

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER A. PREBLE AND JOHN MUELLER

# A DANGEROUS WORLD?

THREAT PERCEPTION AND  
U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

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## Introduction

In February 2012, General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explained, “I can’t impress upon you that in my personal military judgment, formed over 38 years, we are living in the most dangerous time in my lifetime, right now.”<sup>1</sup> He was born in 1952. In 2013, he upped the ante: “I will personally attest to the fact that [the world is] more dangerous than it has ever been.”<sup>2</sup>

He is scarcely alone—or unusual. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, born in 1941, has testified that he has never “experienced a time when we’ve been beset by more crises and threats around the globe.”<sup>3</sup> Sen. Lindsey Graham, born in 1955, explains, “I’ve never seen the world more dangerous than it is now.”<sup>4</sup> From his perch on two congressional committees tasked with keeping Americans safe, Rep. Michael Turner, born in 1960, proclaims, “The security environment is more dangerous and more uncertain than ever before.”<sup>5</sup> Sen. Jim Inhofe, ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, says he is unable to recall “a time in my life where the world has been more dangerous and the threats more diverse.”<sup>6</sup> His Senate colleague, John McCain, born, like Inhofe, before World War II, agrees, “The world is a more dangerous place than I have seen,” and quietly adds the proviso “in many respects.”<sup>7</sup>

Such extravagant proclamations occasionally do generate some push-back.<sup>8</sup> And a few systematic efforts emerged to examine and to warn against the dangers of threat inflation.<sup>9</sup> However, for the most part, the alarmist pronouncements go rather blandly accepted and uncountered. The Defense Department’s Threat Reduction Agency never seems to come out with reports observing that there may not be, actually, all that many threats out there to reduce.

One could say that fear and anxiety are baked into our DNA. Our distant ancestors correctly perceived that a four-legged creature charging at them from a distance might be dangerous, and they were impelled by such emotions either to flee or to defend themselves. Thus, they lived to procreate. But getting the threats right is important. Unnecessary and excessive fear can be harmful to health and emotional well-being. Indeed, fully 18 percent of Americans already

### 13. It's a Commons Misunderstanding: The Limited Threat to American Command of the Commons

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What threatens American command of the global commons—the sea, air, and space domains through which goods, information, and people flow? How precarious is American command, and what dangers exist to the status quo? Above all, what should the United States do to sustain its future command of the commons?

The conventional wisdom offers stark answers to the preceding questions. Not only are the commons threatened by a host of state and non-state actors, but also only efforts to dissuade, deter, or quickly defeat threats can ensure American command. Absent expensive and extensive American efforts, opponents will develop the capabilities to hinder American power projection, while friendly actors will fail to defend the status quo. Policymakers thus call for the United States to expend military and political capabilities to prevent threats to the commons from manifesting. Simply put, the world is often a dangerous place and would be more dangerous without continued U.S. dominance of the commons.

This chapter challenges the policy consensus by assessing threats to American command of the maritime commons. In evaluating three oft-cited potential threats—Chinese anti-access and area denial in East Asia, underbalancing by prospective allies in Asia and the Indian Ocean, and nonstate threats to strategic chokepoints—we find that the dangers to the status quo are significantly overstated. Although more actors are increasingly capable of disrupting American command, none are capable of systematically undermining the maritime status quo: potential adversaries are constrained by the prospect of economic, military, and political counterbalancing by their neighbors; allies are compelled to support the United States because of local threats; and nonstate actors lack the capabilities to challenge American military dominance. Those threats are not negligible, but they are manageable at significantly lower

cost to American political capital and resources than the conventional wisdom suggests.

Instead, and ironically, the greatest danger to American command of the commons may come from the United States itself. By trying to dominate the commons, the United States gives adversaries greater reason to develop the capabilities to challenge the status quo while encouraging free riding by actors who would otherwise contribute to maritime security in ways conducive to the United States. To rectify that problem, we outline an alternate approach toward retaining command—what we term a “security of the commons approach”—that uses the political and geographic limits on prospective challengers to buttress the status quo.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. We first establish the link between command of the commons and U.S. grand strategy. We then elaborate on the assumptions undergirding our analysis and provide a précis of the origins of American command. From there, we discuss the control approach to the commons and outline the alternate security framework. Subsequently, we weigh putative threats to American command of the commons in East Asia and the Indian Ocean and from nonstate actors operating around strategic chokepoints in order to assess (a) the logic underlying the control approach and (b) the viability of security of the commons. The results demonstrate that many nominal threats to American command are minimal if not nonexistent and strongly suggest that the United States can do less in the world without imperiling its command. The penultimate section thus discusses practical steps the United States could pursue in support of a security strategy, followed by a brief conclusion.

### Command of the Commons and U.S. Primacy

The United States has enjoyed uncontested command over the global commons for the past two decades. Command gives the United States significant political advantages. On one level, American strategists can threaten to deny other states access to the commons. At the same time, command means the United States is more likely to defeat another's effort to deny the United States itself access to the commons in wartime. Combined, those factors give the United States a type of escalation dominance and coercive advantage in its relations with other states.<sup>1</sup> Baldly stated, command of the commons allows the United States to better protect and advance its interests.

Because of that dynamic, the U.S. approach toward commanding the commons has expanded in parallel to American grand strategy. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has pursued a primacist

grand strategy.<sup>2</sup> Primacy, as Barry Posen and Andrew Ross offer, “holds that only a preponderance of U.S. power ensures peace” by deterring opponents and reassuring friends.<sup>3</sup> Primacy thus calls for the United States to retain its dominant economic and military position for as long as possible and mandates intensive U.S. involvement in international affairs to maintain the status quo.<sup>4</sup>

The American approach toward commanding the commons both reflects and undergirds that strategy. Command means the United States can undertake complex military operations such as humanitarian military interventions and foreign invasions. By signaling the capabilities available to the United States, it likely gives other actors pause when considering whether to challenge the United States or upset the global status quo. Still, primacy pushes the United States to retain command of the commons by investing in a large, rapidly deployable military that is far more capable than those of potential opponents. It further requires the United States to dissuade prospective challengers from taking steps that might make it difficult for the United States to project power even before the United States chooses to intervene or a challenge clearly emerges. In a self-fulfilling cycle, American primacy both relies on command of the commons and encourages policymakers to maintain the status quo.

Yet although command of the commons is integral to American grand strategy, there is no single formula for retaining command. As the United States rethinks its grand strategy in the face of economic constraints at home and strategic competition abroad, it will also need to rethink its approach to the commons.

### Assumptions

Although “the commons” typically refer to the sea, air, and space domains through which information, goods, and people move, this chapter primarily addresses the maritime commons. We narrow the scope because studying the maritime commons allows us to assess the most important and contested of those domains. On one level, the maritime commons are uniquely vital to international commerce. Despite the rise of air transportation, more than 90 percent of world trade is shipborne, and half the world's oil production moves on maritime routes.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the existing international order is predicated on a safe and secure maritime environment.

Second, the United States is dependent on the maritime commons. Economically, international maritime trade accounts for roughly 11 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, while the reliance of world trade on safe maritime routes suggests the United States would pay a

significant price if the maritime commons were disrupted.<sup>6</sup> And whenever the United States acts militarily, it relies heavily on the maritime commons to project American military power.<sup>7</sup> Absent command at sea, the U.S. ability to act militarily would be substantially circumscribed.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, many analysts see the maritime commons as increasingly contested because of the expanding capabilities of both state and non-state actors. It is also where prospective opponents can do the most damage. Frank Hoffman captures prevailing concerns well, offering that the maritime commons is:

contested by rising powers in the Indian and Pacific oceans, powers that explicitly embrace Mahanian concepts about the relation of naval superiority to commercial success and authority on land. The sea is increasingly a site of conflict for maritime armed groups in lawless areas alongside failed or failing states. The global maritime commons is also contested by states seeking geopolitical and economic advantage in areas formerly overlooked by distance, low accessibility to resources and disagreeable climatic conditions.<sup>9</sup>

In turn, the growing maritime threat of states such as China and India, alongside nonstate actors, suggests that the United States has to devote increasing resources to maintaining its existing degree of maritime dominance;<sup>10</sup> otherwise, the maritime contested zone—the area in which American power projection is constrained—will inevitably expand. Thus, studying command of the maritime commons provides a baseline for assessing American command more broadly: if the United States can spend less and still command the commons in the maritime domain, despite it being the most “contestable” in areas such as the East Asian littorals and around strategic chokepoints, then the argument may apply to other domains.

