Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed

Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment

Patrick Porter

Why has U.S. grand strategy persisted since the end of the Cold War? If grand strategy is the long-term orchestration of power and commitments to secure oneself in a world where war is possible, the United States' way of pursuing security has been remarkably stable.[1] Long before the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States formed a grand strategy of "primacy," often coined as "leadership."[2] This strategy was interrupted only occasionally. By the 1960s, it had set the parameters for Washington's foreign policy debate.[3] The strategy has four interlocking parts: to be militarily preponderant; to reassure and contain allies; to integrate other states into U.S.-designed institutions and markets; and to inhibit the spread of nuclear weapons.[4] These fundamental security commitments have proven hard to change, even amid shocks.

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1. See Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13.
2. For accounts of U.S. grand strategy since the Cold War, see Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post–Cold War Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 332–333; Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 114; Stephen Biddle and Peter D. Feaver, "Assessing Strategic Choices in the War on Terror," in James Burk, ed., *How 9/11 Changed Our Ways of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 27–56, at pp. 28–29; Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press: 2014), pp. 5–12; and Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 105–117.
3. On the postwar evolution of U.S. strategy, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 496; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 2, 169–193; Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 3–42, 125–150; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7–51, especially pp. 10–14, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00107; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
4. On grand strategy within particular issue areas, see Michael J. Hogan, "Revival and Reform: America's Twentieth-Century Search for a New International Economic Order," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Fall 1984), pp. 287–310, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1984.tb00413.x; Francis J. Gavin,

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Scholars continue to debate the sources of U.S. grand strategy. Some emphasize structural-international drivers, claiming that the United States persists in its role as the global hegemon because it is a very powerful state. They argue that unipolarity (i.e., the imbalance of material power in the United States' favor) drives the superpower to predominate beyond its region.[5] Others incorporate domestic factors and ideas.[6] Much of this debate focuses on explaining change in the United States' design. Yet despite the pressures of war weariness and the 2008 global financial crisis, continuity prevails. Thus, it is not change but the roots of stability that need explaining. Some analysts recommend that the United States should adopt an alternative grand strategy of restraint, shift burdens, and accept multipolarity.[7] After all, history suggests that strategies of retrenchment and accommodation, which bring a state's power and commitments into balance, can successfully prevent overstretch, insolvency, or

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"Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Summer 2015), pp. 9–46, especially pp. 19–38, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00205; and Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic, "Should the United States Stay in the Gulf?" in Glaser and Kelanic, eds., *Crude Strategy: Rethinking the U.S. Military Commitment to Protect Persian Gulf Oil* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), pp. 233–251, at p. 233.

5. Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 53–67, 77, doi:10.2307/2539097; Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, "Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War," in Kapstein and Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 138–181, at p. 147; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–41, at p. 37, doi:10.1162/016228899560031; and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), pp. 365–368.

6. Colin Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000–2004," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (October 2004), pp. 511–535, at p. 512, doi:10.1017/S0260210504006205; Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 7–8, 15; Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 70–71; Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 86–124, at p. 88, doi:10.1162/isec.22.1.86; Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 9–10; Richard N. Rosecrance and Arthur A. Sein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3–22; Benjamin Miller, "Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq," *Security Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2010), pp. 26–65, especially pp. 28–32, doi:10.1080/09636410903546426; and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), pp. 9–43, at pp. 42–43, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00097.

7. Posen, *Restraint*, pp. 69–131; Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, pp. 159–193; Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 5–48, doi:10.1162/isec.21.4.5; Christopher A. Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 135–164; and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (July/August 2016), pp. 70–83.

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exhaustion.[8] Others warn against change, fearing that the United States will retrench and chaos will follow.[9] Attempts to change U.S. grand strategy are unlikely to succeed, however, unless advocates of change understand why the current order persists, and unless they can identify the atypical conditions in which it might alter.

I argue that an interaction of power and habit makes U.S. grand strategy stable. By "power," I mean a state's relative economic size and military capabilities. By "habit," I mean collective ideas that come to seem obvious, axiomatic choices made from unexamined assumptions.[10] Material power may enable the United States to pursue primacy. Habitual ideas, however, make U.S. grand strategy hard to change. These habits are perpetuated by a foreign policy establishment known as the "Blob." A nickname popularized by former Deputy National Security Adviser Benjamin Rhodes, the Blob comprises a class of officials and commentators who worry incessantly about the "collapse of the American security order."[11]

The Blob emerged from World War II, as the United States' rising power generated a demand for security expertise. U.S. government officials turned to a group of experts who formed into a cohesive, influential class. Their commitment to primacy became an article of faith. As a grand strategy, primacy warrants scrutiny. It demands significant upfront investments, implicates national security in developments far and wide, and makes the United States prone to the frequent use of force.[12] Yet the Blob's achievement was to erect primacy as the seemingly natural framework of U.S. diplomacy.

The pervasive ideology of U.S. leadership constrains Washington's foreign policy choices. Successive presidents have been predisposed toward the status quo with little critical evaluation. Alternative strategies based on the retrenchment of commitments are effectively taken off the table. For U.S. grand strat-

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8. Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring 2011), pp. 7–44, at p. 9, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00034; and T.V. Paul, ed., *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 21.
9. Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home America"; Robert J. Lieber, *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 89–139; and Hal Brands and Peter D. Feaver, "Should America Retrench?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 6 (November/December 2016), pp. 164–172, at pp. 168–169.
10. Max Weber, *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, eds. and trans. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1949), p. 112; and Ted Hopf, "The Logic of Habit in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (June 2010), pp. 539–561, at p. 541, doi:10.1177/1354066110363502.
11. See David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru," *New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016, p. 27.
12. See Nuno P. Monteiro, "Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 9–40, especially pp. 11, 19–20, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00064.

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egy to change, two developments would need to combine: rapidly changing material conditions, shocking enough to disconfirm the assumptions of the status quo, and determined agents of change willing to incur domestic costs to drive it. Absent these developments, Washington is likely to remain committed to primacy.

I test my argument by examining two cases. The first is the presidency of Bill Clinton (1993–2001). The Clinton administration had discretionary power to choose an alternative grand strategy and strong incentives to consider change. Yet Clinton preserved primacy in its essentials. The second case is the first year of the presidency of Donald Trump. Trump challenged the bipartisan consensus that the United States should lead the world. He threatened to shred alliances, abandon commitments, and tolerate horizontal nuclear proliferation. Even in this case, my argument accords with preliminary observations. The Blob asserted itself.

Existing accounts of U.S. grand strategy provide some explanation of continuity, but are inadequate. Structural interpretations rightly highlight the importance of objective power realities that allow the United States to pursue primacy in the first place. The distribution of material capabilities is only a permissive condition, however, enabling the pursuit of primacy, not causing it. In earlier periods, when the United States was ascendant, it passed up opportunities to increase its power. Structural interpretations also fail to explain why Washington selects traditional ways of maximizing power over others, balancing rather than buck-passing, retaining alliances, and fighting peripheral wars.

Domestic-level explanations rightly incorporate ideas, but also struggle to explain U.S. grand strategy. They predict more change than has actually happened. Those that emphasize the content of ideas mostly treat grand strategy as a deliberative planning process of cost-benefit calculation, where the United States selects primacy against competing alternatives in an open contest. As I demonstrate, a rigorously self-conscious process is mostly absent from U.S. foreign policy decisionmaking circles.

Some observers acknowledge that grand strategic debate in Washington is sterile.[13] Yet the question of how an organically evolving grand strategy emerges from the interaction of policy agents and external conditions remains undertheorized. The power of habit helps explain this process by showing why some policy ideas do or do not receive a hearing in debates designed to chart a course in response to external circumstances. I thus help connect systemic- and domestic-level theories of grand strategy by showing how the

13. Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, "Why Washington Doesn't Debate Grand Strategy," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Winter 2016), pp. 14–45, especially pp. 14–17.

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policymaking process itself is shaped by prior events alongside individual and group beliefs.

This article proceeds in four sections. I begin by offering a deductive argument that explains the stability of U.S. grand strategy, and then derive predictions about U.S. behavior since the Cold War. Next, I demonstrate how this argument explains continuities in U.S. diplomatic behavior in the Clinton era and the first year of Trump's presidency. In the conclusion, I forecast that primacy will prove resilient.

Power and Habit in Washington

Why is U.S. grand strategy hard to change, even when conditions change? To understand why, it is necessary to examine not only what decisionmakers think about, but where they think from. Habit is a type of path dependency, the process whereby prior historical developments limit the scope of choices set before decisionmakers, reproducing behavior even in the absence of the conditions where it began. States move not from a neutral zero but from legacies that prescribe what is legitimate and effective. The logic of habit is distinct from the logic of consequences, where actors consciously make instrumental cost-benefit calculations, and the logic of appropriateness, where agents choose with conscious reference to rules and norms. It is distinct from bureaucratic politics theory, where policy is the outcome of bargaining within government, with officials driven by organizational and personal interests.[14]

To say that habit drives U.S. grand strategy is to suggest that policymakers become unreflective and non-deliberative about the framework within which decisions are made. The process is not automatic, but prior beliefs about the United States' place in the international order mostly set the agenda and impose tight parameters within which bureaucratic politics play out. Habituated decisionmakers are insufficiently stimulated by changing conditions. They deliberate mostly within the boundaries of traditional rationales. A "common sense" mediates between the environment and decisionmakers, turning what were once calculated choices into axiomatic ones.[15] Winston Churchill, for instance, invoked Britain's "unconscious tradition" of supporting weaker states "to oppose the strongest, most aggressive" powers in continental Europe.[16]

The process of habituation manifests itself negatively and positively. Nega-

14. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); and Morton H. Halperin with Priscilla Clapp and Arnold Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1994).
15. Ernest R. May, "The Nature of Foreign Policy: The Calculated versus the Axiomatic," *Daedelus*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Fall 1962), pp. 653–667, at pp. 666–667.
16. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1948), p. 162.

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tively, it takes the form of self-censorship, with senior policymakers sidestepping reevaluation of first-order questions. Scrutiny will be absent even where one should most expect it, within authoritative institutions charged with examining choices. Policy discussion will mostly be conducted through an operational mind-set, confined to issues of implementation. Positively, habit functions as a conformist pressure visibly applied to officials who question assumptions. When officials question basic assumptions, gatekeepers with privileged access, expert status, and agenda-setting power will discipline discussion.

Where does the habit of primacy come from? In the final years of World War II, the United States rapidly became the most powerful nation on Earth.[17] With other major powers exhausted by war, it experienced unprecedented industrial expansion. Its gross domestic product doubled. It enjoyed the world's highest per capita productivity. It dominated the world's gold reserves and became the largest creditor and exporter. The dollar was the reserve currency. It had a monopoly on atomic weapons. Its long-range bombers, carrier task forces, and bases gave it unrivaled reach. There was worldwide demand for its loans, arms, and patronage. The United States recognized, as any state would, its vastly increased power position.

