## \*\*Impact Updates\*\*

### Heg Bad – Unsustainable

#### It’s unsustainable- containment trades off with domestic investments.

Shifrinson 21, Assistant Professor of International Relations at Boston University. (Joshua R. Itzkowitz, Winter 2021, “Neo-Primacy and the Pitfalls of US Strategy toward China”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 43:4, 90-91, NAS)

The US Faces Domestic Constraints

Third, neo-primacy is of questionable domestic sustainability—indeed, it has the potential to undermine the United States’ own strength. Independent of competition with China, the United States likely needs substantial investments in healthcare, education, and infrastructure (among others) over the coming decades. Although some of these could be funded as part of a neo-primacist competition with China, other social programs (e.g., Social Security and public pensions) are likely to require additional funding, particularly as US demographics change.59 This situation is further exacerbated as bills come due for the United States’ prior spending; as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported even before the COVID-19 pandemic reduced revenue and increased borrowing, by 2028 “the [Federal] government will spend more on net interest than it will spend on either defense or nondefense discretionary outlays.” 60 Of course, the United States can service its financial obligations by raising taxes, accepting additional debt, or both.61 Unless the US economy grows faster than US obligations, however, the United States will face a difficult choice in the years ahead. On the one hand, policymakers can constrain the funding available for foreign activities in order to devote the marginal resource to domestic needs. In this situation, neo-primacy could prove unsustainable

### Heg Bad – China Rise Now

#### Hegemony isn’t sustainable, China is rising now

McCoy 22 (Alfred McCoy, “Will the Fight for Hegemony Survive Climate Change?”, The Nation, February 25th 2022, <https://www.thenation.com/article/environment/climate-china-usa-beijing/>, WC-NAS)

Consider us at the edge of the sort of epochal change not seen for centuries, even millennia. By the middle of this century, we will be living under such radically altered circumstances that the present decade, the 2020s, will undoubtedly seem like another era entirely, akin perhaps to the Middle Ages. And I’m not talking about the future development of flying cars, cryogenics, or even as-yet-unimaginable versions of space travel.

After leading the world for the past 75 years, the United States is ever so fitfully losing its grip on global hegemony. As Washington’s power begins to fade, the liberal international system it created by founding the United Nations in 1945 is facing potentially fatal challenges.

After more than 180 years of Western global dominion, leadership is beginning to move from West to East, where Beijing is likely to become the epicenter of a new world order that could indeed rupture longstanding Western traditions of law and human rights.

More crucially, however, after two centuries of propelling the world economy to unprecedented prosperity, the use of fossil fuels—especially coal and oil—will undoubtedly fade away within the next couple of decades. Meanwhile, for the first time since the last Ice Age ended 11,000 years ago, thanks to the greenhouse gases those fossil fuels are emitting into the atmosphere, the world’s climate is changing in ways that will, by the middle of this century, start to render significant parts of the planet uninhabitable for a quarter, even possibly half, of humanity.

For the first time in 800,000 years, the level of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere has [blown past](https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide) earlier highs of 280 parts per million to reach 410 parts. That, in turn, is unleashing climate feedback loops that, by century’s end, if not well before, will aridify the globe’s middle latitudes, partly melt the polar ice caps, and raise sea levels drastically. (Don’t even think about a [future Miami](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/21/florida-climate-crisis-sea-level-habitat-loss) or Shanghai!)

In trying to imagine how such changes will affect an evolving world order, is it possible to chart the future with something better than mere guesswork? My own field, history, generally performs poorly when trying to track the past into the future, while social sciences like economics and political science are loath to project much beyond medium-term trends (say, the next recession or election). Uniquely among the disciplines, however, environmental science has developed diverse analytical tools for predicting the effects of climate change all the way to this century’s end.

Those predictions have become so sophisticated that world leaders in finance, politics, and science are now beginning to think about how to reorganize whole societies and their economies to accommodate the projected disastrous upheavals to come. Yet surprisingly few of us have started to think about the likely impact of climate change upon global power. By combining political projections with already carefully plotted trajectories for climate change, it may, however, be possible to see something of the likely course of governance for the next half century or so.

To begin with the most immediate changes, social-science analysis has long predicted the end of US global power. Using economic projections, the US National Intelligence Council, for instance, [stated](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf) that, by 2030, “Asia will have surpassed North America and Europe combined in terms of global power,” while “China alone will probably have the largest economy, surpassing that of the United States a few years before 2030.” Using similar methods, the accounting firm PwC [calculated](https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/economy/the-world-in-2050.html) that China’s economy would become 60 percent larger than that of the United States by 2030.

If climate science proves accurate, however, the hegemony Beijing could achieve by perhaps 2030 will last, at best, only a couple of decades or less before unchecked global warming ensures that the very concept of world dominance, as we’ve known it historically since the sixteenth century, may be relegated to a past age like so much else in our world.

Considering that likelihood as we peer dimly into the decades between 2030 and 2050 and beyond, the international community will surely have good reason to forge a new kind of world order—one made for a planet truly in danger and unlike any that has come before.

THE RISE OF CHINESE GLOBAL HEGEMONY

China’s rise to world power could be considered not just the result of its own initiative but also of American inattention. While Washington was mired in endless wars in the Greater Middle East in the decade following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, Beijing began using a trillion dollars of its swelling dollar reserves to build a tricontinental economic infrastructure it called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that would shake the foundations of Washington’s world order. Not only has this scheme already gone a long way toward incorporating much of Africa and Asia into Beijing’s version of the world economy, but it has simultaneously lifted many millions out of poverty.

During the early years of the Cold War, Washington funded the reconstruction of a ravaged Europe and the development of 100 new nations emerging from colonial rule. But as the Cold War ended in 1991, more than a third of humanity was still living in extreme poverty, abandoned by Washington’s then-reigning neoliberal ideology that consigned social change to the whims of the free market. By 2018, nearly [half the world’s population](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/17/nearly-half-the-world-lives-on-less-than-550-a-day), or about 3.4 billion people, were simply struggling to survive on the equivalent of five dollars a day, creating a vast global constituency for Beijing’s economic leadership.

For China, social change began at home. Starting in the 1980s, the Communist Party presided over the transformation of an impoverished agricultural society into an urban industrial powerhouse. Propelled by the greatest mass migration in history, as millions moved from country to city, its [economy grew](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1) nearly 10 percent annually for 40 years and lifted 800 million people out of poverty—the fastest sustained rate ever recorded by any country. Meanwhile, between 2006 and 2016 alone, [its industrial output](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf) increased from $1.2 trillion to $3.2 trillion, leaving the United States in the dust at $2.2 trillion and making China the workshop of the world.

