

Summaries

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Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment

Patrick Porter, University of Birmingham

Why has U.S. grand strategy persisted since the end of the Cold War? Despite shocks such as the 2008 global financial crisis and the costs of the war in Iraq—circumstances that ought to have stimulated at least a revision—the United States remains committed to a grand strategy of “primacy.” It strives for military preponderance, dominance in key regions, the containment and reassurance of allies, nuclear counterproliferation, and the economic “Open Door.” The habitual ideas of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, or the “Blob,” make U.S. grand strategy hard to change. The United States’ military and economic capabilities enable the U.S. government to pursue primacy, but the embedded assumptions of the Blob make primacy the seemingly natural choice. Thanks to the Blob’s constraining power, alternative grand strategies based on restraint and retrenchment are hardly entertained, and debate is narrowed mostly into questions of execution and implementation. Two cases—the presidency of Bill Clinton and the first year of the presidency of Donald Trump—demonstrate this argument. In each case, candidates promising change were elected in fluid conditions that we would expect to stimulate a reevaluation of the United States’ commitments. In each case, the Blob asserted itself successfully, at least on the grand strategic fundamentals. Change in grand strategy is possible, but it would require shocks large enough to shake the assumptions of the status quo and a president willing to be an agent of change and prepared to absorb the political costs of overhauling Washington’s traditional design.

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Do U.S. Drone Strikes Cause Blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and Beyond

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Many analysts argue that U.S. drone strikes generate blowback: by killing innocent civilians, such strikes radicalize Muslim populations at the local, national, and even transnational levels. This claim, however, is based primarily on anecdotal evidence, unreliable media reports, and advocacy-driven re-

search by human rights groups. Interview and survey data from Pakistan, where, since 2004, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has launched more than 430 drone strikes, show little or no evidence that drone strikes have a significant impact on militant Islamist recruitment either locally or nationally. Rather, the data reveal the importance of factors such as political and economic grievances, the Pakistani state's selective counterterrorism policies, its indiscriminate repression of the local population, and forced recruitment of youth by militant groups. Similarly, trial testimony and accounts of terrorists convicted in the United States, as well as the social science scholarship on Muslim radicalization in the United States and Europe, provide scant evidence that drone strikes are the main cause of militant Islamism. Instead, factors that matter include a transnational Islamic identity's appeal to young immigrants with conflicted identities, state immigration and integration policies that marginalize Muslim communities, the influence of peers and social networks, and on-line exposure to violent jihadist ideologies within the overall context of U.S. military interventions in Muslim countries.

DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY RESPONSES TO THE CHINESE CHALLENGE

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U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?

David Shambaugh, George Washington University

U.S.-China comprehensive competition is currently playing out on an increasingly global scale. The competition's primary locus is the vast Indo-Asia-Pacific region, and it is centered in Southeast Asia. The United States and China each possess comparative advantages in the region. Beijing's advantages are predominantly economic and diplomatic, whereas Washington's are more multifaceted. Although the Barack Obama administration's "pivot" significantly raised the U.S. profile in Southeast Asia, China has also expanded its presence and influence. The two powers are increasingly locked in a classic strategic competition, but the pervasive media narrative in the region holds that China is gaining the upper hand. While this gravitation toward Beijing has become a popular meme, it is not empirically accurate—as the United States still possesses substantial overall advantages. Still, the regional bal-

ance is dynamic, and the United States needs to remain comprehensively engaged—or else the balance of influence will default to China. At present, the Sino-American competition in Southeast Asia is not (yet) acute and zero-sum. Therefore, the two powers should be able to manage their tensions, limit their rivalry, and practice competitive coexistence.

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Active Denial: Redesigning Japan's Response to China's Military Challenge

Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, both at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The growth of Chinese military power poses significant challenges to Japan. China's military spending, which was half that of Japan's in 1996, is now three and a half times as large. Japan has taken a range of measures to buttress its military forces and loosen the restrictions on their operations, but much remains to be done. Most important, Tokyo needs to reexamine its strategy to maximize Japan's deterrent leverage. Of the three general approaches to conventional deterrence—punishment, forward defense, and denial—Japan's best option is to shift to a denial strategy. Such a strategy, built around a resilient force that can survive attack and attrite an encroaching adversary, can make the risks to a potential attacker unacceptably high. In Japan's case, such a strategy would leverage the inherent dangers that Beijing would face in contemplating a prolonged war against Japan and its U.S. ally. The strategy, updated to reflect the imperatives of air and maritime warfare in the precision strike era, would require a high level of dispersion and mobility and might therefore be labeled “active denial.” Adopting an active denial strategy would buttress Japan's defense and deterrent capability while reducing first-strike incentives and improving crisis stability.

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Markets or Mercantilism? How China Secures Its Energy Supplies

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Since oil began fueling the global economy, governments have employed policies of “energy mercantilism” to secure access to this key input. Critics of these policies claim they are unnecessary because oil can be acquired on global markets. Countries such as China that engage in energy mercantilism are thus neither enhancing their energy security nor threatening others' access to oil.

These critics, however, misunderstand the logic of energy mercantilism, which is rooted in the economics and business literatures on supply chain management. Firms and states are correct to worry about access to critical supplies under four conditions: imperfect contracting, supplier collusion, geographic concentration, and high risk of conflict. All of these conditions plague the oil industry. Likewise, the energy mercantilist policies that critics deride are analogous to the strategies that firms adopt to protect their supply chains. China's steps to ensure access to oil have enhanced its energy security and reduced U.S. coercive options toward Beijing. More broadly, the unfolding competition over energy access highlights the lingering power of mercantilism, even in this age of economic globalization and the apparent triumph of market liberalism.

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