This growth in relative power enabled the United States to enlarge its ambitions and reorder the international system. Its rise amid the dangers of conflict generated demand for security experts. America at war became a national security state, organizing intensively to mobilize and project power. The global disorder of the 1930s and 1940s had already prompted an intellectual rediscovery of strategy, with security experts urging the United States to realize its latent strength and flex its geopolitical muscles.[18] Experts then urged Washington to translate victory into hegemony, under a Washington-designed world order,[19] assuming that the United States would "succeed Britain as the military and economic guarantor and moral leader of the world."[20] This Washington did in concrete form, placing large parts of the globe under U.S. military commands, reshaping the global economy through U.S.-designed institutions, and creating a security bureaucracy.

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17. See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 357–360.
18. See David Ekbladh, "Present at the Creation: Edward Mead Earle and the Depression-Era Origins of Security Studies," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 107–141, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00067.
19. Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 193–220.
20. Godfrey Hodgson, *The Colonel: The Life and Wars of Henry Stimson, 1867–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 386.

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Out of this process emerged a cohesive U.S. foreign policy elite. This elite advanced major policies, from the postwar revival of Western Europe's economies and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the creation of a National Economic Council. The establishment was demoralized by the Vietnam War and economic malaise in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but rebuilt itself on the back of Ronald Reagan's presidency.[21] It often gets its way. As research demonstrates, "the gravitational pull" on foreign policy decisions by the foreign policy establishment tends to be "stronger than the attraction of public opinion."[22]

The foreign policy establishment is not monolithic. Its members dispute issues below the grand strategic level, such as human rights, the extent of multilateral cooperation, democracy promotion, and specific interventions. Until the 1960s, it was mostly a patrician, predominantly white, Protestant class that internalized values nurtured "in prep schools, at college clubs, in the boardrooms of Wall Street, and at dinner parties."[23] It then incorporated nonwhites, women, first-generation immigrants, Jews, and Roman Catholics, to form a more heterogeneous class of coastal internationalists, oriented around the Ivy League. Still, this cross-section of internationalist elites is united by a consensus. They want the United States to remain engaged in upholding world order. They are primacists. They fear U.S. retreat from overseas responsibilities and warn that abandonment would lead to the return of rival power blocs, economic stagnation, and catastrophe. They have established primacy as the only viable, legitimate grand strategy, and as an ingrained set of ideas, while installing themselves as insiders, positioned to steer the state.

The Blob reproduces its ideology through four causal mechanisms. First, security elites accumulate knowledge about how grand strategy succeeds and form mental shortcuts that they repeat and internalize. Second, they socialize personnel into their worldview, educating and selecting individuals who conform, excluding or penalizing those who do not, and linking conformity to an axiomatic worldview with insider status; they also dominate the pool of experienced talent that makes up officialdom. They have privileged access to power via an institutional revolving door, a set of social networks, and institutions—the locations where grand strategic ideas intervene at the unit

21. Carl Gershman, "The Rise and Fall of the New Foreign-Policy Establishment," *Commentary*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (1980), pp. 13–24; and James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 110.
22. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page, "Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (February 2005), pp. 107–123, at p. 121, doi:10.1017/S000305540505152X.
23. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 25.

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level, between appointments in government through to foundations, think tanks, universities, and bodies from the Council on Foreign Relations to the Trilateral Commission.[24] New presidential administrations will often retain career security officials for the sake of continuity. As the cohorts of qualified officialdom are socialized into orthodoxy, even presidents who wish to institute change will be drawn to select from that pool. The Blob has close ties to corporate networks. Fifteen of Clinton's key policymakers, according to one study, had a total of forty-one corporate affiliations, breeding an instinctive sympathy toward the penetration of transnational capital,[25] which was reflected in Clinton's goal of "open and equal U.S. access to foreign markets."[26] Third, the Blob dominates public discourse and sets its agenda, through privileged access to the commentariat, of which it forms a part. Presidential candidates routinely approach establishment figures at think tanks to formulate their foreign policy manifestos. They define the terms of debate, delegitimizing alternative strategies as alien and foolish. They present alternatives to primacy, involving retrenchment or the avoidance of war, in binary terms as retreat or isolationism. Fourth, they exert influence via a transnational pathway, supplying allies with ideas that those allies repeat, creating a feedback loop.

The Blob itself is candid about its privileged access to state power. For Richard Haass, former director of the Policy Planning Staff, think tanks constitute an "informal shadow foreign affairs establishment." As Haass once observed, "Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell's predecessor as Secretary of State, once headed the Center for National Policy. Her former deputy, Strobe Talbott, is now president of the Brookings Institution—where I previously served as vice-president and director of foreign policy studies. . . . I've alternated stints at the National Security Council, the Defense and State Departments, and on Capitol Hill with time at Brookings, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Carnegie Endowment."[27]

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24. Priscilla Roberts, "'All the Right People': The Historiography of the American Foreign Policy Establishment," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (December 1992), pp. 409–434, doi:10.1017/S0021875800031145; and Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the Twentieth Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 1–65, 221–256.
25. Bastian Van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, "Corporate Elite Networks and U.S. Post–Cold War Grand Strategy from Clinton to Obama," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2014), pp. 29–55, especially pp. 34, 44–45, doi:10.1177/1354066111433895.
26. White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington D.C.: White House, July 1994), p. 5.
27. Richard N. Haass, "Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy: A Policy-Maker's Perspective" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, November 1, 2002), https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/p/rem/15506.htm.

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Self-identified members of the Blob acknowledge the conformist pressures that this policy environment creates. Leslie Gelb confessed he supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003 out of the "disposition and incentives to support wars to retain political and professional credibility."[28] Derek Chollet observes an "ecosystem" that incentivizes support for activism and delegitimizes arguments for restraint.[29] Michael Mandelbaum notes that the establishment defines the policy "ballpark," setting boundaries for "what may be legitimately proposed and carried out."[30] Contrary to theories that the marketplace of ideas ensures rigorous weighing of choices, the suggestions of those outside the security establishment rarely penetrate foreign policy decisionmaking.[31]

If habit often shapes grand strategy by inhibiting actors from revising it, how do grand strategies change? Alteration happens normally through an interaction of two variables: rapidly changing external conditions sufficiently shocking to disconfirm the assumptions of the status quo, and determined agents of change willing to incur domestic costs to drive it. A good example is Great Britain's postwar abandonment of empire. External conditions had turned against the maintenance of colonies, through the cumulative fiscal pressures of World War II; a growing decolonization resistance; the United States' dismantling of the economic order of imperial preference and the sterling bloc; and the shock of the Suez crisis of 1956, which revealed Britain's vulnerability to U.S. coercion. Domestically, successive governments redefined Britain's status around alliances and nuclear weapons, presenting retreat from empire as a graceful management of change and casting the emergence of independent countries as "the crowning achievement of British rule."[32]

Short of external circumstances quite so overwhelming as those confronting postwar Britain, grand strategic change remains possible but difficult. For the United States, the major interruption to its traditional strategy was the Richard Nixon administration.[33] When Nixon became president, multiple pressures—including the Vietnam War, the oil embargo imposed by the Organization of

28. Leslie H. Gelb with Jeanne-Paloma Zelmati, "Mission Not Accomplished," *Democracy*, Summer 2009, pp. 1–24, at p. 24.
29. Derek Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), pp. xii, xviii.
30. Michael Mandelbaum, *The Frugal Superpower: America's Global Leadership in a Cash-Strapped Era* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), p. 32.
31. See Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 5–48, especially p. 5, doi:10.1162/0162288041762940.
32. John Darwin, "British Decolonisation since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1984), pp. 187–209, at p. 188, doi:10.1080/03086538408582666.
33. On this case, see Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 85–86.

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Petroleum Exporting Countries, inflation, an imbalance of payments, and racial conflict at home—were eroding the United States' international supremacy. Nixon was determined to shift Washington toward accepting stable multipolarity, particularly through his opening to China and his treatment of the Soviet Union as a permanent partner in a post-hegemonic world order, downplaying and at times abandoning nuclear counterproliferation as a priority, and pursuing hard-line realpolitik.[34] To achieve this objective, Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, issued public explanations to legitimize their shift. They also made policy secretly and obstructed oversight, by turns excluding, deflecting, or dominating the national security bureaucracy, State Department, and Congress, to concentrate power among a small coterie of presidential advisers. This project attracted strong opposition. By the time of President Gerald Ford, it had unraveled.

Grand strategic change is therefore rare. Hardwired beliefs are resistant to change.[35] Major powers can retrench in order to adjust to adversity, but they often fall prey to adjustment failure and overreach.[36] People revise habits only when contradictory information is received dramatically and in large batches, making them realize they cannot assimilate those shocks into their worldview. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 is an example of a shocking event discrediting established orthodoxy. U.S. primacy, and the confidence that the United States possesses vast latent power, is especially resilient to shocks. The country's relative strength is almost unparalleled in history and enables a story hard to falsify. It predisposes policymakers to interpret disasters—such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—as caused by an insufficiency of U.S. dominance and as evidence of the need for more. The "Bush Doctrine," triggered by those attacks, unapologetically reasserted primacy and revived U.S. traditions of preventive war.[37] Washington keeps its core commitments even in the wake of setbacks.

Based on the deductive argument I have set out, I offer a prediction about U.S. grand strategy since the United States became the world's sole superpower. There will be an essential continuity in the decades after the Cold War. The four parts of that grand strategy—preponderance, reassurance, integra-

34. Dan Caldwell, "The Legitimation of the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design and Grand Strategy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (September 2009), pp. 633–652, especially pp. 634–642, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00801.
35. Robert Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (October 2006), pp. 641–663, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00527.
36. Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 3–4, 33–105.
37. See John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 37.

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tion, and nuclear inhibition—will persist despite shifts between presidencies, a changing political balance in Congress, economic change and demands for reallocation of resources, a more benign threat environment, and a public increasingly averse to the costs of primacy. With the Soviet Union gone as the last major check on its power, the United States will look to realize its long-held goal of unrivaled dominance. No fundamental review of its grand strategy will occur, despite incentives and opportunities for revision. The policy process within the executive branch, the branch that directs U.S. statecraft, commands military forces, and makes treaties, will be disciplined by gatekeepers, and public grand-strategic debate will hardly intrude. An operational mind-set, or the "how" and "when," will overshadow "whether." Allies of the United States will encourage and reinforce the reigning ideology.

President Bill Clinton: Primacy and the Peace Dividend

In this section, I demonstrate that the interaction of power and habit explains President Bill Clinton's pursuit of primacy in its essentials.[38] In the unipolar moment between the end of the Cold War and the September 11 attacks, the material dominance of the United States and the absence of external rivals gave it wide room for maneuver. The Soviet Union's sudden collapse attracted calls for a relaxation of foreign commitments and investment at home. Clinton himself was oriented toward domestic politics. These conditions make Clinton an unlikely "hard case" for my argument.[39] Even though there was good reason to expect change and a revision of U.S. strategy, Clinton did not shift the United States from primacy.