By the time Washington awoke to China’s challenge and tried to respond with what President Barack Obama called a “strategic pivot” to Asia, it was too late. With foreign reserves already at $4 trillion in 2014, Beijing [launched](https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/) its Belt and Road Initiative, while [establishing](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/business/international/china-creates-an-asian-bank-as-the-us-stands-aloof.html) an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with 56 member nations and an impressive $100 billion in capital. When a Belt and Road Forum of 29 world leaders convened in Beijing in May 2017, President Xi Jinping [hailed](http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2018/0306/c25-1038.html) the initiative as the “project of the century,” aimed both at promoting growth and improving “people’s well-being” through “poverty alleviation.” Indeed, two years later a World Bank study [found](http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/879031554144957551/pdf/) that BRI transportation projects had already increased the gross domestic product in 55 recipient nations by a solid 3.4 percent.

Amid this flurry of flying dirt and flowing concrete, Beijing seems to have an underlying design for transcending the vast distances that have historically separated Asia from Europe. Its goal: to forge a unitary market that will soon [cover](https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/) the vast Eurasian land mass. This scheme will consolidate China’s control over a continent that is home to 70 percent of the world’s population and productivity. In the end, it could also break the US geopolitical grip over a region that has long been the core of, and key to, its global power. The foundation for such an ambitious transnational scheme is a monumental construction effort that in just two decades has already covered China and much of Central Asia with a massive triad of energy pipelines, high-speed rail lines, and highways.

To break that down, start with this: Beijing is building a transcontinental network of natural gas and oil pipelines that will, in alliance with Russia, extend for 6,000 miles from the North Atlantic Ocean to the South China Sea.

For the second arm in that triad, Beijing has [built](https://www.eesi.org/papers/view/fact-sheet-high-speed-rail-development-worldwide) the world’s largest high-speed rail system, with more than 15,000 miles already operational in 2018 and plans for a network of nearly 24,000 miles by 2025. All this, in turn, is just a partial step toward what’s expected to be a full-scale transcontinental rail system that [started](https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/business/global/hauling-new-treasure-along-the-silk-road.html) with the “Eurasian Land Bridge” track running from China through Kazakhstan to Europe. In addition to its transcontinental trunk lines, Beijing plans branch-lines heading due south toward Singapore, southwest through Pakistan, and then [from Pakistan](https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Turkey-Iran-Pakistan-rail-link-to-China-s-Belt-and-Road) through Iran to Turkey.

To complete its transport triad, China has also constructed an impressive set of highways, representing (like those pipelines) a problematic continuation of Washington’s current petrol-powered world order. In 1990, that country lacked a single expressway. By 2017, it [had built](https://transportgeography.org/?page_id=1869) 87,000 miles of highways, nearly double the size of the US interstate system. Even that breathtaking number can’t begin to capture the extraordinary engineering feats necessary—the tunneling through steep mountains, the spanning of wide rivers, the crossing of deep gorges on towering pillars, and the spinning of concrete webs around massive cities.

Simultaneously, China was also becoming the world’s largest auto manufacturer as the number of vehicles on its roads [soared](http://autonews.gasgoo.com/china_news/70016117.html) to 340 million in 2019, [exceeding](https://www.statista.com/statistics/183505/number-of-vehicles-in-the-united-states-since-1990/) America’s 276 million. However, all of this impressive news is depressing news as well. After all, by clinging to coal production on a major scale, while reaching for a bigger slice of the world’s oil imports for its transportation triad, China’s greenhouse-gas [emissions doubled](https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2021) from just 14 percent of the world’s total in 2000 to 30 percent in 2019, far surpassing that of the United States, previously the planet’s leading emitter. With only 150 vehicles [per thousand](https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/industries/automotive%20and%20assembly/our%20insights/winning%20the%20race%20chinas%20auto%20market%20shifts%20gears/winning-the-race-chinas-auto-market-shifts-gears.ashx) people, compared to 850 in America, its auto industry still has ample growth potential—good news for its economy, but terrible news for the global climate (even if China remains in the [forefront](https://theicct.org/sites/default/files/publications/China-green-future-ev-jan2021.pdf) of the development and use of electric cars).

To power such headlong development, China has, in fact, raised its domestic coal production more than a thousand-fold, from just 32 million metric tons in 1949 to a mind-boggling [record](https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/19/business/china-coal-production-record-intl-hnk/index.html) of 4.1 billion tons by 2021. Even if you take into account those massive natural-gas pipelines it is building, its enormous hydropower dams, and its world leadership in wind power, as of 2020 China still [depended](https://chinapower.csis.org/energy-footprint/) on coal for a startling 57 percent of its total energy use, even as its share of total global coal-fired power [climbed](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-china-coal/china-generated-over-half-worlds-coal-fired-power-in-2020-study-idUSKBN2BK0PZ) relentlessly to a record 53 percent. In other words, nothing, it seems, can break that country’s leadership of its insatiable hunger for the dirtiest of all fossil fuels.

### Heg Bad – Offshore Balancing

#### **Offshore Balancing works!**

Walt 20 (Stephen Walt, columnist at Foreign Policy and the Robert and Renée Belfer professor of international relations at Harvard University, “The United States Forgot Its Strategy For Winning Cold Wars”, Foreign Policy, May 5th 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/05/offshore-balancing-cold-war-china-us-grand-strategy/>, WC-NAS)

If a potential hegemon does appear, the United States should rely on local forces in the threatened region as the first line of defense, calibrating its support for these local actors with the level of the challenge and their own capabilities. If these regional states cannot contain a potential hegemon on their own, then the United States must commit its own military power to the region to make sure the potential hegemon cannot overawe and dominate its neighbors while at the same time making sure that its local partners bear a fair share of the costs of containment.

During the Cold War, the essential features of containment followed this basic logic perfectly. U.S. leaders did not believe that the local powers in Europe or East Asia could stand up to the Soviet challenge on their own, which is why Washington deployed substantial U.S. forces to these critical regions in peacetime. Of course, it might have been preferable in the abstract for the United States to pass the buck to others, but the distribution of power in Europe and Asia at the time made buck-passing infeasible.

There was no potential hegemon in the Persian Gulf, however, and the Soviet Union did not seriously threaten to invade that region during the Cold War. Nevertheless, to maintain the local balance of power and limit Soviet influence, the United States relied on Britain (until the mid-1960s) and on local clients such as Iran. After the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979 and Iran became an adversary, Washington created the Rapid Deployment Force. But it kept this force offshore and over the horizon and did not send significant forces into the region until Iraq seized Kuwait in 1990. This clear and obvious threat to the regional balance of power led the United States to organize a large coalition—in which its own forces played the predominant role—to expel Iraq from Kuwait. This operation was fully consistent with offshore balancing: The first Gulf War was an occasion when it made sense for the United States to go “onshore.”

