



**Atlantic Council**

**STRATEGY PAPER**

# **Dynamic Stability**

US Strategy for a World  
in Transition

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**with Alex Ward**

Foreword by Brent Scowcroft

# Dynamic Stability

## US Strategy for a World in Transition



**Atlantic Council**

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Atlantic Council  
1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005

ISBN: 978-1-61977-992-1

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**April 2015**

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# Foreword

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Even the most casual observer of international affairs notices that the world is going through a tumultuous period. At the geopolitical level, the Middle East roils; Russia wages war against Ukraine; China challenges the stability of its region; Western Africa is beset by extraordinary violence; widespread disease and climate change pose growing global dangers; and to make matters worse, all of this is happening at a time when American and European power are questioned. At the substate level, we are seeing individuals and nonstate actors, ranging from democratic revolutionaries to terrorists, play an outsized role on the global stage, causing nation-states to consider new actors in their thinking about the world.

Dealing with these myriad, complex, and global shifts requires not only American leadership, but also fresh thinking about how the United States should act in the world. Indeed, it requires new thinking on strategy. As the first report in the new *Atlantic Council Strategy Paper* series, this document outlines a way to think about strategy, which the authors call “dynamic stability.” This approach provides a very important contribution regarding how we as a nation, working with our close allies and partners, can begin the long process of formulating an effective strategy for advancing our common interests that better aligns with where we see the world heading.

Strategy should be the framework that gets a state, in this case the United States, from where it is to where it wants to go. Instead of merely responding to global events, the United States, with a sound strategy, could make progress over time to try to get ahead of them, and even to try to shape them for our national advantage as well as for that of our allies and friends. Without question, among the challenges facing the United States today in regard to its foreign and security policy is an inadequate amount of strategic thinking. For a variety of reasons, not least because the world appears to be spinning faster, actionable strategic thinking appears to be in short supply.

This report, and future papers in this series, aim to help remedy this gap in strategy. The hope is that, through this work and the influential community we convene, the Atlantic Council can serve as a hub for strategic thought that helps the United States, and those who want to work alongside us, develop and implement effective strategy for advancing and protecting our interests. If our governments use some of the ideas contained in this document as they respond to current crises and challenges—and use the key points in future planning—we will be better off for it. And, in the long run, the world could become a more peaceful and prosperous place.

**Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, USAF (Ret.)**

*Chairman, International Advisory Board*

Atlantic Council



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# Executive Summary

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**W**e have entered a new era in world history, a post-post-Cold War era that holds both great promise and great peril for the United States, its allies, and everyone else. The more than 350 years since the Peace of Westphalia have featured the nation-state as by far the most dominant global actor. But in our new era, nation-states are increasingly joined on the global stage by powerful individuals, groups, and other actors who are disrupting the traditional world order, for better and for worse. We now can call this a **Westphalian-Plus world**, in which nation-states will have to engage on two distinct levels: dealing with other nation-states as before, and dealing with a vast array of important nonstate actors. A series of unfolding megatrends are driving this dual reality, particularly disruptive technological revolutions that have set in motion a new, vast dynamism in global affairs. A hybrid world is emerging, one that is in flux and whose direction is not yet fixed.

This new world calls for a novel approach to national strategy, which we call **dynamic stability**. US policymakers should continue to seek stability in key regions but, in order to help ensure American leadership over the next several decades, they also must leverage dynamic megatrends that are unfolding across the globe. These trends are diverse, ranging from technological revolutions to energy transformations to mass urbanization to climate change to individual empowerment, yet almost all of them are consistent with America's strengths and, if harnessed properly, serve its long-term interests and values. Under a dynamic stability framework, the United States would continue to pursue its foremost national goals of economic prosperity, security, and protection of the global commons, all while upholding its core values. As such, America's goals remain closely aligned with those it has had for a very long time. The difference is that to achieve these goals in a rapidly changing world, the United States will have to navigate it differently in order to remain prosperous and secure.

This strategy paper, the first in the *Atlantic Council Strategy Paper* series, explains the global shifts that are underway, assesses the prospects for American leadership given these shifts, and details a strategic framework to enable the United States to harness them for national advantage.

## **Global Shifts**

*Power Shift from West to East and South.* Geopolitical power is shifting from the West to the East and South, leading to what may become the “Trans-Pacific Century.” By 2050, over half of the world’s economic activity will occur in Asia, and Asian defense spending is projected to overtake that of the United States by the early 2020s. At the same time, certain elements of power also are shifting toward Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East due to increased urbanization, greater online and social connectivity, fast-growing economies, and inexorable demographic trends. Power, then, is diffusing around the globe, challenging America’s ability to lead global relations.

*Individual Empowerment and Disruptive Technologies.* Together, increased wealth, better education, and improving access to advanced personalized technology are creating a world in which individuals and groups have far greater capabilities than ever before. Advanced-technology prices have plummeted, enabling powerful tools such as mobile computing and smartphones to become accessible to people of even modest means. Those technologies, combined with Internet access, mean that most of humanity now has, at its fingertips, a seemingly infinite amount of information and previously unimaginable computing power. Other technology suites, including artificial intelligence and robotic systems, advanced manufacturing technologies, biotechnologies, quantum computing, big data, and many others, are poised to become just as disruptive to the world’s economic, political, ecological, and social systems, for better and for worse.

These shifts have two major implications:

- More power is spreading to more nation-states, leading to a more complex interstate system;
- More power is accumulating in more peoples’ hands, leading to greater challenges to state preferences and capabilities as well as to the basis of the international system itself.

## **Dynamic Stability**

This paper makes the case for dynamic stability as an approach to strategy in a Westphalian-Plus world. American leaders should not try to counter all the changes that appear to be undermining the liberal international system. Rather, they should seek to harness those changes, as effectively as possible, to play to America’s substantial national advantages. Continuing to ignore or downplay the changes now unfolding globally could undermine, rather than enhance, America’s interests and leadership status in the world. More significantly, doing so could imperil the norms- and rules-based international order that the United States has led since 1945. In short, America must harness change in order to save the system.



Strategists should follow **four guidelines**:

- *Adjust Interstate Mechanics.* An interstate system that is not malleable enough to adjust when power shifts will likely be torn asunder by its very brittleness. As such, American leaders ought to view the current system as an evolving instrument that can be improved over time. Being willing to adjust system mechanics will do more than demonstrate an American desire to steward the global order. Doing so might help ward off interstate conflict in the future. Moreover, in keeping with the dynamic-stability approach, smart adjustment might well preserve the current system's core functions and best attributes more than obsessing over maintenance of its power structure.
- *Play a Multilevel Game.* US leaders must skillfully manage two "games" at the same time, one involving transformations in interstate power dynamics and the second involving empowered nonstate actors. To maneuver within this world, by definition the United States will need to shift from a framework that focuses almost exclusively on state interests, opportunities, challenges, and threats, to one that also addresses nonstate actors. A focus on "streetcraft," meaning the projection of power through two-way engagement with the "street," will become just as important as statecraft.
- *Build Strength through Coalitions.* A practical consequence of both of the above principles is that the US government should become much more active in building coalitions with a wide range of public and private actors, domestically and abroad. Because there are many more actors with power and influence on a vast array of issues, the United States will have to become more adept at building coalitions and groupings of allies and partners. Advancing US interests will require a high volume and frequency of engagement across multiple domains, often under conditions that are in great flux. Being perceived as a good-faith steward of global public goods, including widely shared governance norms and principles, is critical to success. So too is building the perception among existing and potential allies and friends that America is a trusted partner that will act in good faith.
- *Hone the ART of Strategy.* Any strategy dealing with the Westphalian-Plus world must include the attributes of agility (A), resiliency (R), and transparency (T). Agility means nimbleness in the face of change, especially with respect to the fast-moving, intersectoral, transnational, and "wicked" problems (such as Ebola) that will define the crises of the future. Resiliency refers to building national capacity to absorb blows from abroad and recover quickly from them. Finally, transparency signals that American actions are not random acts of a great power, but are based on longstanding commitments to widely shared and deep-seated values and norms.

## The Case for American Leadership

Because of America's current place in the world order and other key dynamics, the United States remains uniquely positioned at the forefront of the Westphalian-Plus world. American leadership of the international system likely will not be supplanted by other major contenders, whether China, Russia, India, or Europe, owing to various limitations on each. While America, too, faces its own set of constraints, the realities of global change play more to America's built-in strengths than they do to those of other states. Yet at the same time, America cannot manage global affairs by itself, owing to a smaller margin of power compared with the past. American leadership therefore must be oriented toward building effective partnerships with allies and friends.

## America's Ends

The United States should broadly pursue **four primary ends in the decades to come**:

- *Values*
  - Lead by ideal and aspiration, the ultimate sources of American power;
  - Maintain the liberal, norm- and rules-based global order founded on these values;
  - Promote democratic principles without proselytizing.
- *Prosperity*
  - Push for rules that enable free trade within global, market-based systems;
  - Build resiliency into the global economic system;
  - Work with allies and partners, including other state actors such as China, to adjust and strengthen that system in order to both broaden and deepen commitment to a common set of economic rules;
  - Seek to maximize the conditions in which nonstate actors—firms and individuals alike—can prosper, thus broadening the number of stakeholders with an interest in preservation of the global system.
- *Security*
  - Remain the international system's ultimate security guarantor;
  - Maintain consensus among friends and allies about both the desirability of this guarantee as well as their involvement in maintaining global security;





- Calibrate the use of military force and other national instruments to more effectively deal with complex and multifaceted challenges via a “whole-of-government” approach.
- *Protection of the Global Commons*
  - Protect the integrity of the global commons, which include the oceans, climate, space, airspace, and cyberspace;
  - Protection of the global commons materially benefits all actors, including the United States, by enabling the smooth operation of the global economic system;
  - America’s standing in the world is enhanced when it is perceived as a good-faith steward of global public goods.

## Conclusion

For policymakers, creating actionable strategies may be a challenging task. Yet if foreign policy and security policy are to avoid aimless drift, thinking and acting strategically are absolute imperatives. This paper, the first in a series of strategy papers produced by the Atlantic Council, has outlined dynamic stability as a concept that offers strategists a means to understand global change, to think ahead while staying pragmatic, and to take advantage of shifting conditions.

Any successful strategy will require a United States that possesses the fortitude to lead. Unfortunately, questions about the ability of the United States to lead now pale in comparison to those regarding its willingness to do so. Now emerging from more than a decade of sustained combat operations with uncertain outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and buffeted by economic storms—both cyclical (the recent financial crisis and its aftermath) and structural (long-term wage and income stagnation and an erosion of the middle class)—the American public no longer may be as willing to support a strategy that requires robust engagement abroad. Among the many responsibilities borne by US Presidents is that of engaging the nation’s citizenry, first to help make sense of what is going on in the world, and second, to articulate a strategy for protecting and advancing American interests. Today, rapidly changing circumstances cry out for more activist US leadership across a broad set of fronts. The President of the United States should begin a conversation with the American people about this new world. Without an active and engaged adaptation of existing approaches, systems, processes, alliances, and other structures led by the United States, the list of global threats and challenges will multiply. The United States must actively lead the world through this current tumultuous period of history.