PRIMACY: WHAT CLINTON INHERITED

When Clinton took office in January 1993, he inherited a grand strategy committed to primacy. The strategy's rationale is that the United States' way of life, its republican and capitalist institutions, depends on a hospitable international environment.[40] To ensure this, the United States actively prevents the world returning to competitive multipolarity. In particular, it seeks to forestall the emergence of a hostile power seizing control of Eurasia's resources. Without

38. For the history, see James D. Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy in a Post–Cold War World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); and James Goldgeier and Derek Chollet, *America between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008).
39. See Harry Eckstein, "Case Studies and Theory in Political Science," in Fred Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 7: *Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading, Pa.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 79–137.
40. For the rationale, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 30–57.

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benign U.S. stewardship overseas, decisionmakers fear, militarized threats or hostile trading blocs would form. Such an outcome would raise risks of evicting the United States from the major power centers of Western Europe, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf, turning the country into an encircled, unfree garrison state. The strategy's intellectual origins lie in President Woodrow Wilson's rationale for the United States' entry into World War I and Secretary of State John Hay's "Open Door Notes" of 1899–1902.[41]

As noted previously, the strategy of primacy has four elements: preponderance, reassurance, integration, and nuclear inhibition. Through preponderance, the United States strives to be overwhelmingly strong, maintaining a preeminent military power position well beyond what it minimally needs to defend or deter threats, to be dominant in key regions beyond the Western Hemisphere. Through reassurance, it acts as security provider and guarantor, to secure the commons to preserve stability, enable economic growth, and contain its allies, dissuading them from pursuing self-reliance and thereby becoming rivals. Through integration on the United States' terms, it creates conditions optimal for the penetration of U.S. capital. It seeks to give potential competitors an equity stake in its brand of market capitalism by tying them into U.S.-friendly institutions and markets, associated with the remnants of the Bretton Woods framework and the Washington Consensus, while retaining U.S. economic privileges. The U.S. commitment to free trade and recourse to protectionism has always fluctuated, but it has consistently sought to prize open markets and ensure investment opportunities and access to raw materials, a pursuit of openness on American terms. Through nuclear inhibition, it prevents or slows the spread of nuclear weapons, which would constrain its freedom of action.

Primacy demands a high level of activity. It relies on a global military presence to maintain a power position.[42] It predisposes the United States toward frequent uses of force to maintain order. It also is intended to be permanent. The containment of the Soviet Union was the most pressing Cold War concern, but primacy was always oriented toward the longer-term international system as a whole, looking to an enduring *Pax Americana*. As the signature Cold War strategic document NSC 68 pronounced, "It is not an adequate objective merely to seek to check the Kremlin design, for the absence of order among

41. Michael C. Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 7–43, at p. 17, doi:10.1162/isec.2008.32.3.7.
42. Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 5–46, especially pp. 8–9, doi:10.1162/016228803322427965.

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nations is becoming less and less tolerable," requiring "world leadership."[43] Because they seek the permanent pacification of whole regions, the strategy of primacy and the United States' forward-leaning presence endured after specific threats dissipated. The United States remained in Europe despite NATO's ability to impose costs on Soviet expansionism by the early 1960s, and in Asia after rapprochement ended competition with China in 1972. Incoming U.S. presidents typically claim that their statecraft represents a new approach to their predecessors', but the traditional strategy does not have to be named to be practiced. Only rarely has Washington departed from primacy's core assumptions.

CONTINUITY UNDER CLINTON

Clinton's major choices conformed with the strategy of primacy. At a juncture where the United States could have chosen alternative paths, it garrisoned Western Europe and Northeast Asia with approximately 200,000 troops and held a forward military presence in the Persian Gulf to ensure both a favorable balance of power and the stability of the oil market.[44] Formal alliances endured and expanded. The United States remained busy. It signed more than 300 bilateral trade agreements. Clinton deployed force more frequently than most presidents since Harry Truman, consistently for the stated purpose of upholding economic and political openness.[45] In one two-week period in 1996, the United States inserted troops into Bosnia, prepared for a possible Iraqi attack on Kuwait, mediated between Greece and Turkey, and responded to China's intimidation of Taiwan.[46] Clinton claimed to shift strategy from containment to enlargement, and to refocus on geoeconomics and democracy promotion, with initiatives such as the North American Free Trade Agreement.[47] Objectively, these were second-order adjustments, consistent with the strategy of primacy, that did not disturb the four fundamentals.

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43. "A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," April 14, 1950, box 180, National Security Council (NSC) Meetings File, President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers, part 4, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf.
44. As Anthony Lake explained in Lake, "Confronting Backlash States," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March/April 1994), pp. 45–55, at pp. 47–48.
45. See the dataset in Ann Rivlin, "The Diversionary Theory of Foreign Policy?" Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2008, p. 65, table: "Uses of Force by President."
46. Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 49–88, at pp. 87–88, doi:10.1162/isec.21.4.49.
47. PDD-29—Security Policy Coordination, September 16, 1994, Office of Records Management—Presidential Decision Directives, *Clinton Digital Library* (CDL), William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Little Rock, Arkansas, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12752.

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Clinton's era ought to have been ripe for a review of primacy. Whereas his predecessor, President George H.W. Bush, straddled the Cold War and post–Cold War eras, Clinton was the first president of the post–Cold War era. He presided during a benign period. There was domestic appetite for a so-called peace dividend. Clinton appealed parochially to the mechanics of domestic policy: "It's the economy, stupid," was the catch-cry during the 1992 presidential campaign.[48] There were alternative strategies on offer in public debate. These included the continuation of primacy; selective engagement; offshore balancing (a pullback to shift burdens and act as balancer of last resort); neo-isolationism; and a return to normality, focusing narrowly on the material balance of power.[49]

Despite these conditions and the availability of alternative strategies, the Clinton presidency was notable for the absence of fundamental reevaluation. Clinton arrived in office unprepared, without a coherent strategic vision, as insider accounts agree.[50] He dismissed grand strategy as "imposed after the fact by scholars, memoirists, and the chattering classes," and Secretary of State Warren Christopher advised against pursuing an overarching doctrine after Cold War containment.[51] Clinton rarely attended meetings of the NSC. Officials had to lobby him even to spend time on diplomatic issues.[52] There was no review of whether the United States should shift from primacy to a new strategy based on retrenchment and a new modus vivendi with other major states. Nor was there a review of whether it should abandon preponderance, alliances, the Open Door policy, or nuclear inhibition. Amid interagency wrangling and the shocks of ill-fated interventions in Somalia and Haiti that delayed Clinton's first codified National Security Strategy of June 1994, there

48. His first State of the Union address devoted little space to foreign policy. See William J. Clinton, "Address before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals," February 17, 1993, in John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, eds., *American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=47232.

49. See Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (January/February 1990), pp. 23–33; Jeane Kirkpatrick, "A Normal Country in a Normal Time," *National Interest*, No. 21 (1990), pp. 40–45; William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (July/August 1996), pp. 18–32; Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 5–53, doi:10.1162/isec.21.3.5; and Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, "Come Home America."

50. See James Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy*, p. 42 nn. 9 and 10, based on interviews with former National Security Adviser to the Vice President Leon Furth and former Special Assistant to the President and the National Security Council Morton Halperin.

51. Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 133.

52. Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Keeping Foreign Policy on a Back Burner," *New York Times*, February 8, 1993; and Richard Reeves, "Why Clinton Wishes He Were JFK," *Washington Monthly*, Vol. 27, No. 9 (1995), pp. 16–20, at p. 19.

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was little internal debate over alternatives to primacy. Retrenchment-based alternatives floated in public were known but quickly dismissed.[53]

Clinton came to power in a slipstream. He inherited from the Bush administration a doctrine that the military's purpose went beyond defense and deterrence, to ensuring globe-girdling preponderance. As Bush directed in his 1989 review, the issue was how—not whether—the United States should maintain existing strategy: "I do not expect this review to invent a new defense strategy for a new world. On the contrary, I believe our fundamental purposes are enduring and that . . . our Alliances, our military capabilities, remain sound."[54] Bush retained a strategy of primacy in which the United States should sustain military supremacy and global reach to outmatch any combination of rivals concurrently, to dissuade adversaries from competing, to contain allies, and to underpin economic openness. The Bush administration's "Base Force" structure was geared to limit military reductions in order to maintain a forward presence, counter regional adversaries, and reconstitute against emerging threats.[55]

Under Clinton, the first general review of U.S. statecraft took place only in August 1993, in response to criticisms of the White House's reactive diplomacy, and was geared toward finding a unifying "bumper sticker" concept.[56] The National Security Strategy was organized around the headline speeches of National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Secretary of State Christopher in the autumn of 1993. Their guiding concepts, Christopher's "engagement" and Lake's "democratic enlargement," both took as an assumed premise all four component parts of traditional U.S. strategy. Christopher's version assumed that the United States "must maintain its military strength," "stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," and "knock down barriers to global trade."[57] Lake's premise was that "America's power, authority, and example provide unparalleled opportunities to lead," that its security rested on the rise

53. Author telephone interview with Peter Feaver (director for defense policy and arms control, 1993–94), February 19, 2017.
54. President George H.W. Bush, *National Security Review No. 12* (Washington, D.C.: White House, March 3, 1989), p. 2.
55. White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: White House, 1991), pp. 27–31; and Dick Cheney, *Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, January, 1993), pp. 14–16. See also Alexandra Homolar, "How to Last Alone at the Top: U.S. Strategic Planning for the Unipolar Era," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2011), pp. 189–217, at p. 194, doi:10.1080/01402390.2011.559024.
56. See Douglas Brinkley's account, based on interviews with NSC members Jeremy Rosner and Leon Fuerth, in Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine," *Foreign Policy*, No. 106 (Spring 1997), pp. 111–127, at p. 114. See also interviews with Lake and Boorstin in Goldgeier and Chollet, *America between the Wars*, pp. 67, 71.
57. Warren Christopher, "Building Peace in the Middle East," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, September 27, 1993, p. 654.

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of market democracy abroad.[58] There is no evidence of a more fundamental revision process beyond consideration of how best to implement primacy.

Critics of the Clinton administration, such as diplomatic historian John Lewis Gaddis, accused it of operating on "autopilot."[59] A system on autopilot, though, carries a preprogrammed code. Precisely because Clinton was reluctant to reevaluate the default settings of U.S. behavior, the status quo endured. Circumstances then forced consequential choices that exposed foundational assumptions. Two major decisions had to be made: the first was over the size of the defense budget, which raised the issue of military preponderance; the second concerned NATO enlargement, which restaged the question of alliances. Each decision point carried first-order questions. Should the United States remain preponderant? Should it remain a European power?