Most importantly, whenever the United States has abandoned offshore balancing and pursued a different strategy, the results have invariably been disastrous. The Vietnam War was not consistent with offshore balancing, for example, because, as realist critics such as [Walter Lippmann](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.jstor.org/stable/23612509?seq=1), [Hans Morgenthau](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.nytimes.com/1965/04/18/archives/we-are-deluding-ourselves-in-vietnam-we-are-deluding-ourselves-in.html), and [Kenneth Waltz](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.jstor.org/stable/3013947?seq=1) emphasized, Indochina was not a vital strategic region and its fate could not alter the global balance of power in any meaningful way. The Clinton administration’s adoption of “dual containment” in the Gulf and the recent U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya were also misguided departures from offshore balancing, as they had little to do with maintaining a favorable balance of power. Indeed, in the case of Iraq, it shattered the local balance in the Persian Gulf to the benefit of Iran.

What does offshore balancing prescribe today? As [I and others](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing) have argued [at length](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.amazon.com/Hell-Good-Intentions-Americas-Foreign/dp/0374280037) [elsewhere](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/end-hubris), there is no potential hegemon in Europe, and we are not likely to see one emerge anytime soon. The United States should gradually disengage, therefore, and let the Europeans provide for their own security. As for the Persian Gulf, the region is as divided as it has ever been, and there is no potential hegemon on the horizon. Moreover, its strategic importance is likely to decline as the world gradually weans itself off fossil fuels. Thus, United States can return to the strategy it followed from 1945 to 1991: keeping its own forces out of the region and letting the competing Middle Eastern powers balance each other.

The situation in Asia is dramatically different. China is a potential hegemon in Asia, and it will remain one long after the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. Although Asia contains a number of capable medium-sized powers, such as Japan, South Korea, and India, [it will not be easy for them to form an effective balancing coalition](https://archive.ph/o/W0SYt/https:/foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/03/balancing-act-asian-version/). In this case, the United States needs to coordinate this effort and commit its own forces. Buck-passing will not work. Although U.S. military forces will have to be onshore in a number of places in Asia, this policy is still fully consistent with the grand strategy of offshore balancing.

To be sure, preventing China from establishing regional hegemony in Asia cannot stop Beijing from trying to build influence through its Belt and Road Initiative or stop it from engaging in other efforts to expand its diplomatic reach. But it would help limit Chinese influence by maintaining an active U.S. presence in Asia and forcing China to focus most of its attention closer to home. By reducing the U.S. commitment to Europe and ending its costly military involvements in the Middle East, offshore balancing would also free up resources that will be needed to meet a future Chinese challenge, a problem that may be increasingly acute in the post-coronavirus fiscal environment.

Why is it a problem when people misrepresent offshore balancing? Because we are finally having a serious and long overdue debate about the proper grand strategy for the United States. The stakes are high, as the many failures that flowed from liberal hegemony—the flawed grand strategy that U.S. leaders pursued during the unipolar moment—make clear. Protagonists often try to win policy debates by distorting their opponents’ views, by falsely associating their own recommendations with past successes, and by denying any responsibility for repeated failures. Deciding which strategic options should guide U.S. policy in the future depends first and foremost on a proper understanding of the different alternatives. **An accurate understanding of offshore balancing will reveal that it provided the foundation most of America’s foreign-policy successes, while departures from that strategy lie at the root of some of the country’s biggest missteps.**

### Heg – Bipolarity

#### Bipolarity inevitable, stable, and solves nuclear conflict

Kupchan 22 (Cliff Kupchan, “Bipolarity is Back: Why it Matters”, The Washington Quarterly, Volume 44, February 2nd 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true>, NAS)

Bipolarity is no longer returning—it is here, and it is here to stay for the foreseeable future. News today is dominated by US-China relations, indicating a recognition of today’s bipolar system, and China continues to close the gap in the economic realm. The effects of this bipolarity have substantially deepened as elites in both Washington and Beijing have become aware of the new global structure and are acting accordingly. Structure and beliefs are amplifying each other.

Because the world now has a bipolar distribution of capabilities, it will be more peaceful than expected by the consensus view.[1](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Bipolar structures deductively and empirically tend to be peaceful (stable); regarding great power war—it is unlikely to happen.[2](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) That prognosis for the current period is strengthened because balancing or competition between China and the United States will occur in the economic arena to a far greater extent than in the more dangerous military realm. The term “Cold Peace” best captures the current system; it will be broadly peaceful but by no means warm. Nationalist views in both the United States and China present a potential risk to the stability forecast by bipolarity, primarily through the specter of military conflict over Taiwan. This risk, however, is much overhyped—predictability and nuclear deterrence will very likely deter an invasion and preserve the Cold Peace.

Competition in the economic arena will be far greater than the more dangerous military realm

Bipolarity will, however, spur Chinese revisionism in some key economic arenas, with direct implications for both geopolitics and firms. This essay links the latest political science to market outcomes, drawing heavily on realist thought, which posits that the distribution of capabilities produces a structure that is the single greatest determinant of outcomes. The presence of nuclear weapons is also a major driver on the systemic level. It breaks from classical realism in recognizing that elite beliefs are a third, significant driver of events.

The essay will first present the evidence that the current system is bipolar. It then explains why bipolarity, nuclear weapons, and elite beliefs are the key drivers of states’ policies. The piece then fleshes out implications of the model for subsections of the international order and concludes with implications for geopolitics.

The Data on Bipolarity

The evidence shows that the geopolitical system is bipolar, albeit with a considerable degree of asymmetry because of US military dominance. Bipolarity is established by data sufficient to support the claim that two superpowers are: 1) broadly peer competitors regarding the distribution of capabilities; and 2) separated from the “pack” by a substantial gap. Bipolarity may exist even if there is a large gap between the powers on a key metric. (In 1970, for instance, during a period commonly referred to as bipolar, Soviet nominal GDP was roughly 40% of US GDP).[3](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) In 2020, Chinese nominal defense spending was 32 percent of US defense spending, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), on par with 2019.[4](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) The gap between China and the number three power, India, is huge; in 2020, India’s nominal defense spending was 29 percent that of China.[5](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

The US advantage over China in the military realm is amplified by its alliance network (China has far fewer allies), its nuclear preponderance (3,750 warheads versus roughly 350 for China, likely growing to 1,000 by 2030), and its military-technological advantage.[6](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) In addition, the US has at least 65 overseas bases, while China has one—in Djibouti.[7](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) US superiority is sufficient to establish strategic stability and deter China from balancing against the US on a global level in the military realm, at least for the foreseeable future. The gap is simply too big. Regarding the sub-balance in the Asia-Pacific region, the trend is toward parity, and balancing is ongoing. A focus of China’s military modernization has been to balance or surpass US power in the Taiwan Strait. While China is closing the regional gap with the United States in terms of air power and missile coverage, Washington still leads when it comes to power projection capacity and the ability to conduct joint combat operations.[8](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

Regarding economics, China is much closer to a peer competitor. Its nominal GDP was 71 percent that of the United States in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), up from 67 percent in 2019.[9](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) The IMF predicts that number will rise to 74 percent in 2021, and many sources predict China will surpass the United States within two decades.[10](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Japan is third at 34 percent of China’s GDP.[11](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) With regard to research and development, China has drawn dramatically close to the United States. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that in 2019, Chinese spending was 84 percent of the US, up from 47 percent in 2010. The third-ranked country, Japan, spends 36 percent of China’s budget.[12](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) China also leads the US on trade volume and on overall investment.[13](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) The rapidly narrowing economic gap warrants graduation to full bipolarity. And it is in this realm that severe balancing and competition will occur.

