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In the National Interest

A grand new strategy for American foreign policy.

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With responses from →

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America's economic, military, and ideological power is the taproot of its international influence and the ultimate guarantor of its security. Anyone who thinks the United States should try to halt the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), promote human rig

advance the cause of democracy, or defend a particular ally must start by acknowledging t America's ability to do any of these things depends first and foremost upon its power.

Yet America's position of primacy also fosters fear and resistance when its power is misus Because the United States is so strong and its impact on others so pervasive, it inevitably attracts suspicion from other states and finds it difficult to elicit their full and enthusiastic cooperation. Moreover, because the United States is wrestling with so many issues in so m places, it is prone to being manipulated or hoodwinked by states who wish to use Americ power to advance their own interests. Given these constraints, how can the United States maximize the benefits that primacy brings and minimize the resistance that its power sometimes provokes?

Trying to increase the American lead might not be worth the effort (if only because the Un States is already far ahead), but allowing other states to catch up would mean relinquishin the advantages that primacy now provides. For this reason alone, the central aim of Ameri grand strategy in foreign policy should be to preserve its current position for as long as possible. Several obvious implications follow. First, American leaders should take care not squander the nation's power unnecessarily (by fighting unnecessary wars, for example) or mismanage its economy in ways that undermine its long-term vitality. Second, the United States should avoid giving other states additional incentives to build up their own power— either by acquiring new capabilities of their own or by joining forces with others—and sho encourage them to rely on America's help when security problems arise in their own regio In other words, we want to discourage balancing against the United States, and encourage *regional balancing* with us.

What grand strategy is most likely to achieve these results? One option is *global hegemony* which the United States tries to run the world more or less on its own. In this strategy, the United States sets the agenda for world politics and uses its power to make sure its prefere are followed. Specifically, the United States decides what military forces and weapons oth states are allowed to possess and makes it clear that liberal democracy is the only form of government that the United States deems acceptable and is prepared to support. Accordin American power will be used to hasten the spread of democratic rule, to deny WMDs to potential enemies, and to ensure that no countries are able to mount an effective challenge America's position.

This image of global dominance is undeniably appealing to some Americans, but the histo of the past few years also demonstrates how infeasible it is. President George W. Bush has embraced many of the policies sketched above, but the rest of the world has not reacted positively. The Bush administration has been scornful of existing institutions and dismissi of other states' opinions, emphasizing instead the unilateral use of American power to "promote liberty" and preempt potential threats. The result? America's global standing ha plummeted, and with it the ability to attract active support from many of its traditional all

Instead, many of these states have been distancing themselves from America's foreign-po agenda and looking for ways to constrain its power. So-called rogue states such as Iran and North Korea have become more resistant to American pressure and more interested in acquiring the ability to deter American military action. Efforts to "promote liberty" at the point of a gun have arguably strengthened the hands of authoritarian rulers in the Middle East, Central Asia, Russia, and elsewhere. The strategy of preventive war and the goal of regional transformation led the United States into a costly quagmire in Iraq, demonstratin once again the impossibility of empire in an era in which nationalism is a profound social force. President Bush's overall approach to foreign policy demonstrates why global hegem is beyond our reach, and even some supporters of this strategy have begun to recognize tha fact.

A second option is *selective engagement*. In this strategy, the United States keeps large mili forces deployed in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East (including the Persian Gulf) in the context of bilateral or multilateral alliances and for the purpose of dampening security competition in these regions. Selective engagement, like global hegemony, emphasizes the need to control the spread of WMDs, but it does not prescribe a policy of preventive war or call for idealistic crusades to spread democracy or other American values.

Selective engagement corresponds closely to the strategies followed by Presidents George H.W. Bush and William J. Clinton, and their performance shows that American primacy ne not provoke widespread global resistance. American power was committed in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, but largely for defensive purposes. The use of military power was restrained and reluctant, and conducted largely through multilateral institutions. The Uni States did use force on occasion—in the 1991 Gulf War, the Bosnian settlement, and the Kosovo war—but it did not part company with its allies and was careful to acknowledge th concerns even as it pressured them to follow its lead. Although other states were concerne about the asymmetry of power and annoyed when American officials praised their own indispensability too loudly, opposition was muted.

The chief problem with selective engagement was that it was not selective enough. With Europe reliably democratic and the Soviet Union gone, there was less and less reason for th United States to keep tens of thousands of its own troops tied down in Europe. In the Persi Gulf, the United States moved away from its traditional balance-of-power policy and adop a policy of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran, thereby fueling the rise of al Qaeda. Unconditional backing for Israel, uncritical support for traditional Arab monarchies, and t failure to achieve a final peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians also contribu to growing anti-Americanism. And by declaring itself to be the "indispensable nation," the United States ended up taking responsibility for a vast array of global problems. Attemptir deal with all of them was too difficult and expensive, but failing to do so cast doubt on American credibility and leadership.