The size and disposition of defense budgets reflect grand strategy. How much is enough? What is the military for? In 1993, the coming of relatively benign conditions might have prompted revision and retrenchment. With the Soviet Union gone, the United States was the most secure superpower in history, with a large nuclear arsenal, unmatched conventional forces, well-shielded ocean moats, and the world's largest economy. Clinton could have reallocated resources by lowering defense spending, shifting burdens to allies, or reducing foreign commitments in some combination. During the 1992 presidential campaign, candidate Clinton had hinted at new possibilities, promising to limit the United States' role to "tip the balance."[60] Clinton, like Bush, distanced himself from the starkly worded 1992 "Defense Planning Guidance" document, a leaked document that envisaged the United States generating overwhelming military superiority to prevent the reemergence of rivals.[61] His first secretary of defense, Les Aspin, led a reformist "bottom-up review."[62] There were also alternatives to primacy on offer in the public domain. The Center of Defense Information, for instance, proposed a minimal force structure to reduce spending by more than half, designed to defend and deter but not to support preponderance or supply extended deterrence.[63]

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58. Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch,* Vol. 4, No. 39 (September 27, 1993), pp. 658–664, at p. 659.
59. John Lewis Gaddis, "Foreign Policy by Autopilot," *Hoover Digest*, July 30, 2000, https://www.hoover.org/research/foreign-policy-autopilot.
60. Douglas Jehl, "Clinton Assails Bush over 'Erratic' Foreign Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1992.
61. Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop," *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.
62. Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, October, 1993), www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA359953.
63. Barry R. Posen, "Defending America: CDI Options for Military Spending," *Defense Monitor*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1992), p. 4.

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Figure 1. U.S. Military Spending

SOURCE: Dinah Walker, "Trends in U.S. Military Spending" (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2014), p. 2. Copyright (2014) Council on Foreign Relations. Reprinted with permission.

Clinton oversaw some military retrenchment, making initial cuts of 25 percent. The percentage share of gross domestic product devoted to defense expenditure fell from 4.3 percent of gross domestic product in 1993 to 3.1 percent by 1999.[64] Two factors, however, prevented these reductions from disturbing the foundations of primacy. First, other states also reduced military spending. The United States remained relatively ahead, to the extent that it sustained a share of global military expenditure mostly above what it had been in the final years of the Cold War, varying above a baseline of 34 percent (see figure 1). At the start of Clinton's presidency, the United States' share of world defense expenditure was 36.2 percent, exceeding the combined spending of France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom.[65] By 2000, the end of his second term, it was 34 percent, still exceeding the combined spending of all these major industrialized powers.[66] Spending levels stayed at approximately 80 percent of the average Cold War year. This stability is significant, since by 1997, military spending by Russia, the United States' major potential peer competitor, had fallen to one-tenth of the Soviet Union's estimated military expenditure of 1988.[67] Second, U.S. gross domestic product grew from $6.6 tril-

64. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2000–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 297, table 38.
65. Calculated from IISS, *The Military Balance 1995–96* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 264–269.
66. "World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1999–2000" (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Verification and Compliance, U.S. Department of State, June 2002), p. 4.
67. See Federation of American Scientists, "Russian Military Budget" (Washington, D.C.: Federa-

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lion to $9.8 trillion from 1993 to 2000, enabling the United States to sustain preponderant levels of military spending even though it marked a smaller share of national wealth.[68]

Despite Aspin's claim that the United States was departing from its strategy of containment,[69] the Clinton administration's commitments to restructure the military were diluted into a modified version of the Base Force blueprint of the George H.W. Bush administration. Clinton's bottom-up review left untouched major questions, such as burden shifting onto allies and the merits of major retrenchment.[70]

Clinton also adopted the traditional rationale for maintaining preponderance, working from the assumption that the United States should be insuperable and have global reach, beyond what it needed to defend and deter. Clinton maintained the "two-war standard," the assumption that a vital measure of U.S. preponderance was its ability to prevail in two major, concurrent regional contingencies, and deter or counter two regional aggressors in distant theaters at the same time. This he inherited from the George H.W. Bush administration. The exact size of this standard has fluctuated, from "two and a half" under President John Kennedy, to "one and a half" during the 1970s.[71] Nevertheless, the principle persisted that for the United States to have enough capability to underpin its primacy, it must be capable of winning simultaneous conflicts.

The continued rationale for U.S. primacy is also evident in the Department of Defense's first Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), released in May 1997.[72] The Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996 directed the Defense Department to incorporate existing assumptions about the United States' forward-deployed defense posture.[73] The QDR process did not reassess the United States' alliances, its military force structure, its forward-deployed prepositioning, its state of readiness, the two-war standard, or its underlying logic that the United States should be able to intervene anywhere in the world on short no-

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tion of American Scientists, December 7, 2000), https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mobudget.htm.

68. IISS, *The Military Balance 2000–2001*, pp. 18–19.

69. Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, p. 1.

70. Eliot Cohen, "Beyond Bottom Up," *National Review*, November 15, 1993, pp. 40–43; and Lawrence J. Korb, "Shock Therapy for the Pentagon," *New York Times*, February 15, 1994.

71. Richard K. Betts, *U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks* (Princeton, N.J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 2005), pp. 17–18.

72. U.S. Department of Defense, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 1997); and David Isenberg, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Reiterating the Tired Status Quo* (Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, September 17, 1998), pp. 13, 15–16, 19.

73. *Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996*, Public Law 104-201, div. A, title IX, subtitle B (Sec. 921-26), September 23, 1996, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 110 (1996), pp. 2623–2628.

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tice. It attracted debate only about the balance between technology and the size of forces, as well as the types of adversaries that should be prioritized. As a senior U.S. defense official explained, "We haven't changed much because much wasn't needed."[74] The QDR recapitulated the United States' role "as the security partner of choice," and "leader of the international community," based on the continued pursuit of deterrence, reassurance, and traditional alliances. Abandoning primacy would tempt adversaries to pounce and cause "allies and friends to adopt more divergent defense policies and postures."[75] Therefore Clinton maintained the traditional logic of primacy, providing security to limit the need of others to secure themselves, and thus to avert spirals of mutual alarm.

As well as deciding to maintain U.S. militarily preponderance, the Clinton administration in 1993 was confronted with a second issue of grand strategic magnitude. Should the United States remain a European hegemon, the security provider in one of the world's power centers? And what to do with NATO, its Atlantic alliance system?[76] Clinton inherited a commitment to continental Europe from the George H.W. Bush administration and a movement toward NATO enlargement, an issue that by October 1990 was under discussion.[77] As Bush officials affirmed, NATO "must" be the vehicle for the United States' role as a continental stabilizer within Europe.[78] The Clinton administration enlarged NATO, in January 1994, announcing that it would include three former Soviet satellite states: the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. NATO enlargement marked the most significant expansion of transatlantic security commitments in Europe for decades, extending eastward the U.S. nuclear umbrella and the Article 5 guarantee to new NATO members that were once in the Soviet orbit. Clinton would go to war in the Balkans in the name of preserving NATO's credibility.[79]

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74. Bradley Graham, "Pentagon's Plan for Future Draws Heavily from Cold War Past," *Washington Post*, May 11, 1997.
75. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 1997), p. 12.
76. See James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); and Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
77. See Mary Elise Sarotte, "Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to 'Bribe the Soviets Out' and Move NATO In," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 110–137, at p. 115, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00005; and Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 7–44, at pp. 38–39, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00236.
78. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 169–170; and George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 230–231.
79. "U.S. and NATO Objectives and Interests in Kosovo" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of

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NATO enlargement, on one level, represented a significant change to the shape and extent of the alliance, but advocates of enlargement justified it as the continuation of a wise traditional security commitment. Above all, enlargement was an alteration within the grand strategy of primacy, to adapt primacy to a post-containment era. The NATO issue divided the Blob. Some opposed enlargement, urging Clinton to resist the appeals of aspiring members and keep the United States' distance from Russia. Others supported expansion, to ensure a favorable imbalance of power. Both sides united around a simple assumption: given that Europe was a potentially dangerous vacuum, the United States should continue to maintain a geopolitical footprint there, to preserve an "essential" national security interest.[80]

How the Blob Prevented Change

In the Clinton era, the foreign policy establishment and the assumptions it perpetuated played a decisive role in ensuring the continuation of U.S. grand strategy. Policy gatekeepers were a source of continuity. One establishment gatekeeper who straddled the Bush and Clinton administrations, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, had strengthened the consensus behind preponderance. Powell drew authority from his intimacy with Washington, having served as Reagan's national security adviser, his prestige from the 1990–91 Gulf War, and the office of Chair that entitled him to advise the secretary of defense on his own initiative. While Soviet communism collapsed, Powell agitated against sizable reductions in defense spending, arguing that defense planning should be premised not on specific known or potential threats, but on the preservation of the United States' capability to exercise its international responsibilities.[81] Powell's "National Military Strategy" of January 1992 interpreted the new security environment as the basis only for a revision of "means," to ensure the United States' capacity to pursue fixed "ends" in a new environment, to protect liberal order and the open economic system, to act as a "stabilizing force" and security provider. According to Powell, the alternative to this strategy was "isolation."[82] Powell developed the

State, March 26, 1999), http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/regions/eur/fs_990326_ksvobjectives 80tml.

80. Richard Holbrooke, "America, a European Power," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (March/April 1995), pp. 38–51, at p. 38.

81. Colin L. Powell, "National Security Challenges in the 1990's," speech at the Army War College, May 16, 1989, *Army* (July 1989), pp. 12–14; and Colin L. Powell, "A View to 1994: The Base Force" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, May 12, 1990).

82. *National Military Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, January, 1992), pp. 2, 27.

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"two-war strategy," which presumed a hegemonic role with "world responsibilities" and a permanent, global military presence, with "the capability to move huge stores to unpredictable trouble spots around the world." Powell's lobbying ensured that the Base Force was the "lineal ancestor" of Clinton's force.[83] Anthony Lake, another establishment gatekeeper, steered Clinton to confine the "peace dividend" to levels that did not disturb preponderance, to oppose the use of the defense budget as a "piggy bank for domestic programs,"[84] and to maintain a "strong defense posture" that would generate broad bipartisan appeal.[85] Lake pressed Clinton to frame the issue in binary terms, as a choice between internationalism and isolationism.[86] Clinton did so. He employed traditional analogies to define the United States' world role.[87] Like his predecessors, Clinton used the historical Munich analogy to justify military interventions.[88] He invoked Truman's example of internationalism and the lessons of two world wars—namely, the wisdom of engagement over isolation.[89]

An indication of the strength of consensus within the foreign policy establishment is how the few attempts to amend existing strategy failed. In the debate over defense budgets and military preponderance, Secretary of Defense Aspin proposed in June 1993 an alternative to the two-war standard, a more frugal model of "win-hold-win," waging all-out war in one theater while holding the line in a second, then redeploying forces while allies held on.[90] Former government officials such as former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Dov Zakheim, traditionalist commentators such as John Correll, unnamed service

83. Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *A Soldier's Way: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 444, 451, 579.
84. Memorandum, Anthony Lake to Governor Clinton, October 1, 1991, folder 6, box 11, Anthony Lake Papers (ALP), Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, D.C.
85. Memorandum to Governor Clinton, August 22, 1992, folder 10, box 10, ALP, LOC.
86. Anthony Lake, "Enlargement: Purpose and Practice," remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations, December 14, 1993, Speechwriting Office—Edward Widmer, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/11514; "The Need for Engagement," *State Department Dispatch*, December 5, 1994, p. 804; and "Foreign Policy Talking Points," January 18, 1996, folder 4, box 51, ALP, LOC.
87. J.A. Edwards, "Staying the Course as World Leader: Bill Clinton and the Use of Historical Analogies," *White House Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007), pp. 53–71, at pp. 56–57.
88. "Remarks by President Bill Clinton to AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) Conference," Federal News Service, March 23, 1999.
89. "Remarks to the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom Policy Conference," March 1, 1995, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (PPPUS), *William J. Clinton, 1995*, book 1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1996), pp. 283–289, at p. 285.
90. Les Aspin, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrative Options," white paper (Washington D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, February 25, 1992), pp. 2–3; Michael R. Gordon, "Cuts Force Review of War Strategies," *New York Times*, May 30, 1993; and Barton Gellman and John Lancaster, "U.S. May Drop 2-War Capability," *Washington Post*, June 17, 1993.

