagement?” Brookings Institution, Policy Brief, September 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FP_20180925_us_china_relations.pdf.

53 See, Richard Baum, “From ‘Strategic Partners’ to ‘Strategic Competitors’: George W. Bush and the Politics of U.S. China Policy,” *Journal of East Asia Policy Studies* 1, no. 2 (August 2001): 191–220, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S159824080000497>.

54 See, for example, Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, “Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China,” Council on Foreign Relations Special Report No. 72, March 2015: “a series of administrations have continued to implement policies that have actually enabled the rise of new competitors, such as China.” See page 4.

55 See, Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

56 Alastair Iain Johnston, “The Failures of the ‘Failure of Engagement’ with China,” *Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1626688>.

57 See, Robert G. Kaiser and Steven Mufson, “‘Blue Team’ Draws a Hard Line on Beijing,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 22, 2000, A1, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/2000-02/22/004r-022200-idx.html>. See also, Baum, “From ‘Strategic Partners’ to ‘Strategic Competitors,’” 199–200.

58 The view was not limited to politicians. University of Pennsylvania Professor Arthur Waldron advocated a similar approach: “I agree with people who think that regime change is key to a really stable peace.” Kaiser and Mufson, “‘Blue Team’ Draws a Hard Line on Beijing.”

59 “Guiding Principles of the Committee,” Committee on the Present Danger: China, <https://presentdangerchina.org/guiding-principles/>.

60 Blackwill and Tellis, “Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China,” 4. See, Ana Swanson, “A New Red Scare is Reshaping Washington,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/20/us/politics/china-red-scare-washington.html>.

61 See, Hugh White, “The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power,” Lowy Institute, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/lowy_institute_extract_-_the_china_choice.pdf; and Charles L. Glaser, “Time for a U.S.-China Grand Bargain,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Policy Brief, July 2015, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/time-us-china-grand-bargain>.

62 For the classic argument about the importance of accommodation among great powers, see, Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

hostile U.S. actions: the continued ban on technology transfers to China imposed after Tiananmen and tightened after the Cox Committee Report in 1998;⁶³ arms sales to Taiwan beginning with the George H.W. Bush administration's F-16 sales in

In one form or another, there is a growing conviction among U.S. politicians and policy analysts that the relationship between America and China should be seen as a zero-sum competition in which the United States should seek to “prevail” over China.

1992 despite the promise of the U.S.-China Third Communique;⁶⁴ Clinton's carrier diplomacy during the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis; the reinforcement of U.S. security alliances with Japan and South Korea despite the end of the Cold War; George W. Bush's use of third-party sanctions against Banco Delta Asia in 2005; and the Obama “pivot,” which included beefing up the U.S. military presence in East Asia. As a result, China had little choice but to focus its efforts on competing with the United States through strengthening its military, building up its indigenous economic and technological prowess, and enhancing ties with countries like Russia to counter U.S. power. Charles Glaser is a prominent

exponent of this view, arguing specifically that accommodating China instead of Taiwan as part of a grand bargain would better serve U.S. interests.⁶⁵

How can we evaluate the likely success of these two alternative strategies? One way is to look at history. In many ways, the “too soft” argument mirrors the argument against détente made by critics of Nixon's policy toward the Soviet Union, including the earlier incarnation of the Committee on the Present Danger.⁶⁶ Following this analogy, today's proponents of the “soft on China argument” would argue that it was Reagan's more confrontational approach — from human rights to security — rather than Nixon's accommodation, that brought the Soviet Union to the bargaining table and ultimately ushered in the end of the regime. Nor is the Nixon era the only possible historical touchstone. Glaser, a critic of the “too soft” school, notes: “Reaching back further in history, the too soft argument might invoke one of the greatest warhorses of historical analogies — the Munich argument.”⁶⁷

The “too hard” argument might, in turn, invoke the history of the United States' own rise, pointing to the early failure of European powers who sought to check U.S. expansion and the more successful approach followed by the United Kingdom, which (at least after 1812) chose to accommodate and work with a rising United States — including its acquiescence to the Monroe Doctrine and a U.S. hemispheric sphere of influence — a history so richly explored by Kori Schake.⁶⁸

But Ernest May, one of the greatest analysts of the use and misuse of historical reasoning, would be the first to caution against such superficial analogies.⁶⁹ Even if we accept the argument that Reagan's tough line brought about the end of the Cold War — a matter of no small controversy — that doesn't help us much in judging whether a similar approach would have a similar effect vis-à-vis Chi-

na. China's leadership is more agile and its society more dynamic than the Soviet Union of the 1980s, and thus is less vulnerable to U.S. pressure and coercion. Reagan's success depended to some degree on the support, or at least acquiescence, of U.S. allies. Getting this support is a much more difficult challenge when it comes to China, as can be seen today in the lukewarm response of U.S. allies to the Trump administration's strategy.⁷⁰

If China is not the Soviet Union of 1980, neither is China the United States of the 19th century. European powers, especially Europe's monarchies, may have been wary of America's ascendancy, but for Britain, shared political values — along with Britain's abandonment of mercantilist policies in the mid-19th century and its preoccupation with imperial interests in Africa and Asia — meant there was a degree of congruence, or at least complementarity of interest, that facilitated Britain's decision to work with, rather than against, the United States. For these reasons, accommodating China's rise might not turn out nearly as well for the United States as accepting America's rise did for Britain.

But this is not the only way to use history to evaluate these counterfactual strategies. A more productive approach is to look more narrowly at the U.S.-Chinese relationship, to see where the U.S. policy has been most and least successful. To use political science terminology, we can look at “within case,” rather than “cross case,” comparisons.

In the years following the Nixon administration, U.S. policy toward China produced some notable successes. Normalization not only began a process of engagement that brought considerable economic benefit both to China and to the United States, it also helped build a more stable security environment in East Asia and the Western Pacific. This benefited not just the United States but also its allies. Over time, China joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty and related arms control regimes, abandoned its policies of supporting revolutionary movements around the world, and began to support U.N. peacekeeping activities. Most notably, China acquiesced to the status quo with regard to Taiwan, despite its rhetorical commitment to unification. Domestically, while democracy failed to

take hold, Chinese society became more open. And of course, China's economic growth helped fuel global prosperity, and contributed to managing the economic crisis of 1998–99.

The achievements of this period were based on a more or less explicit shared understanding or *modus vivendi* about the terms of the relationship. I'm deliberately not using the term “bargain,” which has implications of an explicit quid pro quo. The United States would welcome the rise of a strong, prosperous China and not seek to overthrow the Communist Party's control. China would not seek to challenge the United States' dominant position in East Asia or the broader international economic and political order that helped facilitate China's own economic development. But this understanding had within it the seeds of its own destruction. As long as there was a large military and economic disparity between the two countries the relationship was reasonably stable. It began to erode as China became more economically successful and militarily more capable. This, in turn, fueled U.S. anxiety about China's long-term intentions. Critics in America began to focus on what they saw as the dark side of Deng Xiaoping's “hide and bide” strategy,⁷¹ while some in the People's Liberation Army and Chinese academia began to question why China needed to continue to acquiesce to U.S. hegemony or defer key policy objectives, such as the recovery of Taiwan.