Both countries are emerging from the pandemic with their formidable structural strengths intact. The United States possesses the strongest financial system, its currency remains dominant, it is a leader in innovation, and it has one of the most favorable demographic outlooks among leading powers. China has enormous innovative capacity, a high savings rate, and the ability to mobilize and direct resources.

Soft power—the power to influence through attraction—affects outcomes as well.[14](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Its impact is often less important than hard military or economic power, and it is harder to measure. However, data from the Pew Research Center show that this is the most significant locus of change over the past year—a dramatic drop in China’s favorability ratings among major industrialized countries.[15](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Meanwhile, foreign approval ratings for President Joe Biden are massively higher than those of former president Donald Trump, suggesting a surge in US soft power.[16](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

These structural trends are robust. That said, each country has challenges, such as political polarization in the United States, and debt and demographic issues in China. A disjuncture like the breakup of the Soviet Union is possible in either country, and this would end bipolarity. But in coming decades that is unlikely because the structural strengths of both countries are so profound. The data suggest that this is a bipolar era, if a partly asymmetric one, and that COVID-19 did nothing to change that structure and little to affect its details.[17](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

Bipolarity, Nuclear Weapons, and Peace

Bipolarity and nuclear weapons combined provide strong guardrails against a great power war, a fact that is often overlooked in the context of escalating US-China tensions and hand wringing about a new Cold War. Bipolarity is less stable than the unipolar period that preceded it, but more stable than the multipolar future that many observers foresee.[18](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) In bipolar systems, the superpowers primarily use internal balancing, such as arms buildups and bolstering economic strength, to offset each other’s capabilities.[19](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) External balancing, such as the formation of alliances, is of secondary importance because of the powers’ outsized capabilities.[20](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) This yields stability because internal balancing is more predictable, reliable, and transparent than the use of alliances.

History is replete with examples of destabilizing alliance defections under multipolarity.[21](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) For instance, alliance jockeying in a multipolar landscape played a role in the onset of both World War I and World War II. The 1890 suspension of Germany’s secret reinsurance with Russia set in motion balancing dynamics that ultimately produced war between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. During the 1930s, alliance defections and buck-passing cleared the way for Nazi Germany’s unchecked advances both before and after the outbreak of World War II. In other words, operationally a bipolar system is more stable than a multipolar one because the two main powers need to focus primarily on the actions of the other—and not on those of many countries, as is necessary under multipolarity.

Nuclear weapons, and the risk of escalation to the nuclear level, add a huge overlay of caution to behavior. When two superpowers possess an assured second-strike capability, each can cause the other catastrophic harm—and that induces extreme caution. Weapons deployments and competitions will continue, and advanced technologies will pose challenges to nuclear stability. War between two nuclear-armed superpowers is surely possible; but the bottom line remains that nuclear weapons make it very unlikely.[22](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Moreover, this caution interacts with the predictability of bipolarity to increase restraint. A nation that can see what is coming and is already very cautious is unlikely to miscalculate on decisions of war and peace.

Bipolarity also injects a binary, fragmenting impulse into international relations. Both superpowers pursue their interests, and spheres of influence result. This imparts the fragmentation dynamic into existing international relations and institutions.

Nuclear weapons and the predictability of bipolarity both increase security caution and restraint

Lastly, several features of the current operation of bipolarity and nuclear weapons are important. First, as it did during the Cold War, some external balancing will occur, but it is of second-order importance compared to the power of the two leading countries. Each superpower is, as expected, recruiting allies, with the US focusing on the EU, the UK, and Australia, while China focuses on emerging markets. China is balancing almost exclusively internally, in line with the expectations of bipolarity—in part because of the lack of allies. While the US is primarily using internal balancing, Biden is also trying to form a balancing coalition against China. His main successes so far have been a harder-line EU policy and, in the military realm, AUKUS. The latter, if the 8 agreed nuclear subs are built, will add to deterrence. But even in this narrow field, deterrence will primarily rest with internal balancing—flowing from the US and its large fleet, which currently stands at 68 nuclear subs.[23](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true) Second, China and Russia on some issues balance against the US, which at times marginally increases China’s influence. But on military issues, where balancing is especially dangerous, it is very difficult to devise a credible scenario in which Russia decides to join China in a war against the US. Third, with focus on the US and China, scholars have laid out the structural risks of war that occurs in the context of a rising and a ruling power. Historically, this dynamic often leads to war. But the aspirations of the new power and the fears of the older one are doused by strong caution in the nuclear age.[24](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.2020457?scroll=top&needAccess=true)

### Heg Bad – Turns Democracy

#### Hegemony harms democracy globally.

Street, 18 — Paul; Holds a doctorate in U.S. history from Binghamton University. He is former vice president for research and planning of the Chicago Urban League. (3-1-2018; "The World Will Not Mourn the Decline of U.S. Hegemony;" *Canadian Dimension*; https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-world-will-not-mourn-the-decline-of-u.s.-hegemony)

“Democracy” was fine as a slogan and benevolent, idealistic-sounding mission statement when it came to marketing this imperialist U.S. policy at home and abroad. Since most people in the “third” or “developing” world had no interest in neocolonial subordination to the rich nations and subscribed to what U.S. intelligence officials considered the heretical “idea that government has direct responsibility for the welfare of its people” (what U.S. planners called “communism”), Washington’s real-life commitment to popular governance abroad was strictly qualified, to say the least. “Democracy” was suitable to the U.S. as long as its outcomes comported with the interests of U.S. investors/corporations and related U.S. geopolitical objectives. It had to be abandoned, undermined and/or crushed when it threatened those investors/corporations and the broader imperatives of business rule to any significant degree. As President Richard Nixon’s coldblooded national security adviser Henry Kissinger explained in June 1970, three years before the U.S. sponsored a bloody fascist coup that overthrew Chile’s democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende: “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people.”

The U.S.-sponsored coup government that murdered Allende would kill tens of thousands of real and alleged leftists with Washington’s approval. The Yankee superpower sent some of its leading neoliberal economists and policy advisers to help the blood-soaked Pinochet regime turn Chile into a “free market” model and to help Chile write capitalist oligarchy into its national constitution.

“Since 1945, by deed and by example,” the great Australian author, commentator and filmmaker John Pilger wrote nearly nine years ago: “The U.S. has overthrown 50 governments, including democracies, crushed some 30 liberation movements and supported tyrannies from Egypt to Guatemala (see William Blum’s histories). Bombing is apple pie.” Along the way, Washington has crassly interfered in elections in dozens of “sovereign” nations, something curious to note in light of current liberal U.S. outrage over real or alleged Russian interference in “our” supposedly democratic electoral process in 2016. Uncle Sam also has bombed civilians in 30 countries, attempted to assassinate foreign leaders and deployed chemical and biological weapons.