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chiefs, and senior military planners publicly portrayed the model as defeatist, as "win-hold-oops," and as damaging to U.S. credibility with allies.[91] South Korea's government objected to being the "hold" amid a military stalemate.[92] Under these pressures, Aspin's alternative "never stood a real chance bureaucratically or politically."[93] Aspin repudiated the "win-hold-win" model twenty-six days after proposing it, falling back on the "win-win" model.

Elliott Negin's study of defense reportage in leading news organizations demonstrates how public media "locked in" elite orthodoxy.[94] A survey of 200 articles from 1994 to 1996 shows that mainstream media coverage in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* reflected and reinforced the reigning ideology and marginalized critics inside and outside government who called for a reassessment of Pentagon strategy. In 1996, media outlets cited defense hawks and military officials three times more than "cutters." As Nagin notes, "Those who argued that the two-war scenario is unlikely, and that the threat of rogue states is overstated, and that Congress can significantly reduce the defense budget and still maintain U.S. superiority, received little attention."[95] There was little coverage of the wider context that defense budgets were still at least 80 percent of the Cold War norm of $270 billion—nearly four times larger than that of the next biggest spender, Russia, and eighteen times the combined spending of the seven countries identified by the Pentagon as most likely adversaries.

The strength of the consensus, and the difficulty of even hinting at revision, was also revealed in a rare moment of dissent, known as the "Tarnoff affair." In off-the-record remarks about intervention in Bosnia, Undersecretary of State for Policy Peter Tarnoff observed that financial constraints and domestic priorities dictated that there were limits on the United States' "leverage" and capacity for intervention, that scarcity of resources created disinclination to use military force, requiring "genuine power-sharing," "in a way that has never been the case before."[96] These remarks, made on May 25, 1993, prompted jour-

91. Dov S. Zakheim, "A New Name for Winning: Losing," *New York Times*, June 19, 1993; and John T. Correll, "Two at a Time," *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 76, No. 9 (1993), http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1993/September%201993/0993edit.aspx.
92. Jim Mann, "New U.S. Military Strategy Worries Seoul," *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1993.
93. Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Defense Policy Choices for the Bush Administration, 2001–2005* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 75.
94. Elliott Negin, "News Media Coverage of the Defense Budget," in Leon V. Sigal, ed., *The Changing Dynamics of U.S. Defense Spending* (London: Praeger, 1999), pp. 107–135, especially pp. 107–109.
95. Ibid., p. 109.
96. Daniel Williams and John M. Goshko, "Reduced U.S. World Role Outlined but Soon Altered," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1993.

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nalists and critics to accuse Clinton of a retreat from world leadership and inertia.[97] Abroad, the British Broadcasting Corporation summarized the situation as an abdication of leadership, and Japanese coverage suggested that it threatened the disappearance of the United States' extended deterrence umbrella, leading conservative politicians in Tokyo to advocate building an indigenous nuclear arsenal.[98] The White House scrambled to dissociate itself from Tarnoff's remarks. Clinton's press secretary insisted that Tarnoff "clearly does not speak for the administration on the U.S. role in the post–Cold War world" and suggested his career was in jeopardy. Secretary of State Christopher frenetically contacted journalists to insist that the United States would "take the lead in place after place."[99] Christopher's aides considered firing Tarnoff.[100] In a speech three days later, Christopher referred to U.S. leadership twenty-three times, "to dispel any suggestion at home or abroad that the first Democratic Administration in a dozen years was sounding retreat."[101]

As a further indicator of the strength of consensus, even U.S. government organizations that were designed to test the assumptions behind policy took primacy as their unexamined premise. Orthodoxy captured the government institution that could have revised first principles, the Office of Net Assessment within the Pentagon. The Office focused predominantly on the military doctrinal-technical revolution, and on the future threat of China,[102] with the United States' "preeminent position" as its axiomatic starting point.[103] Likewise, in congressional hearings into force structure levels, the focus quickly settled on how, not whether, to pursue preponderance. Discussion centered on the United States' level of preparedness in a new threat environment, its capacity to intervene in the Persian Gulf or the Korean Peninsula to ensure

97. "The Clinton Foreign Policy, 1977–81, 1993–97," editorial, *Washington Times*, May 27, 1993; Martin Fletcher, "White House Denies U.S. Will Withdraw from Leadership Role," *New York Times*, May 27, 1993; Mark Matthews, "Clinton Foreign Policy Appears to Retreat from Decades of U.S. World Leadership," *Baltimore Sun*, May 27, 1993; and Terry Atlas, "White House: U.S. Not Abdicating Global Role," *Chicago Tribune*, May 27, 1993.
98. On coverage and the White House and State Department response, see Jim Anderson, "The Tarnoff Affair," *American Journalism Review*, March 1994, pp. 40–44.
99. Barry Schweid, "U.S. Won't Shirk Role as World's Leader, Christopher Says," *Indianapolis Star*, May 27, 1993.
100. Chollet and Goldgeier, *America between the Wars*, p. 65.
101. Warren Christopher, "U.S. Support for Russian Reform: An Investment in America's Security," address at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, May 27, 1993, in Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 39–40, 51–60.
102. Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry Watts, *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 194.
103. A.W. Marshall, "Some Thoughts on Military Revolutions," OSD/NA memorandum for the record, July 27, 1993, p. 3, cited in ibid., pp. 194–195.

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"global stability and security," and what constituted the appropriate "minimum" to achieve these goals.[104]

Strong habitual assumptions also informed the inquiry of the National Defense Panel, an independent group created in December 1996 by Congress to examine the QDR. Even this official body, with its mandate to review the United States' military posture, uncritically affirmed the assumption of U.S. preponderance. Its nine appointees consisted of defense "insiders," including two prominent Blob members (Richard Armitage and Andrew Krepinevich), former senior military officers, and Pentagon civilian officials (four of whom were senior executives at defense contract firms).[105] The report suggested only incremental changes.[106] It questioned the two-war standard, but on the basis that it was not global enough, advising that the United States should prepare for "regular deployments to far-flung areas of the globe, from open deserts to confining urban terrain." Its report presumed the standard account of U.S. security interests, emphasizing the need to ensure "global stability" through existing alliances and "the expansion of free market arrangements into all regions of the world."[107]

Clinton's advisers attempted to build legitimacy by seeking the counsel and approval of recognized foreign policy "influentials."[108] On the campaign trail, Clinton cultivated the advice of seasoned Democratic experts Madeleine Albright, Lee Hamilton, Martin Indyk, Dave McCurdy, Sam Nunn, and Stephen Solarz.[109] He consulted regularly with seven establishment advisers, including a corporate strategist, a former national security adviser, an investment banker, and a senior Washington lawyer.[110] Months after the Tarnoff affair, the president's national security speechwriter, Robert Boorstin, reported meeting with foreign policy experts, demanding they show that "we are not simply managing crises, but organizing the world."[111] Commentators urged

104. U.S. Senate, "Force Structure Levels in the Bottom-Up Review," in *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1995 and the Future Years Defense Program* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, March 9, 1994), pp. 695, 723, 724.
105. National Defense Panel, *Assessment of the May 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Panel, May 1997), http://archive.li/zt47o.
106. For a critique of its biases, see Isenberg, *The Quadrennial Defence Review*, pp. 4–5.
107. National Defense Panel, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Panel, December 1997), pp. 19–20.
108. Foreign Policy—Influentials, [August 1994], Speechwriting Office—Robert Boorstin, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/10120.
109. Martin Fletcher, "Foreign Capitals Braced for New White House Face," *Times* (London), October 14, 1992.
110. "A Who's Who of the Men Advising Clinton," *New York Times*, September 13, 1992.
111. "Thoughts for Your Breakfast Tomorrow," n.d. (mid-1993), FOIA 2006-0460-F—Robert (Bob) Boorstin, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14478.

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the administration to disavow retrenchment strategies.[112] With advice from the Blob, Clinton, in his second State of the Union address in January 1994, underscored the theme of U.S. leadership through benign preponderance, framed against its binary opposite of turning inward.[113] In June 1994, the NSC's deputy director of communications proposed a six-month "outreach" strategy to reengage "think tanks, foreign policy associations, media, and business groups."[114] In August 1994, Boorstin briefed Lake on the "need to convince the media/foreign policy elite to take a fresh look at the President's leadership and policies."[115] In early 1995, Boorstin proposed initiatives on nonproliferation and counterterrorism to strengthen the president's "stature," explaining, "The elites care. Introducing new initiatives . . . will stimulate elites."[116]

Regarding the United States' transatlantic commitment, the strength of elite opinion ensured that the question of whether NATO should persist hardly touched the policy process. NATO enlargement attracted little discussion within the president's circle. It was the subject of only one NSC Principals Committee meeting, and generated no official action memorandum. Clinton tilted toward favoring enlargement, though not through organized evaluation. Rather, his conversion was the result of an early galvanizing experience on April 21, 1993. He was moved by conversations with two European leaders, Václav Havel and Lech Walesa, after the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial Museum, when a Holocaust survivor compared the bloodshed in the Balkans

112. Concerned scholars and former diplomats warned that Clinton's fecklessness threatened "our values, our fortunes, and indeed our lives." See Commission on America's National Interests, *A Report from the Commission on America's National Interests* (Cambridge, Mass.: Commission on America's National Interests, July 1996), p. 1, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/americas_interests.pdf; and Joshua Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1996), p. 3.

113. The speech was informed by advice from Blob members Walter Russell Mead, Robert Reich, and Sherle Schwenninger. See Walter Russell Mead to President Clinton re: Foreign Policy and the State of the Union Address, December 30, 1993, FOIA 2008-0699-F—Carter Wilkie, Speechwriter, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14703; Secretary Robert B. Reich to President Clinton re: State of the Union, January 30, 1993, FOIA 2008-0699-F—Carter Wilkie, Speechwriter, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14703; and Sherle R. Schwenninger to President Clinton re: State of the Union, December 29, 1993, FOIA 2008-0699-F—Carter Wilkie, Speechwriter, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14703.