These changing circumstances led the George W. Bush administration to seek to revise the shared understanding. Robert Zoellick's concept of a “responsible stakeholder” was an effort to take into account China's growing power and its desire for a greater international role, while deflecting Chinese pressure to replace the U.S.-led international order.⁷² That effort continued into the early years of the Obama administration. It was reflected most clearly in the joint statement of Obama and President Hu Jintao following Obama's visit to China in 2009: “The two countries reiterated that the fundamental principle of respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity is at the core of the three U.S.-China joint communiqués...The two sides agreed that respecting each other's core interests is extremely important to ensure steady

63 See, “Report of the Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China,” H.R. Rept 105-851, Jan. 3, 1999, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-105hrpt851/pdf/GPO-CRPT-105hrpt851.pdf>. In the wake of the report, Congress enacted a number of new restrictions on the transfer of satellite- and missile-related technology to China. See, “China: Possible Missile Technology Transfers from U.S. Satellite Export Policy — Actions and Chronology,” Congressional Research Service, Report 98-485 F, updated Oct. 6, 2003, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/98-485.pdf>.

64 The communique reads: “[T]he United States Government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution.” “Joint Communique of the United States of America and the Peoples Republic of China,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Aug. 17, 1982, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83B00551R000200010003-4.pdf>.

65 Glaser, “Time for a U.S.-China Grand Bargain.”

66 For the classic statement, see, Norman Podhoretz, “The Present Danger,” *Commentary*, March 1980, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-present-danger/>.

67 Charles Glaser take on the analogy: “The 1938 Munich agreement gave accommodation a bad name. But under certain circumstances, territorial concessions can help a state protect vital interests...the U.S. commitment to Taiwan feeds Chinese concerns about motives in the region and fuels competition over the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in East Asia.” Glaser, “Time for a U.S.-China Grand Bargain.” Hugh White offers a similar argument. Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

68 Kori Schake, *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

69 See, Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

70 See, for example, Arjun Kharpal, “U.S. Allies Defy Trump Administration's Plea to Ban Huawei from 5G Networks,” *CNBC*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/21/future-of-5g-us-allies-defy-washingtons-please-to-ban-huawei.html>.

71 See, Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016). Pillsbury argues that the hide and bide strategy was really intended as a plan to “prepare for revenge.” Also see, Liu Zhen, “War of Words: How the United States Got Lost in Chinese Translation,” *South China Morning Post*, Oct. 24, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2169899/ambiguity-chinese-words-sparks-charges-distortion-us-china>.

72 Robert B. Zoellick, “Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility,” Remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, Sept. 21, 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm>. “It is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China's membership in the international system: We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder in that system.”

progress in U.S.-China relations.⁷³

It's fair to say that these efforts to create a new shared understanding largely failed. Despite the meeting between Obama and Xi Jinping at Sunnylands in 2013,⁷⁴ and later between Trump and Xi at Mar-a-Lago in 2017,⁷⁵ there has been little meeting of the minds on the nature or future of the bilateral relationship.

There are several possible explanations for this failure. Some would argue that failure was inevitable given the inherent conflicts between an established and rising power.⁷⁶ A second explanation might focus on domestic forces in each country that have made mutual accommodation difficult. As we have seen in the United States over the past two decades, Congress — including leaders from both parties — has pushed for a tougher U.S. approach to China. Presidential aspirants have repeatedly challenged the policies of incumbents, with some success: Clinton in 1992, Bush in 2000, and Trump in 2016. In China, growing nationalism and the need to shore up the Communist Party's legitimacy in the absence of democratic reform have pushed China's leaders toward a less accommodating strategy.

A third explanation might emphasize each side's judgment of the other's intentions and of its own capabilities. The case for U.S.-Chinese cooperation in the past was based on the idea of what the Chinese call "win-win" cooperation — that both sides will gain more from cooperation than competition. But what if one concludes that the other is determined to prevail at all costs rather than cooperate?⁷⁷ In that case, the choice then becomes one of "compete or acquiesce." And if both sides believe that they can prevail in the competition,

both will choose competition over conciliation — even potentially risking war. In game theory, it's a game of chicken where each side believes the other will swerve.⁷⁸

I would argue that both the domestic dynamics and each country's increasingly gloomy assessment of the other's true intentions against the backdrop of China's rise help explain the current state of affairs. Here it is important to look at something I have not yet addressed: decision-making in China, specifically the Chinese response to the George W. Bush and Obama efforts to reshape the relationship. Although this assessment risks appearing self-serving coming from a former American policymaker, a good case can be made that the Chinese side bears significant responsibility for the failure to reach a new understanding. I come to this conclusion both from my own engagement as deputy secretary of state from 2009 to 2011, but also from conversations with Chinese interlocutors as well. Jeff Bader expressed a similar view in his book, in which he identifies "a changed quality in the writing of Chinese security analysts and Chinese official statements, and in some respects Chinese behavior."⁷⁹

Two factors explain China's reluctance to move in the direction of a new U.S.-Chinese strategic understanding. First, during a key period — George W. Bush's second term and the beginning of the Obama administration — China experienced relatively weak leadership under the collective decision-making of Hu, which made any bold initiative — particularly one that involved compromise with America — difficult. The problem was compounded by a sense of hubris in some leading Chinese circles following the financial crisis of 2008–09, which led some to believe that the United States was in

permanent decline while China was on the ascendancy.⁸⁰ As a result, a promising moment passed, and the failure of these two U.S. efforts to elicit a positive response from China began to harden attitudes in America.

It is possible to argue that Xi's proposal for a new form of "major power relations" was a belated effort to respond to the initiatives of Bush and Obama.⁸¹ For a brief period, there was evidence that the Obama administration saw this as a new opening.⁸² But Xi's effort came to naught — in part, because of skepticism in the United States, in part, because China never really made clear what Xi envisioned by this concept or whether it reflected a real Chinese willingness to meaningfully accommodate U.S. concerns.

Even if there was an opportunity for a new Sino-American understanding, one might reasonably ask whether that window is now closed — as a result of decisions made both in Beijing and Washington. And if the window is not closed, what form might that new understanding take? These questions are worth deep reflection before the two countries resign themselves to a costly and dangerous future of rivalry and potentially even conflict. In reflecting on the decisions leading to the Spanish-American War and the annexation of the Philippines, Ernest May wrote: "unconcerned and almost unthinkingly, these statesman ran the risk of precipitating Europe into a coalition against the United States."⁸³ The challenge for policymakers in the United States and China is to avoid this peril even as the United States adapts its policy to a more capable and assertive China. A solid understanding of the history of Sino-American relations — both what went wrong and what went right — will allow us to do just that. 📌

Hon. James B. Steinberg is professor of social science, international affairs, and law at Syracuse University and previously served as dean of the Maxwell School, from July 2011 until June 2016, and dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin from 2005 to 2009. His government service includes deputy secretary of state (2009–11), deputy national security adviser (1996–2000) and director of the State Department Policy Planning Staff (1994–96). Recent publications include, "China-Russia Cooperation: How Should the US Respond," in Richard J. Ellings and Robert Sutter, eds., *Axis of Authoritarians* (National Bureau of Asian Research 2018); "US versus China: A Technology Cold War," *Nikkei Asian Review*, March 19, 2019; and *A Glass Half Full? Rebalance, Reassurance and Resolve in the US-China Relationship* (Brookings Institution Press, 2017) and *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: US-China Relations in the 21st Century* (Princeton University Press, 2014) (both with Michael O'Hanlon).