### Heg Bad – Turns War

#### Liberal hegemony *fuels* global prolif

Mearsheimer and Walt 16 (John J, R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen M, Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” Foreign Affairs, July/August, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing)

Proponents of liberal hegemony also claim that the United States must remain committed all over the world to prevent nuclear proliferation. If it reduces its role in key regions or withdraws entirely, the argument runs, countries accustomed to U.S. protection will have no choice but to protect themselves by obtaining nuclear weapons. No grand strategy is likely to prove wholly successful at preventing proliferation, but offshore balancing would do a better job than liberal hegemony. After all, that strategy failed to stop India and Pakistan from ramping up their nuclear capabilities, North Korea from becoming the newest member of the nuclear club, and Iran from making major progress with its nuclear program. Countries usually seek the bomb because they fear being attacked, and U.S. efforts at regime change only heighten such concerns. By eschewing regime change and reducing the United States' military footprint, offshore balancing would give potential proliferators less reason to go nuclear. Moreover, military action cannot prevent a determined country from eventually obtaining nuclear weapons; it can only buy time. The recent deal with Iran serves as a reminder that coordinated multilateral pressure and tough economic sanctions are a better way to discourage proliferation than preventive war or regime change.

#### Hegemony inflames global terrorism – downsizing minimizes the risk

Mearsheimer and Walt 16 (John J, R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen M, Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” Foreign Affairs, July/August, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing)

Offshore balancing would also reduce the risk of terrorism. Liberal hegemony commits the United States to spreading democracy in unfamiliar places, which sometimes requires military occupation and always involves interfering with local political arrangements. Such efforts invariably foster nationalist resentment, and because the opponents are too weak to confront the United States directly, they sometimes turn to terrorism. (It is worth remembering that Osama bin Laden was motivated in good part by the presence of U.S. troops in his homeland of Saudi Arabia.) In addition to inspiring terrorists, liberal hegemony facilitates their operations: using regime change to spread American values undermines local institutions and creates ungoverned spaces where violent extremists can flourish. Offshore balancing would alleviate this problem by eschewing social engineering and minimizing the United States' military foot-print. U.S. troops would be stationed on foreign soil only when a country was in a vital region and threatened by a would-be hegemon. In that case, the potential victim would view the United States as a savior rather than an occupier. And once the threat had been dealt with, U.S. military forces could go back over the horizon and not stay behind to meddle in local politics. By respecting the sovereignty of other states, offshore balancing would be less likely to foster anti-American terrorism.

### Heg Good – AT: Offshore Balancing

#### Offshore balancing fails. It causes proxy conflict, intervention, and instability

McKeil 22 (Aaron McKeil, London School of Economics and Political Science, “The Limits of Realism after Liberal Hegemony”, Journal of Global Security Studies, 2022, <https://watermark.silverchair.com/ogab020.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kkhW_Ercy7Dm3ZL_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAsUwggLBBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggKyMIICrgIBADCCAqcGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBglghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMxzftFwOe6eKqb9NBAgEQgIICeKPdAGy8yiDxcz_bwBdOtfXnZln6BmGfdhIW0XPNYzggwhWF8Y9QBLY4EDStNk8kYgNtlTIIxyBlY6T9RIKirYnqPVZlGmU1sZDUTOCK1nHyvGZeKGp54iPIyYpd972caLCXU65oK-M6LDc4vsm7oggbalR64MybdKfN5agWBxmmPJ2nbLyAm2HWGf9p8KyxUT1zLEDxuafVQbWL3KdIwoATfeUXYFGzNZM7w9dgokGD_i04R1dX9ee0nPWuon2g8yDvTm3MA_DwhintNM4gHja4xYHxNdhOcQJbXTaymbXWQo6riHzUILd3NAe-6s4Bf7gaKp5CsN8DblNJyl_Tr0Bx0NteHO_o6RQRUkEldfQnBdea4s-f3II-qU_rMTPHheGJcN5_Xs1uj0ew43Y6vY21l0NUKnwJsv9vPJrXfiKG16VADRkbh1pTnobXIHwQaF8YbFFpfxLL-1IsYWHcI53MG9onpv-0kbfmFAZon0HCim1g8bPGkGxtH_M-c-cJ_OxSU2mj7syBJAw6G4BUAxBrby5sCvelFmF3YfyvuM4uSnAYuSEB2YGRP1YKgEki8TSPZ4HxlTmbfhMl4Z-mwTAEPtltDULDhS5P_3cZEs7Tre8sJWgw7FO4cgNe6ZAhHYTNw85vwqSw-fjxC1TxUc-5vbNGeRnIlNPsolwwZv9pweig8V04qZQNbfW09F2oCHP_TQRrwOctXYAi26E43VgjXQFHQUBvM3PwvuZwm29iymqVnecacJFkJJm0JVBV2b6PTknRszYfo42tRIe3LfIBNJu4-XngzGsBYrZIdpkL4cjmnE-ftr3DohphYjunpDBBs9oCZWt6>, NAS)

The Limits of Realist Policy Alternatives Regardless of any analytical limitations of their critiques, however, the pragmatically more significant shortcoming of realist critiques is their struggle to offer more promising alternative paths to international order. Although realist critics identify important problems with liberal hegemony, what of the alternative international order strategies they offer? Are defenders of a US-led “liberal” international order project right that despite its flaws it is still nevertheless the best international order strategy among bad options, if modifications are made? While the critiques leveled by realists may identify important problems and make some damaging points, the alternative policy proposals they offer suffer from their own serious limitations, when scrutinized. From closer examination and consideration, that is, these limitations of alternative realist foreign policies questions their ability to contribute to international order in the twenty-first century and suggest, quite the opposite, that if pursued they would instead become new sources of international disorder, albeit while avoiding some of the problems associated with liberal internationalism. Realist critics have offered variations on balance of power foreign policy proposals, suggesting that the deployment and use of US forces should be restricted to only vital US interests, while abandoning ambitions of democratizing other states.Mearsheimer and Walt in particular make cases for “restraint” and “offshore balancing,” meaning a reservation of the use of force to the most serious threats to US power, coupled with a policy to prevent China’s assumption of regional hegemony in Asia (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016). Mearsheimer explains that when following a realist policy of restraint, there are only a limited number of regions where [the US] should be willing to risk a war. Those places include the great power’s own neighbourhood and distant areas that are either home to another great power or the site of a critically important resource. For the United States, three regions outside the Western Hemisphere are of vital strategic importance today: Europe and East Asia, because that is where the other great powers are located; and the Persian Gulf, because it is the main source of an exceptionally important resource, oil. (Mearsheimer 2018, 222)