114. "Six-Month Public Affairs Strategy," memorandum, Tara Sonenshine and Tom Ross to Mark Gearan, June 10, 1994, FOIA 2006-0460-F—Robert (Bob) Boorstin, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14478.

115. Memorandum, Robert Boorstin to Anthony Lake re: POTUS Speeches September–December, August 15, 1994, FOIA 2006-0460-F—Robert (Bob) Boorstin, Previously Restricted Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/14478.

116. Memorandum, Robert Boorstin to Communications Group, February 17, 1995, Declassified Documents concerning Robert Boorstin, NSC Speechwriter, Declassified Documents Collection, CDL, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36629.

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to 1930s Europe.[117] Both leaders, with their moral authority, lobbied Clinton to support their states' admission to NATO, with Havel "urging the American leader to move the Atlantic community of shared values and common defense eastward to include the new democracies of Central Europe. . . . President Lech Walesa of Poland delivered a similar message."[118] Clinton told Lake that he was impressed with their vehemence, and supported enlargement from that moment.[119] Clinton was open to these appeals, because they fitted with the drive to expand market democracy and modernize alliances.

The administration disregarded warnings that enlargement would commit the United States to defend weak and vulnerable protectorates, and that it might have the unintended consequence of stoking Russian hostility through the perceived threat of humiliation or encirclement, a consideration Clinton blithely dismissed as "a silly argument."[120] Enlarging NATO in Europe fitted a preferred storyline. An aide reported, "The idea that Reagan brought down the Berlin Wall, Bush unified Germany, and Clinton will unite Europe sounded good at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue."[121] Alternative storylines, of reconciling Russia with a new Europe or bringing a victorious America home from a liberated continent, were not up for discussion.

Proponents of NATO enlargement succeeded with relative ease, because extending U.S. power into a vacuum fitted the logic of primacy. Clinton's impulsive conversion to NATO enlargement did not reflect a lack of grand strategy.[122] Rather, that this major strategic move came spontaneously, without considered internal debate, indicated how deeply ingrained were long-term assumptions of primacy. The context of the occasion, a ceremony commemorating the Holocaust, is instructive. A central tenet of primacy is the historical lesson that retreat by the United States makes possible totalitarianism and catastrophe, thus requiring the United States' to extend its stabilizing presence in

117. "The President's News Conference," June 17, 1993, *PPPUS 1993*, book 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1994), pp. 868–869; "Exchange with Reporters Prior to Discussion with Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands," January 4, 1994, *PPPUS 1994*, book 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1995), pp. 5–6; and interviews with Anthony Lake and Sandy Berger in Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 24.
118. Cited in Tyler Marshall, "NATO's Eastern Growth a Giant Step or Stumble?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1997.
119. James M. Goldgeier, "NATO Expansion: The Anatomy of a Decision," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 85–102, at pp. 86–87.
120. Memorandum of Conversation, Luncheon with British Prime Minister Blair, May 29, 1997, Declassified Documents Concerning Tony Blair, Declassified Documents Collection, CDL, http://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48779.
121. Douglas Waller, "How Clinton Decided on NATO Expansion," *Time*, July 14, 1997, p. 58.
122. See John Lewis Gaddis, "History, Grand Strategy, and NATO Enlargement," *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 145–151, at p. 149.

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Europe. Clinton drew on this vocabulary to justify his decision.[123] Beyond containment of the Soviet Union, NATO was an instrument of U.S. hegemony, of consolidating democratic reform in Eastern European states and integrating them into a new security architecture. This "cognitive map" was shared by Madeleine Albright, a Czech-born refugee and ambassador to the United Nations, who announced the accession of new members.[124] According to Clinton's directive of July 1993, "The extension of Western values and institutions eastward is essential to building a post–Cold War Europe characterized by stability and prosperity."[125] Even anti-Clinton partisans supported the logic that enlarging NATO was a natural extension of primacy. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the leader of the conservative Republican congressional challenge, was persuaded in September 1993 by NSC member Jeremy Rosner to support it. Gingrich assured Clinton's speechwriter that "congressional Republicans could never oppose policies designed to enlarge the 'blue blob' of democracy now that the Soviet 'red blob' had gone." The speaker helped edit the draft of Lake's speech outlining the doctrine of "enlargement," entering it into the *Congressional Record*.[126]

Only after Clinton made public statements supporting NATO enlargement did the bureaucracy produce concrete plans.[127] Enlargement was a decision made by a small group around the president, who then imposed it on officials. The gatekeeper who oversaw the rapid decision to enlarge was National Security Adviser Lake, and the gatekeeper who imposed it on reluctant officials was Richard Holbrooke, assistant secretary of state for European affairs. Lake and Christopher scheduled an "action forcing event," the NATO summit in Prague, January 1994. As Clinton proclaimed in Prague, the issue was "not whether but when and how."[128] The settled unanimity between the president, vice president, national security adviser, and secretary of state handed the enforcer Holbrooke a powerful weapon within the bureaucracy, as in September 1994 he waved copies of Clinton's speeches at reluctant

123. See "Memorandum of Conversation from the President's Meeting with Italian Prime Minister Carlo Ciampi," September 17, 1993, cited in Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 312 n. 26.
124. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 178.
125. Declassified Documents concerning Presidential Review Directive 36 (PRD 36), July 5, 1993, Declassified Documents Collection, CDL, p. 1, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16201.
126. Douglas Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine," *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1997, pp. 111–127, at pp. 118–119.
127. Goldgeier, "NATO Expansion," pp. 96–97.
128. "The President's News Conference with Visegrad Leaders in Prague," January 12, 1994, in Woolley and Peters, *American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=49832.

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Pentagon officials.[129] There remained debate about the pace, sequence, and criteria for admitting new members. Strobe Talbott, Clinton's Russia adviser, urged caution about the details of the implementation, while sharing the goal to integrate Central Europe and the former Soviet Union into the Euro-Atlantic Community.[130] The speed and informality with which the president committed the United States, and the domination of operational questions of how and when, suggests that the force of habit was strong.

Habitual ideas also assisted NATO enlargement lobbying efforts. Proponents framed enlargement as a natural extension of U.S. primacy, a seed that fell on fertile ground, given the widespread identification of U.S. leadership with Eastern European democracy. This argument met with a strong reception among foreign policy figures such as NSC Senior Director and Special Adviser to the President Daniel Fried. At a dinner in February 1997 for "a select group of Washington's power elite," Polish dissident Adam Michnik "mesmerized his audience with a two-hour discourse on Poland's tragic history, his own incarceration and torture by the communist police, and how NATO membership was the logical culmination of the struggle for democracy and freedom waged by the Polish trade union Solidarity. The audience was overwhelmed."[131]

In persuading reluctant lawmakers to support enlargement, lobbyists from the U.S. Committee to Expand NATO, a group led by figures from the Blob,[132] successfully drew on embedded assumptions to frame NATO enlargement as naturally American. As Ronald Asmus recalls their rationale, "If NATO did not exist, would we create it and what would it look like? Our answer was that of course we would still want to have a strategic alliance between the U.S. and Europe to defend our common interests against future threats. But it was also obvious that such an alliance would look quite different—and would have new members and be focused on a different set of missions. Ergo, enlargement was part of the natural transformation and modernization of NATO for a new era . . . the changes we were making in NATO were a commonsensical adaptation of the Alliance to a post–Cold War world."[133] "Commonsensical," "natural," "obvious"—this is the vocabulary of habit. Subsequent congressional debate reflected the ease with which habitual ideas took hold. The high-stakes commitment, already endorsed in both major party platforms, received "no

129. See James M. Goldgeier, "The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO," *Brookings Review*, June 1, 1999, p. 20.
130. Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 99.
131. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 256–257.
132. Its board included Richard Holbrooke, Anthony Lake, Paul Wolfowitz, and Robert Zoellick.
133. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 260.

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more than a cursory glance" before the Senate and House overwhelmingly passed the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act in July 1996.[134]

Even arguments made against enlarging NATO were predominantly traditionalist ones, reflecting the assumption that the United States self-evidently should maintain its European commitment. Much criticism was driven by anxiety that enlargement could jeopardize this commitment, rather than by the alternative rationale that NATO was unnecessary or obsolete in a post-Soviet world. Early opposition by the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and in the Defense Department warned that expansion could dilute NATO's effectiveness. An open letter in June 1997 signed by forty-six individuals—foreign policy experts, retired diplomats, senators, and senior military officers—argued that enlargement would "degrade NATO's ability to carry out its primary mission" and, domestically, "will call into question the U.S. commitment to the Alliance, traditionally and rightly regarded as a centrepiece of U.S. foreign policy."[135] In a Council on Foreign Relations debate in December 1996, where former security adviser Michael Mandelbaum defeated Richard Holbrooke in a straw poll, Mandelbaum claimed that enlargement would jeopardize "an essential American commitment."[136]

To anticipate an objection, some might argue that in consolidating U.S. preeminence in post–Cold War Europe, Clinton was simply exploiting the United States' power advantage. Material power, however, is not a sufficient explanation. At previous junctures where the United States enjoyed a power advantage, it relinquished opportunities to expand.[137] It did not conquer Mexico or Canada after 1850, despite its continental hegemony after the withdrawal of European powers. In the economic boom of 1865–89, the United States hardly developed military forces. In 1918–20, with European powers depleted by war and its relative economic and military strength enlarged, it rejected alliances with Britain or France, refused any combinations within the League of Nations, and withdrew to the Western Hemisphere.[138] Even after World War II, which devastated other great powers, the Truman administration lacked a set-

134. John Isaacs, "Congress Snoozes," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (March/April 1997), pp. 15–17, at p. 15.
135. Cited in Robert W. Ruchhaus, *Explaining NATO Enlargement* (London: Routledge, 2013), appendix 4, pp. 203–204.
136. Michael Mandelbaum, "Expanding NATO: Will It Weaken the Alliance?" transcript, speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, New York, December 9, 1996, http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/docs/ExpandingNATO.htm.
137. See Jeffrey W. Meiser, *Power and Restraint: The Rise of the United States 1898–1941* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015).
138. See Jeffrey W. Legro, "Whence American Internationalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 253–289, doi:10.1162/002081800551172.

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tled consensus and was receptive to competing proposals to contain or accommodate the Soviet Union.[139] The United States only decisively committed to increase its extra-regional preeminence after the Korean War shifted opinion.[140] By contrast, the United States by 1991 had been a superpower for decades, and a cohesive foreign policy establishment ensured primacy was locked in.

Neither can Clinton's continuation of U.S. grand strategy be dismissed as a populist measure. There was little domestic popular demand for a reassertion of primacy. When the populace articulated preferences, most expressed attitudes consistent with more restrained strategies that accepted multipolarity and a scaled-back U.S. role.[141] A chronic gap existed between elite and popular opinion, where elites showed a preference for military activism and unique responsibility for the provision of security.[142] When Republicans tried to turn Clinton's leadership into an electoral issue in 1996, the electorate was unresponsive, weighing economic and social issues well above foreign and defense policy.[143] Public disengagement left the way open for elites to impose the boundaries for strategic choices.