The final option is *offshore balancing*, which has been America's traditional grand strategy this strategy, the United States deploys its power abroad only when there are direct threats vital American interests. Offshore balancing assumes that only a few areas of the globe are strategic importance to the United States (that is, worth fighting and dying for). Specifically the vital areas are the regions where there are substantial concentrations of power and wea or critical natural resources: Europe, industrialized Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Offshore balancing further recognizes that the United States does not need to control these areas directly; it merely needs to ensure that they do not fall under the control of a hostile great power and especially not under the control of a so-called peer competitor. To prevent rival great powers from doing this, offshore balancing prefers to rely primarily on local actors to uphold the regional balance of power. Under this strategy, the United States would interve with its own forces only when regional powers are unable to uphold the balance of power o their own.

Most importantly, offshore balancing is not isolationist. The United States would still be actively engaged around the world, through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the WTO and through close ties with specific regional allies. But it would no longer keep large numbers of troops overseas solely for the purpose of "maintaining stabili and it would not try to use American military power to impose democracy on other countr or disarm potential proliferators. Offshore balancing does not preclude using power for humanitarian ends—to halt or prevent genocide or mass murder—but the United States wo do so only when it was confident it could prevent these horrors at an acceptable cost. (By limiting military commitments overseas, however, an offshore-balancing strategy would make it easier for the United States to intervene in cases of mass murder or genocide.) The United States would still be prepared to use force when it was directly threatened—as it wa when the Taliban allowed al Qaeda a safe haven in Afghanistan—and would be prepared to help other governments deal with terrorists that also threaten the United States. Over time strategy of offshore balancing would make it less likely that the United States would face th hatred of radicals like bin Laden, and would thus make it less likely that the United States would have to intervene in far-flung places where it is not welcome.

Offshore balancing is the ideal grand strategy for an era of American primacy. It husbands power upon which this primacy rests and minimizes the fear that this power provokes. By setting clear priorities and emphasizing reliance on regional allies, it reduces the danger of being drawn into unnecessary conflicts and encourages other states to do more for us. Equ important, it takes advantage of America's favorable geopolitical position and exploits the tendency for regional powers to worry more about each other than about the United States But it is not a passive strategy and does not preclude using the full range of America's powe advance its core interests.

What are the other steps the United States could take to implement this strategy most effectively? The rest of the world knows that the United States is the most powerful countr

on earth, and other states are understandably sensitive to the ways it uses its power. If Americans want their power to attract others instead of repelling them, they must take car use it judiciously. Americans should worry when generally pro-American publications like *The Economist* describe the United States as "too easily excited; too easily distracted, too f of throwing its weight around," or when knowledgeable but moderate foreign observers describe the United States as a "rogue superpower" or "trigger-happy sheriff."

Two specific recommendations follow. First, the United States should use military force w forbearance, asking questions first and shooting later. America's power allows it to take a deliberate approach to many international dangers, and the world's most powerful country should never appear either overly eager to use force or indifferent to the human consequen of its actions. In general, Americans should heed President Woodrow Wilson's wise advice "exercise the self-restraint of a truly great nation, which realizes its own power and scorns misuse it."

In particular, the United States would do well to abandon the doctrine of "preemption" contained in the 2002 *National Security Strategy*, a policy that alarmed the rest of the wor without conferring any concrete advantages on the United States. This new doctrine was r in fact a policy of "preemption" (that is, a first strike intended to forestall an imminent attack). Rather, the new doctrine sought to justify a policy of "preventive war" (that is, a w fought to forestall a shift in the balance of power, independent of whether the opponent w planning to attack). "Preemption" is a legitimate act in international law (provided there is well-founded fear of imminent attack), but preventive war is not.

Supporters of this new doctrine argued that preventive war might be needed to keep "rogu states" from obtaining WMDs, based on the fear that such regimes would give them to ant American terrorists and thus expose the United States to the threat of surprise attack. Yet danger that rogue regimes will give WMDs away is extremely remote. After incurring all th costs and risks of obtaining these weapons, would any leader simply give them to terrorist when that leader could not control how the terrorists might use the weapons or whether th transfer itself would be detected? Indeed, a rogue state with WMDs would need to worry th the United States would retaliate if it merely *suspected* that the state had transferred weap to a terrorist group. For this reason, among others, newly WMD-capable states will go to g lengths to make sure their arsenals do not find their way into terrorists' hands. No foreign government is going to give up the weapons they need for deterrence and allow them to be used in ways that would place their own survival at risk.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq offers abundant evidence of the inherent unworkabili of a policy of preventive war. The failure to find any Iraqi WMDs demonstrates the dangers going to war merely on the basis of suspicions, especially when leaders who want to go to w are able to distort the intelligence process into giving them the "answers" they want. Furthermore, when you invade a foreign country in order to disarm and oust a hostile regi

you end up owning the entire society and must therefore deal with all its internal problems the United States has discovered in Iraq, trying to occupy and rebuild a hostile society is costly. For these reasons, preventive war will rarely (if ever) be a viable policy option.