# Introduction

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**W**e have entered a new era in world history, a post-post-Cold War era that holds both great promise and great peril for the United States, its allies, and everyone else. The 350 years since the Peace of Westphalia have featured the nation-state as by far the most dominant global actor. But in this new era, nation-states are increasingly joined on the global stage by powerful individuals, groups, and other actors who are disrupting the traditional world order, for better and for worse. We now can call this a “Westphalian-Plus” world, in which nation-states will have to engage on two distinct levels: dealing with other nation-states as before, and dealing with a vast array of important nonstate actors. A series of unfolding megatrends is driving this two-level reality, particularly the disruptive technological revolutions that have set in motion a new, vast dynamism in global affairs. A hybrid world is emerging—one that is in flux, and whose direction is not yet fixed.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has emphasized “stability” in key regions around the world as the foremost goal of its national strategy, in order to preserve peace, prosperity, and the broader international order. Stability was an appropriate goal for the postwar period, and it remains a very desirable end. However, global trends are making it far more difficult to maintain stability at both the global and regional levels. A diffusion of power across nearly every domain of human experience is making the world much more dynamic than ever before. If the United States aims to restore stability to global order, it will have to effectively harness vast, and increasingly powerful, global changes in a deliberate fashion.

To that end, this era calls for a new approach to national strategy, an approach that can be called “dynamic stability.” Under this approach, US policymakers should continue to seek stability in key regions but, in order to ensure continued American preeminence, they also must leverage the dynamic trends that are unfolding across the globe. These trends span a multitude of arenas—including energy, urbanization, technology, climate, individual empowerment, and communications—and many are inherently consistent with long-term US interests and values. Under a dynamic-stability framework, the United States would continue to pursue its foremost national goals of economic prosperity, global security, and protection of the global commons, all while upholding its core values. However, dynamic stability would emphasize different approaches than did previous, state-centric strategies. It would call for the United States to partner more aggressively and systematically with nonstate actors—such as increasingly nimble and powerful cities, which are at the forefront of solving some of the most vexing global challenges—in pursuit of its goals.



A dynamic stability strategy would, in essence, rebalance the framework for how the United States pursues its interests in the new world. Under this framing, the United States would recognize that stability remains critical, but is more elusive now that dynamic change is becoming the new normal in world affairs. The United States' goals remain closely aligned with those it has had for a very long time. The difference is that the world is changing rapidly and, borrowing from the scientific definition of dynamic stability, the United States will need to become better at anticipating, utilizing, and adapting to increased turbulence in order to maintain stability.<sup>1</sup>

As current events underscore, the world of the early twenty-first century appears to have neither coherent direction nor clear leadership. The bipolar world of the Cold War is now a quarter century behind us, and America's stark, post-Cold War "unipolar moment" appears to be ending.<sup>2</sup> The alignment of power with governance in a relatively benign global order—an order more or less created and maintained by the United States after 1945—seems to be on the wane, if not already over.<sup>3</sup> The relative diffusion of power away from the United States and toward other states and nonstate actors—which, in many ways, was a deliberate aim of US postwar strategy, as the United States sought to bring more nations into the global economic and security system<sup>4</sup>—is making coherent and effective global governance a far more difficult proposition. To echo Robert Kagan, who insists that American power and leadership are fundamental to global governance, it is worth asking whether the uncoupling of American power from global governance is good for the world.<sup>5</sup>

Absent American power, there is no guarantee that the world we are accustomed to living in, and from which we derive much benefit, will endure. That world, the one governed (however imperfectly) by a set of rules, norms, and principles—which Americans, and billions around the world, believe are fair and just—is at risk. To preserve this world and the ideals upon which it rests, American power and leadership, though adapted to new global circumstances and creatively exercised, should remain the most critical levers for just and effective global governance.

The Westphalian-Plus world offers enormous opportunities to strengthen American prosperity and security, *if* the United States identifies and monitors the most important changes that are under way, works with close allies to develop approaches to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges, and systematically realigns its resources and institutions to better support its efforts. Such a strategic outlook will require forward-looking and active leadership. In short, the United States will have to harness change in order to save the system.

**In short, the United States will have to harness change in order to save the system.**

This paper is divided into four major sections. The first describes the Westphalian-Plus world we now inhabit, including a basic assessment of where the world has been and where it is headed. The second section elucidates dynamic stability as a strategic concept. It makes a case for harnessing the upheaval that is inherent in the Westphalian-Plus world. The third section provides an analysis of what should be the ends of American foreign and security policy in the Westphalian-Plus world. This section makes the case that, although American policymakers will have to employ a different strategic toolkit, America's ends should remain consistent going forward. The fourth section makes the case for America's ongoing leadership into the future. Despite some important weaknesses, America remains the power best suited to lead an evolving global order in the years ahead. A short conclusion offers suggestions for further work.



A small unmanned aerial vehicle flies during a demonstration at the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International exhibition, Washington, DC, August 13, 2013. *Photo credit: Reuters/ Jason Reed.*

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# The Westphalian-Plus World

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Our world is characterized by the rapid speed and massive scale of change. Challenges confront world leaders at a pace that appears faster than ever before, and of a fashion that seems more novel than at any time in the past. To most observers, these challenges make the world appear to be more volatile than it has been.<sup>6</sup> The key global trends that are driving such change, as outlined in the National Intelligence Council's landmark *Global Trends 2030* report and the United Kingdom's *Global Strategic Trends out to 2045* report, include the rapid shift of power within the interstate system to Asia and the global South, and the diffusion of power from states to nonstate actors. The power diffusion trend, in particular, is reinforced by disruptive technologies and the unprecedented growth of a global and diverse middle class.<sup>7</sup>

## Power Shift from West to East and South

A clear global trend driving change is the shift of power within the international system itself. If the twentieth century could be characterized as the "Trans-Atlantic Century," then the twenty-first century may become known as the "Trans-Pacific Century." According to the Asian Development Bank, the Asian share of global gross domestic product (GDP) will double from 26 percent in 2011 to 52 percent in 2050, meaning that the majority of all economic activity on Earth will occur in Asia.<sup>8</sup> This trend is a historic development. In recent decades, Asian countries have positioned themselves for success within the global economy, starting with postwar Japan's reconstruction in the 1950s; then in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of the "tiger" economies (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea); and finally, in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, with the rise of China and India—Asia's demographic giants. A key moment in this storyline occurred in October 2014, when the International Monetary Fund estimated that China's economy had become the world's largest (as measured in terms of purchasing power parity), surpassing that of the United States.<sup>9</sup>

As Asia is rapidly becoming the locus of global economic activity, the region's security dynamics are also becoming unsettled and drawing increased global attention. An Asian arms race is under way. In 2012, Asian countries spent more on defense than did European states; in 2013, nine of the top ten arms importers were Asian, including India (first), China (third), Bangladesh (ninth), and Taiwan (tenth).<sup>10</sup> Few believe that this arms race will end soon. A



study by IHS Jane's, conducted in 2013, estimated that Asian nations collectively will overtake the United States in defense spending by around 2021.<sup>11</sup> Military buildups often go hand in hand with rising economic power, as was true in the European, American, and Japanese cases at different periods during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a fashion, then, increased military spending in East Asia is yet another sign of the region's growing economic power. However, should East Asia's simmering tensions escalate into open conflict, the effects would harm regional economies and ripple outward to affect the larger global economy.

At the same time, power is also moving toward other regions, including Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. While these regions are frequently in the news for the wrong reasons—such as warfare and conflict, illicit trafficking, or poverty and disease—one can also find encouraging political, economic, demographic, or social trends in each of them. Latin America, for instance, is a region on the rise, economically and otherwise. As the most urbanized region in the world, Latin America has both well-educated and highly connected populations (in 2015, the region is expected to have a 126 percent mobile-penetration rate, and some 781 million mobile connections).<sup>12</sup> It also possesses significant energy reserves and other natural resources. Although no one can forecast with certainty individual countries' growth rates over the long term, both Brazil and Mexico are forecasted to rank among the world's largest economies by the middle of the century.<sup>13</sup>

Sub-Saharan Africa contains both positive and negative trends. Economically, the region has some real bright spots. Over the course of a decade, ending in 2013, Africa had six of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world; in 2014, that figure increased to seven of the world's ten fastest.<sup>14</sup> Yet looking ahead, Sub-Saharan Africa faces several enormous challenges, including managing the world's highest population growth rates. In 2014, the United Nations revised its population forecasts upward, noting that fertility in the region has not declined as rapidly as it historically did in Latin America and Asia. It now forecasts that Sub-Saharan Africa's population will not stabilize before 2100. The consequences of this forecast are extreme; the UN considers it likely that Nigeria's population alone will exceed five hundred million people in 2100, with the possibility of a number closer to one billion.<sup>15</sup> African countries must be able to translate this demographic growth into economic bounty while maintaining the integrity of their natural ecosystems, or their populations will overwhelm their natural resources and governing capacities. This task will be difficult for many African countries. However, the optimistic take is that if African countries can productively employ their large working-age populations, their demography can become a source of strong economic growth, as occurred during the twentieth century in Europe, the United States, and Asia. By mid-century, Africa will certainly have the workforce; one in four workers globally will be African.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, while the Middle East is beset by growing conflicts and simmering rivalries, it also contains much dynamism. Some Arabian Gulf countries, for instance, have been investing in highly advanced platforms designed to help them shift to knowledge economies. For example,




The Pudong district in Shanghai. Established by the Chinese government in the 1990s as a special economic zone, the Pudong district is a glittering symbol of the country's new-found wealth and economic power. *Photo credit: Aly Song.*





Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah University of Science and Technology and the United Arab Emirates' Masdar City are major projects designed both to attract scientific and technological investment to the region and to build national capacity in these areas.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, like Africa and Latin America, the region contains a youthful, and often entrepreneurial, population that is highly connected to the global economy through information and communications technologies (ICTs).<sup>18</sup> For example, there are some ninety million Internet users in the region, representing 40 percent of its population. In some places, Internet usage is far higher; the UAE is expected to be the first country in the world with 100-percent household broadband Internet access.<sup>19</sup> There is no guarantee that the efforts by Gulf leadership, and by entrepreneurial individuals across the Middle East, will succeed in diversifying economies away from the energy sector or in building knowledge economies. For that matter, there is no guarantee that these countries will continue to prosper, given the region's many security problems. Yet their efforts are nonetheless remarkable for the scale of investment and sustained attention to economic diversification.



**Our world is characterized by the rapid speed and massive scale of change. Challenges confront world leaders at a pace faster than ever before.**

## **Individual Empowerment and Disruptive Technologies**


Together, increased wealth, better education, and improving access to advanced personalized technology are creating a world in which individuals have far greater capabilities than ever before. Today, individuals are much better connected to each other and to the rest of the world, with easy and rapid access to information about global developments, the means to communicate with one another, and the ability to organize to shape events in their favor. Individuals also have increasing access to other emerging technologies that will augment these capabilities. Also, over the next decades, economic growth in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America will grow the global middle class. While the majority of the 6.8 billion people in the world today do not enjoy middle-income status, projected growth in emerging economies suggests that, by 2030, the majority will be propelled into the middle class.<sup>20</sup> Although this global middle class will be heterogeneous—with wide variations in income and preferences, as well as other disparities—the upshot is that, in 2030, billions of people will have the means to acquire a middle-income lifestyle.

Increasingly powerful technologies are indeed an important storyline. During the last four decades, Moore's Law has proven more or less correct, and technological development has made astonishing leaps.<sup>21</sup> As a result, advanced-technology prices have plummeted, enabling powerful tools, such as personal computers and smartphones, to become accessible to people of even modest means. Combining those technologies with Internet access means most of humanity now has, at its fingertips, a seemingly infinite amount of information and previously unimaginable computing power.

Historically, states have often been the primary movers of technological change. Time and again, their basic investments in research and development have proven foundational for later commercial development.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, even in those cases where states have had to respond to technological changes created elsewhere in society, they have found adaptive ways to maintain, or even strengthen, their capabilities. States discovered that technological leaps—such as the printing press, telegraph, railroad, and airplane—could be used for their own purposes, whether for building governance capacity, extending their authority, providing services to their people, or, of course, for waging wars. As a result, we can expect that states will respond aggressively to technological changes, just as they always have. In the social-media domain, for example, states are using these technologies for their own purposes, including leveraging or even controlling individuals' use of social media.