Photo: Derzsi Elekes Andor

73 "U.S.-China Joint Statement," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Nov. 17, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realty-check/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>.

74 During the press conference after the Sunnylands meeting, Xi stated, "we had an in-depth, sincere and candid discussion...on our joint work to build a new model of major country relations." Obama then described progress on improving U.S.-China military-to-military communication and observed, "that's an example of concrete progress that can advance this new model of relations between the United States and China." "Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China After Bilateral Meeting," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, June 8, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/08/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-jinping-peoples-republic-china->. In a subsequent speech at Georgetown University, National Security Advisor Susan Rice stated, "When it comes to China, we seek to operationalize a new model of major power relations." "Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Nov. 21, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice>. Soon after, however, the Obama administration stopped using the phrase.

75 Following the Mar-a-Lago meeting, the White House press secretary stated: "President Trump and President Xi agreed to work in concert to expand areas of cooperation while managing differences based on mutual respect. The two presidents reviewed the state of the bilateral relationship and noted the importance of working together to generate positive outcomes that would benefit the citizens of both countries." "Statement from the Press Secretary on the United States-China Visit," The White House, April 17, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-united-states-china-visit/>.

76 See, Allison, *Destined for War*.

77 In game theory terms, the parties believe the highest "payoff" is from prevailing and competing and losing is better than compromise.

78 This discussion draws on the insights of Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1960) and Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, new ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

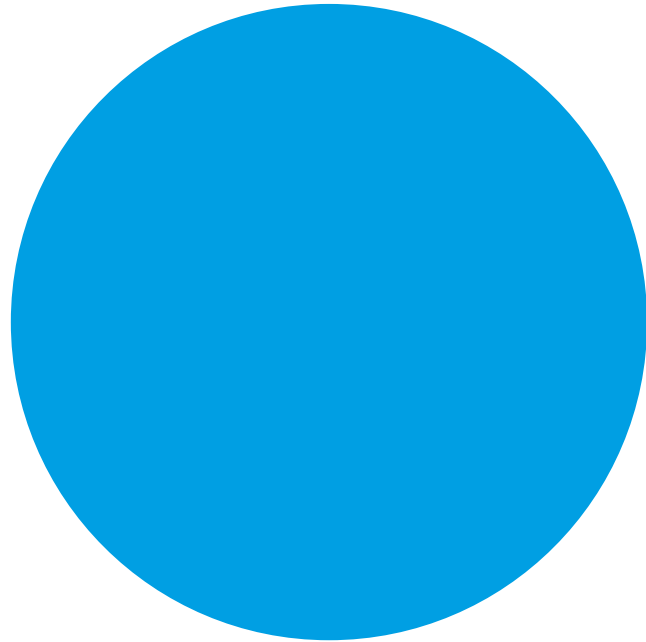
79 Jeffrey Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 79–80.

80 See, Minnie Chan, "We Don't Want to Replace US, Says Dai Bingguo," *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 8, 2010, <https://www.scmp.com/article/732710/we-dont-want-replace-us-says-dai-bingguo>. (Dai at the time was a state councilor, the highest ranking foreign policy official). "The notion that China want to replace the United States and dominant the world is a myth." The article quotes Professor Shi Yinhong, a well-connected international scholar, noting that Dai's comments indicated that Beijing "was trying to amend some senior officials' 'improper commentaries' on Sino-US issues." For the full version of Dai's remarks, see, Dai Bingguo, "Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development," *Beijing Review*, no. 51, Dec. 23, 2010, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2010-12/24/content_320851.htm.

81 Although the phrase appears to have originated under Hu Jintao (see, Hideya Kurata, "Xi Jinping's 'New Model of Major-Power Relations and South Korea," *International Circumstances in the Asia-Pacific Series (China)*, *Japan Digital Library* (March 2016), https://www2.jia.or.jp/en/pdf/digital_library/china/160331_Hideya_Kurata.pdf; Ren Xiao, "Modeling a 'New Type of Major Power Relations' A Chinese Viewpoint," *ASAN Open Forum*, Oct. 4, 2013, <http://www.theasanforum.org/modeling-a-new-type-of-great-power-relations-a-chinese-viewpoint/>), it is most closely associated with Xi. For a rich history of the concept, see, Jinghan Zeng, "Constructing a 'New Type of Great Power Relations': The State of Debate in China (1998-2014)," *British Journal of International Relations*, 18, no. 2 (2016): 422–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1369148115620991>. China's leaders now appear to have moved beyond the expression. See, David Wertime, "China Quietly Abandoning Bid for 'New Model of Great Power Relations' with U.S.," *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/02/china-quietly-abandoning-bid-for-new-model-of-great-power-relations-with-u-s/>.

82 See, Susan E. Rice, "America's Future in Asia," Speech, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., Nov. 20, 2013, found at, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice>.

83 Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1991), 270.



The Roundtable Feature

Roundtables are where we get to hear from multiple experts on either a subject matter or a recently published book.

HOW TO REVIVE CONGRESS'S WAR POWERS

Oona A. Hathaway



In this featured roundtable for Vol 3, Iss 1, Oona A. Hathaway argues that the institutional structure for authorizing military force is broken and suggests three reforms.

The U.S. Congress has not approved a use of force since 2002. And yet, the United States certainly has not been at peace in the years since. In 2001, Congress authorized the United States to go to war against those who carried out the 9/11 attacks and any nation, organization, or persons that harbored them. Seventeen years later, the U.S. military is still in Afghanistan battling insurgent and terrorist forces. In 2002, Congress authorized the president to invade Iraq. In 2003, the U.S. military toppled then-President Saddam Hussein and has been battling the insurgent groups that emerged in the aftermath ever since. The U.S. government is also using force against extremist groups outside Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States reportedly has missions in Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and around 20 African countries, including most prominently Somalia and Libya.¹

None of these ongoing military operations has been separately authorized by Congress. Instead, as explained in greater detail below, they are grounded in capacious readings of Congress's 2001 and 2002 authorizations for use of military force.² And let's not forget the war in Libya, launched by President Barack Obama in 2011, and the use of force against the Syrian government by President Donald Trump in April 2017 and again in April 2018 — which were not authorized by Congress at all.³

Even though the United States has been at war

around the globe for most of the last two decades, the vast majority of those serving in Congress has never voted to authorize a military operation. Only 18 of the 100 current senators were in office when the 2002 authorization for war against Iraq was enacted and only 58 of the 435 representatives were.⁴ As a result, there has been little democratic accountability for the many wars the United States has waged over the past 17 years,⁵ which have cost trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives.⁶

The institutional structure for authorizing military force is obviously broken. Part of the problem is the absence of political courage among many of America's elected officials. Too many members of Congress are all too happy to abdicate their constitutional responsibility and allow the president to go it alone, taking all the political risk. Indeed, the lesson many learned from the Democratic primary in 2008, during which Hillary Clinton paid a steep political price for her vote five years earlier to authorize the war in Iraq, was that it is best to avoid taking hard votes on the use of force if at all possible. As long as the president is willing to act, Congress is perfectly content to sit on the sidelines and avoid bearing any responsibility.