Equally important, making preventive war the centerpiece of U.S. national security policy considerable damage to America's international image. All nations retain the option of usi force if their vital interests or survival is threatened, and America's enemies are well aware that the United States might use force first if its own security were at risk. But putting preventive war at the heart of its national security policy made the world's most powerful country seem eager to use force—at times and places of its own choosing—whether a genu threat of attack was actually present or not. Not surprisingly, this policy was alarming to n countries: no state could be entirely sure that it would not end up in America's crosshairs, be confident that its interests would not be adversely affected by a unilateral American decision for war. It also set a dangerous precedent: if preventive war made sense for the United States, then it could be equally legitimate for China, India, Pakistan, Syria, Russia, any other country that concluded that it could improve its strategic position by using force against a weaker adversary. In short, adopting a declaratory policy that emphasized preemption damaged America's global image without enhancing its security, and repudiat this policy is an obvious first step in rebuilding America's reputation.

Second, instead of emphasizing "preemption," the United States should strive to reassure i allies that it will use force with wisdom and restraint. In particular, the United States can reduce the fear created by its overawing power by giving other states a voice in the circumstances in which it will use force. Although exceptions may arise from time to time, United States should be willing to use a de facto "buddy system" to regulate the large-scale use of its military power, whether by NATO, the UN Security Council, or other internation institutions. The point is not to cede control over American foreign policy to foreign powe or to an international institution like the United Nations; the point is to use other states or existing institutions to *reassure* others about the ways the United States will use its power. Conservative critics of the UN and other multilateral institutions have mistakenly focused the rather modest restrictions that these organizations might impose on the United States and they have ignored the role these institutions could play in legitimizing American polic and reducing the risk of an anti-American backlash.

For the foreseeable future, the United States must think of this sort of "reassurance" as a continuous policy problem. During the Cold War, the United States took many steps—including military exercises, visits by important officials, and public declarations—to remi allies (and adversaries) that its commitments were credible. And it didn't just do these thir once and consider the job over; rather, it reaffirmed these signals of commitment more or l constantly. Now that the Cold War is over and the United States is largely unchecked, American leaders have to make a similar effort to convince other states of their good will, g judgment, and sense of restraint. American leaders cannot simply assert these values once

twice and then act as they please—which is what the Bush administration has done. Rathe reassuring gestures have to be repeated, and reassuring statements have to be reiterated. A the more consistent the words and deeds are, the more effective such pledges will be.

The benefits of self-restraint can be demonstrated by considering how much the United States would have gained had it followed this approach toward Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Ha the Bush administration rejected preventive war in Iraq in March 2003 and chosen instead continue the UN-mandated inspections process that was then underway, it would have scored a resounding diplomatic victory. The Bush team could have claimed—correctly—th the *threat* of U.S. military action had forced Saddam Hussein to resume inspections under new and more intrusive procedures. The UN inspectors would have determined that Iraq didn't have WMDs after all. There was no reason for the Bush team to rush to war because Iraq's decaying military capabilities were already contained and Saddam was incapable of aggressive action so long as the inspectors were on Iraqi soil. If Saddam had balked after a f months, international support for his ouster would have been much easier to obtain, and in the meantime the United States would have shown the world that it preferred to use force as a last resort. This course would have kept Iraq isolated, kept the rest of the world on America's side, undermined Osama bin Laden's claims that the United States sought to dominate the Islamic world, and incidentally allowed the United States to focus its energie and attention on defeating al Qaeda. Even more important, this policy of self-restraint wo have made the war avoidable, thereby saving thousands of lives and billions of dollars and keeping the United States out of the quagmire in which it is now engulfed. The Bush team l all these benefits in their hands, and it squandered them by rushing headlong into war. Ins of demonstrating that America's primacy would be guided by wisdom and restraint, the Bu team gave the rest of the world ample reason to worry about the preponderance of power in Washington's hands. Repairing the damage is likely to take years.

As the world's premier power, the United States has a vital interest in discouraging other states (or political movements) from joining forces against it. Accordingly, it should resist widespread tendency to see potential enemies as monolithic, and it should eschew policies that force different adversaries to overlook their differences and make common cause agai the United States. To lump North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and other states together as a set "rogue states," or to announce a global crusade against any political groups that employ "terrorist" methods, is to ignore the critical differences among these various parties, whic blinds us to the possibility of improving relations with some of them and encourages them cooperate with each other more actively. Even worse, to label Iraq, Iran, and North Korea a "axis of evil," as President Bush did in his 2002 State of the Union speech, made it less like that these regimes would moderate their anti-American policies and made key allies quest America's judgment. At a broader level, anticipating a looming "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam or between the United States and China could easily lead the

United States to act in ways that will aggravate existing differences and turn a valuable warning into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As Libya's decision to abandon its WMD programs reveals, the United States will do much better if it pursues a strategy of "divide and conquer." The Clinton and Bush administratio persuaded Libya to change course by using carrots and sticks specifically tailored to Libya' particular aims, circumstances, and vulnerabilities. Indeed, the Libyan example provides a model for dealing with the most difficult and recalcitrant regimes, including Iran and Nort Korea. Viewing these states as a single problem—even if only for rhetorical purposes—interferes with the adroit and effective use of American power and should therefore be avoided, unless hostile states are really in cahoots. Even then, policymakers should look fo ways to drive wedges between them instead of acting in ways that give them little choice b to cooperate with each other.