Regardless, no state can afford to ignore technology as a force in the lives of its citizens. The new era is characterized by greater individual autonomy, stemming from a combination of more education, greater wealth, and technologically driven capabilities. Consider, for example, the wide and varied grassroots-driven protests in the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and East Asia, just in the past few years.<sup>23</sup> Information technologies played important roles in shaping these developments, including by providing a means for grassroots protesters to find inspiration from abroad.<sup>24</sup> Historically, organizing mass protests and demonstrations meant face-to-face, or word-of-mouth, recruitment of participants. Though these methods will remain central tools for grassroots organization in the future, social media has greatly expanded individuals' ability to identify likeminded others at different scales—across a city, a nation, or the world—and to organize effectively and efficiently around a common cause.

So what are the key technologies that will continue to change the world? While not an exhaustive list, some of the most transformative include "big data" technologies, additive



**It is dangerous to assume that the diffusion of technological capabilities to individuals will lead to enlightenment.**



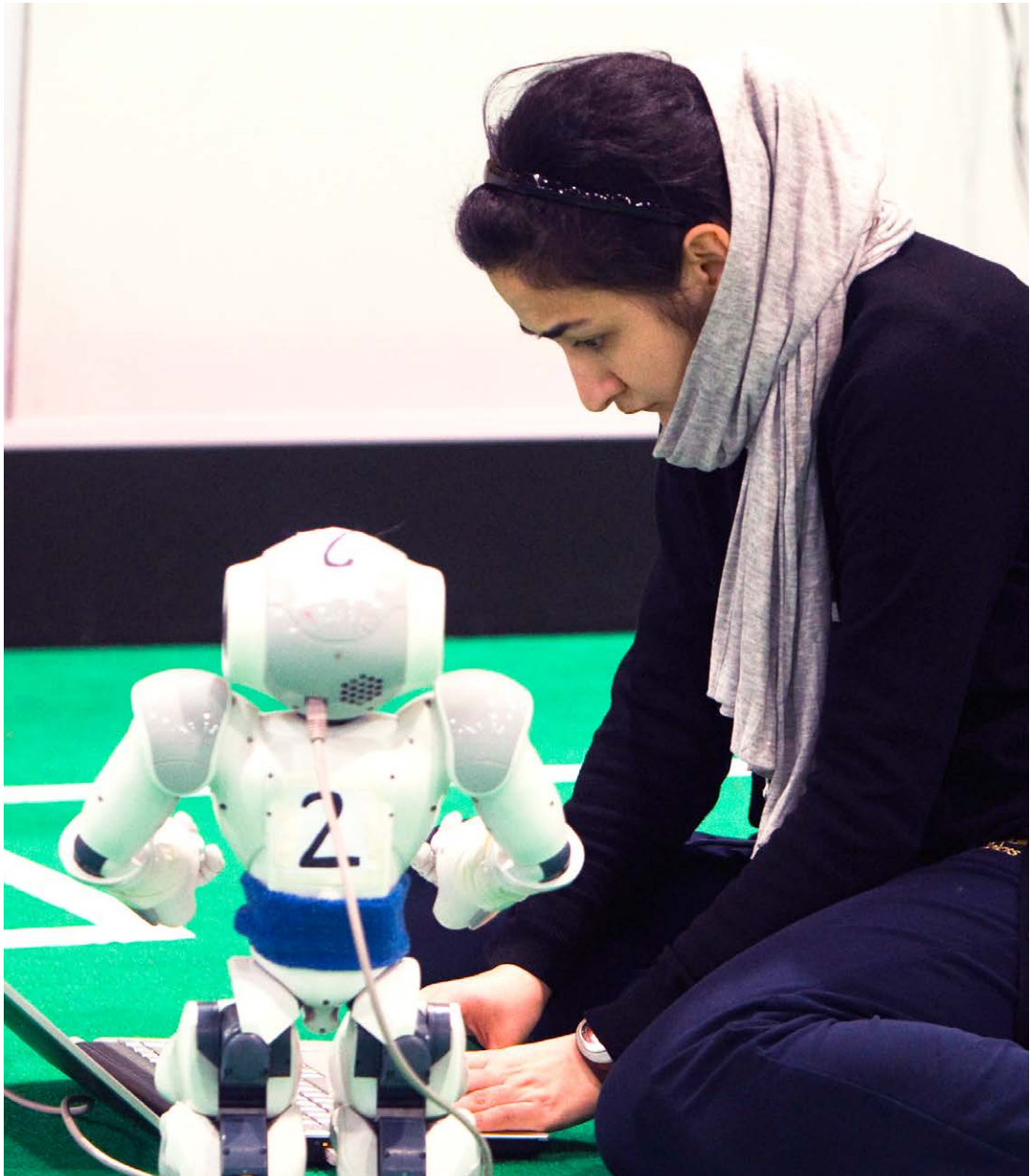
manufacturing, robotics and automation, and biotechnology. Big data refers to how data is becoming a nearly limitless storehouse of information for an almost endless variety of applications.<sup>25</sup> Peter Levine, a partner at the venture-capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, observed that nearly all of the data in the world today has been created just in the last few years. The world, he stated, “create[s] 2.5 quintillion bytes of data every four days”—equivalent to a new Google over that time span—“and the rate is increasing.”<sup>26</sup> Nonstate actors can better understand and navigate the world as the costs of generating, storing, and accessing data fall to almost zero, and as data analytics improve.

Additive manufacturing (ADM), also known as “3D printing” (and now “4D printing”),<sup>27</sup> has similarly revolutionary implications. Called “additive” manufacturing because goods are produced through printing processes that build objects one layer at a time, this technology enables very small producers to manufacture complex, high-quality goods at low cost. ADM could reduce or eliminate assembly lines and inventory, at least for some manufactured goods, because products can be “printed” on demand.<sup>28</sup> But there is a darker side. As the military and NASA see the value in ADM, so do nonstate actors, which are gaining the means to manufacture their own weapons, armor, and much else.<sup>29</sup>

Robotic systems are becoming mainstream in every domain—on land, under water, and in the atmosphere—because they substantially increase productivity and efficiency.<sup>30</sup> Robots remove people from risky manufacturing and resource-extraction jobs and, in the future, will become ever more prominent in war zones.<sup>31</sup> As with ADM, inexpensive robotics give individuals access to technologies that were previously possessed only by states and large corporations. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), a type of robotic system, are a good example. As UAVs become smaller, more capable, and much cheaper, their impacts on labor and prosperity remain uncertain, and significant employment dislocation cannot be ruled out.<sup>32</sup>

Biotechnology may turn out to have the greatest impact of all emerging technologies. J. Craig Venter, who in the early 2000s became one of the first persons to sequence the whole human genome, estimates that it cost roughly \$100 million to do so at the time. Now that cost has fallen to around \$1,000 per genome, and can be expected to fall further.<sup>33</sup> Molecular diagnostics (genetic analysis and testing) is another rapidly evolving field, providing doctors with more timely and accurate disease testing as well as improved information about treatment.<sup>34</sup> Together, these and other biotechnologies (for instance, human augmentation) should lead to an improved quality of life and increased lifespans for millions if not billions of people.

However, like all such disruptive technologies, there is a darker side to biotechnology. First, the chances for an inadvertent error leading to a biological catastrophe (“bio-error”) are increasing, as exponentially more actors experiment with biotechnology. Second, the potential for adversaries’ use of biological organisms with military or terrorist application (“bioterror”)



Tuche Ayar, a member of the Cerbrus Turkish robotic team, prepares her robot before a soccer match during the sixth RoboCup Iran Open 2011 competition in Tehran. *Photo credit: Reuters/Raheb Homavandi.*



is also growing. Third, it is unlikely that all societies will follow the same ethics guidelines regarding the limits of biotech applications. To provide a current example, American scientists are reluctant to explore the genetic bases of intelligence, because of cultural resistance to notions of the inheritability of intelligence. Chinese researchers, in contrast, have few such reservations, and are now mining DNA samples in the hope of being able to identify, and eventually manipulate, genetic bases of human intelligence.<sup>35</sup>

## Implications

Mathew Burrows, the author of the National Intelligence Council's three most recent *Global Trends* reports, has written that, while at the NIC, he and his team consistently underappreciated the rate of change in the world.<sup>36</sup> While Burrows was referring to multiple types of change, he emphasized the speed of technological development in particular. Technological change is going to disrupt our comfortable notions about how the world works, whether geopolitically, economically, socially, or even spiritually. Take the case of 3D printing. Like fracking, it is an example of sector-specific technological innovation (manufacturing in the one case, and energy production in the other). And like fracking, 3D printing is likely to have enormous spillover consequences extending well beyond the manufacturing sector. It will mean a lot more than just empowering small manufacturers relative to larger ones (which alone would be a watershed development in industrial history). The truly disruptive effects of 3D printing will shape not only other economic sectors but also other dimensions of life, including intellectual-property rights, counterfeiting, and illicit trafficking. In each case, this technology is not only threatening to make national regulations obsolete, but is also challenging the very idea of interstate control of globally traded goods and services (including illicit ones, such as drugs and weapons). What meaning, for example, does intellectual property have when an individual can perform a high-resolution scan of an object and then easily reproduce it to exactly the same specifications as the original?<sup>37</sup> This becomes a wicked problem when one considers that a digitized image, from a high-resolution scan, can be sent instantly from one part of the world to another, and then be manufactured locally with a 3D printer. In this case, as in so many other areas, technologists are forcing regulators' hands, rather than the other way around.