### **The Origins of Command**

American command of the commons is predicated on core military capabilities. The first is an open-ocean anti-ship and anti-submarine capability, maintenance of which is key to defending the maritime sea lines of communication (SLOCs) from closure. Second is the military use of space for reconnaissance, navigation, and communication. Third is the ability to launch precision-guided weaponry against an adversary from offshore and from aircraft above 15,000 feet. The fourth entails the ability to deploy military forces around the world. Finally, underwriting all of that is a network of bases and command arrangements to direct and sustain U.S. military power.<sup>11</sup>

American command did not come about overnight. Indeed, the United States has a long-standing interest in ensuring that the commons are not used to threaten U.S. security. American strategists worked throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to expand the United States' continental reach to ensure no great power could (a) control the SLOCs; (b) dominate either the Western Hemisphere or industrial Eurasia; and (c) thereby imperil U.S. prosperity, threaten an invasion, or challenge the American way of life.<sup>12</sup> Still, the scope of U.S. command today is largely the result of historical contingency. Many of the military systems associated with command of the commons—airlift and sealift, robust naval and air forces, the Unified Command Plan, deployable ground units, and so on—were byproducts of the United States' Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union. For 40 years, the United States prepared to fight an adversary that posed both a significant military threat to Europe and could threaten the SLOCs. And because a conflict might not be contained to Europe, the United States needed to be able to respond to Soviet threats in other regions.<sup>13</sup> To overcome the triple problems of an uncertain European balance, hindrances to reinforcement, and the potential for spreading conflict, the United States acquired vast air, sea, reconnaissance, and intelligence assets.

The end of the Cold War eliminated the possibility that another superpower would threaten American security as no other state could match the combination of U.S. firepower married to a command-and-control structure optimized for global operations.<sup>14</sup> Yet rather than dismantle the forces built for Cold War contingencies, the administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush continued funding a military that was essentially a smaller Cold War-style force. Instead of designing a new military structured for a post-Cold War world, policymakers constructed a strategy that sought to perpetuate the United States' unipolar moment by keeping Cold War-era commitments and sustaining existing military forces.<sup>15</sup> Irrespective of the wisdom of those decisions, they left the United States with massive conventional superiority from 1991 onward. Forces optimized to fight a peer competitor were repurposed for humanitarian interventions and combat against far less capable regional powers posing minimal to non-existent threats.

### **The Nature of Command: Control and Its Costs**

Within this situation, the United States pursues a particular type of command, what we term “control of the commons.” As we will elaborate, that approach is based on an exaggerated estimate of threats to

and the vulnerability of the commons. Rather than commanding the commons by reacting decisively to challenges should they emerge, control seeks to prevent challenges in the first place. Specifically, the approach encompasses three related ideas: (a) the United States should dominate the commons at all times; (b) American command provides a global "public good" that all other states value and that gives the United States political leverage, but that is vulnerable to disruption; and (c) given uncertainty over future threats, it is imperative to forestall potential challenges regardless of their salience or likelihood of manifesting.

The first element equates stability of the commons with American military preeminence over any possible challenger or combination of challengers. Having obtained control, the United States seeks to preserve it and to have other states defer to the situation.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the emergence of increasingly powerful states seeking to influence the commons is viewed with deep suspicion.<sup>17</sup> Despite the rhetoric of multilateralism, other states' influence over the commons is, according to prevailing sentiments, acceptable only under the aegis of American leadership.<sup>18</sup>

Second, American command is viewed not only as beneficial for the United States but also as providing global "public goods" for other states in the form of stable modes of trade and communication.<sup>19</sup> Efforts to limit U.S. command are, therefore, portrayed as threats to the international economic system itself. Moreover, advocates of control assume the commons are easily disrupted and American command subverted. The concerns are threefold. First, actors might seize control of the commons and damage the foundations of the American order. Second, even if U.S. command cannot be eliminated, seizure of vital international "chokepoints" might prevent the system from smoothly operating. Third, even if U.S. command survives in the long run, short-term disruptions can hurt American credibility and cause the international system to fragment. Preventing challenges to the commons is, therefore, crucial to the survival of the international economic order and requires that the contested zones remain as small as possible.

Finally, because expansion of the contested zones is a threat to American leadership, control requires early identification of potential challenges—even those that have yet to clearly emerge. Such potential threats justify efforts to either dissuade or outcompete prospective challengers, often at high cost. Put simply, the United States must disarm or defuse nascent threats before they can impede U.S. leadership.<sup>20</sup>

The net effect is an approach that seeks to forestall challenges to U.S. dominance with little evaluation of (a) their likelihood to manifest,

(b) the plausible responses of other actors (aside from the United States), and (c) the magnitude of the problem(s) that might result. The United States pursues that goal by keeping substantial U.S. military forces forward deployed to prevent crises and threats from emerging.

Control undoubtedly preserves the U.S. position in the short term. Nevertheless, it is a costly approach that may eventually be both economically unsustainable and strategically self-defeating.<sup>21</sup> In particular, by equating openness of the commons with American leadership, the approach may cause emerging powers such as China and India to fear that the United States will one day deny them access to the commons.<sup>22</sup> That fear incentivizes them to develop capabilities to counter American military advantages and thus expand the contested zone. Such efforts, however, are viewed by American policymakers as threats to American command and as signs of hostile intentions, thus leading to a dangerous spiral and further American efforts to retain the United States' military position. Preeminence thereby minimally sets the stage for insecurity spirals and arms races, and it may even cause the all-out rivalry for maritime dominance that the United States seeks to avoid.

#### **An Alternative Strategy: Security of the Commons**

Control, however, is not the only approach the United States could enact to maintain command. Instead, the United States could adopt a more hands-off policy that relies more on regional actors to protect the commons as they pursue their strategic self-interest. That effort, in return, would reduce the costs and risks to the United States. We refer to that approach as "security of the commons."

Security of the commons shares with control the assumption that the United States must retain access to the commons and must be able to ultimately deter or defeat challengers to American command. Given the minimal threats the United States faces today, that task is not difficult. As a result, the security of the commons approach breaks with control in three key ways. First, it acknowledges the high fiscal and geopolitical costs involved in control relative to the minor threats the United States faces or is likely to face. Second, it argues that other states have self-interested reasons not to challenge U.S. command of the commons and, indeed, to actively support the status quo. And third, given uncertainty over the future, it appreciates that the United States can leverage the advantages of its economic and military base and the present structure of world politics to maintain command of the commons even in the unlikely event that a challenge emerges. Ultimately, security

of the commons is analogous to Paul Kennedy's description of "naval mastery," namely:

A situation in which a country has so developed its maritime strength that it is superior to any rival power, and that its predominance is or could be exerted far outside its home waters. . . . It does *not* necessarily imply a superiority over all other navies combined, nor does it mean that this country could not temporarily lose local command of the sea; but it does assume the possession of an overall maritime power such that small-scale defeats overseas would soon be reversed by the dispatch of naval forces sufficient to eradicate the enemy's challenge.<sup>23</sup>

In short, maintaining control is not needed to maintain command.

Security assumes that the United States cannot indefinitely prevent expansion of the contested zones—presently limited to the littorals near major powers—unless it is willing to devote ever-increasing resources to the defense budget. As military technologies, such as advanced surface-to-air missiles and cruise missiles, proliferate to potential adversaries, the United States must expend more resources to overcome those assets than it costs others to field them.<sup>24</sup> Although it is a rich country, the United States cannot undertake that effort in perpetuity—and, given current economic trends and domestic debates, such an effort may be infeasible in addition to being unwarranted. The implication is that the United States needs to weigh the value of invariably pushing back contested zones with the cost of accepting the growth of the zone, managing risk, and pushing only when core U.S. interests are demonstrably threatened.