The United States has many instruments of influence at its disposal, and other states (and movements) all have unique interests, goals, assets, and vulnerabilities. Instead of launchi crusades against undifferentiated and abstract enemies (such as "international terrorism" the United States should focus on the concrete foes that threaten key interests and then de particular approaches to each one. Unless the United States has clear and compelling evid that foreign states or terrorist groups are actively aiding each other, the proper strategy is t exacerbate and exploit the differences between them.

American power is most effective when it is seen as *legitimate*, and when other societies believe it is being used to serve their interests as well as America's. On the other side, America's enemies will try to rally support by portraying the United States as a morally dubious society that pursues dangerous and immoral policies abroad.

Therefore, in addition to waging the familiar forms of geopolitical competition, the Unitec States must do more to defend the legitimacy of its position and its policies. This process must begin by recognizing how the United States looks to others and then proceed to devis clear, specific, and sustained initiatives for shaping these perceptions. The United States cannot expect to win over every heart and every mind, of course, because conflicts of inter will always arise and sometimes the pursuit of the national interest will offend or anger others. But the United States can surely do better than it has done of late, both by adopting more sensible policy positions and by explaining them to others with greater care and resp America will not be universally loved or admired, but it should get credit for the good it do do, and it should not be blamed for misfortunes or evils that are not its fault.

Unfortunately, American efforts at public diplomacy remain half-hearted and ineffective. recent Council on Foreign Relations task force concluded that "public diplomacy is all too often relegated to the margins of the policy process, making it effectively impotent." As a result, the task force discovered, "anti-Americanism is on the rise throughout the world."

as the former ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke put it, "How can a ma a cave [Osama bin Laden] out-communicate the world's leading communications society? The report of the 9/11 Commission offers a partial answer: al Qaeda and other anti-Americ groups take the struggle for legitimacy seriously. They know they are in a war for hearts an minds around the world, and they work hard at developing and disseminating a message th will place America in the worst possible light. In the commission's words, "Bin Laden's message . . . has attracted active support from thousands of disaffected young Muslims an resonates powerfully with a far larger number who do not actively support his methods." A result, the commission calls for the United States to "engage the struggle of ideas" and recommends increased funding and attention for media outreach, broadcasting, scholarsh and cultural exchange.

In particular, the commission emphasizes the need for an improved capacity to communic effectively in the Arab and Islamic world. The hatred that provoked the 9/11 attacks is part reaction to American policy in the region, but it is also fueled by myths and misperception promoted by anti-American groups and governments. To overcome them, the United State should launch a broad-based *and sustained* public-information campaign, using every instrument and channel at its disposal. In addition to preparing diplomats to engage on a regular basis with local media outlets such as al Jazeera, the United States must increase its own Arabic-language broadcasting and develop sophisticated and appealing Arabic Web s to reach the growing population of Internet-savvy Arab youth. A major effort to train fluen Arabic speakers is also essential so that we can engage Arabic and Islamic news agencies on equal footing.

The good news is that the United States possesses formidable assets in this sort of ideation competition. Not only is English increasingly the lingua franca of science, diplomacy, and international business, but the American university system remains a potent mechanism f socializing foreign elites. Students studying in the United States become familiar with national mores while simultaneously absorbing mainstream American views on politics an economics. To be sure, not all of them will have positive experiences or end up adopting favorable attitudes toward the United States, but most of them will. It is crucial that the United States not let its post-9/11 concern for domestic security interfere with the continu flow of foreign students to our best colleges and universities.

It should be noted that any public diplomacy effort, to be effective, needs a good product t sell. Defending the legitimacy of American primacy is not primarily a question of "spin," o propaganda, or even cultural exchange. If American foreign policy is insensitive to the interests of others, and if it makes global problems worse rather than better, no amount of "public diplomacy" is going to convince the rest of the world that the United States is reall acting in the best interests of mankind.

Just imagine how the United States might appear had it behaved just a bit differently over t past few years. Suppose the Bush administration had said that it was not going to submit t Kyoto Protocol for ratification (an announcement that would have surprised no one) but ha immediately added that it recognized the dangers posed by global warming and was theref ready to place on the table a new and fair-minded proposal that showed a sensitivity to the concerns of others as well as appropriate attention to its own particular interests. Suppose United States had signed the landmines convention, pressed hard for a small-arms treaty, not blocked the improved verification protocol for the biological-weapons convention. Suppose President Clinton had taken strong action to prevent the Rwandan genocide and t President Bush had actually delivered on his pledge to rebuild Afghanistan. And as already discussed, imagine how the United States would look if President Bush had followed his father's policy of "multilateral containment" of Iraq, instead of choosing preventive war ar "regional transformation." Pursuing any or all of these policies would not have eliminated forms of anti-Americanism, but it would have made it much harder to portray the United States as a "rogue superpower," and it would have given America's friends around the worl far more effective ammunition in the battle for world opinion. None of these measures wou have made America weaker, and none of them would have given "aid and comfort" to America's enemies. On the contrary, each would have made it easier to rally other countrie America's side and helped to keep America's adversaries weak and isolated.