No institutional reform can fix a dearth of political courage. But at least part of the problem is that the system of checks and balances is broken, making it difficult for those who *do* want to act to do so effectively. A few revisions — some

1 Annika Lichtenbaum, "U.S. Military Operational Activity in the Sahel," *Lawfare*, Jan. 25, 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/us-military-operational-activity-sahel>. Although many of the groups the United States is targeting have some current or historic ties to al-Qaeda, many of them are also indigenous to the countries where they operate.

2 Some claim that Congress continues to vote to pay for the wars through authorizing the military budget and that is enough, but authorization and appropriations are two very different things.

3 See Jack Goldsmith and Oona Hathaway, "Bad Legal Arguments for the Syria Strikes," in *Lawfare* and *Just Security*, April 14, 2018, <https://www.justsecurity.org/54925/bad-legal-arguments-syria-strikes/> and <https://www.lawfareblog.com/bad-legal-arguments-syria-airstrikes>; Jack Goldsmith and Oona Hathaway, "The Downsides of Bombing Syria," in *Lawfare* and *Just Security*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/downsides-bombing-syria> and <https://www.justsecurity.org/54698/downsides-bombing-syria/>; Spencer Ackerman, Julian Borger, Ben Jacobs, and Ed Pilkington, "Syria Missile Strikes: US Launches First Direct Action Against Assad," *The Guardian*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/06/trump-syria-missiles-assad-chemical-weapons>; Cory Booker and Oona Hathaway, "A Syria Plan that Breaks the Law," *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/opinion/syria-tillerson-constitution-trump.html>.

4 Calculations by author, based on the information available at https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_current_members_of_the_U.S._Congress.

5 Some argue that presidential elections, which occur every four years, are sufficient accountability. However, there are reasons to think this is not sufficient. First, due to term limits, direct accountability is only effective during a president's first term. Second, presidential elections are multi-issue elections. The candidates' positions on the use of military force is one of many issues of importance to voters. Although 54 percent of registered voters surveyed by the Pew Research Center thought Clinton would do the better job of making wise foreign policy decisions (compared to 36 percent who thought Trump would), Trump became president. (The two were closer on the question of "defending future terrorist attacks," with Trump having the slight edge at 48 percent to Clinton's 43 percent.) "Top Voting Issues in 2016 Election," *Pew Research Center*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>.

6 As of 2017, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan alone had cost American taxpayers \$5.6 trillion since they began in 2001. Gordon Lubold, "U.S. Spent \$5.6 Trillion on Wars in Middle East and Asia: Study," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 8, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/study-estimates-war-costs-at-5-6-trillion-1510106400>.

simple, some more ambitious — could significantly strengthen the tools available to members of Congress who want to press back against presidential assertions of unilateral authority to take the nation into war. Specifically, I argue for three separate reforms. First, the War Powers Resolution should be revised to include a definition of “hostilities.” Second, Congress should enact rules for limited war that would create a default sunset for all new authorizations. Third, the War Powers Resolution should be revised to reaffirm that any use of military force in contravention of international law is prohibited. While none of these suggested reforms addresses all of the problems plaguing the system for authorizing the use of military force, each would help reset the balance in the right direction.

1. Define “Hostilities”

One of the fateful decisions made by the authors of the War Powers Resolution was to tie the reporting requirements and the automatic withdrawal provisions not to “war” or “armed conflict,” but to “hostilities.” The House report on the War Powers Resolution explained the choice of the word as follows:

The word hostilities was substituted for the phrase *armed conflict* during the subcommittee drafting process because it was considered to be somewhat broader in scope. In addition to a situation in which fighting actually has begun, *hostilities* also encompass a state of confrontation in which no shots have been fired, but where there is a clear and present danger of armed conflict. “*Imminent hostilities*” denotes a situation

in which there is a clear potential either for such a state of confrontation or for actual armed conflict.⁷

Perhaps because the meaning was self-evident to those involved, the term was not a subject of significant debate during the many hearings on the proposed legislation,⁸ nor was it defined in the legislation. That has left it open to wildly differing interpretations since.

Over the course of the decades following the passage of the resolution, administrations have adopted varying interpretations of the term “hostilities.” Many presidents evaded the consultation, reporting, and mandatory withdrawal provisions by arguing that military operations were not hostilities, even when they plainly were. For instance, according to the administration of President Ronald Reagan, the invasion of Grenada did not qualify as hostilities and so was not subject to the War Powers Resolution.⁹ That incident was far from unique. In 1993, John Hart Ely observed,

Repeatedly — as in the final stages of the war in Indochina, the botched 1980 attempt to free our hostages in Iran, the tragic 1982-83 commitment of our troops to Lebanon, the 1983 invasion of Grenada, the Gulf of Sidra incident of March 1986, the bombing of Tripoli a month later, the 1987-1988 Persian Gulf naval war against Iran, and the 1989 invasion of Panama — the president filed either no report at all or a vague statement pointedly refusing to identify itself as a Section 4(a)(1) ‘hostilities’ report.¹⁰

The War Powers Resolution was grievously ailing when the Obama administration dealt it what was arguably a death blow in 2011.¹¹ On June 28,

2011, State Department Legal Adviser Harold Koh defended the administration’s decision not to seek congressional authorization to continue military operations in Libya past 60 days on the grounds that the military operations were not hostilities.¹² Stating that “hostilities” is “an ambiguous standard, which is nowhere defined in statute,” he argued that because the mission was limited, exposure of U.S. armed forces was limited, risk of escalation was limited, and the military means the United States was using were limited, the Libya operation did not amount to hostilities and thus the War Powers Resolution did not apply.¹³ Never mind that the United States deployed a naval force of 11 ships and engaged in an extensive bombing campaign that included striking 100 targets in just 24 hours.¹⁴

The most recent Senate hearing on war powers issues as of this writing once again reflected ongoing uncertainty about the meaning of the term “hostilities.” Sen. Tom Udall asked the acting State Department Legal Adviser Marik String whether the U.S. disabling of an Iranian drone counted as hostilities under the War Powers Resolution. String responded that his office had not yet made a determination as to whether it did or not — a puzzling answer given that if it did, it would trigger War Powers reporting obligations. Sen. Mitt Romney then asked what the Trump administration understands by the term “hostilities” under the War Powers Resolution. String responded that he could only discuss that in a closed setting.¹⁵