Mearsheimer argues this more strategically “restrained” policy will better manage the balance of power, reduce the amount of wars by eliminating liberal interventionism, and improve great power diplomatic relations by easing liberal antagonism of non-democracies. Walt likewise strongly argues for realist foreign policy of “offshore balancing”, meaning a deployment of US forces only where necessary, while more heavily relying on allies and strategic partners to balance regional challengers and Russia and China. Walt provides a clear description of this policy and its logic, worth quoting at length, to fairly convey its contents: Under a strategy of offshore balancing, the proper role and size of the U.S. national security establishment depends on the distribution of power in the key regions. If there is no potential hegemon in sight in Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Gulf, there is little reason to deploy U.S. ground or air forces there and little need for a national security establishment that dwarfs those of the major powers. If a potential hegemon does appear, the United States should turn to local forces as the first line of defense. It should expect them to uphold the regional balance of power out of their own self-interest and to deal with local security challenges themselves. Washington might provide material assistance and pledge to support certain regional powers if they were in danger of being conquered, but it should refrain from deploying significant U.S. forces under most conditions… In essence, this strategy aims to keep U.S. forces “offshore” for as long as possible while recognizing that sometimes the United States will have to come onshore even before a conflict starts. If that happens, the United States should get its allies in the region to do as much of the heavy lifting as possible and go back offshore once the threat has been defeated. (Walt 2018, 262–63) The realist foreign policy alternative of “offshore balancing” aims to balance against potential hegemons in overseas regions, but with emphasis on using US allies to invest in that balancing. The benefits of this policy, Walt argues, are partly that it reduces costs by requiring allies to contribute more, but more importantly that it preserves US power by managing its de ployment and avoiding costly interventions with US forces. Compared to a policy of liberal hegemony that has been troubled by costly military interventions, these realist policy alternatives on a superficial reading appear sensible and even peace-loving, because they advocate restricting intervention to a much higher threshold condition of defending vital security interests. Yet, under scrutiny, these realist policy proposals suffer from two key limitations that ultimately question their ability to contribute to international order in the twenty-first century and suggest that if pursued they would instead become new sources of international disorder (McKeil 2021), even if they avoided the problems associated with liberal interventionism. Firstly, and most troubling, is the likelihood that realist policy alternatives would contribute to proxy wars between the great powers in strategic regions. That is, a realist policy of restraint and offshore balancing means less US-led interventionism, but an equal amount and plausibly more proxy wars, where the United States would seek to defend its strategic interests indirectly. In fairness to realist policies, they prudently cede key states neighboring Russia and China, such as Ukraine and Myanmar, thereby avoiding proxy wars in such strategically sensitive territories (Mearsheimer 2014). It is nevertheless concerning, however, that realist proposals for “restraint” and “offshore balancing” do not offer a genuine foreign policy alternative for crises such as Syria, where both the Obama and Trump administrations have already sought to avoid direct intervention, by waging protracted a proxy war with regional consequences and casualties in the hundreds of thousands. The costs and dramatically circumscribed successes of interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Libya, have already made it an increasingly commonsense belief that direct interventions are infeasible, even misguided, but this has suggested to many that therefore more use of proxies is the only feasible policy option for certain crises. The literature on proxy wars suggests that states engage in proxy wars when their interests are perceived to be threatened, but direct intervention with their own forces is also perceived to be too high-risk or too costly (Groh 2019, 8). Proxy wars are “war on the cheap” and they have the advantage of reducing potential escalation to direct great power conflict and nuclear war at the highest and last stage of escalation. A policy of restraint as such follows the perception that use of US forces in small wars is too costly and too high-risk where great powers may come into direct conflict. Yet, by increasing this threshold for intervention, realist policy alternatives decrease the threshold at which the United States would use strategic partners to wage proxy wars against assumptive hegemons, or to suppress terrorist groups, or secure vital resources. Let me unpack these points further. A degree of skepticism is warranted about the extent to which realist policies of restraint and offshore balancing would be conducive to international order, and not a series of protracted proxy wars. As a recent study on proxy wars notes, “If the United States does less, it must rely on others to do more” (Berman and Lake 2019, 3). Inversely, however, if the United States does less, its proxies must also rely on the United States for more support, and when allies and partners engage in conflict for their own interests, for instance, they likely will call for support in terms of kit, including heavy arms, finance, training, and perhaps air support, even while US “boots on the ground” are denied. Where crises emerge and allies and strategic partners become unstable or engaged in a local or regional conflict, a realist-guided US foreign policy would be inclined to support US partners and allies as proxies for US forces. Because the use of US forces would have a higher threshold, but because realists also advise maintaining the material balance of power, a realist-guided US foreign policy would become more easily persuaded to engage in proxy wars. Furthermore, because it is a “cheap” way to balance, the United States could engage a wide number of proxy wars simultaneously, almost indefinitely. This strategic environment would also tempt the United States to trap Russian or Chinese forces in costly protracted wars against US proxies, along the model of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as a strategy to drain the power of China and Russia and limit their ability to engage in other conflicts. The potential for a wide number of proxy wars could potentially condemn the twenty-first century to the miseries and suffering of a series of protracted proxy wars waged with ever-more sophisticated weapons technology. Proxy wars are an immense source of international disorder because they tend to be protracted, devastating the countries in which they are waged. They are also generative of regional consequences including humanitarian and refugee crises, as well as new military groups operating across borders, whose long-term alignment with the United States is not always ensured. The Syrian civil war, for example, evolved into a proxy war with immense loss of life and consequences for regional stability (Hughes 2014). It involved embedding of US forces in proxy forces against Russian-supported government forces. At the same time, the diminishing presence of the United States in the region and inconsistent US support for key partners has been a critical contributor to the intensity, duration, and regional involvement in the Syrian conflict (Phillips 2020). Realists rightly suggest diplomacy is required to unwind the conflict in Syria, yet, where the United States withdraws its presence, as realist policies advise, proxy wars will tend to continue and emerge without diplomatic breakthroughs, which require years to develop, achieve, and implement. Realist thinkers foresee as an emerging “bounded order”, divided between China and the United States (Mearsheimer 2019). A bounded order pocketed by a series of proxy wars is not unimaginable and well within the realist vision of the emerging twenty-first century. The conditions of potential nuclear war and the global scope of the struggle made proxy warfare a common ingredient of the Cold War. A realist policy of US restraint and offshore balancing without sufficient additional measures to develop a stable international order likely would contribute to a series of proxy wars between the great powers seeking to support their partners and defend their vital interests through proxy forces in key regions. The fighting itself would invariably differ from that of the Cold War with state and nonstate proxies likely being mixed with use of remote weapons and cyber war, for instance (Innes 2012; Krieg and Rickli 2019). The ideological contest between the great powers will also instead likely become increasingly geo-cultural and geo-civilizational, not simply geostrategic or purely geopolitical (Coker 2019; Acharya 2020). But the conditions of security competition, high risks of direct conflict, lower costs of proxy warfare, and realist proposals for doctrines limiting the use of US forces with little other institutional measures for managing conflict likely would precipitate protracted proxy wars where conflicts emerge. Proxy wars, moreover, are an international activity with virtually no international rules beyond those applying to the conduct of war in general. This assessment of realist foreign policy proposals suggests that additional policy measures are required for developing a stable international order, to avoid proxy wars where possible and to contain and resolve them when they do emerge, in addition to further global challenges. Realists are not opposed to the use of diplomacy to avoid and manage conflict. To the contrary, they encourage it, but in encouraging the use of diplomacy it is crucial to recognize that diplomacy also requires the support of international institutions and established diplomatic networks. Diplomatic breakthroughs are difficult to achieve, requiring years of skillful and patient negotiations. Diplomacy, moreover, is an inconstant and limited tool without the support of broader international institutions that provide mechanisms of delay, ongoing networks of collaborative great power pressure on belligerent parties, and collaboratively developed processes and agreed terms of dispute resolution, negotiation, and mediation. Realist critics of liberal hegemony often suggest policy-fuzzy gestures toward diplomacy and accommodation. Porter for instance argues that the United States should abandon liberal hegemony in favor of détentestyle collaboration with illiberal powers in the making of global order (Porter 2020, 170–99). The key strategic proposal Porter advances is to attempt a settlement with Russia with significant mutual concessions, including sacrificing the interests of non-NATO countries on its eastern flank, in order to ease the growing sense of mutual threat. To facilitate negotiations, the USA should revive government-togovernment dialogue to reach a new bargain. (Porter 2020, 187) This is a strategy to ease pressure on Russia, in the hopes of encouraging tensions between Russia and China, which Porter proposes to combine with a reduction of forces in the Middle East, and a containment strategy against China in Asia, by cultivating regional strategic partners. This proposal in the abstract sounds promising and genuinely contains helpful strategic thought, but does not propose sufficient measures to produce a lasting and stable order, and crucially requires the willingness to collaborate from Russia, which Porter admits is not guaranteed to be forthcoming (Porter 2020, 188). There is surely more needed for the construction of a stable and lasting order between the United States and China than a containment balancing strategy, even if it were successful in dividing Russia from China. Where the first proxy war between the United States and China would emerge can only be speculated. China, like the United States, has the capacity to wage indirect warfare, incentives to avoid direct conflict, and experience from the Cold War. This as such poses a second limitation of realist policy alternatives; they are insufficiently ambitious in developing new and revised ordering of international institutions and take for granted the role of deeper primary institutions in producing international order (Mearsheimer 1994–1995).2 With limited confidence in the use of international institutions, realists struggle to provide a substantive and sufficient strategy for producing international order. Realists do acknowledge the importance of major institutions such as the United Nations or World Trade Organization for providing general 2 In this discussion, I define international institutions both narrowly as regulative organizations and broadly as bundles of constitutive and patterning rules and norms. “rules of the road” that clarify expectations among states (Mearsheimer 2018, 131; Walt 2018, 71). Yet, realists offer no suggestions for reforming these institutions for current challenges, nor do they see much promise in developing new institutions, and ultimately claim international institutions are ineffective because they have “no coercive leverage over states” in a context where states in anarchy find themselves in security competition precipitating conflict (Mearsheimer 2018, 131). As Mearsheimer states, “The nub of the dispute between liberals and realists regarding both institutions and economic interdependence has to do with whether they promote world peace. Liberals believe they ameliorate conflict; realists do not” (Mearsheimer 2018, 143). Walt provides a clear explanation of the realist lack of confidence in institutions where he states, As multilateral organizations such as NATO, the World Bank, or the World Trade Organization have shown repeatedly, international institutions can facilitate cooperation when states have clear and obvious incentives to work together, but they cannot stop powerful states from acting as they wish and thus cannot remove the danger of conflict and war. International institutions are simply a tool that states use to advance their interests, and they inevitably reflect the interests of the most powerful states. (Walt 2018, 71) Because institutions lack an ability to coerce great powers, realists claim, they have little to no impact on conflict between great powers that arises as a result of security competition. Because of this lack of realist confidence in institutions, Walt and leading economist Dani Rodrick have instead advanced a global order proposal for constructing a collection of select global “meta-norms” as conflict avoidance and resolution mechanisms at a global level (Rodrik and Walt 2021). This proposal is important and in the right direction, as a needed element of building shared global order, but it is also a thin set of meta-norms, highly modest and limited in their order-making capacities and ambitions. The proposal does not include integrative institutions to formalize and embed meta-norms, nor does it provide inclusive principles to legitimate those meta-norms beyond the imperative to avoid direct great power conflict. Walt and Rodrick, moreover, suggest that their international order proposal exists within an emerging “bounded order” marked by proxy wars, and concede their meta-norms do little to help mitigate or resolve proxy wars, focusing more on avoiding direct great power conflict (Rodrik and Walt 2021, 20).