Or imagine something even bolder: suppose the Bush administration had decided to inves the same level of energy, attention, and money into rebuilding its relationship with the Ara and Islamic world that it devoted to toppling Saddam Hussein. In particular, suppose it ha worked as hard to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as it worked to engineer a war with I Instead of claiming that the road to Jerusalem lay through Baghdad, what if Bush had reali that winning the war on terrorism requires ending the long-running conflict between our main Middle East ally and the Palestinian people, as well as eventually encouraging econo and political reform in the Arab and Islamic world itself. Instead of embracing Ariel Sharo rejection of the peace process and Israel's own agenda of territorial expansion and regional transformation, what if George Bush had made achieving a just peace between Israel and t Palestinians the cornerstone of his foreign policy after 9/11, and had been willing to comm the same amount of time, political capital, and money ($145 billion and rising) that he committed to overthrowing Saddam?

Had the United States done any of these things, its position in the world today would be va improved. As the Pew Global Attitudes Survey concluded in 2003, "The bottom has fallen of support for America in most of the Muslim world." The United States is hated and feare a number of reasons, but a critical element in Arab and Islamic hatred is the combination o Israel's oppression of the Palestinians and America's increasingly one-sided support for Israel. America's support for autocratic Arab rulers plays a role as well, but it is clearly a les concern. These attitudes make it more difficult for Arab leaders to embrace any idea that

seems to be "made in America." Furthermore, America's Middle East policy is one of the m reasons terrorists like Osama bin Laden want to attack the United States and have a steady stream of new recruits to help them do so. Even worse, America's tacit (and at times, activ support for Israeli expansionism makes bin Laden and his ilk look like prophets and heroes rather than murderous criminals. If the United States wants to win the war on terrorism, it must find a way to reverse the steady deterioration of its standing in this critical part of the world.

To do this will require three steps.

First and foremost, the United States should use its considerable leverage to bring the Israe Palestinian conflict to an end. American leaders have been actively engaged in virtually ev aspect of the peace process, but they have never used the full leverage at their disposal. Wh reaffirming its commitment to Israel's security within its pre-1967 borders, the United Sta should make it clear that it is dead set against Israel's expansionist settlement policy (including the land-grabbing "security fence") and that it believes this policy is not in America's or Israel's long-term interest. This approach means going beyond the Bush administration's moribund "road map" and laying out America's own vision for what a jus peace would entail. Specifically, Israel should be expected to withdraw from virtually all th territories it occupied in June 1967 in exchange for full peace. The United States has every right to pressure Israel in this way: so long as it is bankrolling Israel (and jeopardizing its o security by doing so), it is entitled to say what it is willing to back and what it rejects. The "Clinton parameters" laid out in December 2000 contain the basic outlines of a settlemen (and contrary to the widespread myth that the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat "reject this offer, the reality is that the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships both accepted Clinton's guidelines, with both sides expressing extensive reservations). And if an agreement can be reached, the United States and the European Union should be willing to subsidize the new arrangements generously.

If Israel remains unwilling to grant the Palestinians a viable state—or if it tries to impose a unjust solution unilaterally—then the United States should end its economic and military support. Consistent with the strategy of offshore balancing, the United States would pursu its own self-interest rather than adhere to a blind allegiance to an uncooperative ally. We c hope that it does not come to this, but American leaders should prepare themselves for the possibility. In effect, the United States would be giving Israel a choice: it can end its self-defeating occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and remain a cherished partner of the Un States, or it can remain an occupying power on its own. In other words, the United States would be treating Israel the same way it treats any other country. The United States would still support the continued *existence* of a Jewish state (the same way we support a Norwegi state, a Thai state, a Polish state, etc.), and it would be prepared to help if Israel's survival w in jeopardy. But it would no longer treat Israel as though its interests and American interes were identical, or behave as if Israel deserved generous support no matter how it acted.

This policy would undoubtedly be anathema to the different elements of the Israel lobby a would probably make some other Americans uneasy. Americans should recognize, howeve that unconditional support for Israel has done great harm to America's position in the Ara and Islamic world, and it continues to put our nation at risk. Even worse, denying the Palestinians their legitimate political rights has not made Israel safer. On the contrary, tho who have lobbied for unconditional backing for Israel have unwittingly nurtured Israeli extremism and inflicted unintended hardships on the very society they sought to support. high time to abandon this bankrupt policy and adopt a more evenhanded position. This sh will help the United States to win its war on terrorism and encourage Israel to make the adjustments that will ensure a lasting peace.