If the resolution is to be revived, Congress should start by filling this key gap in the statute and defining the term “hostilities.” There are signs that many members of Congress think that the term

“hostilities” has a broader meaning than the Obama administration gave it. In April 2019, House lawmakers passed a measure that would have used the War Powers Resolution to force an end to U.S. participation in the conflict in Yemen.¹⁶ Part of what was intriguing about the draft resolution was the way in which it defined “hostilities.”¹⁷ It found that “Since March 2015, members of the United States Armed Forces have been introduced into hostilities between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis, including providing to the Saudi-led coalition aerial targeting assistance, intelligence sharing, and mid-flight aerial refueling.”¹⁸ And it specifically stated that “For purposes of this resolution, in this section, the term ‘hostilities’ includes in-flight refueling of non-United States aircraft conducting missions as part of the ongoing civil war in Yemen.”¹⁹

This definition of “hostilities” is a far cry from the definition offered by the Obama administration during the debate over the 2011 U.S. intervention in Libya. Indeed, many think it swings too far in the other direction, defining “hostilities” so capaciously that it would incapacitate much military cooperation with allies. But, at a minimum, the resolution suggests that there is a desperate need for clarity about the meaning of “hostilities” and an opportunity to rejuvenate the resolution as a more effective institutional constraint.

An ideal definition of “hostilities” would make explicit the original intent of the War Powers Resolution: that it encompass armed conflict and situations in which there is a clear and present danger of armed conflict. Indeed, the ideal definition would, in fact, specify “armed conflict,” a term on which there is substantial and robust legal authority both in domestic and international law, making

7 See, “The War Powers Resolution: Relevant Documents, Correspondence, Reports,” U.S. Congress, Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., January 1976, Committee Print 23, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022638/00001/1?search=the+word+hostilities+was+substituted>. Interestingly, the explanation given by the House report is at odds with the common use of the term “hostilities” at the time — which was to refer to active fighting, as opposed to the legal state of war (which could begin after hostilities began and end before they were concluded). It is unclear whether the authors of the House report understood this. Interestingly, a Senate report better reflects this more common understanding of the term “hostilities.” It stated, “The essential purpose of the bill, therefore, is to reconfirm and to define with precision the constitutional authority of Congress to exercise its constitutional war powers with respect to ‘undeclared’ wars [i.e., hostilities] and the way in which this authority relates to the constitutional responsibilities of the President as Commander-in-Chief.” *War Powers*, report prepared by Mr. Fulbright, from the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 93rd Cong., 1st Sess., June 14, 1973, 2.

8 The many hearings on the resolution use the term repeatedly, but there appears to be very little debate over its meaning. There was, by contrast, significant debate over the relative constitutional authorities of Congress and the president over the initiation, conduct of, and termination of hostilities. See, e.g., *id.*; “Congress, the President, and War Powers: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,” U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, 91st Cong., 2nd Sess., June-August, 1970.

9 Stuart Taylor Jr., “Legality of Grenada Attack Disputed,” *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1983.

10 John Hart Ely, *War and Responsibility: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 49.

11 Two months earlier, the Office of Legal Counsel issued an opinion concluding that “the President had the constitutional authority to direct the use of force in Libya because he could reasonably determine that such use of force was in the national interest.” It further decided that he “was not constitutionally required to use military force in the limited operations under consideration.” Both conclusions stretched the unilateral authority of the president to authorize the use of military force far beyond previous limits. Caroline Krass, “Memorandum Opinion for the Attorney General: Authority to Use Military Force in Libya,” April 1, 2011, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/doj/olc/libya.pdf>.

12 “Testimony by Legal Adviser Harold Hongju Koh, U.S. Department of State, on Libya and War Powers,” U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 112th Cong., 1st sess., June 28, 2011, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/167452.pdf>.

13 This was not a consensus view within the administration — both the Office of Legal Counsel acting head Caroline Krass and Department of Defense General Counsel Jeh Johnson had counseled that the operation was, in fact, hostilities to which the resolution applied. The White House counsel agreed with Koh, and the president accepted that view. Charlie Savage, “2 Top Lawyers Lost to Obama in Libya War Policy Debate,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/18/world/africa/18powers.html>.

14 By 2011, the budget of the Department of Defense was so large and the funds so fungible that the department did not even need to seek a separate appropriation to support the war effort (unlike during the 1999 U.S.-led NATO intervention in Kosovo). See, Bruce Ackerman and Oona Hathaway, “Obama’s Illegal War,” *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/01/obamas-illegal-war-2/> (noting that the war had already cost three-fourths of a billion dollars but had been funded entirely out of general appropriations). See also, Bruce Ackerman and Oona Hathaway, “The Clock Is Ticking on Obama’s War,” *Foreign Policy*, April 6, 2011; Bruce Ackerman and Oona Hathaway, “It’s Not Up to the President to Impose a No-Fly Zone Over Libya,” *Huffington Post*, March 9, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/no-fly-zone-libya_b_833426.

15 “Reviewing Authorities for the Use of Military Force,” U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 2019, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/reviewing-authorities-for-the-use-of-military-force-072419>.

16 See, Missy Ryan, “After Yemen Vote, Question Remains: When Is the U.S. at War?” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/after-yemen-vote-question-remains-when-is-the-us-at-war/2019/04/05/08dbdcb6-57b4-11e9-9136-f8e636f1f6df_story.html.

17 “A Joint Resolution to Direct the Removal of United States Armed Forces from Hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that Have not Been Authorized by Congress,” S.J. Res. 7, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7/text>.

18 “A Joint Resolution to Direct the Removal of United States Armed Forces,” (emphasis added).

19 “A Joint Resolution to Direct the Removal of United States Armed Forces.”

it less susceptible to convenient reinterpretation to fit particular situations.²⁰ Hence, “hostilities” ought to be defined as “armed conflict” or a “clear and present danger of armed conflict.” An alternative approach would be simply to replace “hostilities” in the resolution with “armed conflict,” or perhaps even, “armed conflict as that term is understood under international law.”

There are four other ways in which the definition of “hostilities” in the War Powers Resolution should be sharpened, as well. First, it would be wise to clarify that the definition of “hostilities” applies to cyber attacks. Cyber has become an increasingly important operating environment. The U.S. government’s position has long been that the law of armed conflict applies to cyber just as it does to conventional warfare.²¹ Most experts agree that the way to assess a cyber operation is to examine its effects. Where the effects of a cyber operation are equivalent to a kinetic event that would trigger an armed conflict, that operation triggers an armed conflict as well.²² However, no war powers report has been submitted to date on a pure cyber operation, even though news reports indicate that cyber operations have taken place that arguably would trigger an obligation to report.²³ This suggests that the executive branch may not have come to a determination that war powers reporting applies to cyber events. Thus, even though simply defining “hostilities” as “armed conflict” should be sufficient to bring cyber attacks within the scope of the War Powers Resolution, it may nonetheless be worth making it explicit.

