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Offshore Balancing Revisited

In the wake of September 11, saying that everything has changed has become fashionable. Yet, although much indeed has changed, some important things have not. Before September 11, U.S. hegemony (or primacy, as some call it) defined the geopolitical agenda. It still does. Indeed, the attack on the United States and the subsequent war on terrorism waged by the United States underscore the myriad ways in which U.S. hegemony casts its shadow over international politics. The fundamental grand strategic issues that confronted the United States before September 11 are in abeyance temporarily, but the expansion of NATO, the rise of China, and ballistic missile defense have not disappeared. In fact, the events of September 11 have rendered the deeper question these issues pose—whether the United States can, or should, stick to its current strategy of maintaining its post–Cold War hegemony in international politics—even more salient.

Hegemony is the term political scientists use to denote the overwhelming military, economic, and diplomatic preponderance of a single great power in international politics. To illustrate the way in which U.S. hegemony is the bridge connecting the pre–September 11 world to the post–September 11 world, one need only return to the "Through the Looking Glass" collection of articles in the summer 2001 issue of *The Washington Quarterly*. A unifying theme runs through those articles: the authors' acknowledgment of U.S. primacy and their ambivalent responses about it.

Collectively, the "Through the Looking Glass" contributors make an important point about U.S. power that policymakers in Washington do not always take to heart: U.S. hegemony is a double-edged sword. In other words, U.S. power is a paradox. On one hand, U.S. primacy is acknowledged as the

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The Washington Quarterly • 25:2 pp. 233–248.

most important factor in maintaining global and regional stability. "[I]f not for the existing security framework provided by bilateral and multilateral alliance commitments borne by the United States, the world could, or perhaps would, be a more perilous place."[1] On the flip side of the coin, many—indeed most—of the contributors evince resentment at the magnitude of U.S. power and fear about how Washington exercises that power.

Not *everything* has changed since September 11.

China, specifically, wants the United States to accommodate its rise to great-power status and stop interfering in the Taiwan issue. The political elite in Moscow wants Washington to treat Russia like a great power equal to the United States and stop meddling in Russia's domestic affairs.[2] Warnings are issued that for its own good—and the world's—the United States must change its ways and transform itself into a benign, or "enlightened," superpower. As the contributions to "Through the Looking Glass" demonstrate, the paradox of U.S. power evokes paradoxical reactions to it. U.S. primacy is "bad" when exercised unilaterally or to justify "isolationist" policies, but U.S. hegemony is "good" when exercised multilaterally to advance common interests rather than narrow U.S. ones.[3]

U.S. Power: The Effects of September 11

The paradox of U.S. power has been very much on display since September 11. U.S. primacy in the war on terrorism has its benefits. First, unrivaled U.S. military power is obviously a plus. In terms of military capabilities, the United States indeed enjoys what the Pentagon calls "full spectrum dominance." Today, the United States can war against virtually any foe, whether big powers, rogue states, or terrorist groups, and prevail on the battlefield at little or no cost. Second, because of its preponderant military and economic power, the United States has been able to organize an international coalition against terrorism. Only an enormously powerful state—a true hegemon—could make stick its admonition to the rest of the world that you are either with us or with the terrorists.

No doubt, President George W. Bush's "us or them" declaration carried an implicit element of threat. Certainly, the United States has many sticks to wield. Being a hegemon, however, also means that the United States has plenty of carrots to use as coalition-building inducements. By making "side payments"—the political science jargon for what most would call bribes—Washington, for example, was able to draw a reluctant Pakistan into its antiterror coalition. The United States would have been hard pressed to

project its military power into Afghanistan without the use of Pakistan's bases and airspace, but Pakistan's open alignment with the United States was anything but a slam-dunk. After all, for Islamabad, Afghanistan holds crucial strategic importance. Pakistan's need to have a friendly government in control of Kabul explains its pre–September 11 support for the Taliban. At the same time, Pakistan's archenemy, India, backed the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. When you throw into the mix factors such as ethnic kinship (like the Taliban and much of the rest of southern Afghanistan, many Pakistanis are Pashtuns) and Pakistan's tenuous domestic political situation (where support for Islamic fundamentalism purportedly is widespread), the government of Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf had many compelling reasons to distance itself from the United States.[4]

Washington was well positioned to overcome Pakistan's ambivalence about joining the coalition because the United States had a well-stocked bag of diplomatic and economic goodies into which it could reach to bestow rewards on Islamabad for Pakistani cooperation. For one, the United States was able to tell Pakistan that it would lift the economic sanctions it had earlier imposed as punishment for Pakistan's nuclear weapons testing. The United States also has promised impoverished Pakistan some $600 million a year in foreign aid for the next two years, plus other economic and trade inducements.[5] Moreover, although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is not supposed to assist states for political reasons, it has done precisely that in Pakistan's case.[6] The IMF's decision to reward Pakistan for joining the U.S.-led coalition is in itself another example of U.S. hegemonic power. In international institutions such as the IMF, U.S. power is preponderant, and the United States alone is able to use these institutions to advance its geopolitical interests.