Moreover, security recognizes that other states have self-interested reasons not to undermine American command. Rising states such as China and India have benefited from the U.S.-led international system. That benefit is particularly true in economic affairs, where their economic security depends on stable trade routes.<sup>25</sup> To assert that other states want to supplant the United States in command of the commons, one must assume that other states are willing to bear the costs of conflict and the economic opportunity costs that would be paid afterward. That seems a dubious prospect given the benefits derived from the present system and rising state efforts to maintain the system to date.<sup>26</sup>

Relatedly, states interested in undermining American command of the commons are constrained because of the likely strategic repercussions. A glance at the map reveals that the most plausible challengers to American command—states encompassing a large economy, educated

population, technological expertise, and at least moderate military forces—all face potential counterbalancing coalitions that would greatly limit their ability to bid for command. That limitation lowers the attractiveness of even undertaking the effort. In Asia, Japan, China, Russia, and India have long-standing rivalries with one another and would not look kindly at one obtaining local command, a circumstance that fosters a large degree of deterrence independent of American policy. And even if one state successfully obtained local dominance, the others would likely seek to undo the change. An analogous situation holds in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> As a result, potential challengers are limited in their ability to threaten U.S. command for the foreseeable future.

That dynamic also means the United States will have opportunities to partner with regional actors to preserve American command at lower cost and has more latitude to share the burden of maintaining the commons than it has pursued. Under a security approach, the United States would first rely on similarly interested regional powers to preserve the commons in their area of the world. States such as India, Japan, Russia, and even China should be encouraged to develop the air and sea capabilities necessary to protect the maritime domain. Recent activities by all those states suggest they are already moving in that direction; instead of feeling threatened, the United States would be wise to embrace the trend.

Credibly committing to using regional actors as the first line of defense would help avoid three drawbacks of control. First, it would help forestall free riding—the incentive states have to contribute less to a collective good than they would otherwise, while expecting another state will pick up the slack. States in Asia, the Indian Ocean, and around strategic chokepoints believe their well-being depends on a stable maritime commons, but they rely primarily on the United States to protect the status quo.<sup>28</sup>

As the preceding analysis suggests, however, the maritime commons are secure against plausible threats, meaning American investments are militarily unnecessary. As such, reducing the American role abroad and moving away from control would free the United States from free riders and would reverse the situation: the United States can save its time and money as the states most interested in maritime stability spend the most for the privilege.

Second, shifting from control to security would limit the risk of American entrapment in regional disputes. With the American role more ambiguous, American partners are less likely to engage in provocative behavior (e.g., nationalist instigations or escalations) as they



internalize the costs of their actions and cannot count on the United States' quickly intervening on their behalf. Third, the security approach would help avoid the appearance of an American threat and would reduce the possibility of balancing against the United States.

To credibly commit to that effort, the United States should curtail its military presence in areas where it wants other states to carry the burden. The model for the United States ought to be the United Kingdom, which successfully used the Japanese empire to preserve Britain's Far East interests while improving relations with the United States and Russia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup>

Still, that approach does not mean that the United States should disarm and itself free-ride. The final elements of security are the maintenance of a powerful military and the capacity to develop and deploy additional capabilities to preserve the commons if a challenge emerges. The United States' large economy, educated population, and long history of producing advanced military hardware allow it to generate military power that most countries can only imagine. Its geographic advantages also enable it to position forces and come to the aid of allies around the world in a pinch. Those factors suggest that the United States can maintain command of the commons so long as it can generate military power from its domestic economy. Even a smaller military with fewer assets forward deployed can preserve command by partnering with regional powers if and when the situation merits. Put differently, the United States should aim to retain sufficient military capacity to step in and assert control if it appears regional actors were unable to preserve access to the commons, thus operating as a security guarantor of last resort by providing "swing" capacity to defeat challengers.

Overall, a security approach breaks from control in accepting an expansion of the contested zones and growth of others' ability to influence the commons. The United States can accept that change because the commons is far more resilient, support for the status quo more widely shared, and threats far smaller than conventional wisdom suggests. Potential challengers are limited in how far they can threaten U.S. command before they hinder their own security and trigger backlash. Admittedly, some states may miscalculate the situation and conclude that the net benefit of challenging American command outweighs the losses. If that occurs, however, it is likely to happen gradually rather than as a bolt from the blue as challengers maneuver to mask their intentions. This would give the United States and others time to respond. Moreover, because states confronting a challenger will seek to counterbalance, the United States should enjoy multiple channels to project

influence and preserve stability. The result means the United States can relax its efforts to dominate the commons before threats emerge.

### **The Commons' Emerging Spheres of Contestation**

Control of the commons depends on a significant forward presence in the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf. With potential multipolarity, the diffusion of military technology, mounting unconventional threats, and instability around chokepoints, an emerging consensus holds that the contested zones are expanding.<sup>30</sup> Left unchecked, those trends may undermine American command.

The jury is still out, however, on the scope and source of those problems. In our assessment, existing arguments overstate threats and misdiagnose the causes. Instead, we argue that trends pose some problems but do not constitute strategic threats. On one level, nonstate actors lack the ability to substantively disrupt the maritime commons. At the same time, although anti-access capabilities are increasing and can deny access to another's littorals, they do not give those states the ability to deny access to vast swaths of the commons as the United States and its allies can maneuver offshore.<sup>31</sup> Though American dominance is ebbing in some ways, American command remains intact. To illustrate our argument, we analyze purported threats to the commons in three theaters commonly identified as sites of prospective contestation: East Asia and the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.

#### *East Asia and the Pacific Ocean*

East Asia and the Pacific Ocean are a focal point of American strategy.<sup>32</sup> In particular, analysts from across the political spectrum see the "rise of China" as a prospective challenge to U.S. command in much the same way that many rising powers have historically used their capabilities to contest the international status quo.<sup>33</sup> China's growing military power and recent assertiveness lend some support to those fears.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the proposition that China will eventually challenge U.S. command in East Asia is debatable. Even as its power and interests expand, there are strong constraints on what China can accomplish without imperiling its security.<sup>35</sup> Those constraints limit the threat posed to U.S. command.

#### CONSTRAINTS ON CHINA

China would suffer great costs if it were to try to assert command of the East Asian commons. Economically, a Chinese bid for East Asian command would scare away trading partners and investors leery of

abetting Chinese aggrandizement and leaving themselves dependent on a potential hegemon. China might then forfeit the economic growth that has fueled its rise in the first place and confront domestic instability as economic losses threatened the legitimacy of China's Communist Party.<sup>36</sup> Other economic costs might emerge if Chinese access to oil and other seaborne trade—on which China's economy relies—were cut off as regional actors began blockading or interdicting fuel shipments.<sup>37</sup> It would also pay a political and strategic premium. China's economic growth, expanding military capabilities, and territorial claims have already unsettled its neighbors. Tellingly, states such as India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, and Vietnam have begun seeking closer strategic ties to hedge against Chinese expansion.<sup>38</sup> Overt Chinese aggrandizement or attempts to "Finlandize" its neighbors would only accelerate that process.<sup>39</sup> China, in turn, would need either to rein in its ambitions or work to counterbalance. In either case, China would face limits on expansion and would undercut the international stability on which its rise depends.<sup>40</sup>