Second, the revised resolution ought to specify that “operational preparation of the environment” activities — both cyber and conventional — must be reported to Congress. Such activities suggest “imminent involvement in hostilities,” but might not meet the current reporting threshold, which requires that “imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances.” While

recent reporting requirements for “sensitive military operations” and “sensitive cyber operations”²⁴ have filled important gaps, operational preparation of the environment remains a key blind spot that falls between existing Title 10 and Title 50 reporting obligations. This could be rectified if such activities were designated evidence of “imminent involvement in hostilities” that requires reporting. (If necessary for operational security, that reporting could be done in a classified setting.)

Third, the revised War Powers Resolution should address partnered operations, which have become much more frequent in recent years. The Trump administration has apparently adopted the view that where the United States is engaged in military operations authorized under the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force with partner forces — both state and non-state — that authority also encompasses defense of those forces from attack.²⁵ For instance, until the recent reversal of policy by Trump, the Trump administration had made it clear that it was prepared to defend the Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria from attack by Syrian forces (and even Russian or Turkish forces). The administration never sought congressional approval for the use of such defensive force because it claimed that it fell within the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force. This is a novel legal position that no prior administration had embraced and it had the potential to embroil the United States in escalating hostilities without any clear congressional intent — or even notification to Congress — because it putatively falls within an existing congressional authorization. This could be addressed by revising the War Powers Resolution to clarify that if the U.S. military is prepared to defend partner forces in an operation authorized by Congress, this would constitute “imminent involvement in hostilities” and must be reported to Congress.

Fourth, the resolution should clarify the context in

which the War Powers Resolution stops and restarts. In 1993, President Bill Clinton committed troops to Somalia to assist in alleviating a humanitarian disaster without seeking congressional authorization. His administration claimed that the 60-day clock in the War Powers Resolution did not apply because the military operations were “intermittent” rather than “sustained.” These claims prompted a member of Congress to declare that “[a]nother casualty of Somalia has been the war powers resolution.”²⁶ The Reagan administration made similar arguments during the so-called “Tanker Wars” in the 1980s. It treated each incident in the conflict as discrete, as if each one started the 60-day clock anew.²⁷ To avoid such claims, the revised resolution should clarify that the clock continues to run as long as “active hostilities” are ongoing between the United States and the other state or non-state actor as a matter of international law.²⁸

An advantage of defining “hostilities” as “armed conflict” is that it would anchor congressional involvement to instances where international legal obligations under the Geneva Conventions are triggered. After all, the conventions provide in Common Article 2 that they “shall apply to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.”²⁹ While the international legal obligations that apply to non-international armed conflicts are less capacious, it is nonetheless clear that there are obligations on both parties to the conflict under Common Article 3.³⁰

One danger that must be acknowledged is that this approach could lead the executive branch to adopt a narrower view of when an armed conflict is triggered to avoid congressional involvement. But there are a couple of reasons to think this unlikely. First, as already noted, there is extensive existing

domestic and international law on the meaning of the phrase “armed conflict.” An interpretation at odds with decades of legal interpretations is unlikely to be adopted by principled executive branch lawyers. It would, moreover, be subject to international criticism (unlike the current U.S.-specific term “hostilities”). Second, the existence of an armed conflict triggers immunities for members of the armed forces. In the absence of an armed conflict, members of the armed forces are not immune from prosecution for their actions in the course of a military conflict. When a member of the armed forces kills in the absence of armed conflict, she is committing murder, but when she kills a belligerent during an armed conflict, she is doing her job. Hence, the U.S. armed forces and its lawyers are likely to resist inappropriately cabined interpretations of when an armed conflict is triggered.

2. Require that all Future Authorizations Sunset

The second proposed revision is more challenging politically, but, if successful, could help prevent the next forever war. In 2011, Bruce Ackerman and I proposed what we called, “Rules for Limited War.”³¹ As we explained:

The new rules will work proactively through a three-stage process. The rules first require all new authorizations for the use of force to state clearly whether they contemplate an open-ended conflict or a limited war. In the absence of a clear statement, the rules will create a presumption for limited war; they will presume a two-year sunset unless the House or Senate specifies a different time period. Second, the rules permit the House

20 In brief, an international armed conflict is triggered when there is a “resort to armed force between States.” *Prosecutor v. Tadić: Decision on Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction*, Case No. IT-94-1-I, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Oct. 2, 1995, 70, <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/tadic/acdec/en/51002.htm>. A non-international armed conflict is triggered when there is “protected armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State”; *Prosecutor v. Tadić*. For more on the threshold for triggering a non-international armed conflict, see, Oona A. Hathaway et al., “Consent Is Not Enough: Why States Must Respect the Intensity Threshold in Transnational Conflict,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 165, no. 1 (2016): 8–16.

21 See, John Reed, “U.S. Gov’t: Laws of War Apply to Cyber Conflict,” *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/25/u-s-govt-laws-of-war-apply-to-cyber-conflict/>.

22 See, e.g., Oona Hathaway, et al., “The Law of Cyber Attack,” *California Law Review* 100 no. 4 (2012): 847–48, 850–56.

23 For example, there have been recent reports that the United States has escalated attacks on Russia’s power grid. David E. Sanger and Nicole Perloth, “U.S. Escalates Online Attacks on Russia’s Power Grid,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/us/politics/trump-cyber-russia-grid.html>, (noting that the actions by the United States carry “significant risk of escalating the daily digital Cold War between Washington and Moscow”).

24 *Notification Requirements for Sensitive Military Cyber Operations*, U.S. Code 10 (2019) § 395.

25 “Reviewing Authorities for the Use of Military Force,” U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 116th Cong., 1st sess., July 24, 2019, (answer to question by Marik String, Acting Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/reviewing-authorities-for-the-use-of-military-force-072419>.

26 Congressman Benjamin A. Gilman, “Remarks,” reprinted in 139 Cong. Rec. H7094 (daily ed., Sept. 28, 1993).

27 For a helpful overview of the claims, see, Todd Buchwald, “Anticipating the President’s Way Around the War Powers Resolution on Iran: Lessons of the 1980s Tanker Wars,” *Just Security*, June 28, 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/64732/anticipating-the-presidents-way-around-the-war-powers-resolution-on-iran-lessons-of-the-1980s-tanker-wars/>.

28 Under the international law of armed conflict, the authority to detain those captured during the conflict continues only as long as “active hostilities” are ongoing. As the *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* plurality noted, “It is a clearly established principle of the law of war that detention may last no longer than active hostilities.” *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 520 (2004) (plurality) (citing Geneva Convention (III), art. 118). See also, “Brief of Experts on International Law and Foreign Relations as Amici Curiae in Support of Initial Hearing En Banc,” *Al-Alwi v. Trump*, No. 17-5067 (D.C. Cir. Oct. 10, 2017) (arguing the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force no longer authorizes detention of Guantanamo detainee held since 2002 because hostilities are no longer ongoing).