#### Mearsheimer and Walt are wrong; offshore balancing undermines global stability

Hoffman 16 (Frank G. Hoffman, Board of Advisors at the Foreign Policy Institute and a Distinguished Research Fellow with the Institute for National Strategic Studies”, “Retreating Ashore: The Flaws of Offshore Balancing”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, July 5th 2016, <https://www.fpri.org/2016/07/retreating-ashore-flaws-offshore-balancing/>, WC-NAS)

While Offshore Balancing claims some historical evidence and some relevant geostrategic advantages as the basis for an American strategy, there are a few distinct disadvantages from a pragmatic perspective.  By passing the buck, Mearsheimer and Walt want to have their cake (America’s core interests preserved) and eat it too (a smaller and less costly defense establishment). The authors note that the U.S. represents only 46% of the NATO Alliance’s aggregate GDP but that our defense spending “contributes” 75% of NATO’s military spending.  This is a canard however, as it compares the total US defense establishment as if all these resources were devoted to the defense of NATO countries.  Obviously, U.S. defense spending far exceeds the regional-oriented European states.  Just as obviously the $535B U.S. defense budget includes resources for homeland defense, military health care, a large American R&D establishment, numerous domestic military bases, and a sizable strategic deterrent. Some of our budget directly supports either our own homeland security or our interests in Asia.  But these resources are not directly related to NATO defense and thus the comparison is meaningless.  Untested by the pair is the presumption that by withdrawing our forces from Europe and Korea, there will be substantial savings.

Some advocates of this approach would abandon many, if not all, of America’s treaties and security obligations.  Walt and Mearsheimer are vague on this in their Foreign Affairs article but many advocates explicitly reject NATO or our bilateral Pacific partners as obligations.  Dr. Mearsheimer has called for U.S. [withdrawal from NATO](https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/evaluating-u-s-foreign-policy-since-end-cold-war/)  in the past. No mention is made about other allies or partners, and presumably Israel is also left adrift to care for itself, until it is nearly overrun.