#### CONTROL OF THE COMMONS AND CHINESE STRATEGY

How might American control of the commons factor into Chinese strategy? Ironically, U.S. strategy—epitomized by the recent "pivot" to Asia—undercuts China's incentives to support the status quo by fueling Chinese insecurity. China is dependent on trade and vulnerable to disruption of the SLOCs. Likewise, most of China's wealthiest regions are located near the Chinese coast and, therefore, are vulnerable to attack from the littoral. The American presence in East Asia, however, gives the United States the ability to bring significant power to bear against China and to cut China off from trade routes. Thus, although American forces are in East Asia to maintain openness and to reassure allies, they appear offensive and threatening to China because they are the same assets that facilitated American action against Serbia, Iraq, and other states. In trying to prevent a very limited Chinese threat from manifesting, the American presence may precipitate a greater Chinese challenge in the future.<sup>41</sup>

The resulting insecurity fuels China's efforts to expand its military reach: not to challenge American command but to ensure that the United States cannot threaten China. It is thus not surprising that China's response has focused on acquiring (still maturing) anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. Given the threat of American attack or encirclement, A2/AD capabilities raise the prospective costs of American action and may deter U.S. adventurism.<sup>42</sup> Overall, and partly as a result

of the United States' propensity for pursuing control, the United States and China are in an escalating security spiral. That observation implies that the United States can reduce the risk of a future Chinese challenge to American command by reducing the offensive power that can be brought to bear and the insecurity that current American strategy creates and so "assuage, not exploit, Beijing's anxieties."<sup>43</sup>

#### THE LIMITS OF CHINA'S MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Still, even if China's interests appear largely supportive of the status quo, expanding Chinese capabilities could either mask or give rise to revisionist tendencies. Indeed, some analysts fear that Chinese A2/AD will provide a glacis behind which China will develop the capacity to seek command of the East Asian commons.<sup>44</sup> Those concerns are unwarranted. Chinese leaders are themselves uncertain over which direction they want to take their military, with views ranging from support for an A2/AD force, to advocating for limited power projection, and finally to seeking a more expansive vision of a blue-water navy that could compete with the U.S. Navy.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, most analysts acknowledge that Chinese capabilities remain significantly circumscribed because of a variety of institutional and historical factors and are unlikely to actually challenge U.S. naval dominance *in the aggregate* for some time, perhaps 15–20 years.<sup>46</sup> For instance, even if China develops a more robust A2/AD force, the U.S. Navy could still deploy its submarine force—the most advanced in the world—to deny China's control of the SLOCs. Similarly, China's development of a surface navy would provide easy targets for the United States to attack; the United States could practice its own type of anti-access and area denial.<sup>47</sup> Combined, Chinese leaders would have to suffer from significant strategic myopia to conclude that China can successfully challenge American command. In effect, Chinese naval expansion will be checked either by China's own acknowledgment of its limitations or by capability gaps relative to the United States.<sup>48</sup> China is not the Soviet Union, and it lacks the ability, opportunity, or motivation to seriously challenge American command.<sup>49</sup>

#### *South Asia and the Indian Ocean*

The Indian Ocean is also central to discussions surrounding the commons.<sup>50</sup> There, threats to U.S. command are thought to come from non-state actors in the form of terrorism, insurgency, illicit trafficking, and piracy.<sup>51</sup> China's entrance into the Indian Ocean is also held up as a potential destabilizing force.<sup>52</sup> In our assessment, although nonstate actors

pose a moderate threat to the commons, they pose a much smaller danger than is often portrayed. At the same time, India's interest in expanding its trade and security will provide opportunities for the United States to partner with it to ensure that the commons remain open while retaining significant influence over the process.

#### NONSTATE THREATS

Insurgency, terrorism, piracy, and other nonstate threats are largely inconsequential to U.S. command of the commons. Though American officials have used nonstate threats in and around the Indian Ocean to justify U.S. activism there, the logic linking nonstate actors to threats to the maritime commons falls somewhere between underdeveloped and nonexistent.<sup>53</sup> Even advanced smuggling networks, for instance, cannot conduct ocean-wide blockades, have operated for decades without challenging U.S. command, and rely themselves on the free movement of goods via the commons.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, even the strongest militant groups, such as Hezbollah, cannot deny the United States access to littoral regions, chokepoints, or international waterways.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the inability of even medium-size states to prevent the United States from operating near littorals or in chokepoints suggests that comparatively poor and militarily weak groups would be even less successful.<sup>56</sup> There is no need to preemptively counter those groups to defend the commons.

Piracy, particularly in the Indian Ocean, has captured headlines partly because it suggests a loss of U.S. preeminence over major waterways.<sup>57</sup> Piracy's bark, however, is worse than its bite. Although disruptive, piracy threatens neither freedom of navigation nor command of the commons. The numbers are telling. The annual cost of piracy is estimated at \$1–\$3 billion per year,<sup>58</sup> a rounding error compared with the total value of international commerce.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, pirates pose little threat to sea lines of communication: when they disrupt movement through international waterways, naval flotillas quickly reduce their operations around the most critical chokepoints.

The piracy problem does not generally require significant American action. Even at its recent peak, three-quarters of piracy attempts failed as countermeasures were developed. The estimated 20 percent of ships operating around the Horn of Africa that failed to implement security measures were overwhelmingly the ones targeted. In contrast, ships with armed guards and other self-defense measures were never successfully attacked.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, recent figures suggest that individual measures such as armed guards, in conjunction with international policing

efforts encouraged by states with the most vulnerable vessels, substantially reduced piracy by raising the costs of attacks.<sup>61</sup> On balance, piracy rarely reaches a threshold that requires American military action. When it does, modest American action can contribute to coordinated efforts (such as providing convoy escorts) but is not needed to lead actors to take steps in their self-interest.<sup>62</sup>

#### INDIA'S ROLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

As the world's largest democracy and an emerging power in its own right, some see India as a natural ally for the United States, a balancer of China, and a supporter of American command of the commons. Yet despite the 2008 nuclear deal designed to align India with the United States, relations have stagnated, and India remains leery of intensive cooperation.<sup>63</sup> That fact has not stopped Indian-American collaboration, but it has limited such efforts to low-level missions such as anti-piracy and humanitarian operations.<sup>64</sup>

China's continued movement into the region has produced calls for the United States to foster greater Indian-American cooperation.<sup>65</sup> That step seems both unwise and unnecessary. By prematurely hedging against Chinese activism, a U.S.-Indian alignment would almost certainly spark encirclement fears in China. Indeed, given Chinese concerns about American command of the commons today, an Indian-American partnership would antagonize China with the prospect of naval blockade. China is unlikely to simply accept that situation, and it could respond with a military buildup that would imperil East and South Asian stability.

Moreover, such an American effort is unnecessary. Even without an Indian-American partnership, India needs no push to defend what are essentially its own interests. The country's dependence on maritime trade and its growing overseas presence mean it has a vested interest in preventing an actor such as China from dominating the regional SLOCs.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, India has already begun to grow wary of Chinese power in the Indian Ocean, viewing the region as its "rightful and exclusive sphere"<sup>67</sup> and forging security relationships with Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam in response.<sup>68</sup> A stronger Chinese push would likely cause even more intensive Indian balancing.<sup>69</sup> In essence, a natural coalition to protect the status quo is already forming and requires little prodding from Washington.

To be clear, India is unlikely to be simply an ancillary to American designs.<sup>70</sup> India has its own interests in trade, in avoiding disruptive military conflicts, and in retaining strategic flexibility. Those objectives

could be undermined by a sustained rivalry with other emerging powers. Thus, the more the United States pushes India to sign up to an American-led effort to control the commons that might risk entrapping India in disputes, the less likely Indian-American cooperation is to occur (indeed, it may even spur Indo-Chinese cooperation).<sup>71</sup> If, however, the United States focuses on preventing any other state from closing the maritime domain, then the opportunities for Indian-American accord increase: India's own objectives push it toward the same course. So long as the United States can intervene in the breach and can work with India to keep the Indian Ocean free of another's dominance, both Indian and American objectives can be obtained.<sup>72</sup> Put differently, American command of the commons can be maintained by relying on the concordant objectives between the United States and India and by planning to decisively influence events should threats in the region ultimately emerge.