29 “Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field,” art. 2, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3114, 75 U.N.T.S. 31; “Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea,” art. 2, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3217, 75 U.N.T.S. 85; “Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War,” art. 2, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3516, 75 U.N.T.S. 287; “Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War,” art. 2, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3316, 75 U.N.T.S. 135.

30 “Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field,” art. 3, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3114, 75 U.N.T.S. 31; “Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea,” art. 3, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3217, 75 U.N.T.S. 85; “Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War,” art. 3, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3516, 75 U.N.T.S. 287; “Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War,” art. 3, Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3316, 75 U.N.T.S. 135.

31 Bruce Ackerman and Oona A. Hathaway, “Limited War and the Constitution: Iraq and the Crisis of Presidential Legality,” *Michigan Law Review* 109, no. 4 (2011).

or Senate to reauthorize the war for another period before the expiration date arrives. If the two houses fail to take affirmative action, the third and final stage kicks into operation: the rules prohibit all further appropriations for the conflict once the time limit has elapsed, with the exception of a one-year appropriation of funds for the orderly withdrawal of troops and other forces from the battle zone. During this withdrawal period, the president remains free to try to convince Congress and the public that a more extended war is in the national interest. But there is only one way for him to press onward: he must gain the explicit consent of both houses to another military authorization, which once again will be governed by a two-year sunset unless Congress provides otherwise. In the meantime, withdrawal must proceed in a responsible fashion.³²

What matters most is that there is an established date by which Congress must affirmatively revisit its decision to authorize the use of military force, requiring an affirmative vote, rather than passive inaction, to continue military operations.

The aim of this proposal is to challenge the process that led to the longstanding “limited” war inaugurated by the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for the Use of Military Force, which, even in 2011, had been interpreted to reach situations far beyond the intent of Congress at the time they were enacted. This sunset proposal does not necessarily require a revision to the War Powers Resolution itself — it can operate as a stand-alone legislative proposal — but it interacts with the War Powers Resolution in obvious ways. The vast majority of military oper-

ations undertaken by the U.S. military around the globe are currently carried out under the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, as generously interpreted by successive executive branch lawyers. The War Powers Resolution constraints do not apply to any of these operations because they have been “authorized” by Congress. However, as noted above, only a small fraction of the current members of Congress voted on that authorization, and most of those who did participate did not anticipate that the authorization would be used so broadly or for so long.³³

As the opening noted, all of the current, ongoing operations are grounded in capacious readings of authorizations for use of military force passed in 2001 and 2002. Specifically, the government argues that the operations in Iraq and parts of Syria are authorized by the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq, passed by Congress in 2002 after the George W. Bush administration assured Congress that Saddam Hussein, who was then president of Iraq, possessed weapons of mass destruction that posed an existential threat to the United States and its allies. Congress responded by authorizing the use of force to address that threat³⁴ — a threat that the public would later learn did not, in fact,

exist.³⁵ And yet, the government continues to rely on the authorization almost 17 years later to justify ongoing operations in Iraq and parts of Syria that have little to do with the purposes for which Congress authorized the use of force: defending the “national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq” and enforcing U.N. Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.³⁶

The rest of the ongoing military operations carried out by the United States today are grounded in the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force,

passed a mere week after the 9/11 attacks.³⁷ That joint resolution authorized the president to use all

necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.³⁸

Through a series of interpretive moves over the course of the last 18 years by Republican and Democratic administrations alike, it has been stretched and pulled far beyond its plain meaning and is now treated by the government as a blank check for battling jihadist groups around the world.³⁹

Congress could prevent the expansive, and arguably highly inappropriate, use of these authorizations by refusing to authorize funding for the various ongoing war efforts. But there are three obstacles to exercising the power of the purse: First, appropriations for military operations are bulked together into massive Defense Department budgets. Even as early as the 1960s, political scientist Raymond Dawson observed that “the totals involved in the defense budget have become so great, the lump-sums and carry-overs so large, the discretion to shift funds from one category to another so extensive, that budgetary controls have actually provided Congress with little leverage over policy.”⁴⁰ That problem has only grown and has been exacerbated by the normalization of emergency funding bills that further truncate the process of congressional review.⁴¹ Indeed, the entire 2011 Libya operation did not require any new funding from Congress — it was paid for out of the existing military budget. The second obsta-

cle is that any restriction of funding faces a likely presidential veto. Because the modern military budget lumps together so many programs, a presidential veto not only affects funding for the conflict over which Congress seeks to exercise some control, but it can put at risk programs that have nothing to do with it — including programs, projects, and bases in members’ states and districts. Third, holding up funds for the U.S. military carries massive political risks: Members of Congress may face accusations not only that they are soft on terrorism but also that they do not support the troops and are prepared to put them in unnecessary danger. It’s no surprise, then, that in the era of modern military budgets, the appropriations power has only rarely been used to constrain the president’s use of the military.

The proposal Ackerman and I put forward was meant to establish a blanket *ex ante* commitment to a sunset for *all* new authorizations for the use of military force — one that could be modified or adjusted by Congress where circumstances warrant. We set the default sunset at two years plus one year for withdrawal, but that number could be set higher or lower. What matters most is that there is an established date by which Congress must affirmatively revisit its decision to authorize the use of military force, requiring an affirmative vote, rather than passive inaction, to continue military operations. An advantage of the two-year default is that it echoes the express terms of Article I of the Constitution, which forbids Congress from “support[ing] Armies” with any “Appropriation of money...for a longer Term than two Years” and ensures that every member of Congress, at some time during his or her term in office, faces the question of whether to vote in favor of continuing ongoing military efforts.⁴² That, in turn, gives each member’s constituents information on which they can base their votes in the following election.

32 Ackerman and Hathaway, “Limited War and the Constitution,” 497.

33 At a recent hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Ben Cardin stated of the debate over the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, for which he voted: “I remember that debate very well. I participated in that debate and it was clearly aimed at those that planned the attack against us and those who harbored those who planned the attack against us. And the interpretation now of three administrations to apply that ‘01 authorization to contemporary issues is totally absurd. Absurd. It’s not what Congress intended.” “Reviewing Authorities for the Use of Military Force,” U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 116th Cong., 1st sess., July 24, 2019, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/reviewing-authorities-for-the-use-of-military-force-072419>.

34 *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002*, Public Law 107-243 (Oct. 16, 2002), <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ243/PLAW-107publ243.pdf>.

35 “Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD,” Director of Central Intelligence, Sept. 30, 2004, https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/index.html#sect1.

36 *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002*.

37 *Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of the United States Armed Forces Against those Responsible for the Recent Attacks Launched Against the United States*, Public Law 107-40, Sept. 18, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ40/PLAW-107publ40.pdf>.

38 *Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of the United States Armed Forces Against those Responsible for the Recent Attacks Launched Against the United States*.

39 The only post-9/11 U.S. military operations that have not been justified under either the 2001 or 2002 Authorizations for the Use of Military Force is the decision by the Obama administration in 2012 to use military force to topple Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, an operation that extended over 60 days in clear violation of the War Powers Resolution. And the Trump administration engaged in limited military strikes against the Syrian government twice in response to chemical weapons attacks on civilians.