Second, the United States should reject the quasi-imperial role that neoconservatives in t Bush administration have tried to play in the Middle East. Instead of trying to impose democracy at the point of a gun—a project that has already gone seriously awry in Iraq—th United States should return to its earlier role as an offshore balancer in this region. The Un States does have important interests in the Middle East—including access to oil and combatting terrorism—but neither objective is well served by occupying the region with it own military forces. Because American interests are served as long as no single state contr all (or even most) Persian Gulf oil, the United States can play the balancer's role, shifting it weight as needed to make sure that no one state is able to dominate the others. The United States pursued this policy successfully from 1945 to 1990, and it is still the right policy tod In fact, a balancing strategy will be much easier now because we no longer have to protect gulf from a Soviet invasion.

Taken together, these two steps would facilitate the long-range goal of helping various Ara and Islamic states make smooth transitions to more pluralist forms of government. As it stands now, efforts to encourage democratic change in the Arab and Islamic world are undermined by America's one-sided support for Israel: why should Arabs believe the Unit States is committed to freedom when its money and power are used to deny these rights to millions of Palestinians? History also warns that trying to run—let alone "transform"—th entire Middle East is a fool's errand: any leaders the United States might install will have li legitimacy, and a continued occupation will fuel anti-Americanism and make the terrorisr problem worse. Neo-imperial pundits who call for the United States to rule a new empire (to put it more tactfully, a "protectorate") in the region ignore one of the central lessons of t 20th century: nationalism is the most powerful political ideology in the world, and trying run large alien populations by force is a losing game. Nationalism and the desire for self-determination helped destroy the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, British, French, and Sovie empires, just as it defeated Israel's occupation of Lebanon and continues to bedevil the Indians in Kashmir and the Russians in Chechnya. Only a fool or a knave would send the United States down this path.

If the United States wants to play a positive role in the Middle East, it must end the conflic between Israel and the Palestinians and use non-military means to encourage progressive forces in the Arab world itself. The United States should encourage the gradual transforma of Middle East monarchies and dictatorships, but not by imposing its democracy through invasion and occupation.

The issues just discussed are serious ones, but they pale in comparison to the potential dar of nuclear terrorism. Conventional terrorism—including the 9/11 attacks—can be horrifyi and tragic, but even an event as awful as 9/11 does not threaten America's existence or way life. Although the United States should take every reasonable step to prevent another terro attack, we could absorb a replay of September 11 once every ten years and continue to thriv a society.

A terrorist attack involving WMDs—especially one involving a nuclear weapon—would be another matter entirely. If a nuclear bomb were to go off in any major American city, hundr of thousands of lives could be lost in an instant. The economic damage would be enormou and far-reaching. We could not know if additional attacks were coming, and we might hav little idea how and where to retaliate. Such an event would probably have incalculable implications for America's security, prosperity, civil liberties, and foreign policy. Indeed, it could be the most significant single event in American history.

Recognizing this fact, a number of analysts have called for renewed efforts to deny terroris any possible access to the fissionable materials that would be needed to construct a nuclea device. Specifically, they call for 1) redoubled efforts to secure loose nuclear materials in th former Soviet Union and elsewhere, 2) a global "clean-out" of nuclear-research reactors ar other unsecured materials, and 3) enhanced measures to block nuclear smuggling. Such measures are certainly worthwhile, and if implemented quickly and effectively, they could substantially reduce the risk that nuclear weapons or the materials to make them could fal into hostile hands.

The risk of nuclear terrorism will also increase if more and more countries acquire nuclear weapons of their own. Accordingly, the United States should give such states as North Kor and Iran strong incentives to abandon their nuclear weapons programs, to work to shut do black-market nuclear-technology networks, and to take concrete steps to improve the glol regime against the spread of nuclear arms. In particular, the United States should 1) press f the revision of Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which currently gives all signato access to the full nuclear fuel cycle, 2) support an even more ambitious "proliferation-security initiative" to intercept illegal shipments of nuclear materials and missile technolo and 3) make a coordinated, multilateral effort—using both carrots and sticks—to persuade Iran, North Korea, and other likely proliferators to abandon their nuclear ambitions.

Unfortunately, getting other states to embrace these initiatives will probably be impossible the United States does not alter its own nuclear-weapons policies and its current approach nuclear diplomacy. The United States wants to discourage other states from acquiring nuc weapons or improving their existing arsenals, and it hopes to enlist other nations in a broa set of anti-nuclear initiatives, yet it insists on maintaining a nuclear arsenal that is far larg than it needs to deter any possible adversary. Indeed, the Bush administration believes tha the United States should retain thousands of warheads and build a new generation of nucle weapons to deal with a number of new threats, even though America's conventional forces dwarf those of any other state. Thus, Mohamed El Baradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, likens the United States to "some who have continued to dangle a cigarette from their mouth and tell everybody else not to smoke." These policies send the c message that whatever American leaders may say, they really believe that having lots of nuclear weapons is highly desirable. And if the world's only superpower thinks nuclear weapons are essential for its security, why is it so surprising that much weaker and more vulnerable states have reached the same conclusion?