The biggest flaw in their argument involves allied state behavior if this strategy became operative. This approach argues that it exploits the capabilities of regional players in their own neighborhood where they have vital interests in order to preserve stability.  Instead of risking resource overstretch by the extensive investment in building up and posturing U.S. military forces around the globe, Japan, South Korea and our NATO allies would be expected to provide more for their own national and regional security commensurate with their interests.  These major regional powers would police themselves in their interaction with other powers.

But this assumes that regional powers share our interests and have the will and capacity to stabilize the region. China’s actions (and Russia’s in the Black Sea or Iran’s in the Persian Gulf) suggest that these assumptions are frail. Mearsheimer and Walt fail to consider the possibility that such countries will not take advantage or operate against U.S. allies negatively.  Their hope is an illusion belied by the rising level of geopolitical competition of the last several years.  Withdrawal from East Asia and the Pacific or Europe is not likely to have a stabilizing effect on these region.  This produces a very reactive strategy that arguably increases the chances of a war breaking out, for example in Korea or in the South China Sea.

The fourth problem relates to the law of unintended consequences.  As Dr. Hal Brands has noted, this version of OSB appears to offer numerous benefits at little risk, but in fact, the [risks and liabilities](https://twq.elliott.gwu.edu/sites/twq.elliott.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Brands_Summer%202015.pdf) including greater nuclear proliferation, are indeed quite significant.   Critical allies like Japan would face a stark choice having to hedge against a lack of commitment from the United States and would need to appease or negotiate a subservient position to Chinese hegemony.  Other scholars have noted this particular [fatal flaw](https://twq.elliott.gwu.edu/sites/twq.elliott.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Brands_Summer%202015.pdf) in OSB:

In East Asia today, U.S. allies rely on U.S. reassurance to navigate increasingly fraught relationships with a more assertive China precisely because they understand that they will have great trouble balancing Beijing on their own. A significant U.S. retrenchment might therefore tempt these countries to acquiesce to, or bandwagon with, a rising China if they felt that prospects for successful resistance were diminishing as the United States retreated.

A related strategic and operational disadvantage that Mearsheimer and Walt fail to recognize is the presumption that U.S. forces will have the capability to regain access to key regions during crises.  Offshore balancing places our forces back at home, far from future flashpoints.  The further one distances U.S. capabilities from its interests in critical regions of the world, the slower and harder it is to make an effective response.

Having abandoned Asia or the Middle East, returning after being absent for some time is not a matter of simply sailing back.  Having unburdened ourselves of forward stationed forces and basing, port and airfield infrastructure will be needed to deploy forces at great distances, we should be more realistic about the time and cost involved in generating combat power overseas in the absence of access.  Regaining access and bringing forces to bear will be harder and take longer for future U.S. Presidents under such a strategy. Embedded in OSB is the notion that American credibility, commitment and capabilities can be “surged” at will.  That’s not how the world works.  More likely, our perceived detachment would undercut U.S. crisis management actions and our diplomacy.  Certainly, it would make U.S. policy actions reactive and belated.

My preferred alternative to OSB was published in Orbis several years ago.  This option, which I deliberately titled “[Forward Partnership](https://www.fpri.org/article/2013/12/forward-partnership-a-sustainable-american-strategy/),” rejects OSB’s assumptions, its reactive character, and reduces the distance it puts between the U.S. and its friends. This strategy accepts that unilateral action in this century is a bankrupt method and that alliances and multilateral responses are in our interests. This strategy embraces the need to engage broadly with designated partners and friends to preserve regional stability without extensive forward-stationed forces. As suggested by the name, this strategy operates forward with alliances and partners to leverage cooperative and preventive actions to preclude conflicts before they occur. It uses forward-deployed naval power and Special Operations Force assets to generate and sustain preventive actions and promote true partnerships (vice dependencies). The strategy focuses on critical national interests in the global commons, ensuring access to critical markets and resources, for ourselves and our partners. Rather than husbanding our forces ashore in California or Norfolk this strategy is forward with our partners, retaining our regional access, our influence, and our interoperability with our friends. Far better than detachment, this strategy is more reassuring and actually balances. It also provides a flexible deterrent posture that is able to move where and when needed. This element, flexible presence without costly stationary posture, is a far better tool for balancing than what Mearsheimer and Walt offer. In short, OSB–as presented by academics–is less of a strategy about how to secure U.S. interests more efficiently, and is more of a dodge. As presented, it is not a strategy that advances our core interests. Overall, this strategic approach cedes the initiative and our national interests to another power until that power, a friend or foe, takes actions that we deem unacceptable. There is something to be said for restricting imperial overstretch and for calibrating U.S. interests with greater discipline, but sacrificing U.S. leadership and contributions to global stability is simply a retreat, and one that is ill-timed. If there was a strategy destined to accelerate the unraveling of world order, and the establishment of the United States as accelerator to the demise of global stability, this is it. Certainly, in the face of rising revisionist powers and constrained resources, we should not ignore the value of collective security. Surely, as Jakub Grygiel has persuasively argued, we can do more to [arm our allies](https://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/issues/Autumn_2015/7_Grygiel.pdf) along the frontiers of freedom. Nor should we shrink from the embattled peripheral countries where allies and partners are [particularly vulnerable](https://www.the-american-interest.com/2011/03/01/the-vulnerability-of-peripheries/) and where collective defense is needed to stand up to coercive states. If adopted at this point in history, OSB would just represent another distinct step toward the [disintegration of Europe](https://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blogsections/2016-d1f9/june-ccc4/a-step-towards-disintegration-b92f?_cldee=aG9mZm1hbmZnQGFvbC5jb20%3d&urlid=6) and the alliance structure that has underwritten peace and prosperity for the last generation. Rather than husband U.S. resources, it abdicates our leadership position, abandons friends and allies, and dismisses our ability to shape events. On one hand it minimizes the possibility of making foreign policy mistakes and eliminates entanglements. But it only does that by increasing instability however, and ensures that U.S. forces will arrive belatedly and at a disadvantage. We need a strategy that avoids being the [Crusader State](https://www.amazon.com/Promised-Land-Crusader-State-Encounter/dp/0395901324), without abandoning friends and encouraging opponents. This strategy reenacts the myths of Splendid Isolation that some British policy makers mistook for strategy in the last century. Mearsheimer and Walt’s version, one we might call Delighted Detachment, would be an even worse disaster. OSB, as presented, is a strategy that makes a virtue out of ignoring strategic interests, eluding obligations and responsibilities, and avoiding disciplined strategic choices. Were we living in the 1990s, at the apex of the [Unipolar Era](https://nationalinterest.org/article/the-unipolar-moment-revisited-391), this strategy would be relevant. Today, it risks power vacuums, entices regional aggression, and puts U.S. military forces at both a strategic and operational disadvantage.  Developing a more viable strategy, without these defects, will be a critical task for the next President.