#### *The Persian Gulf and Strategic Chokepoints*

Even as the United States watches India and China carefully, policymakers worry that the commons might be disrupted by closure of strategic (maritime) chokepoints. By "strategic chokepoints," we mean regions of the world's oceans where many ships pass, but whose constricted geography makes them potential military targets. The fact that many ships pass through chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal, Panama Canal, and Strait of Gibraltar means their closure could theoretically imperil the SLOCs. The Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant portion of world oil moves, is often flagged as a particular concern.<sup>73</sup>

Chokepoint vulnerability has been used to justify a more activist American presence in nearby regions. That justification includes a robust military presence, support for regime change (particularly around the Persian Gulf), and counterterrorism operations. Yet such actions can create new incentives for other actors to threaten, disrupt, or close strategic chokepoints as a way of deterring or retaliating against American activities. Iran provides a case in point, because the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf and discussion of attacking the Iranian nuclear program give Iran a clear reason to threaten Hormuz even as Iran—in the estimates of U.S. intelligence—"is unlikely to initiate or intentionally provoke a conflict" on its own.<sup>74</sup>

That situation is ironic because chokepoints are significantly less vulnerable than often appreciated. First, the prevalence of chokepoints is exaggerated. Few straits are really chokepoints: the closure of many straits would not block the SLOCs because alternative routes are

available. That applies in particular to the Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal, Panama Canal, and Strait of Gibraltar.<sup>75</sup>

Second, few, if any, states have the ability to close strategic chokepoints far from home ports. Admiral Dennis Blair puts the issue well, arguing that even countries with the economic potential to build blue-water navies are "at least 20 years away from developing the fleet strength, naval-supply networks, and operational skills needed to mount sustained blockades far from home ports."<sup>76</sup> And as Caitlin Talmadge points out with regard to Hormuz, it is even more unlikely that a state could close a chokepoint and *keep it closed* in the face of an international response.<sup>77</sup>

Third, other states are more vulnerable to chokepoint disruption and have a natural incentive to cooperate to counter threats. China, for instance, is concerned about the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf (a concern shared by India, Japan, South Korea, and others).<sup>78</sup> That situation provides numerous potential coalitions that could work together to deter other actors from closing a chokepoint or to work together to reopen a vital transit route.

Finally, and despite concerns to the contrary, regional conflicts, piracy, or terrorism are not substantive threats to chokepoints. As noted earlier, they can—at best—harass shipping and slightly raise the costs of commerce.<sup>79</sup> Again, ships can either bypass conflict-prone chokepoints or take measures (e.g., traveling in convoys or employing guards) to limit their vulnerability.<sup>80</sup>

Once one recognizes that the threat to maritime chokepoints is overstated, then the risk to American command of the commons also diminishes. In turn, that recognition means the United States does not need to forward deploy military forces or to play an active role in keeping the chokepoints open in order to preserve maritime dominance.<sup>81</sup> Just as no harm befell the United States after it surrendered control of the Panama Canal in 1999, so too it is highly unlikely that harm will befall the United States with respect to other chokepoints in the future.<sup>82</sup>

#### **Toward "Security of the Commons"**

The control of the commons approach was manageable in the 1990s as the United States enjoyed massive military and economic advantages over other states. Today, however, the United States finds itself in different circumstances. Political, economic, and military pressures may soon force the United States to make difficult fiscal decisions that will affect U.S. military strategy, while the emergence of new great powers suggest the era of American unipolarity is ending.<sup>83</sup> Given those

pressures, a security-based approach offers potential advantages because it would (a) offer lower direct U.S. economic costs, (b) reduce spirals of insecurity, and (c) encourage other states to subsidize efforts to keep the commons open without undermining American command.

#### *Control versus Security*

Security of the commons differs from control in a number of underlying propositions. First, it envisions a more limited American role in managing the commons. Second, it measures threats to the commons on the basis of material factors such as others' offensive capabilities rather than rhetoric or presumed intentions. Third, it argues that the United States needs to avoid appearing offensively oriented by reducing forward-deployed forces in order to avoid spirals of insecurity that create a self-fulfilling justification for an activist American role.<sup>84</sup> Fourth, the approach argues that by reducing the size of its forward-deployed forces, the United States increases others' incentives to counter threats to the commons and to limit free riding on American security largesse. Fifth, it calls for the United States to be an equal-opportunity cooperater, not limiting cooperation to democracies or existing allies but embracing ad hoc, flexible coalitions with states that share similar interests.<sup>85</sup> Finally, it ignores the nuisance posed by most nonstate actors.

Building from those premises, the plan—spelled out in the following section—pushes the United States to act as a security guarantor of last resort. Looking first to regional actors to address threats to the commons, the approach calls for the United States to retain forces able to respond and contain strategic challenges if and when regional actors are unable to do so. Other states would look to the United States as the holder of the balance of power because its intervention would decisively defeat otherwise unmanageable threats to the commons on which most major states depend. American command, in turn, would be assured by occupying this position.

#### **Implementing Security of the Commons**

Several steps are needed to adopt the security approach. First, the United States should reduce its political and military presence abroad to devolve responsibility for maintaining the commons to regional actors sharing American interests. The objective should be to make states such as China, Japan, and India responsible for managing the commons on a day-to-day basis. Because a rough balance of power exists among regional actors and because the commons are resilient, that effort is most likely to lead to stability and maintenance of the status quo.

That change does not mean, however, abdication of an American role. Rather, concurrent with efforts to devolve responsibility should be efforts to indicate the United States' willingness to intervene if a true strategic threat to the commons—for instance, a new Sovietesque competitor—emerged. Because regional actors would be unable to defeat such challenges on their own, they would have to look to the United States as the security guarantor of last resort. And because American intervention would decisively tilt the balance of power against a revisionist push, the United States' privileged position as the commander of the commons would be preserved: it would be able to defeat others' efforts to upend the international status quo.

Second, the plan requires changes to the American force posture. Although the size and scope of American forward deployments may prevent some threats to the commons, they also antagonize potential adversaries (producing insecurity spirals and new threats) while encouraging free riding among allies. The security approach would try to overcome those problems by downplaying operational concepts such as Air-Sea Battle. Instead of keeping large forces forward deployed and training them for offensive operations, the United States should emphasize defense of the SLOCs, support for critical regional actors, and a smaller overseas footprint. That framework places a premium on anti-submarine warfare, convoy escort, and air and missile defense assets. Conversely, advanced fighter aircraft, aircraft carriers, large ground units stationed onshore, and multimission surface vessels would be withdrawn to the United States or eliminated. The United States could remove carrier battle groups and fighter wings forward deployed in Asia, limit ground troops in Asia and the Persian Gulf, and avoid deploying offense-oriented units to the Indian Ocean. Instead, the United States might dispatch naval escorts, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, and air and missile defense batteries designed to secure the maritime commons without threatening other states. Meanwhile, it could center that modified force on bases on Diego Garcia, Guam, and other Indian and Pacific Ocean islands, while retaining or obtaining basing rights—without a continuous presence—in case a scale-up of forces is needed in a crisis.<sup>86</sup>

Enacting those changes should diminish the sense of insecurity felt by states such as China, and thereby undercut their incentives to roll back American maritime dominance. The proposed approach will also require similarly interested states—to the extent they feel their security is underprovided—to mobilize and pick up the strategic slack. However, such regional arming would be better characterized as an arms

“catch-up” rather than an arms race<sup>87</sup> and would, therefore, be less likely to trigger the same insecurity spiral as a large and offensively postured U.S. presence. In either case, the United States benefits by spending on fewer forces, avoiding the costs of stationing units abroad, decreasing the risks of insecurity spirals, limiting entrapment dilemmas, and requiring partners to share more of the defensive burden. Yet because the United States could redeploy additional forces (that still swamp those of regional actors) if a threat emerged, a modified posture and reduced forward presence would still leave the United States in command of the commons.