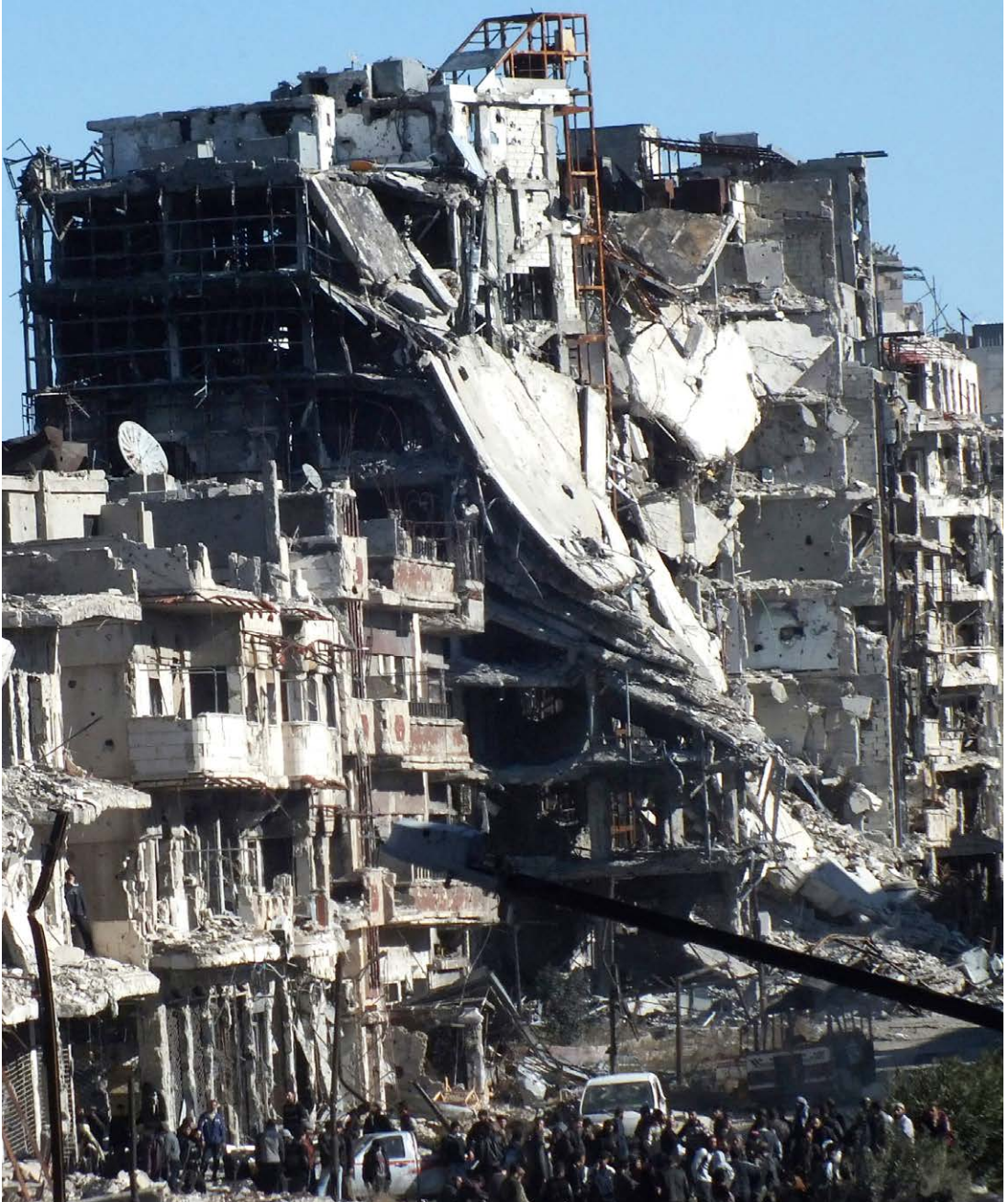
Likewise, for strategists and policymakers, individual empowerment presents a thorny set of issues, owing to the implications of a world in which states pull fewer levers. On the positive side, individual empowerment could mean greater demand for accountable, effective, and democratic forms of governance, although none of these outcomes is a given (middle classes, for example, might defend non-democratic systems as long as their economic expectations are met).<sup>38</sup> Yet the diffusion of power to nonstate actors is also adding to a problematic "global-governance deficit." Power diffusion from the United States to other states

around the world is already straining the rules, norms, and decision-making procedures of the existing global governance system.<sup>39</sup> The diffusion of power to nonstate actors further muddies this complicated picture, for it is no longer obvious who gets to participate in governance. In the Westphalian world, the answer was self-evident: the sovereign state and its designated representatives. In the Westphalian-Plus world, the answer is far from clear.

More power in the hands of more people translates into more challenges to state preferences. It also means the erosion and, in some cases, preclusion of desired state outcomes. The diffusion of power to nonstate actors is a tantalizing and hopeful development to the extent that it results in grassroots pressure for better governance. Yet there is no guarantee that empowerment will lead to these outcomes. An obvious worry is that nonstate actors, including criminal and terror organizations, will apply the same tools of empowerment toward very dark ends. The technologies that can empower individuals, groups, and other nonstate actors for good—such as ICT, biotechnology, and unmanned aerial systems—can also empower them for much else. It is dangerous to assume—as both futurists and technologists are often wont to do—that the diffusion of technological capabilities to individuals (often mislabeled as “democratization”) will lead to enlightenment.

The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS, also called the Islamic State or Daesh) provides a fitting, and unsettling, example. ISIS is a nonstate actor that places modern technology in the service of a radical and antimodern agenda. According to Robert Hannigan, head of the United Kingdom’s intelligence operation Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), ISIS is “the first terrorist group whose members have grown up on the Internet” and which “embrace[s] the web as a noisy channel in which to promote itself, intimidate people, and radicalize new recruits.”<sup>40</sup> Social media is as important a weapon for ISIS as anything used on the battlefield. As such, Twitter—an exemplar of the liberation narrative that usually dominates discussion of social media’s impact on society—has become a core tool in ISIS’s fight, as have other social-media platforms. The group’s female adherents craft enthusiastic tweets about infidels, beheadings, slavery, and the desirability of pre-modern gender roles in a fashion that one observer has called “a kind of jihadi subculture cool.”<sup>41</sup>

The sober reality is that the diffusion of power to nonstate actors will not *automatically* translate into more justice, transparency, accountability, democracy, and human rights. While there is much hope for a better world, it is also possible that individual empowerment will lead to fragmented governance, which in turn will mean poorer governance, which in turn will create worse outcomes rather than better ones. Outside of those who believe that technological progress and human progress are one and the same, the diffusion of power to nonstate actors introduces real governance challenges that must be overcome if the world is to become a better, rather than a worse, place to live. In the future, as in the past, good governance will remain fundamental for global peace, security, and prosperity.



People waiting to be evacuated gather near damaged buildings at a besieged area of Homs, Syria, on February 12, 2014. *Photo credit: Reuters/Yazan Homsy.*

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# Dynamic Stability

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**H**istoric transition periods in global affairs, such as those after both world wars, are marked by uncertainty, without a clear path forward for the global system. The global order that we have lived in since 1945 is now under great strain, and the operating principles that have guided US international engagement for so long are no longer sufficient to address a rapidly changing world. This dynamism in global affairs presents the United States, and the world, with significant new challenges that cannot be ignored. However, that same dynamism also opens an enormous set of new opportunities for those bold enough to seize the moment. As in past transition periods, human agency will shape the world going forward.

“Dynamic stability” best describes our recommended approach to US strategy in the Westphalian-Plus world. As the universal values of the liberal international system are vital to American prosperity and security, the country’s priority ought to be maintaining and adapting the system that underpins those values amid a changing global environment. The best way to do so is not to try to counter all of the changes that appear to undermine stability across a range of domains. Rather, the United States should seek to harness those monumental changes, as effectively as possible, to play to its national advantages. While the quest for stability remains central, it can no longer be the only overarching national goal. Continuing to ignore or downplay the changes now unfolding globally could reduce, rather than enhance, maintenance of the rules-based international system and achievement of the national goals outlined below.

In short, in this Westphalian-Plus world, the United States’ strategic portfolio should be rebalanced, with significantly greater attention paid to identifying, and then leveraging, the key changes shaping the global environment. These changes, if harnessed smartly, can be keys to sustaining the United States’ preeminent position well into the middle of the century. For instance, the global trend of individual empowerment plays to built-in strengths of the United States: to American society, political culture, economic model, and other aspects of the American national enterprise. Yet the US government’s approach to navigating the global landscape does not take the individual-empowerment trend into account nearly as much as it should. Of all nations, the United States is in the best position to both encourage the highest aspirations of empowered individuals around the world and to benefit from that empowerment.





## Strategy for a World in Transition

This strategy paper emphasizes how the twenty-first-century world will feature global surprises amid sustained and rapid change. As Randall Schweller argues, “entropy” will be the new normal—by which he means that disorder, rather than order, is becoming the defining and unsettling central reality of the global environment during this century.<sup>42</sup> While military conflict between great powers will become less likely, he believes, disputes across wide-ranging issues in the security, economic, and environmental domains will become more common, and more difficult to settle through cooperative mechanisms. In order to prosper within such a world, American strategists should heed four basic guidelines.

**1. Adjust interstate mechanics.** An interstate system that is not malleable enough to adjust when power shifts will likely be torn asunder by its very brittleness. As such, American leaders ought to view the current system as an evolving instrument that can be improved over time. Being willing to adjust system mechanics will do more than demonstrate an American desire to steward the global order; doing so might help ward off interstate conflict in the future.

Moreover, in keeping with the dynamic-stability approach, smart adjustment might well preserve the current system’s core functions and best attributes more than obsessing over maintenance of its power structure. The dust-up over China’s plans to create an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) provides a timely and fitting example. Frustrated in part by America’s unwillingness to reform the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) voting structure to reflect China’s economic clout, Chinese leaders decided it was best to create a parallel bank where they would have greater control. In March 2015, fearing that the AIIB would undermine the IMF, the United States forced a diplomatic showdown over AIIB membership, a fight it lost in highly public and embarrassing fashion. Rather than leading global efforts to adapt multilateral institutions to shifting power dynamics, American insistence on maintaining the status quo boomeranged, resulting in diplomatic isolation and estrangement from longtime European allies.<sup>43</sup> (It is possible that the United States misread Chinese motives for creating the AIIB in the first place, seeing in China’s actions a threat when the Chinese may very well have just needed an institution that would help them better navigate their large-scale lending.<sup>44</sup>)

For America’s leaders, the difficult part of this equation will be determining when it should seek to adjust and when it should stand firm. Adjustment works when the different actors buy into the basic premise upon which an interstate order is built. However, as Henry Kissinger argues in his most recent book, *World Order*, the difficulty is that other states do not always accept the legitimacy of that premise. Both Russia and China, he argues, see the world in fundamentally different ways than the United States does. Hence, their conceptualization of “world order” begins with divergent assumptions that, in turn, lead to contrasting, even clashing, understandings about how to govern the world and who should govern it.<sup>45</sup> This

idea explains Russia's intervention in Ukraine and its broader assertiveness across Europe. It is a shot aimed not only at the post-Cold War order, but at a set of norms about interstate behavior, including norms regarding the legitimate use of force. Similarly, China's moves in the East China and South China Seas represent its attempt to reset international norms and power relationships in the Pacific, which for decades have been defined by the United States and its regional allies and partners (including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, and Australia), on its own terms. A core task ahead is to find ways to manage the rise of state actors with such different outlooks, while preserving the governance norms and best attributes of the system that America has led since 1945.

**2. Play a multilevel game.** This paper asserts that the world consists of far more than diplomats engaging other diplomats in high-stakes gamesmanship. Dynamic stability demands that national leaders become more comfortable playing a multilevel game, one that includes management of the transformational shifts being brought about by individuals, groups, firms, and other nonstate actors who are increasingly empowered through technological development. These actors, individually and collectively, possess a greater range of capabilities than at any time in history, and their ability to organize effectively for participation in local, national, and global governance has never been greater.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, civil society's engagement on issues from climate change to human rights to pandemics to illicit trafficking forces states to pay greater attention to global governance and security topics that traditionally do not rise to the level of high diplomacy (typically defined as questions of war and peace).<sup>47</sup> Quite often, civil society also engages on questions of high diplomacy.

It follows that American strategists and policymakers ought to become as concerned with powerful nonstate actors at home and abroad as they are with their counterparts in foreign and defense ministries. The US government should operate under the assumption that important nonstate constituencies will continuously evaluate: whether the United States is a potential friend, foe, or something in between; whether they should support, oppose, or simply observe US policies and actions; and how, why, and when they can leverage the US government in pursuit of specific ends.<sup>48</sup> "Streetcraft," meaning the projection of power through engagement with the "street" (engaged citizenries, as demonstrated in Hong Kong in 2014, Istanbul in 2013, or the Arab Spring from

**In the Westphalian-Plus world, perception becomes reality more than ever, as information is produced and consumed by more people through more avenues than at any other time in history.**



A protester dressed in protective equipment demonstrates calls for G20 leaders to address the Ebola issue, Brisbane, Australia, November 15, 2014. *Photo credit: Reuters/Jason Reed.*

2011 onward), therefore becomes a more important dimension of diplomacy during the twenty-first century.<sup>49</sup> For its part, statecraft can no longer be practiced effectively without skillful employment of the tools of “streetcraft” and effective engagement that can help attract foreign publics, stakeholders, and media to the wisdom of the American endeavor broadly, and of US policies and actions in particular.