President Donald Trump: Stability amid Tumult

Another significant test case for my argument is the first year of the Trump administration. Inaugurated on January 20, 2017, Trump posed a greater challenge to the established security order than any incoming president since Nixon. As an outsider, he was elected on a wave of revolt against the costs and burdens of primacy—and against the Blob. Trump rejected the bipartisan cause of U.S. leadership. His slogan, "America First," evoked interwar isolationism and zero-sum nationalism. The critical test is how Trump behaved in office and whether an iconoclastic president ultimately conformed with tradi-

139. Melvyn P. Leffler, "The Emergence of an American Grand Strategy, 1945–1952," in Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 67–90, especially 69–70.
140. Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 1980), pp. 563–592, at pp. 573–574, doi:10.1177/002200278002400401.
141. Steven Kull, "Americans Have Not Turned Isolationist," *Public Perspective*, Vol. 8, No. 5 (August/September 1997), pp. 1–4; and Daniel W. Drezner, "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 51–70, at pp. 58–61, doi:10.1017/S1537592708080067.
142. Benjamin I. Page and Jason Barabas, "Foreign Policy Gaps between Citizens and Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 2000), pp. 339–364, at pp. 355–356, doi:10.1111/0020-8833.00163.
143. See Paul R. Abramson, John H. Alrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1996 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 1996), p. 124.

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tion. Preliminary observation suggests that his behavior accords with my argument's forecasts. Trump is not a typical president. But on grand strategic questions, tradition imposed constraints.

A property tycoon and media celebrity, Trump ran for office as an insurgent against the establishment. He was the first president without elective office experience since Dwight Eisenhower. He based his campaign on hostility toward the status quo and the policy elite that guarded it. He characterized government officials and lobbyists as a corrupt oligarchy, vowing to "drain the swamp" and "look for new people."[144] Trump threatened to shred traditional alliances, accommodate major adversaries, tolerate nuclear proliferation, abandon the frequent use of military force, and exchange free trade for protectionism. Former senior security officials, defense intellectuals, and ex-presidents attacked his probity, sanity, and legitimacy. Both sides presented the November 2016 election as a contest over the fundamentals of the United States' role in the world.[145]

As Trump took aim at traditional U.S. grand strategy, some foreign policy experts predicted that he would run an experiment in applying retrenchment-based strategies long advocated by academic realists, bring primacy to an end,[146] and convert the *Pax Americana* into a "transactional protection racket."[147] Traditionalists feared that Trump stirred a popular tide against the burdens of U.S. primacy, thus destroying the domestic basis for it. Voters may not have elected Trump primarily because of his stances on alliances or nuclear proliferation. They did, however, respond to his assaults on free trade, failed wars, free-riding allies, and the negative consequences of globalization for American workers. Registered Trump voters ranked foreign policy high on their list of priorities.[148] Trump's broader attack on existing grand strategy and the foreign policy establishment resonated.

Yet in Trump's first year, there was more continuity than change regarding

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144. Doug Bandow, "Donald Trump Dismisses U.S. Foreign Policy Elite," Forbes, May 16, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL5https://www.forbes.com/sites/dougbandow/2016/05/16/donald-trump-dismisses-u-s-foreign-policy-elite-would-he-save-americans-from-unnecessary-war.

145. David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, "50 G.O.P. Officials Warn Donald Trump Would Put Nation's Security at Risk," *New York Times*, August 8, 2016.

146. Rosa Brooks, "Donald Trump Has a Coherent, Realist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/12/donald-trump-has-a-coherent-realist-foreign-policy/; Kori Schake, "Will Washington Abandon the Order? The False Logic of Retreat," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (January/February 2017), pp. 41–46; and Stewart M. Patrick, "Trump and World Order: The Return of Self-Help," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (March/April 2017), pp. 52–57.

147. Steve Coll, "Global Trump," *New Yorker*, April 11, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/11/global-trump.

148. Pew Research Center, *2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, July 7, 2016), p. 32.

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grand strategic issues. Within months, Trump "abandoned stances that were at the bedrock of his establishment-bashing campaign."[149] His first choices were surprisingly "mainstream," to the approval of traditionalists and displeasure of revisionists.[150] The power of the Blob and tradition constrained Trump's administration, making his stance toward U.S. global commitments more orthodox than was expected, in substance if not in style.

TRUMP'S CONTINUITY

Before becoming president, Trump threatened to tear up long-standing alliances. He branded NATO outmoded, expensive, irrelevant to contemporary security problems, and "obsolete."[151] At other times, he threatened to change the basis of alliances, making what had been permanent U.S. commitments more conditional and transactional, issuing threats to allies in Europe and Asia that the United States might abandon them if they did not pay up.[152] Trump implied similar policies for the Persian Gulf. As a candidate, Trump argued that Saudi Arabia, as the traditional bulwark of U.S. power projection in the Gulf, should pay more for the United States' "tremendous service," accusing it of complicity in the September 11 attacks.[153] Trump suggested that he would accommodate the United States' rivals, especially Russia. He promised to give Russia, NATO's resurgent adversary, a freer geopolitical hand. He would shift burdens by forcing allies to pay for protection. Such open threats struck against the grand strategy of primacy, which regards permanent commitments as essential even if the distribution of sacrifices is lopsided.

Within only months of his presidency, Trump altered both the rhetoric and substance of his stance toward allies. By April 2017, NATO was "no longer ob-

149. Stephen Collinson, "Trump's Stunning U-Turns on NATO, China, Russia, and Syria," *CNN*, April 13, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/12/politics/trump-russia-china-nato-syria/index.html.

150. Michael E. O'Hanlon and David Gordon, "Surprise! Trump's Foreign Policy Is Turning Out OK," *USA Today*, February 23, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/02/24/surprise-trumps-foreign-policy-is-turning-out-okay/; James Jay Carafano, "The Most Shocking Thing about Trump So Far: How Boring He's Been," *National Interest*, March 13, 2017, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-most-shocking-thing-about-trump-so-far-how-boring-hes-19769; Elliott Abrams, "Trump the Traditionalist: A Surprisingly Standard Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (July/August 2017), pp. 10–16; and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Welcome to the Foreign Policy 'Reassurance Tour,'" *National Interest*, February 9, 2017, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/welcome-the-foreign-policy-reassurance-tour-19384.

151. "Full Transcript of Interview with Donald Trump," *Times* (London), January 16, 2017.

152. David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, "Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO," *New York Times*, July 21, 2016; and Jesse Johnson, "Trump Rips U.S. Defence of Japan as One-Sided, Too Expensive," *Japan Times*, August 6, 2016.

153. Christine Rushton, "Donald Trump: 9/11 Report Excerpt Will Reveal Saudi Arabia's 'Profound' Role in the Attacks," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 2016.

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solete."[154] In May, Trump increased by 40 percent the United States' European Reassurance Initiative, established by Obama to signal the U.S. commitment to Europe with increased troops, infrastructure, and exercises after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.[155] In addresses in Brussels in May 2017 and Warsaw in July, Trump signaled support for NATO while insisting its members contribute more.[156] By June, he had reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Article 5 of the NATO Charter.[157] At the urging of advisers, Trump now took only a more abrasive version of the position taken by every president since Eisenhower—that NATO is vital, but that member states should contribute more. In the Middle East, Trump embraced Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies in the United States' traditional role as armorer and protector; in his May visit to Riyadh, he signed a $110 billion arms deal and jettisoned "America First" rhetoric in favor of "bipartisan internationalism."[158] Within six months of taking office, Trump's strategic vision for the world's key power centers—the Gulf, Europe, and East Asia—held the United States to be the principal security provider. In Asia, Secretary for Defense James Mattis reassured Japan and South Korea of U.S. alliance commitments.[159] Toward Russia, Trump did not lift sanctions imposed to penalize Moscow's adventurism in the Ukraine. He authorized the sale of "defensive" weapons to Ukraine against Russia-leaning separatists, sold Patriot missiles to Poland, and demanded that Russia withdraw from Crimea. In its 2017 National Security Strategy, the Trump administration promised continued primacy, dominance in key regions, and counterproliferation, while more explicitly acknowledging competition with rivals.[160]

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154. Jenna Johnson, "Trump on NATO: I Said It Was Obsolete. It's No Longer Obsolete," *Washington Post*, April 12, 2017.
155. David M. Herszenstorn, "NATO Cheers Trump's Military Budget," *Politico*, May 24, 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-donald-trump-military-spending-cheers-military-budget-jens-stoltenberg/.
156. Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at NATO Unveiling of the Article Five and Berlin Wall Memorials" (Washington, D.C.: White House, May 25, 2017), https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/25/remarks-president-trump-nato-unveiling-article-5-and-berlin-wall.
157. Jeremy Herb, "Trump Commits to NATO's Article 5," *CNN*, June 9, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/09/politics/trump-commits-to-natos-article-5/index.html.
158. David M. Drucker, "Trump's Speech in Saudi Arabia Reassures Foreign Policy Critics," *Washington Examiner*, May 21, 2017.
159. Peter Nicholas and Carol E. Lee, "Donald Trump's Diplomatic Moderation," *Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2017.
160. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington D.C.: White House, December 2017); and Patrick Porter, "Tradition's Quiet Victories: Trump's National Security Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, December 22, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/traditions-quiet-victories-trumps-national-security-strategy/.

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Trump also has rededicated the United States to military preponderance and the frequent use of force that is a hallmark of U.S. unipolarity. Campaigning for office, Trump denounced his opponent's hawkishness. He promised to reduce and focus the use of force, to "stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about, that we shouldn't be involved with," to withdraw from Afghanistan,[161] to avoid nation-building expeditions, and to focus on the Islamic State and counterterrorism.[162]

Upon taking office, Trump showed a propensity toward using force. By July 31, 2017, he had overseen the unleashing of 80 percent of the total number of bombs dropped by the United States under Obama during the whole of 2016, including the most bombs dropped on Afghanistan since 2012.[163] He also increased the U.S. ground commitment to Afghanistan.[164] In the name of deterring the use of chemical weapons, Trump bombed President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. He also bolstered U.S. military deployments to NATO's eastern flank. Trump declared an increased defense budget and an ambition for nuclear supremacy. His combination of arms buildup and budget expansion amounted to "warmed-over Reaganism"; and like Reagan, Trump's administration formulated its budget on the advice of the primacist Heritage Foundation.[165] Trump also conformed with the tradition of "inhibition," forcefully confronting North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs. While campaigning, he suggested he would tolerate nuclear proliferation by South Korea, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. He imagined negotiating with the "rogue" proliferator, North Korea's ruler Kim Jong-un, suggesting that nuclear proliferation was both inevitable and acceptable.[166] These sentiments violated decades of tradition, whereby the United States has inhibited proliferation through security guarantees, troop deployments, arms sales, nuclear umbrellas, and sanctions threats. By the summer of 2017, Trump had converted to denuclearization and was engaged in brinkmanship with North Korea, attempting to co-

161. Samuel Ramani, "What a Trump Presidency Would Mean for Afghanistan," *Diplomat*, August 2, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/what-a-trump-presidency-would-mean-for-afghanistan/.
162. Sabbrina Siddiqui and Ben Jacobs, "Donald Trump: We Will Stop Racing to Topple Regimes," *Guardian*, December 7, 2016.
163. Micah Zenko and Jennifer Wilson, "Donald Trump Is Dropping Bombs at Unprecedented Levels," *Foreign Policy*, August 9, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/09/donald-trump-is-dropping-bombs-at-unprecedented-levels/.
164. Rebecca Shabad, "Trump Outlines New U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan," *CBS News*, August 21, 2017, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-addresses-nation-on-new-afghanistan-strategy-live-updates/.
165. Michael Lind, "Whatever Happened to Trumpism," *Coffee House* blog, *Spectator*, March 18, 2017, https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/03/whatever-happened-trumpism/.
166. Gene Gerzhoy and Nicholas Miller, "Donald Trump Thinks More Countries Should Have Nuclear Weapons," *Washington Post*, April 6, 2016.