Of course, that approach assumes that regional actors do not shirk in defending the commons following a U.S. retrenchment or refuse to allow U.S. reengagement in the event of a crisis. That assumption is supported by history and current events. Even as American attention turned away from East Asia and toward the Middle East after the September 11, 2001, attacks, Japan and Korea scaled up their militaries to shoulder more of the regional security burden while later welcoming the American “pivot” to Asia.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, American military retrenchment during the 1970s saw European, Japanese, and Chinese capabilities grow alongside efforts to garner renewed American attention.<sup>89</sup> The process is not frictionless, but when real threats are on the horizon, states balance, put history aside, strike the deals necessary to address the problem, and overcome coordination challenges. Indeed, as China has become more assertive, other regional actors have begun overcoming past differences and engaged in cooperative ventures—including 18 military exercises independent of the United States in 2012 and 15 exercises in 2013.<sup>90</sup>

Third, the security approach calls for diplomatic multilateralism, albeit a different form of multilateralism than the United States currently practices. Presently, the United States pursues multilateralism by working through international bodies such as the United Nations and NATO.<sup>91</sup> Often, however, those bodies are simply forums to approve policies the United States would pursue unilaterally if all else failed. Instead, multilateralism under security of the commons would rely as much on coordination among groups of self-interested states as on broad international groupings.

Achieving that type of multilateralism, therefore, requires recognizing that preexisting institutions are not the only means to that end, while accepting that cooperation will sometimes require accepting other states’ definitions of the desired objectives; in other cases, it may require cooperation with states such as China against states with which the United States is institutionally embedded if such cooperation helps

sustain command. That call for “flexible multilateralism” is intended to give American policymakers multiple options for retaining command: rather than assume existing multilateral forums are the best way to preserve American command, it allows that command may require ad hoc coalitions that wax and wane as threats rise and decline. Such coalitions may not be as efficient as existing ones for some issues, but they may be less troublesome than trying to repurpose existing institutions for tasks they were never designed to address.

Finally, a security approach calls for the United States to invest heavily in its economy and socioeconomic well-being. Just as British command of the commons was undone by the country’s economic decline and a series of resource-draining wars, so too is American command challenged. Because military power ultimately hinges on economic dynamism and human capital, shoring up American command, therefore, requires increased investment in the bases of American power—science, research and development, education, and infrastructure.<sup>92</sup> Particularly as the world becomes more economically competitive and fiscal pressures mount, those steps are needed to ensure the United States’ long-term ability to command the commons. Considering the size of the U.S. defense budget (over \$600 billion in 2013 dollars), even moderate reductions will produce sizable absolute savings to spur domestic growth.<sup>93</sup>

### Conclusion

Ultimately, no approach to command of the commons is risk free. Still, given the costs of trying to control the commons amid a shifting distribution of power and the underlying resiliency of the status quo, the United States can today do significantly less to shape the maritime commons without imperiling its command. Facing minimal threats to the status quo, the United States can significantly reduce its role abroad. Money will still have to be spent on expeditionary air and naval forces (a) to reassure local actors that the United States, in the breach, will come to their aid and (b) to preserve a “force in being” that can be scaled up in a crisis. However, that force can be much smaller than current U.S. forces and would, in our framework, deploy only in the rare event that a local actor sought to overturn American command without being deterred by local opposition. Though such an event is unlikely, the damage that could result from an all-out, unopposed push by a hostile actor to overturn the status quo requires current investments as a hedge.

Yet, short of that situation, the United States can gain more security with fewer costs and less effort. The maritime commons is currently secure and is so virtually independent of whether the United States

is actively involved in its day-to-day policing. By relying on local actors' self-interest in preserving maritime openness and recognizing the small challenge posed by prospective competitors, the United States can thus have its cake and eat it too: by retrenching, the United States can limit the spirals of insecurity that might cause challenges to American command to emerge, while pocketing the fiscal and political savings of a smaller footprint abroad. Pursuing security of the commons, therefore, offers the prospect of sustaining American command over the long term. Although no silver bullet, security makes sound geopolitical and fiscal sense at a time of mounting economic, military, and political challenges. American strategists would do well to recognize that situation and plan accordingly.

## 14. Security Threats in Contemporary World Politics: Potential Hegemons, Partnerships, and Primacy

*Brendan Rittenhouse Green*

For much of its history, the United States has not faced serious security threats from nation-states. Its expansive ocean moats and weak neighbors simplified its security problem even before it became a great power; geographic distance and European distraction often protected what power alone could not. After the end of the Civil War, America added to those assets political unity and economic might. With few exceptions, the United States has been free from the worst sorts of external dangers. It took a freak accident of world historical scale—the military collapse of French armies in May 1940—to create a serious geopolitical threat to the United States. The efforts to meet Hitler's threat set the stage for Stalin's, because five years of war destroyed the industrial world and put the Red Army in the heart of Europe. In short, for a few decades following 1940, the United States arguably did face a legitimate external threat: the possibility that the resources of the industrial world could be politically united and turned against the Western Hemisphere.

Those conditions have long since disappeared; yet their intellectual influence lives on in contemporary American grand strategy. The United States maintains the world's most powerful military, which makes its presence felt overseas through a political system of globe-girdling alliances. Those expensive efforts aim to prevent a renewed power competition such as the one that led to World War II and the Cold War. Such a competition is generally regarded as catastrophic, either because it would produce a potential hegemon such as Germany or the Soviet Union, or because the United States would inevitably be drawn into war in order to forestall such an outcome. Instead, America pursues a grand strategy of primacy, which aims to stop dangerous threats to its security resulting from competition among nation-states.

America does indeed face threats from nation-states, but those threats stem from its primacy strategy rather than being prevented

circumstances would at most justify particular alliances rather than a general strategy of deep engagement. For an assessment that conflict does not threaten vital oil supplies (oil being the key resource that most naturally springs to mind), see Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "Protecting 'The Prize': Oil in American Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 453–85. A further case study of trade in rare earth elements, which caused a brief flurry of fears of dependence on China in 2010–2011, shows that interruption of other apparently concentrated resources is also unlikely to threaten the United States. See Eugene Gholz, "The Story of Rare Earths: Even a Perfect Storm of Dependence Is Hard to Exploit," Council on Foreign Relations (forthcoming, 2014).

<sup>1</sup>Some countries, notably in Asia, go to considerable effort to try to ensure that their defense spending has such spin-off benefits. Richard J. Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army: National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Tai Ming Cheung, "The Chinese Defense Economy's Long March from Imitation to Innovation," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 3 (June 2011): 325–54. In the United States, history suggests that defense spending has limited spin-off benefits, although it might have greater such effects in some sectors (computers) than in others (aircraft). Eugene Gholz, "Eisenhower versus the Spin-Off Story: Did the Rise of the Military-Industrial Complex Hurt or Help America's Commercial Aircraft Industry?" *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 1 (March 2011): 46–95.

<sup>2</sup>"Remarks of Treasury Secretary Jacob L. Lew at the Close of the Fifth U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue," July 11, 2013, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2008.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup>Niall Ferguson, *The Pitty of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 252, 328–29; John T. Madden, Marcus Nadler, and Harry C. Sauvain, *America's Experience as a Creditor Nation* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937).

<sup>4</sup>Nils Ørvik, *The Decline of Neutrality 1914–1941*, 2d ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1971), p. 58; Edgar Turlington, *Neutrality: Its History, Economics, and Law*, vol. 3, *The World War Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

<sup>5</sup>Martin S. Navias and E. R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980–1988* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>See Gholz and Press, "Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries."

### Chapter 13

<sup>1</sup>Barry Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 11–19.

<sup>2</sup>Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97): 5–53. Support for primacy of some kind appears to have obtained since the mid-1990s. See Barry Posen, "The Case for Restraint," *The American Interest* 3, no. 2 (November–December, 2007): 7–32. Moreover, some identify a bipartisan consensus as far back as the post-Vietnam era. See Stephen Chaudoin, Helen Milner, and Dustin Tingley, "The Center Still Holds: Liberal Internationalism Survives," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 75–94.

<sup>3</sup>Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 32–42. See also Barry Posen, "Stability and Change in U.S. Grand Strategy," *Orbis* 51, no. 4 (October 2007): 561–67.