De-emphasizing America's nuclear-weapons programs is unlikely to alter the calculations a North Korea or an Iran, whose nuclear ambitions are well advanced, but it would strengtl anti-nuclear advocates in countries where the nuclear option is still being debated. Equall important, American nuclear-weapons policies make other states reluctant to embrace a more stringent nonproliferation regime, in large part because they believe the United State has yet to fulfill its own obligations to the existing nonproliferation treaty. Indeed, after bo nuclear and non-nuclear states agreed on a 13-point program to implement the Article VI obligation for nuclear disarmament at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the Bush administration came to power and proceeded to repudiate or ignore virtually all of the 13 points. Trying to get other states to accept new constraints on their own conduct without offering parallel concessions in return is not going to work.

To make matters worse, the United States continues to act in ways that increase other state incentive to get nuclear weapons of their own. By putting North Korea and Iran in the "axis evil" and by making it clear that the United States favors regime change in both countries, Bush administration gave both governments an obvious reason to seek some way to deter t United States from using its power to threaten their political survival. Given the overall asymmetry of power between the United States and these states, the only way to do this is acquiring a nuclear deterrent of their own.

If the United States is serious about reducing the dangers of nuclear terrorism (and it shou be), then it must offer the rest of the world a "grand bargain." In exchange for a more reliab nonproliferation regime (accompanied by an aggressive effort to secure existing stockpiles loose nuclear materials) and the verifiable abandonment of nuclear ambitions by countries like Iran and North Korea, the United States would simultaneously agree to 1) abandon cur plans to build a new generation of nuclear weapons, 2) significantly reduce its own nuclear

arsenal (while retaining a few hundred warheads as a deterrent against direct attacks on th United States), and 3) take concrete steps to reduce the threat that it presents to so-called rogue states, including a willingness to sign some sort of nonaggression agreement with them.

Critics may see this proposal as a form of appeasement that would undermine American superiority and threaten its long-term national security, but this view is short-sighted. Unless it makes a series of catastrophic blunders, the United States will be the strongest country on the planet for the next several decades, and its primacy will be unaltered wheth it has 5,000 nuclear warheads or 500. Nor does this approach entail giving in to threats; it simply the most obvious way to reduce other states' incentive to take measures that are no the American national interest. This strategy would also make the United States look mucl less hypocritical in the eyes of others, and thus make it easier to line up other states behinc tougher and broader nonproliferation regime.

In short, the grand bargain proposed here does involve making certain compromises, but it does so out of a clear sense of national interest and strategic priorities. Nuclear terrorism i the most worrisome danger that the world's only superpower now faces, and a grand strate centered on America's national interest would focus on the biggest problems and subordin other goals in order to address them.

A key element in the strategy of offshore balancing is reducing the overall "footprint" of U military power and beginning to play hard-to-get when dealing with various regional pow Instead of insisting that the United States be responsible for solving all global-security problems, and instead of accepting (or seeking) the job of running large areas of the world, offshore balancing seeks to take advantage of America's hegemonic position in the Western hemisphere and its distance from the other key centers of world power. As discussed above the United States would stand ready to deploy its power against specific threats to America vital interests but would otherwise refrain from large-scale, quasi-permanent military engagements overseas.

What would this strategy mean in practice? First, the United States would remain a memb of NATO but would drastically reduce its military presence in Europe. Most of Europe is nc reliably democratic and faces no significant external military threats. Although far from united on matters of foreign policy, the EU countries have the political and economic wherewithal to deal with the modest security challenges that they are likely to face in the foreseeable future. Small American contingents would remain in Europe for training purpo and as a symbol of America's transatlantic commitments, but the United States would no longer play the leading security role there.

Second, the United States would maintain a significant military presence in Asia (primarily and naval forces) and continue to build cooperative security partnerships with its current

Asian allies. In addition to helping support counterterrorist operations against al Qaeda affiliates in several Asian countries, maintaining the military presence in Asia also lays the foundation for an effort to contain China in the event that China's rising power eventually leads to a more ambitious attempt to establish a hegemonic position in East Asia.

Third, the United States should return to a balance-of-power policy toward the rest of the world, and especially the Middle East (including the Persian Gulf). As discussed above, the United States has no need to occupy or dominate these regions; it just needs to ensure that other state is able to do so. Trying to control other regions encourages anger and resentme and it entangles the United States in events and processes that it cannot control. Instead, t United States should declare that it is committed to maintaining the territorial integrity of every state and that it will oppose any acts of aggression that threaten to result in any one state exercising hegemony over the others. But it will do in classic balance-of-power fashi relying in the first instance on local allies, intervening only when absolutely necessary, and withdrawing once the threat has been thwarted.