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erce Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear ambitions. In July 2017, he approved plans to increase U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, to resist Chinese expansion.[167] Trump's America exercises military preponderance, maintains alliances, and pursues counterproliferation—even at the risk of war—to forestall the emergence of challengers and prevent a return to multipolar disorder.

EXPLAINING CONTINUITY: TRUMP AND THE BLOB

Trump's conformity on major grand-strategic questions fits my argument's predictions. He took office at a time when the electorate was buffeted by war weariness and the long-term stresses of the 2008 global financial crisis. These pressures could have been a basis for grand strategic revision. Yet Trump is not trying to overhaul grand strategy. He has been unwilling to spend the political capital that such a revision would require. In the absence of a determined agent of change, the Blob's advantages persist. The Blob has a privileged position in presidential staffing and security expertise; it exerts dominance over the security discourse; and it is reinforced by the demands of allies.

With Trump elected, the Blob urged capable bureaucrats to boycott the administration. At the same time, they lobbied the president to uphold tradition.[168] Trump suffered a staffing dilemma. To appoint experienced officials to key positions would install defenders of the status quo. Yet to appoint untutored outsiders would raise risks of error, and to mix both groups would threaten coherence.[169] In forming his transition team, Trump leaned heavily on Washington insiders he had once denounced, including former administration officials and corporate lobbyists. Trump reached into the "big pool" of his party for the "most highly qualified" candidates.[170] His senior appointees were mostly primacists who had the Blob's blessing. These included Secretary of Defense James Mattis, a retired Marine general and former Hoover Institution fellow, who with Vice President Mike Pence assured NATO of the United States' continued support.[171] Trump appointed as director of central intelli-

167. Laura Zhou, "Trump Signs Off on Plan to Allow U.S. Navy More Freedom to Patrol in South China Sea," *South China Morning Post*, July 22, 2017.
168. See the Brookings Institution manifesto, authored by security experts and former high-ranking officials in the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama: Derek Chollet et al., *Building Situations of Strength: A National Security Strategy for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).
169. See Stephen M. Walt, "The Donald versus 'the Blob,'" *ISSF Policy Series*, February 14, 2017, p. 4, https://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5n-blob.
170. Andrew Restuccia, Isaac Arnsdorf, and Nancy Cook, "Insurgent Trump Taps GOP Insiders, Lobbyists for Transition," *Politico*, November 11, 2016, https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/donald-trump-transition-gop-insiders-lobbyists-231224.
171. Jim Mattis, "A New American Grand Strategy" (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, Febru-

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gence Mike Pompeo, known for his hawkish stances against nuclear proliferation and Russian adventurism, as well as support for arms sales to Israel and Taiwan.[172] Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, a former oil executive endorsed by Robert Gates, vowed to assert U.S. primacy against China's expansion and to oppose nuclear proliferation.[173] Trump appointed as national security adviser Gen. H.R. McMaster, a protégé of the orthodox Gen. David Petraeus. McMaster has argued that the provision of U.S. security is indispensable, and that retrenchment will create dangerous vacuums.[174] Trump appointed former senator, lobbyist, and diplomat Dan Coats as director of national intelligence. He appointed critics of Russian President Vladimir Putin to every major national security post, significant given that Russia is the focal point of criticisms that his diplomacy is compromised.[175] These included former presidential candidate, governor and ambassador Jon Huntsman as ambassador to Russia; Wess Mitchell, who coauthored a study cautioning against the weakening or abandonment of alliances, as assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs; and Fiona Hill, a Brookings Kremlin analyst skeptical of the possibility of a Russia-U.S. accommodation, as White House senior director for Europe and Russia.[176]

Partly because of the Blob's mobilization against the new president, the administration remained significantly understaffed. The failure to appoint many subcabinet posts meant that many senior advisers are career civil servants of what Trump denounced as the "permanent government." Valuable expertise also explains the retention of holdovers from the Obama administration, such as diplomat Brett McGurk with his "almost impossible-to-replicate, case-specific knowledge."[177] Trump appointed some government outsiders with unorthodox views, such as his son-in-law Jared Kushner and the anti-globalist

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ary 26, 2015); and Julie Smith and Jim Townsend, "It's Mattis and Pence to the Rescue of the Transatlantic Alliance," *Foreign Policy*, February 13, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/13/its-mattis-and-pence-to-the-rescue-of-the-transatlantic-alliance/.

172. Phil Stewart and Patricia Zengerle, "Trump's Picks to Lead Pentagon, CIA Take Tough Stand on Russia," *Globe and Mail*, January 13, 2017.

173. Charles Clover, "Tillerson Sets Stage for Clash with Beijing over South China Sea," *Financial Times*, January 12, 2017.

174. Gabriel Elefteriu, "General McMaster Knows Where the West Went Wrong, and Can Help President Trump Make It Right," *Policy Exchange*, February 23, 2017, https://policyexchange.org.uk/general-mcmaster-knows-where-the-west-went-wrong-and-can-help-president-trump-make-it-right/.

175. As Matthew Kroenig observes in Kroenig, "The Case for Trump's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (2017), pp. 30–34, at p. 33.

176. A. Wess Mitchell and Jakub J. Grygiel, *Unquiet Frontier: Vulnerable Allies, Rising Rivals, and the Crisis of American Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Lisa Riley Roche, "Huntsman's Official Announcement as Ambassador to Russia May Still Be Weeks Away," *Deseret News*, April 11, 2017.

177. Mark Landler, "Meet the Obama Holdovers Who Survived Trump's Sweep," *New York Times*, April 1, 2017.

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Steve Bannon. But in the White House, a power center emerged of traditionalist military figures with a commitment to primacy, who exerted restraining influence.[178] Significantly, after initially appointing Bannon to the NSC Principals Committee and removing the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the director of national intelligence, Trump stripped Bannon of his NSC role and restored the chairman and director.[179]

With the anti-globalists sidelined, an intensive and coordinated briefing on July 20, 2017, by the traditionalists Pence, Mattis, and Tillerson influenced Trump, "explaining the critical importance of forward worldwide deployments" and dangers of retrenchment, tailoring the "Open Door" logic to Trump's background, and emphasizing the value of "military, intelligence officers and diplomats" in "making the world safe for American businesses."[180] In his inner convictions, Trump does not have to convert to primacy for primacy to persist. On major questions, he felt its constraints, even when watching television, as he frequently did. As the scholar Daniel Drezner suggested, "The more mainstream foreign policy advisers are better at being on television."[181]

The Blob enjoys a number of advantages. As well as influence within the security bureaucracy, it can attack the legitimacy of measures that offend tradition. It can act through the courts and the quiet resistance of civil servants, and articulate alternatives through well-funded think tanks. It has strong institutional platforms in Congress, links to a powerful business community, and a network of nongovernmental organizations. Trump, with his inchoate worldview, was not a determined revisionist who could overcome these obstacles, and, instead, on security issues, if not on tariffs and protectionism, quickly fell into line.

Conclusion

The habitual ideas of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, the Blob, make U.S. grand strategy hard to change. Change is possible, but only in conditions shocking enough to undermine assumptions, and even then, only when a president is determined to overhaul primacy and absorb the political costs of

178. Vivian Salama and Julie Pace, "Trio of Military Men Gain Growing Influence with Trump," Associated Press, February 23, 2017.
179. Donald J. Trump, "Organization of the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and Subcommittees" (Washington, D.C.: White House, April 4, 2017).
180. Matthew Lee and Jonathan Lemire, "How Trump's Advisers Schooled Him on Globalism," Associated Press, September 18, 2017, https://www.apnews.com/4cef63caf6b34cb796bc4c196d47c143/How-Trump's-advisers-schooled-him-on-globalism.
181. Daniel W. Drezner, "Trump Fought the Blob and the Blob Won. Why?" *Washington Post*, April 13, 2017.

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doing so. I have demonstrated this assessment using the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Donald Trump. In both cases, candidates came to office promising change, in fluid conditions that ought to have stimulated revision. The demand for a peace dividend created an appetite for change in Clinton's case and constraints on resources and popular discontent did so in Trump's. Yet the Blob mostly got its way on grand strategic questions. Grand strategy emerged organically rather than through instrumental planning. Alternative grand strategies hardly penetrated decisionmaking within the executive branch. Decisionmakers were biased toward legacy institutions. Unspoken assumptions, suppression, and self-censorship narrowed choices. Internal review was ideologically circumscribed, concerned about how rather than whether to apply primacy. In identifying the Blob's constraining influence in Washington, former Obama adviser Benjamin Rhodes was right.

U.S. military capabilities enable the United States to adopt a grand strategy of primacy. This does not explain, however, why it has maintained that choice, even in conditions that create incentives for revision. Theories that stress the importance of ideas and domestic politics are part of the explanation. But how ideas are transmitted is just as important as the content of those ideas. This is where the process of habit intervenes. Having been a superpower for decades is a condition that leaves the United States averse to revising fundamental assumptions and to considering alternatives. The Blob believes that the assumptions underpinning primacy are self-evidently true and that grand strategies based on retrenchment are unworthy of serious consideration. Habit-driven style impoverishes decisionmaking by insulating the most consequential assumptions from scrutiny. As a result, the starting point for most discussion of grand strategic questions reflects an intramural debate about how best to practice primacy.

Defenders of primacy may resist the suggestion that a flawed process drives grand strategy, arguing that the current grand strategy endures because it is superior. The strategy's excellence, though, is not self-evident. It entails trillions of dollars of investment that could be spent more productively. It makes the United States prone to frequent uses of force, including several disappointing wars. It threatens the U.S. Constitution, by increasing the power of the state. Finally, it implicates the country in potential conflicts worldwide. President Trump is aggressively reasserting the grand strategy of primacy, a strategy that has put the country where it now is: struggling under the weight of spiraling debt, multiplying conflicts, domestic discord, and set on a collision course with rivals. These stakes are high enough to warrant systematic review. Yet if my argument is correct, such a review is unlikely except in atypical circumstances. Until that hour, Washington's decades-old design will endure without a proper audit, as the master, not the servant, of American democracy.

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