<sup>5</sup>Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Chokepoints," Department of Energy, February 2011.

<sup>6</sup>In 2012, international trade made up 24 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, and maritime trade accounted for 46 percent of that figure. Bruce Lambert, "International Maritime Trade Benefits the Nation's Economy," Working Paper no. 1, Institute for Trade and Transportation Studies, August 2013, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>See *Moving U.S. Forces: Options for Strategic Mobility* (Washington: Congressional Budget Office, 1997).

<sup>8</sup>Paul Kennedy, "Naval Mastery, Past, Present, and Future: Some Thoughts Twenty-Five Years Later," *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. xiv, xix.

<sup>9</sup>Frank Hoffman, "The Maritime Commons in the Neo-Mahanian Era," in *Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World*, ed. Abraham M. Denmark and James Mulvenon (Washington: Center for a New American Security, January 2010), p. 53. Those sentiments are echoed by the U.S. Naval Operations Concept: see *Naval Operations Concept 2010: Implementing the Maritime Strategy* (Washington: Department of the Navy, 2010), p. 36, <http://www.navy.mil/maritime/noc/NOC2010.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>Jane Perlez, "Panetta Outlines New Weaponry for Pacific," *New York Times*, June 1, 2012.

<sup>11</sup>Posen, "Command of the Commons," pp. 10–19.

<sup>12</sup>Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

<sup>13</sup>See, in part, the expansion of the Unified Command Plan discussed in Ronald H. Cole et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan* (Washington: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995); also see William Story, "Military Changes to the Unified Command Plan: Background and Issues for Congress," CRS Report for Congress, RL 30245, Congressional Research Service, June 21, 1999.

<sup>14</sup>For recognition of that fact, see William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a Global Age* (Washington: White House, 2000), p. i.

<sup>15</sup>Lorna Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force, 1989–1992* (Washington: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1993).

<sup>16</sup>"2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report," Department of Defense, February 2006, p. 30; Dennis Roy, "US-China Relations and the Western Pacific," *Diplomat*, January 16, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>"National Security Strategy of the United States of America," White House, Washington, March 2006, pp. 38–42; "National Security Strategy," White House, Washington, May 2010, pp. 42–45. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review similarly signaled the unease felt in Washington with the role of rising powers: "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," Department of Defense, February 2010, p. 7 (hereafter "2010 QDR").

<sup>18</sup>See 2010 "National Security Strategy," p. 43.

<sup>19</sup>In this sense, it embraces key insights about public goods from benign versions of hegemonic stability theory; see Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); also see Carla Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage: U.S. Hegemony and International Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. chap. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Abraham M. Denmark and James Mulvenon, "Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World," in Denmark and Mulvenon, *Contested Commons*, pp. 5–6, 15–16; Tara Murphy, "Security Challenges in the 21st Century Global Commons," *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2010): 28–43.

<sup>21</sup>There is no perfect way to determine the cost of that strategy and the savings that would be derived by alternate approaches. Considering, however, that the United States spends between \$75 billion and \$175 billion annually in regions of the world that seem militarily secure in any meaningful sense, even moderate changes would produce major absolute savings. On estimates of U.S. spending, see Barry Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2013, pp. 116–28; Benjamin H. Friedman and Christopher Preble, "Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 667, September 23, 2010; Eugene Gholz, "The Costs of U.S. Commitments to the Persian Gulf," unpublished paper, August 2013. Thanks also to Russell Rumbaugh on these issues.



<sup>22</sup>China, for instance, seems extremely concerned that the United States might use its maritime dominance to hinder Chinese oil imports. See Robert Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 70; Wu Lei and Shen Qinyu, "Will China Go to War over Oil?" *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, no. 3 (April 2006): 38–40; Gabriel B. Collins and William S. Murray, "No Oil for the Lamps of China," *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 79–80. <sup>23</sup>Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p. 9 [emphasis in original].

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Jan Van Tol et al., *AirSea Battle: A Point of Departure Concept* (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), pp. x–xvi. Particular approaches may also involve increased political risks. See Joshua Rovner, "AirSea Battle and Escalation Risks," Changing Military Dynamics in East Asia Policy Brief no. 12, Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, January 2012.

<sup>25</sup>For example, see Brian Spegele and Matt Bradley, "Middle East Oil Fuels Fresh China-U.S. Tensions: Beijing Depends on U.S. Military to Secure Middle East Imports," *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2013.

<sup>26</sup>On China, see M. Taylor Fravel, "International Relations Theory and China's Rise: Assessing China's Potential for Territorial Expansion," *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (December 2010): 505–32.

<sup>27</sup>For instance, Iranian mischief in the Persian Gulf could be offset by the Arab states, and it might antagonize China and India into joining a coalition.

<sup>28</sup>Though we assess the threat to the commons to be low, some threats do—as we will elaborate—exist, and there is some uncertainty surrounding future trends. Because the United States has some very small interest in addressing present threats and a larger interest in hedging against the future, the stability of the commons resembles a public good.

<sup>29</sup>Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894–1907* (London: Athlone, 1966); Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>30</sup>See 2010 "National Security Strategy," p. 40; "2010 QDR," p. 8; *Naval Operations Concept 2010*, p. 18; "NATO in the Global Commons," Allied Command Transformation Workshop Report, Atlantic Council, Washington, July 21, 2010. [http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2010/gc/report01\\_wash.pdf](http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2010/gc/report01_wash.pdf).

<sup>31</sup>Andrew Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle?* (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010); James Kraska, "How the United States Lost the Naval War of 2015," *Orbis* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 35–45.

<sup>32</sup>2010 "National Security Strategy," p. 43; "2010 QDR," p. 60; *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: Department of Defense, 2011), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>34</sup>James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "A Chinese Monroe Doctrine?" *Defense News*, September 20, 2010. Note, however, that many China hands question whether Chinese assertiveness is (a) really a new development and (b) driven by confidence in its power or deep insecurity over its role in the world. See Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 7–48; and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, No. 3 (December 2011): 292–319.

<sup>35</sup>Fravel, "International Relations Theory," p. 506.

<sup>36</sup>Edward Steinfield, *Playing Our Game: Why China's Economic Rise Doesn't Threaten the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>37</sup>See Sean Mirski, "Stranglehold: The Context, Conduct, and Consequences of an American Naval Blockade of China," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 385–421.

Although Mirski frames the effort as an American-led campaign, regional actors could also conduct the blockade given time.

<sup>38</sup>For overviews, see Kei Koga and Yogesh Joshi, "Japan-India Security Cooperation," *Diplomat* (online), July 17, 2013; Martin Fackler, "Japan Is Flexing Its Military Muscle to Counter a Rising China," *New York Times*, November 26, 2012; Fiona Hill, "Gang of Two: Russia and Japan Make a Play for the Pacific," *ForeignAffairs.com*, November 27, 2013.

<sup>39</sup>Andrew Krepinevich, "China's 'Finlandization' Strategy in the Pacific," *Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 2010; Robert Kaplan, "America's Pacific Logic," *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, April 4, 2012.

<sup>40</sup>Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Evan Medeiros, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009).

<sup>41</sup>For elaboration on those points, see Robert Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot," *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2012, pp. 70–82; Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America," *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 2012, pp. 32–47; Robert Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism," p. 55.

<sup>42</sup>Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism," pp. 54–60.

<sup>43</sup>Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot," p. 72.

<sup>44</sup>David Lague, "U.S. Military Officials Wary of China's Expanding Fleet of Submarines," *New York Times*, February 7, 2008.

<sup>45</sup>Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism," pp. 72–75.

<sup>46</sup>Good overviews are in Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism"; Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

<sup>47</sup>Andrew Krepinevich, "Strategy in a Time of Austerity," *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2012, pp. 58–69.

<sup>48</sup>For a similar assessment of capability gaps, see Michael Glosny and Philip Saunders, "Debating China's Naval Nationalism," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 161–75.