Values and norms revolve around perceptions. Acting strategically in this world means paying greater attention to how the United States can shape global perceptions about itself and its values. American leaders will need to find ways to rebuild, and then maintain, the consensus that has underpinned the global system that the United States constructed after 1945 and has led since. Public diplomacy has to be upgraded to match the scale and novelty of this century’s challenges. In the Westphalian-Plus world, perception becomes reality more than ever before, as information is produced and consumed by more people through more avenues than at any other time in history. As such, the US government must sharpen its public-diplomacy instruments. More importantly, it must engage local thought leaders who can become effective and influential voices, if not advocates, for American positions abroad. Kristin Lord has argued that this task has become so large and important that “public diplomacy” fails to capture its significance. Only well-conceived, well-resourced, scaled, and sustained public-engagement strategies will do the trick.<sup>50</sup>

There is a subtle but important point to be made here. ICT advances are creating the possibility for much greater collaboration between national governments and the public, including foreign publics. Social media ought not to be seen as a simple information-transmittal mechanism akin to the radio or television, but rather as a two-way device (of sorts) that can build relationships, provide more thorough and timely information for improved decision-making, and otherwise bypass “calcified traditional channels and...networks of influence” anywhere on Earth.<sup>51</sup> Social media, in other words, is a powerful new type of tool that goes well beyond the dissemination of information from a sender to a receiver. It is no accident that local governments around the world have taken up the “smart cities” baton with such eagerness. Cities use social media and other ICT (such as sensor-equipped smart devices) not only to improve dialogue between themselves and their residents but, more critically, to improve their services—in effect, to provide better governance—using the very same technologies. Diplomats would do well to follow this lead.

**3. Build strength through coalitions.** A practical consequence of both of the above principles is that the US government should become much more active in building coalitions with a wide range of public and private actors, domestically and abroad. Given the rise of other states within the Westphalian system, it is clear that solutions must go well beyond the maintenance of America’s existing interstate partnerships. It also means deepening those partnerships and building new ones through creative forms of engagement. One place to look is to the club of democratic states. Although it is erroneous to assume that democratic states’ interests always align, it is nonetheless reasonable to posit that democracies have much to gain from maintenance of the existing global order and should be inclined toward cooperation with one another and the United States on a great many issues. As Ash Jain asserts, what the democratic club needs is a “standing entity focused on advancing the norms and principles of a liberal world order,” a function that he argues is not fulfilled by organs such as NATO or the UN Security Council.<sup>52</sup> In keeping with this idea, Jain and the Atlantic Council now coordinate the “Democracies 10” (or “D-10”) forum, which is designed to “promote strategic cooperation on global political and security issues and advance the norms and values of a liberal international order.”<sup>53</sup>

The US government will also need to find new ways to partner with nontraditional actors, including: “subnational” governments; foundations and NGOs; multinational firms and entrepreneurs; and even individual people. American companies and individuals, for example, are powerful agents domestically and abroad, and the US government ought to leverage these powers more systematically than it has to date.<sup>54</sup> It should align policies to coordinate more closely with industry and other actors in the domains of energy, cyber, technology, communications, and many other spheres, as General (Ret.) James L. Jones has often suggested.<sup>55</sup> The US government should also intensify its reach into universities and other centers of critical expertise, to help coordinate responses to shifting global conditions. While there is some risk that building such partnerships can backfire in some instances, as when



foreign governments level the accusation that the United States is meddling in their domestic politics, the gains to be achieved from engagement with global civil society far outweigh its drawbacks.<sup>56</sup>

The cyber domain represents a particularly salient illustration of these themes. In this domain, the private sector possesses significant subject-matter expertise, has exceptional agility with respect to responding to changes in the cyber landscape, and provides much of the online content and nearly all of the cyber infrastructure. The private sector owns some 80-90 percent of this infrastructure, and responds to most of the attacks on it. For its part, the public sector has nearly endless resources for investing in cyber research, infrastructure, and policing, and has considerable staying power within this domain. To govern this public and private domain, Microsoft has proposed a “G20+20” concept, through which governments would create an ongoing dialogue with the private sector, with respect to cyber governance. This structure would allow both partners to utilize their expertise in a shared-governance arrangement.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, there are few effective governance structures to bring together the best of the private and public sectors. New solutions could be based on existing governance structures (such as building from the G20 group of nations) or starting fresh (such as a stability board made up of likeminded Western governments and key companies).

**Power will be exercised through leveraging connectivity—through using one’s network of state and nonstate actors to build *ad hoc* coalitions.**

The cyber case provides an example of the highly networked world in which we now live. Connectivity within global networks has become a core attribute of power, and nonstate actors almost always are significant participants within those networks.<sup>58</sup> The ISIS case provides a powerful, but negative, example of a heavily networked transnational organization. But there are many more positive examples. Cities, for instance, serve as the global economy’s hubs, through which global trade, investment, and culture all flow, hence local governments are embedded in dense transnational governance networks.<sup>59</sup> States will have to become more adept at accessing other networks, which can then be leveraged to achieve their ends.

Because there are many more actors with power and influence on a vast array of issues, the United States will have to work with changing coalitions and groupings of allies and partners. Advancing US interests will require a high volume and frequency of engagement across multiple domains, often under conditions that are in great flux. As Robert A. Manning has characterized it, the United States needs to seek out “situational power” opportunities,



Then-New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (right) shakes hands with Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon (left) as Babatunde Fashola, Governor of Lagos State, Nigeria, looks on during the Rio+C40 Megacity Mayors Taking Action on Climate Change event in Rio de Janeiro, June 19, 2012. *Photo credit: Reuters/Sergio Moraes.*



wherein “different issues and problems will require different tools and different constellations of actors to obtain results.”<sup>60</sup> Power will be exercised through leveraging connectivity—through using one’s network of state and nonstate actors to build *ad hoc* coalitions, often in hurried conditions such as disaster or pandemic response.

**4. Hone the ART of strategy.** American leaders ought to hone a set of attributes that will enable the United States (not just the US government) to prosper within a turbulent world. These attributes are agility, resiliency, and transparency (ART).<sup>61</sup> Dynamic stability holds that agility—nimbleness in the face of change—is a keystone of strength, for the Westphalian-Plus world is one where anticipation of events, and speed and deftness in responding to them, are far more valuable than ever before. For example, the Pentagon’s Defense Innovation Initiative, announced in 2014, is a step in the right direction. This initiative seeks to ensure that the United States stays ahead of its rivals through constant innovation—including, but not limited to, the creative use of the technological advances outlined in this essay.<sup>62</sup> In addition, in a world where shocks are more common, it is equally necessary to build resiliency into policies, institutions, and society writ large. Deepening America’s ability to absorb blows from abroad, and bounce back quickly from them, will be an essential strategy for marshaling swift and effective responses to crises. The United States will be surprised, and it will need to deal quickly and effectively with the sources of those surprises, working with both state and nonstate allies and partners in all cases. Finally, building greater transparency will signal that American actions are not random acts of a great power, but are based on longstanding commitments to widely shared and deep-seated values and norms. These attributes are defined in greater detail in box 1.

## BOX 1. THE “ART” OF DYNAMIC STABILITY

### Agility

The increased pace and interconnectedness of global events requires increased agility and deftness in foreign affairs. The 2014 Ebola outbreak is an apt example of the type of complex, or “wicked,” problem requiring agile leadership—one involving high levels of coordination across public, private, and nonprofit actors to meet a rapidly changing, transnational public health, humanitarian, economic, and security crisis. As the Ebola case illustrates, the US government will not only have to become faster in response to the pace of global affairs, but must expect that it will have to pivot rapidly from one complex issue to another—or have to address several such issues simultaneously. It must build the capacity to more adroitly handle fluid and nonlinear crises involving multiple state and nonstate actors. Doing so will require, at minimum, greatly improved collaboration among the US government’s many departments and agencies, which in turn will have to work more closely and effectively with diverse actor coalitions domestically and abroad.

### Resiliency

The increasing pace and interconnectedness of world affairs also requires building greater resiliency into American society. Increased resiliency means deepening the nation’s ability to absorb and bounce back from the inevitable shocks that the Westphalian-Plus world will produce across every aspect of experience—including the security, public health, economic, and ecological aspects. While there is no magic formula to prescribe exactly how to boost societal resiliency, America’s leaders can start by improving the US government’s policymaking and policy-execution systems. As outlined by Leon Fuerth in a 2012 National Defense University report, the US government can create “anticipatory governance” mechanisms by: taking strategic foresight more seriously; aligning policies, tools, and budgets to manage complex crises and problems; and constructing feedback systems to monitor and improve policy performance before crises hit.<sup>1</sup> US policymakers also need to craft strategies to buffer American society from systemic shocks—for instance, by resetting the American people’s expectations about the greater risk of shocks that the Westphalian-Plus world will generate going forward.

### Transparency

The Westphalian-Plus world requires that states become more adept at managing public perception. In a world where information flows easily—where anyone can become a global news reporter at any time via online tools and mobile platforms, and where a local protest can expand regionally or globally—the US government must be able to act with alacrity and agility, but also with transparency. Clarity—of strategic intent, of core goals and priorities, and of methods—would reduce the odds of misperception during crises. More fundamentally, doing so would help rebuild the US government’s “brand” abroad through enhancing America’s credibility as a good-faith actor, as a steward of the international system, and as a defender of broadly shared values and norms.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon S. Fuerth with Evan M.H. Faber, *Anticipatory Governance: Practical Upgrades* (Washington: National Defense University, 2012).





The Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York. *Photo credit: Reuters/Carlo Allegri.*

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## America's Ends

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A strategy is a structured approach to harnessing available means to attain a desired end; in more common parlance, “it gets you from where you are to where you want to go.”<sup>63</sup> Building a strategy requires leaders to define a nation’s goals. Dynamic stability is not itself an end, but rather an approach to strategy about how to achieve that end. What the United States will desire most in the future is not very different from what it has sought in the past. In the simplest terms, that is to help shape a world that is worth having. Indeed, America’s main goal will be to sustain (and where necessary, adapt) a global order that reflects America’s highest ideals and best serves America’s national interests—an order not dissimilar to the one that it built after World War II.

The challenge this time around is that maintaining this system, and adapting it to meet this century’s realities, will have to be done under very different circumstances than those of the late 1940s. These circumstances are both quantitative and qualitative: quantitative, in that some key objective metrics of American power are less than they were after World War II; qualitative, in that the Westphalian-Plus world is less well-charted for policymakers than the one they confronted in 1948 or 1949.

The United States should broadly pursue four primary goals in the decades to come: 1) promotion of its core national values; 2) maintenance of prosperity; 3) assurance of global security; and 4) protection of the global commons.

### Values


American power ultimately derives from its ability to lead by ideal and aspiration, instead of by force. Former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski has observed that America’s power of attraction is an enduring strength.<sup>64</sup> The United States is a cosmopolitan country, possessing a long history of immigration, a universal citizenship ideal, and a commitment to democratic governance. Throughout its history, the United States has gained allies and drawn immigrants because, time and again, other people have discovered shared values and found common aspirations in the American project. This power is not to be underestimated. Without it, the United States would have to spend untold blood and treasure cajoling allies and partners to link with Washington. Instead, they most often do so willingly.

The liberal postwar order that the United States and its allies constructed is founded on these values. That system has benefited its dominant power, the United States. But more



importantly, it has benefited scores of nation-states and, ultimately, billions of people around the world. Indeed, this order has proven its virtue, as it has created a durable peace among great powers, rising (and expanding) prosperity, rules-based standards of global justice (at least compared with previous eras), and relative stability. Nominally at least, the system is also built on democratic principles. Supranational institutions, such as the United Nations, have democratic governance norms built into their very structures and processes.