40 Raymond H. Dawson, “Congressional Innovation and Intervention in Defense Policy: Legislative Authorization of Weapons Systems,” *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 1 (March 1962): 42, 44.

41 For more on the weakening of congressional control over war-making through use of its budgetary powers, Ackerman and Hathaway, “Limited War and the Constitution.”

42 This is the only limit on the duration of appropriations in the U.S. Constitution. This was specifically designed for the purpose of requiring congressional review of presidential military activity on regular intervals. Alexander Hamilton explained in the *Federalist Papers*, number 26: “The legislature of the United States will be obliged, by this provision, once at least in every 2 years, to deliberate upon the propriety of keeping a military force on foot; to come to a new resolution on the point; and to declare their sense of the matter, by a formal vote in the face of their constituents.”

3. Reaffirm that Use of Military Force in Contravention of International Law Is Prohibited

The War Powers Resolution should be revised to make explicit that any use of military force in contravention of international law is prohibited. A use of military force in violation of international law entails specific additional harm to the United States that a use of force in conformity with international law does not. Of course, if this prohibition were added to the resolution, Congress would retain the capacity to specifically and expressly authorize a violation in the future (because a later-in-time statute preempts an earlier-in-time one). But it would clarify that international law is, in fact, binding as a matter of both domestic and international law.

To be clear, the bodies of law discussed here *are already binding on the United States*. The United States is party to the United Nations Charter as well as to the four Geneva Conventions. Those treaties are binding on America as a matter of international law. They are also obligatory as a matter of domestic law, because the Supremacy Clause provides that “all Treaties...shall be the supreme Law of the Land.”⁴³ There has been some dispute, however, over whether the treaties are self-executing and, therefore, whether they are binding as a matter of domestic law.⁴⁴ Adding language to the resolution would serve to clarify that these treaty obligations are, indeed, obligatory as a matter of domestic law. And it would serve to place the weight of Congress behind the proposition that international law should be carefully weighed in making the decision to go to war and in how that war is waged.

Turning to substance, there are two separate bodies of international law that regulate the use of military force by states. The first is *jus ad bellum* — the law governing the resort to force. Here, the key legal rules are found in the U.N. Charter. Article 2(4) of the charter provides the key prohibition. It states that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner

inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”⁴⁵ Article 51, in turn, authorizes uses of force in self defense “if an armed attack occurs.”⁴⁶ A use of force by the United States against another sovereign state that amounts to an “armed attack” under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter would legitimize a use of force against the United States in self defense. Even a use of force that violates Article 2(4) but does not meet the Article 51 threshold can have serious consequences. It makes the United States vulnerable to legal, diplomatic, and economic sanctions. For example, during the 2003 Iraq War, some E.U. countries refused to allow U.S. troops to cross their territory by road, rail, or even by air, on the grounds that the war had not been authorized by the U.N. Security Council and thus was illegal.⁴⁷ Such a use of force also erodes the norm prohibiting the use of military force in contravention of the charter. That, in turn, makes the United States more vulnerable in the future to uses of force that might similarly violate the charter’s prohibition on force.

The second body of international law governing the use of force is *jus in bello* — the law that governs the way in which warfare is conducted. This is the law contained in the Geneva Conventions (to which the United States is a party), the Additional Protocols (which the United States has not joined but has accepted, in part, as customary international law), and customary international law. Any use of force by the United States in violation of the *jus in bello* brings with it serious consequences. There are possible criminal sanctions for members of the U.S. armed forces, who could be subject to prosecution for committing war crimes. And there is, once again, the danger of eroding law that protects U.S. forces and civilians in times of war.

It must be acknowledged that a danger of this provision is that it creates an incentive for executive branch lawyers to interpret international law prohibitions narrowly. After all, if an otherwise authorized use of force might violate international law, it would now not only be illegal under international law, it would be unauthorized as well (unless Congress specifically and expressly approved it). Yet, the incentives for narrow interpre-

tations of international law already exist. International law is binding as a matter of domestic law — the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution specifically provides that treaties are the supreme law of the land. The new provision would simply add additional weight to that already existing prohibition. Not only would a war waged in violation of international law violate international law and the domestic law giving it force, but it would also no longer be authorized by Congress. Of course, if Congress judges that an illegal use of force is warranted, Congress would have the ability to reverse its decision (subject to a possible presidential veto), but it would have to take responsibility for and explain that decision rather than simply letting the blame rest on the president alone.

Conclusion

At the moment, none of these reforms is likely to make it through Congress, and if they did, Trump would certainly veto them. But the story may be different after the 2020 election. To be sure, in the past presidents have run on pacific platforms that fell by the wayside when they entered office. Even the most well-meaning presidential candidates have found it less pressing to support constraints on the ability of the president to unilaterally deploy military force once they are in office. The question will be whether Congress and the president, whoever he or she may be, have learned a hard lesson from the recent past. The U.S. military is the most powerful in the world, with a capacity to destroy that is unprecedented in human history. Checks and balances over this power may be particularly difficult to design and enforce, but they are also absolutely essential. As John Hart Ely put it at the close of his book, *War and Responsibility*, “Whether or not the War Powers Resolution is ever amended, the Constitution requires no less.”⁴⁸ ●

Oona A. Hathaway is the Gerard C. and Bernice Latrobe Smith Professor of International Law at Yale Law School, professor of international law and area studies at the Yale University MacMillan Center, professor of the Yale University Department of Political Science, and director of the Yale Law School Center for Global Legal Challenges. She is also counselor to the dean at Yale Law School. She is vice president of the American Society of International Law and member of the Advisory Committee on International Law for the Legal

Adviser at the United States Department of State. In 2014-15, she took leave to serve as special counsel to the general counsel at the U.S. Department of Defense, where she was awarded the Office of the Secretary of Defense Award for Excellence. She is the director of the annual Yale Cyber Leadership Forum. She has published more than 25 law review articles, and *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (with Scott Shapiro, 2017).

Photo: Architect of the Capitol

43 U.S. Constitution, art. 6, cl. 2.

44 See, e.g., Deborah Pearlstein, “Contra CIA, Non-Self-Executing treaties Are Still the Supreme Law of the Land,” *Opinio Juris*, Oct. 28, 2015, <http://opiniojuris.org/2015/10/28/contra-cia-non-self-executing-treaties-are-still-the-supreme-law-of-the-land/>; Marty Lederman, “Why the Strikes Against Syria Probably Violate the U.N. Charter and (therefore) the U.S. Constitution,” *Just Security*, April 6, 2017, <https://www.justsecurity.org/39674/syrian-strikes-violate-u-n-charter-constitution/>.

45 U.N. Charter art. 2(4).

46 U.N. Charter art. 51.

47 Barry James, “Nation Also Bans Military Overflights: Austria Bars U.S. Troops from Crossing Country,” *International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 15, 2003.

48 John Hart Ely, *War and Responsibility: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 114.