Interestingly, the Bush administration has embraced several key elements of this approach without fully committing to its underlying logic or the policy implications. Although the members of the Bush team have made many other errors, they have recognized that the deployment patterns left over from the Cold War were no longer appropriate for dealing w the new array of global threats. As a result, they have begun to implement a far-reaching rearrangement of American forces worldwide. In particular, the new strategic environmen requires less reliance on the semi-permanent overseas deployments of large, heavy ground forces and greater emphasis on more mobile and flexible forces that can go where they are needed and return home as soon as they are done. The Bush team seems also to be aware th the United States is more popular when it indicates a willingness to withdraw instead of insisting on staying, and that reducing America's overall military "footprint" might reduce some of the latent anti-Americanism that now exists.

There is a broader lesson here: as the world's only superpower, the United States has an incentive to play hard-to-get. It also has the luxury of being able to do so. Instead of bendi over backward to persuade the rest of the world that the United States is 100-percent relia American leaders should be encouraging other states to bend over backward to keep the United States as an ally. Other states are more likely to do this if they believe that American support is conditional on their cooperation. If other states were not entirely sure that the United States would come to their aid if asked, they would be willing to do much more to n sure that we would. America's Asian and Persian Gulf allies illustrate this dynamic perfect whenever they begin to fear that the American role might decline, they leap to offer Washington new facilities and access agreements and go to greater lengths to conform the foreign policy to ours.

To reiterate: offshore balancing is not isolationist. The United States would not withdraw from world affairs under this strategy, and it would still retain potent power-projection capabilities. Playing hard-to-get simply means intervening only when overt aggression occurs and America's vital interests are directly threatened—and intervening with the clea intention of coming home quickly, and with a clear strategy for doing so.

The United States is the strongest country on the planet and probably the strongest and m influential great power in modern history. It also remains a remarkably immature great pov one whose rhetoric is frequently at odds with its conduct and one that tends to treat the management of foreign affairs largely as an adjunct to domestic politics. Unlike Great Brita whose empire was managed by a permanent civil service that could bring continuity and expertise to the conduct of foreign policy, the United States brings in a new team every tim the White House switches parties. Americans remain remarkably ignorant of the world the believe it is their obligation and destiny to run, and foreign affairs only captures public attention when major mistakes have already been made.

If the United States wants to make its privileged position acceptable to others, the America body politic must acquire a more serious and disciplined attitude toward the conduct of foreign policy. In the past, seemingly secure behind its nuclear deterrent and oceanic moat and possessing unmatched economic and military power, the United States allowed its for policy to be distorted by partisan sniping, hijacked by foreign lobbyists and narrow domes special interests, blinded by lofty but unrealistic rhetoric, and held hostage by irresponsibl and xenophobic members of Congress. Even after receiving a dramatic wake-up call on September 11, efforts to reform intelligence services, to corral loose nuclear materials, and improve domestic security have been half-hearted at best. And even though the country fa a new and very real enemy in al Qaeda, the Bush administration was able to persuade Congress and the American people that preventive war against a country that had nothing do with 9/11 was still the best way to fight bin Laden and his followers. Is this the way a mature great power behaves?

The problem, alas, goes even deeper. Despite its pretensions as the world's only superpow the United States has starved its intelligence services, gutted its international-affairs budg done little to attract the ablest members of its society to government service, neglected th study of foreign languages and cultures, and basically behaved as though it simply didn't matter if its foreign policy were well run or not. This policy might have been sufficient in tl past (though it is hard to be proud of it), but it no longer serves us well.

What is needed instead is greater confidence in America's fundamental principles and institutions and greater wisdom in understanding what its power can and cannot accompl America's core values of liberty and opportunity provide the energy upon which our economic prosperity is built. That prosperity, in turn, provides the sinews of our military power and the core of our international influence. But our ability to defeat other armies an

our influence over the world economy does not give the United States either the right or th ability to impose these principles on others, and it hardly gives five percent of the world's population the capacity to govern vast areas of the world by force. Instead of telling the wo what to do and how to live—a temptation that both neoconservative empire-builders and liberal internationalists find hard to resist—the United States should lead the world primar by its example. If we have faith in our principles, we will expect to win hearts and minds because others will see how we live and see what we have, and they will want those things

Despite the missteps it has made over the past four years, the United States still retains enormous material power and considerable global influence. The question is whether its future choices will draw others closer, drive them into sullen resentment, or provoke them into open resistance. The United States can use its power and wealth to compel others to d what it wants, but this strategy will surely fail in the long run. In most circumstances, the l is not power but *persuasion*.

There is a lesson here. More than anything else, the United States wants to retain its positi of primacy for as long as it can. To do this, it must persuade the rest of the world that American primacy is preferable to the likely alternatives. Achieving that goal will require a level of wisdom and self-restraint that has often been lacking in American foreign policy, largely because it wasn't needed. But it is today. Although geography, history, and good fortune have combined to give the United States a remarkable array of advantages, it woul still be possible to squander them. Unfortunately, there is as yet no clear sign that Presider Bush intends to change course in his second term, which means that America's internatior standing is likely to deteriorate further over the next four years. And if the United States er up hastening the demise of its existing partnerships and creating new partnerships whose main aim is to contain us, we will have only ourselves to blame.

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