As this system's leader, the United States has enjoyed great benefits, including prosperity, security and a substantial amount of prestige. For decades, critics who have been dissatisfied with the system, or impatient with America's exercise of power, have used this fact to try to counter American leadership. Such critics have not appreciated, however, the degree to which the United States has had to bear the burden of system maintenance at substantial cost. More broadly, they have not fully appreciated what the United States has done for the world through constructing and maintaining this system. While US leadership may not always have lived up to its own ideals, today's broadly shared international norms—including democratic governance, the rule of law, and individual human rights—are nonetheless reflective of American ideals. These norms, and the global system that enables them to survive, are worth preserving. The alternative—a retreat to a world containing fewer universal aspirations, weaker norms of democratic governance, and less appreciation of human rights—is far less appealing.<sup>65</sup>



**American power ultimately derives from its ability to lead by ideal and aspiration, instead of by force.**

Maintaining this system will require sustained adherence to America's core values, and to an updated version of its highest aspirations. Time and again, this appeal has been articulated by American leaders, whether by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1941 "Four Freedoms" speech (freedom of speech and worship, freedom from want and fear), or by John F. Kennedy, who labeled America's mission "a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."<sup>66</sup>

Today, as the post-World War II international order faces an array of daunting challenges, the values that undergird it are also under enormous pressure, across a range of domains. From China's aggressive testing of international maritime law in the western Pacific, to Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilization of a sovereign state in Ukraine, to the declaration by extremists of an Islamic State in parts of Syria and Iraq, to the Hungarian President's declaration of adherence to illiberal democracy, this is a historic time of challenge to longstanding US ideals. If the nations and nonstate actors that benefit the most from the promotion of these universal values—which are sometimes called "transatlantic values,"

defined not by geography but by the community of democracies and states that share similar governance norms—do not assiduously strive to support and uphold those values in word and in deed, then the new era will be far more dangerous and uncertain.

This argument is not to suggest that countries and peoples be made over in the American image, nor that others necessarily copy the American system. America's many allies have political and economic systems that are dissimilar to those found in the United States, and all have national cultures that are distinct as well. For instance, neither Germany's market economy nor its democratic system functions in the same way as America's market economy and democratic system. That is a perfectly healthy and desired state of affairs, even when the two countries diverge on foreign policy and security policy. Divergence does not defeat the larger point: both Germany and the United States, regardless of their differences, share common values that frame their basic understanding of a just and desirable society and world.

This last argument raises a fundamental point. On the one hand, Americans believe that their democratic ideals are virtuous, just, and universal. The United States has a long tradition of orienting its foreign policies around these ideals. On the other hand, Americans have discovered—sometimes painfully—that the rest of the world might not be as aligned with this outlook as the United States has hoped. Yesterday, as today, America's pro-democracy messaging is simply not welcome in a good many places on Earth. Moreover, America's espousal of democratic principles is often misinterpreted as part of a self-important mission to turn the rest of the world into a version of itself. Perhaps worst of all, others have seized upon those occasions when American foreign and security policy appears to have contradicted its democratic values, and used these instances to accuse the United States of being a nation of hypocrites.

These criticisms should make America's leaders pause to reflect. The best way to realize a world that is consistent with America's values is not to proselytize, but to find common ground so as to move toward desired ends. This ground is easier to find with America's democratic allies than with others, although it is still difficult when it comes to policy coordination (recall the "D-10" initiative, described above, which is designed to address this exact problem). The bigger challenge is finding such commonality with those who do not share the entirety of America's democratic values. The good news is that there are opportunities for carving out and solidifying governance norms and principles to which many others (state and nonstate alike) can subscribe. These norms and principles include the rule of law and due process, transparent governance (e.g., anticorruption), respect for human rights and minority rights, prevention of illicit trafficking and piracy, protection of the global commons, and protection of vulnerable populations, such as women, the elderly, and children.



While other actors may not be in a position to sign on to the entire panoply of American ideals, American leaders might find traction in moving different parts of their agenda forward—albeit through different pathways, at different speeds, and with different partners, depending on the issue and circumstance. This would enable the United States to build a wider range of partnerships, and enable it to more effectively advance parts of its agenda. Doing so would help insulate the United States against the frequent charge that America is more infatuated with its power than its ideals, an infatuation that can translate into arrogance. Whether deserved or not, that accusation has turned away a good number of America’s potential partners, state and nonstate alike.<sup>67</sup>

## Prosperity

After World War II, the United States purposefully set up a system that, while also serving to solidify its prime position, was built to enable others to prosper. In fact, the success of this very system is the main reason US relative power has declined so sharply since 1945. Other states, including China, have found that opening their economies to global exchange within this order unleashes economic potential and, over time, leads to growth and national prosperity. It remains to everyone’s ongoing benefit to keep this system in place and manage it as needed.

To maintain this economic order, the United States should continue to push for rules that enable free trade within global, market-based systems. Embracing a rules-based economic order is paramount to ensuring that trade is conducted fairly. Of course, this system is no panacea. Economic woes—including financial crises, cyclical recessions, unemployment, and underemployment—will recur. The United States should remain open to refining or reworking these components to address the system’s weaknesses, such as by continuing to build rules to avoid another financial meltdown. Building resiliency into the global economic system is necessary to ward off the deep economic downturns that the world has experienced twice in the last eighty years, one of which helped trigger a world war.


As such, the United States should work with allies and partners to strengthen the global economic system, both to ensure ongoing growth and to prevent or reduce the incidence of financial shocks. Historic trade arrangements, like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), are cases in point. If successfully concluded, both sets of trade negotiations will renew US global leadership on trade and investment matters, in concert with America’s closest transatlantic and transpacific partners. These partnerships will establish new global standards that reflect the preferences of the United States and its allies across a wide range of sectors, and would create the world’s largest free-trade and investment zones. These agreements would be critical milestones

in reaffirming the economic component of a global order. Successfully concluding such agreements would also act as a strong inducement to China and others to buy into and continue to benefit from that order. (Americans, however, should be under no illusions about the degree to which other states will adopt liberal economics. “State capitalism,” wherein the state’s hand is involved to a far greater degree in national economies than it is in the Anglo-Saxon economic tradition, is a fixture in many emerging economies, particularly in Asia.)<sup>68</sup>

Finally, as referenced above, the United States should work on adjusting the major multilateral economic institutions. Since 1945, the World Bank and IMF have provided foundations for the American-led interstate system. Yet these institutions were designed during a different era, before economic power had diffused outward from the historic industrial core (United States and Europe, primarily). These institutions have come under increasing assault as emerging economies find that the multilaterals’ governing architecture is mismatched with economic reality. China’s desire to launch parallel lending institutions, including the AIIB and a New Development Bank (NDB), stems from this divergence between power and reality, as well as a concern that other major powers, including rival regional powers—the United States in the case of the World Bank and IMF, Japan and the United States in the case of the Asian Development Bank—are in control of these institutions.<sup>69</sup>

## Security

For the current international system to remain viable, the United States must remain its ultimate security guarantor.<sup>70</sup> In the face of continuing change and strategic shocks, not to mention the continued rise of rivals’ capabilities in important areas, the United States must reinvigorate its efforts to ensure that it can maintain the system. To be clear, American military power is not the solution to every strategic problem. Yet the United States cannot abjure the use of military force abroad. Doing so would convince adversaries and competitors that there is no price to pay for aggression or coercion, and would greatly contribute to the further deterioration of the current order. If postwar history has taught anything, it is that the judicious use of American military power is central to system maintenance. Calibrating that use of power has proven



**American military power is not the solution to every strategic problem. Yet the United States cannot abjure the use of military force abroad. The judicious use of American military power is central to system maintenance.**



challenging at times. Still, it is clear that moving toward either end of the spectrum on use-of-force questions would be ineffective for addressing the complex security challenges of the Westphalian-Plus world.

At the same time, one cannot overstate the importance of maintaining consensus among friends and allies about the desirability of the American security guarantee. This consensus is a fundamental reason why the exercise of American military power since 1945 has remained, on balance, more stabilizing than destabilizing as a feature of the global security environment. When America's friends and allies believe that the United States is acting judiciously and appropriately, then the exercise of American military power is greeted with far greater support than when the opposite perception holds true. Therefore, America's first priority should be to engage its allies and partners while deterring and, when necessary, defending against those actors that seek to undermine the system and do harm to those who are part of it. If America calibrates wisely, other states will be more likely to participate in military action that serves to uphold the integrity of the global security system.

While working with states remains the top priority, the United States must increasingly engage nonstate actors. States are not the only actors with a stake in system maintenance, nor are they the only actors with military and paramilitary capabilities. Building relationships with nonstate actors, and continuing to engage them, will help the United States better manage the twenty-first century security environment. For example, the US government's longstanding relationship with Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (and its *peshmerga* security forces) has become useful in the current fight against ISIS. Reinforcing the point of this paper, this is a case where the US government has built a positive, if complicated, relationship with a quasistate actor, in order to help counter the threats to regional security posed by nonstate actors.<sup>71</sup>

There are many areas related to security—biotechnology, cyber, robotics, energy, defense industry, and others—in which nonstate actors have important or even primary roles to play, as partners helping to safeguard mutual interests. Some analysts are advocating for the development of “private-sector-driven” or “private-sector-centric” strategies for strengthening the US approach to these increasingly important domains of US foreign and security policies.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, part of the challenge for American policymakers is to realize that many security issues cannot be resolved only by using the military instrument. In keeping with dynamic stability's basic premise, America's global posture will need to become more nimble and flexible as security challenges become more complex and multifaceted. America's decades-long preponderance in the military sphere, as valuable as it is, might predispose its leaders to view foreign-policy problems through an overly securitized prism. In this way, use of the US military can become America's solution to every international problem. A preferable approach



US President Barack Obama meets with executives from leading tech companies at the White House on December 17, 2013. Pictured (from left to right) are Zynga cofounder Mark Pincus, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, Obama, AT&T Chairman and CEO Randall Stephenson, and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. *Photo credit: Reuters/Kevin Lamarque.*

is to adhere to a “whole-of-government” approach to achieving policy objectives, wherein the United States places more equitable value on its panoply of tools—including diplomacy, economics, and development, as well as the military. Nonmilitary observers are not the only ones who have come to this conclusion; military leaders have as well. General (Ret.) James L. Jones recently articulated a whole-of-government approach to better coordinate the wide range of US government instruments, in service of the nation’s international-policy ends. In his view, cross-departmental coordination might be achieved through a reworked Combatant Command structure (renamed “Unified Regional Commands”) that would bring together disparate arms of the US government abroad under a single coordinating umbrella.<sup>73</sup> Through such approaches, the United States could better sustain its efforts in concert with others, and be better prepared to face the multidimensional challenges that are intrinsic to twenty-first century global problems.

## **Protection of the Global Commons**

The United States must reinvigorate its efforts to protect the global commons, which include the oceans, space, airspace, cyberspace, and climate. The security field has






Two Adelie penguins stand atop a block of melting ice on a rocky shoreline at Cape Denison, Commonwealth Bay in East Antarctica. *Photo credit: Reuters/Pauline Askin.*

long defined the global commons in the first four of these domains. In light of the increasing evidence of accelerating climate change and its significant national security consequences, it is important to include climate in the definition of global commons.<sup>74</sup>

Protecting the global commons is a foundational end for two major reasons. First, the interconnected nature of the global system means that the integrity of the commons is key to the proper functioning of everything else. The world's oceans, cyberspace, and airspace are the stages upon which global trade and exchange occur. Second, the United States reaps significant benefits (both military and economic) from the global commons, and has a vested interest in maintaining them for both the present and the future. Protecting the commons not only serves the material interests of the United States and its allies, but also underscores America's commitment to acting in the best interests of humankind.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, the protection of the world's oceans serves two goals. First, the sea lanes provide the physical transit routes that enable the world's shippers and navies to access far-flung regions. To protect these routes, America ought to stay vigilant against high-seas piracy and, more fundamentally, against attempts to bring international waters under national control. As is true in other commons domains, this task will only get harder as power continues to diffuse to other states (China, for example, appears to want larger parts of the East China and South China Seas under its control) and to nonstate actors, which are finding it easier to acquire "high-end asymmetric technologies" that could hinder American military access to some waters.<sup>76</sup> Second, America has an interest in maintaining the oceans' ecological integrity. This is true both for self-interested reasons (doing so will help sustain economic activity into the future, such as by preventing fisheries from collapsing through overexploitation) and for reputational ones (the perception of the United States as a power acting to protect a global public good).