<sup>49</sup>There is an ongoing historical debate over whether the Soviet Union was ever in a position or had the motivation to threaten continental Eurasia. Our point is somewhat different: not only is it unclear whether China has the intent to threaten East Asia, but also there are good reasons to question whether China has yet reached a point to compete with the United States in a sustained way. For the historical debate, see, for instance, John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); also see James Noren, "The Controversy over Western Measures of Soviet Defense Expenditures," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 11, no. 3 (1995): 238–76. For debates on China, see Ian Easton, "China's Deceptively Weak (and Dangerous) Military," *Diplomat*, January 31, 2014; Harry Kazianis, "Why to Ignore China's Aircraft Carriers," *Diplomat*, January 28, 2014; Jeffrey Legro, "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (2007): 515–34; Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin and Michael Beckley, "Correspondence: Debating China's Rise and U.S. Decline," *International Security* 37, no. 3 (December 2012): 172–81.

<sup>50</sup>"2010 QDR," p. 60.

<sup>51</sup>Some of this language comes out in Robert Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2009, pp. 179–80.

<sup>52</sup>"2010 QDR," p. 60.

<sup>53</sup>Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century," pp. 180, 185.

<sup>54</sup>Krepinevich, "Strategy in a Time of Austerity," p. 62; Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 330–32.

<sup>55</sup>That does not mean that they cannot raise the costs of access, only that they cannot sustainably deny it. For an example of difficulties that even strong nonstate groups face in seriously challenging state militaries at sea drawn from Indian experience, see

Neville de Silva, "Indian Navy Chief Calls Sea Tigers a Nuisance," *Sunday Times* (Sri Lanka), June 24, 2007.

<sup>1</sup>Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 82–117.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert Kaplan, "Anarchy on Land Means Piracy at Sea," *New York Times*, April 11, 2009; also see "Piracy: No Stopping Them," *The Economist*, February 3, 2011.

<sup>3</sup>Tim Besley, Thiemo Fetzer, and Hannes Mueller, "One Kind of Lawlessness: Estimating the Welfare Cost of Somali Piracy," Working Paper no. 626, Barcelona Graduate School of Economics, April 20, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>With the total value of international shipping worth \$14 trillion in 2008, the cost of piracy amounts to a maximum of 0.02 percent. See Denmark and Mulvenon, "Contested Commons" in Denmark and Mulvenon, *Contested Commons*.

<sup>5</sup>"Piracy," *The Economist*, February 3, 2011. Also see "What Happened to Somalia's Pirates," *The Economist Explains* (blog), May 19, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/05/economist-explains-11>.

<sup>6</sup>"Privateers," *The Economist*, January 12, 2013; "7-Year Low Reported in Piracy off Somalia," *New York Times*, October 23, 2013.

<sup>7</sup>Quy-Toan Do, *The Pirates of Somalia: Ending the Threat, Rebuilding a Nation* (Washington: World Bank, 2013). By extension, the United States does not need—as some claim—to engage in onshore action to stop pirate attacks.

<sup>8</sup>Ashley Tellis, "Obama in India: Building a Global Partnership: Challenges, Risks, Opportunities," *Carnegie Policy Outlook*, October 28, 2010.

<sup>9</sup>"2010 QDR," p. 60; C. Raja Mohan, "India, the United States, and the Global Commons," working paper, Center for a New American Security, October, 2010, pp. 10–11, <http://www.cnas.org/publications/working-papers/india-the-united-states-and-the-global-commons>.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Nicholas Burns, "America's Strategic Opportunity with India," *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2007, pp. 131–46.

<sup>11</sup>Amitabh Mattoo and Rory Medcalf, "How the World Looks from India," *The Hindu*, May 20, 2013; Andrew Erickson, Walter Ladwig III, and Justin Mikolay, "Diego Garcia and the United States' Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy," *Asian Security* 6, no. 3 (September 2010): 230.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Harsh Pant, "India Comes to Terms with a Rising China," in *Strategic Asia 2011–2012*, ed. Ashley Tellis, Travis Tanner, and Jessica Keough (Washington: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2011), p. 112.

<sup>13</sup>B. R. Deepak, "Will India Go Whole Hog to Play the Balance of Power in Asia?" Paper no. 5504, South Asia Analysis Group, June 10, 2013.

<sup>14</sup>R. S. Vasan, "China's Maritime Ambitions: Implications for Regional Security," Paper no. 720, Chennai Centre for China Studies, January 2011; Erickson, Ladwig, and Mikolay, "Diego Garcia."

<sup>15</sup>For proposals along these lines, see Mohan, "India, the United States, and the Global Commons;" Robert Kagan, "The Case for a League of Democracies," *Financial Times*, May 13, 2008.

<sup>16</sup>Sutirtho Patranobis, "Paper Calls for China, India Alliance against US," *Hindustan Times*, February 12, 2012.

<sup>17</sup>For a similar analysis, see Erickson, Ladwig, and Mikolay, "Diego Garcia."

<sup>18</sup>"National Security Strategy," 2010, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup>Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, "Defense Intelligence Agency Annual Threat Assessment," Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 112th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, 2012.

<sup>20</sup>John Noer and David Gregory, *Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1996), pp. 33–37.

<sup>21</sup>Dennis Blair and Kenneth Lieberthal, "Smooth Sailing: The World's Shipping Lanes Are Safe," *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2007, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup>Talmadge, "Closing Time."

<sup>23</sup>Dinakar Sethuraman, "China's Crude Oil Imports to Drive Tanker Market, Poten Says," *Bloomberg News*, February 22, 2010.

<sup>24</sup>Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "Protecting 'The Prize': Oil and the U.S. National Interest," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 478–79.

<sup>25</sup>Blair and Lieberthal, "Smooth Sailing."

<sup>26</sup>See also the chapter by Daniel W. Drezner in this volume.

<sup>27</sup>For concerns, see J. Michael Waller, "China's Beachhead at Panama Canal," *Insight*, July 26, 1999.

<sup>28</sup>On the changing distribution of power, a middle-of-the-road analysis—and one reflecting input from both government officials and private analysts—is "Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds," National Intelligence Council, December 2012.

<sup>29</sup>For a similar approach, see Joseph Parent and Paul MacDonald, "The Wisdom of Retrenchment: America Must Cut Back to Move Forward," *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2011, pp. 32–47.

<sup>30</sup>For example, see Ted Osius, "Global Swing States: Deepening Partnerships with India and Indonesia," *Asia Policy* 17 (January 2014): 67–92.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power: How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea?" *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2010, pp. 22–41.

<sup>32</sup>Felix Chang, "More Is Not Enough: Arms Buildups, Innovation, and Stability in the Asia-Pacific," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes*, November 2013.

<sup>33</sup>For Japanese efforts, see Richard Samuels, "'New Fighting Power!' Japan's Growing Maritime Capabilities and East Asian Security," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/8): 84–112.

<sup>34</sup>For illustration, see the Japanese Defense White Papers for 1973–1980.

<sup>35</sup>Those numbers are out of 41 total exercises in the region in 2012 and 40 total exercises in 2013. For details, see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2013* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 545–46; also see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2014* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 473–74.

<sup>36</sup>2010 "National Security Strategy," p. 50.

<sup>37</sup>Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p. xxviii; Michael Beckley, "Economic Development and Military Effectiveness," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 1 (February 2010): 43–79.

<sup>38</sup>Savings from moderate cuts along the lines we suggest could save upward of \$90 billion per year; calculated from figures in Benjamin Friedman and Justin Logan, "Why the U.S. Military Budget Is Foolish and Sustainable," *Orbis* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 186–87. To put that figure in perspective, \$90 billion is nearly one and a half times the size of the entire budget for the U.S. Department of Education. Barack Obama, *Budget of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2013).

## Chapter 14

<sup>1</sup>Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012/13): 7–51. The authors prefer to call their strategy "deep engagement." I retain the more familiar term here.

<sup>2</sup>This chapter focuses solely on the security objectives. I leave aside the other two objectives that they argue are necessary to secure American core interests: a liberal world economy and an institutional order.