There are many sound reasons for the United States to lead on climate change as well. As with oceans, there are reputational benefits from protecting a global public good. But there are important practical reasons too, including significant national security consequences. Increased coastal flooding from more frequent and severe storm surges in places like Norfolk,



**Protecting the commons not only serves the material interests of the United States and its allies, but also underscores America's commitment to acting in the best interests of humankind.**



Virginia, will have severe, negative impacts on US military installations. Even more foreboding is the fact that, should the worst scientific forecasts come to fruition during this century, climate change will have existential consequences for the United States—and everyone else. Not least of these consequences are impacts on national and global ecosystems that provide food, fresh water, and energy. The United States cannot meet climate challenges by itself, and will need to lead others in finding workable global solutions. The Sino-American climate agreement reached in November 2014 is an example. Although critics point out the weaknesses in this agreement between the world's two largest carbon-dioxide polluters, it has boosted (at least symbolically) the flagging United Nations climate negotiations, and has offered some hope that a comprehensive global accord will be agreed upon in Paris in late 2015.<sup>77</sup>

There are three other common spaces that need protection. For one, outer space is becoming a highly “congested, contested, and competitive” domain.<sup>78</sup> The United States has slashed its space funding, while other powers, including India and China, are increasing their presences in space.<sup>79</sup> Washington must work with other actors to ensure security, and to prevent potential adversaries from undertaking activities in space that detract from others’ ability to achieve their space goals. It is a certainty that nonstate actors will be a central part of this equation. Whereas states ushered in the space age half a century ago, space exploration today increasingly resembles a flying public-private partnership. Universities, hobbyists, wealthy individuals, and newer commercial entrants (such as Virgin Galactic and SpaceX) are taking advantage of smaller and cheaper technologies to envision and build their own creations. Often, they partner with public space agencies, such as NASA, to achieve their ends. For example, NASA now launches into space miniature satellites known as “cubesats,” built by university faculty and students. Nonstate actors also aim for far greater endeavors, such as manned commercial spaceflight, privately financed and operated moon landings, and much more.<sup>80</sup>

Another commons, airspace, likewise requires sustained effort to secure. Accessible and usable airspace has been a powerful good for the world over the past half century, enabling air travel and commerce. However, ever since Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down over Ukrainian territory in July 2014, the world has become painfully aware that it should not take safe and accessible airspace for granted.<sup>81</sup> Evolving technologies will complicate this commons even further. For instance, ubiquitous drone technology will challenge airspace

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navigation and its legal foundations.<sup>82</sup> In the future, individuals, terrorist organizations, or nation-state adversaries might use swarming drones to launch a sophisticated and deadly attack on a city or other site.<sup>83</sup> More prosaically, law enforcement and regulatory agencies are already alarmed by individuals' use of drones to disrupt sporting events and other large public gatherings.<sup>84</sup>

Lastly, virtual space—cyberspace—is increasingly important, as all global technologies, and all of the economy and society, are becoming plugged into the cyber domain in some way. Even if most of the cyber realm is actually owned by the private sector, the United States needs to make sure that it remains a global commons and is not broken up into walled-off blocs. Cyberspace should remain as “resilient, open, and secure for future generations” as it was for its pioneers.<sup>85</sup> Universal access to cyberspace is not unlike universal access to the oceans; just because universal access exists does not mean it will continue into the future. And this access is under threat from at least two directions. The first is from states that want to bring Internet access under national control, either out of concern for privacy rights (as discussed in Germany, as a result of the National Security Agency revelations) or, conversely, the desire of authoritarian states to control the flow of information to and from their citizens and in the wider world.<sup>86</sup> The second threat is from risks to the technical operation of the system—from hackers, cyber criminals, solar storms, and other disruptors—that have the potential to cause massive interference in the system itself. Failing to protect the system from such interference might lead to a cyber “Lehman moment,” a global shock cascading into parts of the “real” economy and society, which would cause a loss of confidence in cyber governance and even cyberspace itself.<sup>87</sup>



New citizens are naturalized during a US Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalization ceremony, Oakland, California, August 13, 2013. America's ongoing status as an immigrant country is a core sign of the enduring global appeal of the United States. *Photo credit: Reuters/Robert Galbraith.*

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## The Case for American Leadership

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Some analysts have labeled the current state of global affairs as “No One’s World” or the “G-Zero” world, describing a system in which no actor is powerful enough to shape the global environment.<sup>88</sup> As this essay underscores, there are good reasons to adopt such a position. Yet at the same time, it would be an error to write off states and state power. It is not accurate to say that this is a “G-Zero” world, regardless of how convincing this idea appears to be. States will likely remain the most powerful actors within the global system for some time to come. Moreover, among the constellation of states, the United States will remain the predominant power in the global system and across key power domains, for years to come, albeit with less of a margin than before.<sup>89</sup>

Before addressing the case for American leadership, it is important to assess the major contenders, including China, Russia, India, Europe, and others.

Both China and Russia—two major powers that have been busily roiling the international system—appear to be candidates for assuming the mantle of global leadership. Russia’s actions in Ukraine and elsewhere show how much its leadership, most notably President Vladimir Putin, is dissatisfied with the current order. Russia possesses genuine national strengths, including a massive natural-resource endowment (particularly fossil fuels), a sizable and increasingly well-equipped conventional military, a modernizing nuclear deterrent, and a leadership that has demonstrated speed and agility in response to changing international conditions. Geographically, Russia’s massive size appears to be a consistent source of strength. The country borders three major regions (Europe, Central Asia, and East Asia), which gives it at least some built-in advantage, both economically and militarily. For example, it is cheaper for Russia to send its natural gas to Europe and China than it is for the United States to do the same across oceans. (Transoceanic shipping of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, remains more expensive than transcontinental shipping of nonliquefied gas via pipeline).<sup>90</sup>

But Russia’s strengths are more than outweighed by its significant structural weaknesses. Its biggest challenge might be its bleak demographic outlook. Low fertility and early mortality—in 2014, Russian males could expect to live for sixty-four years—mean that Russia’s population, which is already less than half the size of the American population, might be shrinking in absolute terms.<sup>91</sup> In 2015, Russia’s vulnerability to global price fluctuations in fossil fuels has been exposed, as a shale- and Saudi-driven supply glut, combined with soft global demand,



has driven crude oil prices downward and created serious fiscal challenges for the Russian government.<sup>92</sup> Over the long run, this reliance threatens to limit Russia's national power in a world where the knowledge economy increasingly drives wealth accumulation. Russia's gigantic size may be an overestimated advantage. It has historically proven to be a negative as often as a positive, as Russia's proximity to powerful and numerous neighbors exposes it to land-based invasion. Finally, while Russia's leadership has shown an occasional ability to play tactical diplomacy well, it has offered little in the way of an overarching vision or a set of ideals that might inspire others to follow its lead.

China is a far more formidable case. China is a society with a powerful awareness of its five-thousand-year history, a strong sense of national identity, and a political leadership that aims to reset relations with the rest of the world on its own terms. It also possesses a huge population and a great deal of money—two metrics that translate well into global power and that, in China's case, ought not to be underestimated. China's billion-plus population is more than three times the size of the United States', and its economy is forecasted by nearly everyone to become the world's largest in the coming years. Cash goes a long way in this world, and China has utilized it to invest in itself through infrastructure projects, technological research and development, and upgrading its national defense.<sup>93</sup> China also uses its growing economic clout to invest heavily in other places, including in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, and even Europe. These investments have bought China more than just access to the commodities it needs to sustain its incredible growth (such as energy, food, metals, ores, and raw materials). They also have bought China considerable influence abroad.<sup>94</sup>

Yet while China has strengths that will give it hefty global power in the years ahead, it also faces important obstacles: a population-aging problem that is worse than that of the United States; rising labor costs that threaten to undercut its export-oriented manufacturing economy; massive environmental problems; and the challenges of transitioning to a consumer economy.<sup>95</sup> It is entirely possible that China will overcome all of these limitations. For instance, upward wage pressures might not doom China's economy, in particular its comparative advantage as a low-cost manufacturer; China could transition to a high-value-added manufacturer, along German lines, and grow more from domestic consumption rather than exports.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, China's governance system might stay intact over the long run, as the regime benefits from centuries of popular deference to the state as a bedrock institution.<sup>97</sup> Yet despite this deference, the regime feels compelled to continuously bolster itself in the face of swift societal change and demands for political reforms. In 2014, it confronted a student-led, pro-democracy, mass-protest movement in Hong Kong. Although that movement began to fizzle after a few tense months, the regime nonetheless found itself in the rare position of having to navigate uncomfortable discussions about the nature of governance itself, heretofore an almost untouchable subject in communist China.<sup>98</sup>



A satellite image captures Chinese efforts to create new islands through dredging up sand on Mischief Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands, which are claimed by China, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. China's actions in the South China Sea are an example of its assertiveness in its neighborhood. *Image credit:* CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative/DigitalGlobe.





More generally, China's historic national strengths—which are substantial—do not translate as easily to a Westphalian-Plus world as do US strengths. The United States is a country built on immigration, heterogeneity of outlook, individual expression, and cultural hybridity. All of this makes the United States better suited than China for grappling with a world characterized by instantaneous global flows of information, people, and cultural messaging. Despite the opening of China's economy to global commercial flows over the past three decades, its regime remains suspicious of foreign cultural influence, and treats culture as a global strategic battleground.<sup>99</sup>

However, Beijing's foreign policy might create the greatest obstacles to China becoming the world's foremost leader. The historic grievances that the Chinese leadership occasionally uses to bang the nationalist drum are important reasons why China remains mired in simmering conflicts within its own neighborhood. China's generally poor bilateral relations with its neighbors—including Japan, Vietnam, India, Taiwan, and the Philippines—are a microcosm of China's lack of strong alliances based on enduring friendships. China has made rivals when it could win friends. This contrasts with America's extensive alliance system, which is often based on common values and warm cultural ties, in addition to shared economic and geopolitical interests.<sup>100</sup> Russia's recent overtures to China, forged out of geopolitical circumstance rather than shared values or cultural attachment, do not much help China, even in its own regional context. Given the suspicion with which its neighbors view China, this rapprochement may hurt. In 2014, Narendra Modi's India, already wary of China's geopolitical aims in Asia, sought improved ties with both Japan and the United States—in part, because China was moving closer to Russia.<sup>101</sup>

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India, like China, has enormous potential that could someday translate into global ascendancy, if not outright primacy. Realizing this potential, however, is just as likely to be a long-term prospect that will occupy the country's leaders for decades. India is the world's most populous country, and also has a relatively young population. This gives India a massive labor pool upon which it can grow an enormous middle class, and which will allow it to defer the fiscal challenges of an aging population. (In contrast, China, the United States, and Europe will face these challenges much sooner.) But these same conditions also mean that Indian leaders likely will remain preoccupied with a crowded domestic agenda, including poverty alleviation, gender equality, education, anticorruption, infrastructure, and rapid urbanization. Moreover, when considering foreign policy, Indian leaders tend to focus much more on the country's

immediate neighborhood—including its ongoing rivalry with Pakistan, cross-border terrorism, and management of a rising China. It remains to be seen if the Modi government will be willing and able to alter India's traditionally modest global aspirations. India's limited global agenda has historically focused on fostering trade relations, acting as a voice for the world's underdeveloped nations, and exploring ways in which emerging powers can build alternative economic institutions. Until India's national challenges are better settled, and until Indian leaders set their sights on global, rather than regional, power, it is difficult to foresee India playing the role of the world's foremost leader, even if it develops the material means to do so.<sup>102</sup>

Unlike Russia and China, Europe is closely aligned with the United States, and the transatlantic relationship remains a bedrock component of the United States' global network of alliances and partnerships. Narratives about the inevitability of European decline are overwrought. Speaking generally, Europe has much going for it when taken as a whole—including established democracies, a massive and advanced consumer economy, a well-educated workforce, and highly informed and networked citizenries. In the historical big picture, the European Union is a success story, having provided European states with a supranational tool for ending their twentieth-century record of nationalistic wars.

Yet Europe faces significant obstacles if it is to regain its collective place at the top of the global interstate order. Politics is primary among these. The shorthand use of "Europe" to describe the continent's place in the world—as if it were a unified entity, along the lines of a United States or China—does carry some truth. But for the most part, this term is spectacularly inaccurate. The EU might be successful in some respects, but in no way provides a coherent voice for Europe. In foreign affairs, deep-seated policy disagreements among EU member states are the norm, rather than the exception. Such disagreements surface in the security arena as well, as in the case of divergence among NATO's European members over the handling of the Ukraine crisis and the treatment of a newly aggressive Russia.<sup>103</sup> Structurally, Europe faces a number of significant problems that will be difficult to circumvent, including economic woes stemming from euro implementation and, even more seriously, long-term demographic decline due to low fertility and rapid aging. Europeans remain divided over whether to address their demographic decline through greater immigration, as the rise of antiimmigrant populist parties across Europe currently demonstrates. Finally, the eurozone crisis and fallout from the great recession have revealed significant differences within Europe over economic policy, and exposed deep fissures that will not be easy to close.<sup>104</sup>

Wealthy middleweight powers—such as Japan, Germany, South Korea, Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, and Australia—have long been in the US orbit, and continue to look to the United States for leadership. Part of this general alignment of interests owes to the success of the American-led postwar system, from which every country on this list has benefited. Despite




Russian sailors take part in a ceremony marking the first anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea in Sevastopol. *Photo credit: Reuters/Maxim Shemetov.*

occasional flare-ups over policy (for instance, over the Iraq war, or more recent American espionage), all of these powers are democracies with vested interests in maintaining at least a semblance of the American-led global system and the ideals upon which that system rests. None of them are in a position to assume the mantle of global leader, and likely never will be. (Demographically, all have smaller populations than the global heavyweights, and they face aging-related challenges.) Nonetheless, each of these nations is an important actor in regional and world affairs, albeit in different ways at different times, and across different domains.

Middleweight emerging powers—including Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, Colombia, Mexico, and others—are a mixed bag. Like the wealthy middleweight powers, these nations have yet to achieve the material power necessary for global-system leadership, while their emerging economic status means that they will be predisposed toward domestic development issues for the foreseeable future. In foreign affairs, some are predisposed toward US leadership, while others are not. As is true of the wealthy middleweight powers, all possess strengths that make them important actors in their regional spheres, and which give them enough power to influence world affairs.

So although the task will be harder than ever before, the United States must remain the leader of the liberal international order, within which the world has lived and prospered since 1945, if that order is to remain the world's primary operating system. And the United States is well positioned to partner with other states and nonstate actors to maintain that system. Many others share Americans' aspirations, having long since arrived at similar norms about the just political order: democracy, rule of law, human rights, peaceful coexistence, and the fulfillment of material aspirations through free trade and market economies.

The United States can seize this moment in a fashion not dissimilar to how American leaders seized a historic moment during the late 1940s. America has great and enduring strengths that give its leaders the power to do so. America has a wide range of formal assets that will continue to give it considerable material power. The American economy remains enormous and resilient, despite the serious difficulties that arose during the 2008-2009 financial crisis. America's military remains unmatched, and any competitor would have to invest heavily for decades in order to begin competing with the United States on equal terms and on a global basis.<sup>105</sup> Demographically, the United States might be aging but, due to immigration and other



**The United States can seize this moment in a fashion not dissimilar to how American leaders seized a historic moment during the late 1940s.**



factors, it will retain a large and dynamic population, relative to its peers, for some time to come.<sup>106</sup> America's rich natural endowment remains a basis of national wealth. When these riches are combined with American technical innovation and business savvy, they continue to be leveraged for considerable national gain. For example, American technology and innovation are behind the ongoing shale revolution, which has enabled the United States to enjoy a complete reversal of its energy fortunes.<sup>107</sup> The United States is currently on track to become a net energy exporter, as trends show net imports of energy declining significantly.<sup>108</sup> The United States is now one of the world's greatest oil producers, rivaling Saudi Arabia and Russia. Since the 1970s, such a state of affairs had been an almost unimaginable prospect.<sup>109</sup>

Beyond material power, success in the Westphalian-Plus world will be characterized by dynamic interaction among a wide-ranging and diverse set of actors. An important component of overall power will be defined by degrees of connectivity across military, diplomatic, economic, social, political, and cultural spheres. As Anne-Marie Slaughter points out, this decentralized—yet highly connected—world means that power rests with actors possessing the highest levels of connectivity. A more networked environment places a premium on building relationships, as connectivity becomes one of power's defining features.<sup>110</sup>


If power in this world follows this script, then US culture, economy, demography, and national outlook suggest that it should thrive. The United States possesses the world's most formidable set of "soft power" assets, including the sheer number of American firms, nongovernmental organizations, media conglomerates, cities and states, and a variety of individuals who are engaged abroad, as well as the depth and breadth of the connections they have built with global counterparts. This engagement speaks to an unmatched national attribute that is integral to American staying power in a new global landscape. US culture derives from centuries of experience and practice with accepting and integrating immigrants from every corner of the globe. While this aspect of the American experience has almost always been controversial (and remains so currently), the aggregate effect has been to create a heterogeneous society that freely imports culture from every point on the globe, then often repackages that culture into unique products for export. Time and again, American society and its economy have benefited. (For example, Hollywood has followed this script since its beginning.) The United States thus possesses a massive advantage in a globalized world where people, ideas, and goods flow more freely than ever before.<sup>111</sup>

Like other powers, the United States faces its own set of constraints. Maintaining the United States' economic dynamism is not a given. At some point, American leaders must address their systemic challenges. These problems include the need to overhaul the country's increasingly decrepit infrastructure, which threatens to erode its competitiveness. In education, America's universities may continue to enjoy significant global esteem and attract legions of foreign students, yet acquiring a good university education has become a huge

financial burden for many American families. In similar fashion, the United States needs to figure out how best to ensure that its workers' skills are kept sharp, to ensure competitiveness in the twenty-first century's knowledge industries. The United States will enjoy greater prosperity if it figures out how to address the "skills gap," which is an obvious problem that has no simple solution.<sup>112</sup>

Politically, Washington's increasingly prominent and frequent disputes are detracting significantly from American influence in the world. During the Cold War, the United States sold itself and its system as a beacon, a brighter alternative to the Soviet system. The nation's widely shared postwar prosperity was integral to the legitimacy of this global message, and to eventual victory against the Soviet Union. Going forward, the appeal of the American model—and thus the credibility of US global leadership—will be reduced if the performance of the US government itself continues to hinder, rather than advance, the allure of the American governance system. As John Cassidy, a *New Yorker* columnist, puts it, "Today it is hard to make the argument that the US political system is serving the country well."<sup>113</sup>

Finally, American strategists in the next decade must take as a premise that US influence in the world has been reduced over the last decade and a half—by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the revelations about the National Security Agency's activities in cyberspace, and other US foreign-policy actions that have caused allies and partners to question US reliability and trustworthiness as a security partner. Thus, the context that a US strategy must address is more challenging than heretofore, and US leaders should not underestimate the influence deficit that must be surmounted in order to effectively navigate the new Westphalian-Plus world.



**Going forward, the appeal of the American model will be reduced if the performance of the US government itself continues to hinder, rather than advance, the allure of the American governance system.**




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## Conclusion

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For a nation's leaders, creating actionable strategies may seem an insurmountable challenge. Yet if a nation is to avoid aimless drift, thinking and acting strategically are absolute imperatives. Strategy is a difficult task to navigate. In the words of Lawrence Freedman, leaders and their advisers need to develop the ability to “think ahead, forge coalitions and hold on to long-term objectives,” all while staying pragmatic and “shifting [intermediate] goals as new opportunities arise.”<sup>114</sup> This paper, the first in a series of strategy papers produced by the Atlantic Council, has outlined dynamic stability as a concept that offers strategists a means to understand global change, to think ahead while staying pragmatic, and to take advantage of shifting conditions. Through the *Atlantic Council Strategy Paper* series, in the coming years, leading thinkers will add their perspectives on how the United States and its allies, partners, and friends can best grapple with different dimensions of the Westphalian-Plus world. Future papers will focus on topics ranging from energy to cybersecurity, and provide strategies for bringing state and nonstate actors into strong and enduring coalitions.



**Any successful strategy will require a United States that possesses the fortitude to lead.**

Finally, one observation might be more important than all of the others. Any successful strategy will require a United States that is more than just capable of leading its allies and partners. It will require an America that also possesses the fortitude to lead. Unfortunately, questions about the ability of the United States to lead now pale in comparison to those regarding its willingness to do so. Now emerging from more than a decade of sustained combat operations with uncertain outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and buffeted by economic storms—both cyclical (the recent financial crisis and its aftermath) and structural (long-term wage and income stagnation and an erosion of the middle class)—the American public may no longer be as willing to support a strategy that requires robust engagement abroad. There is certainly ample evidence for this assertion among the American body politic.<sup>115</sup>

For seven decades, America's leaders and its citizenry have assumed the mantle of leadership in service of the country's global vision. If they were not always willing to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty,” in John Kennedy's immortal words, then they at least proved willing to

do many of these things much of the time.<sup>116</sup> The generation that led the United States during World War II, as well as leaders like Kennedy, who came of age during it, had learned a hard lesson in the worst of circumstances—namely, that a free, peaceful, and prosperous world required the United States’ constant and vibrant leadership. They were determined not to allow the world to return to a prewar condition, in which American power, and the ideals upon which US power rested, were weak or absent. They were convinced that neither the world nor the United States would enjoy the consequences of American withdrawal from global leadership.

Among the many responsibilities borne by US Presidents is that of engaging the nation’s citizenry, first to make sense of what is going on in the world, and second, to lead a strategy for protecting and advancing American interests. Today, rapidly changing circumstances cry out for more activist US leadership across a broad set of fronts. The President of the United States should begin a conversation with the American people about this new world. Without an active and engaged adaptation of existing approaches, systems, processes, alliances, and other structures led by the United States, the list of global threats and challenges will multiply. As has been argued in other Atlantic Council publications,<sup>117</sup> a status-quo approach would lead to the slow deterioration of some institutions and arrangements, and the catastrophic failure of others—to the great detriment of security, prosperity, and, ultimately, shared values. The United States must actively lead the world through this tumultuous period of history.





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## Endnotes

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## Acknowledgments

Many people from within and outside the Atlantic Council assisted in the production of this strategy paper. The authors wish to thank in particular the following people for their assistance, advice, and support: Brent Scowcroft, Steve Hadley, Fred Kempe, Alexander Mirtchev, Virginia A. Mulberger, Kirk Radke, Daniel Arbess, Stephen Shapiro, Dan Chiu, Mat Burrows, HuiHui Ooi, and Sean Auyash.

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