The war on terrorism is merely an interlude in international politics.

The downside of U.S. power also has been evident since September 11. Given the horrific nature of the September 11 attacks, traditional U.S. security partners such as NATO (and especially Great Britain) rallied strongly to the U.S. side. In many ways, especially in the areas of intelligence cooperation and crackdowns on Europe-based terror cells, U.S. allies have made significant contributions to the war on terrorism. Yet, at the same time, NATO clearly has tried at the governmental level to constrain the exercise of U.S. power, as demonstrated by early admonitions for the United States to obtain United Nations (UN) authorization to use military force in Afghanistan; by pleas for the United States to limit its bombing of Afghanistan; and, perhaps most important, in warnings that Washington should not expand the geo-

graphical scope of the war on terrorism, for example, by going after Iraq.[7] At the level of public opinion, at least in the war's early stages, a significant number of Europeans opposed the U.S. campaign and openly expressed hostility toward U.S. hegemony itself.[8]

In Russia, before President Vladimir Putin decided to cast Moscow's lot with Washington, the highest decisionmaking levels were apparently split as to whether Russia should welcome or oppose a U.S. military presence in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. The dissenters on this point in Moscow were fearful that U.S. use of Central Asian bases to prosecute the war in Afghanistan would become the opening wedge to establishing a permanent U.S. presence in the region. In the Islamic world, fear and resentment of U.S. power was more pronounced. Even key U.S. client states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt only circumspectly supported the U.S. military effort, and their own contributions to the war effort were minimal. Not unexpectedly, on the Arab and Islamic "street," hostility both to the war, especially U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, and to U.S. hegemony was widespread. (The volatile nature of public opinion mostly explains the tepid support for the United States extended by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others in the region.) In essence, although the coalition held together through the campaign in Afghanistan, the war on terrorism evoked a spectrum of responses to U.S. power, ranging from unease (NATO) to real hostility (the Persian Gulf/Middle East region).

Stepping Back to See the View

Given the paradox of U.S. power, what should U.S. policymakers make of perceptions of U.S. hegemony, and how should Washington respond to these perceptions? To answer these questions, one should step back from ongoing events and put the issue of U.S. hegemony in a broader perspective. Obviously, by transforming the international system from its post-1945 bipolarity to unipolarity, the Soviet Union's collapse elevated the United States to a historically unprecedented position of primacy in international politics. Although the Cold War's end did not trigger a "great debate" about U.S. grand strategy, it did elicit a discussion about grand strategy among foreign-policy analysts and scholars of strategic studies.[9] Contributors to this conversation have adopted U.S. post–Cold War hegemony as a common starting point. The questions they have asked concern whether the current unipolar distribution of power is stable and whether the United States should deliberately seek to maintain its preponderance in the international political system.

Policymakers and scholars of strategic studies widely agree that power plays a central role in international politics. If power counts, then embracing the proposition that the United States should seek to amass as much

power as it possibly can is not a great leap of faith. Consequently, the United States should do everything possible to maintain its current hegemony, which has been the goal of U.S. grand strategy for more than a decade. If the duchess of Windsor had been a U.S. strategist, she would have said that the United States could never be too rich, too well armed, or too powerful. Under the administrations of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, the overriding aim of U.S. grand strategy has been to ensure that the United States maintains its lofty geopolitical perch by preventing the rise of new great powers (or the resurgence of old ones, such as Russia) that could challenge the United States as king of the hill. (In Pentagon-speak, such powers are called "peer competitors.") In other words, U.S. grand strategy has sought for the last decade the indefinite prolongation of what one commentator called the United States' "unipolar moment."[10]

Being a hegemon means having sticks to wield and carrots to use.

Today, the United States apparently has firmly consolidated its global hegemony. Surely, no great power in the history of the modern international system (since approximately 1500) has ever been as dominant as the United States in global politics. Still, history suggests a note of caution is appropriate. The United States is merely the most recent great power to seek hegemony. When examining the fates of previous hegemonic contenders, a clear lesson emerges: aspiring to hegemony or even attaining it for a short period of time is different than maintaining it.

Although at first the conclusion may appear counterintuitive, states that seek hegemony invariably end up being less, not more, secure. Being powerful is good in international politics, but being too powerful is not. The reasoning behind this axiom is straightforward as well as the geopolitical counterpart to the law of physics that holds that, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Simply put, the response to hegemony is the emergence of countervailing power. Because international politics indeed is a competitive, "self-help" system, when too much power is concentrated in the hands of one state, others invariably fear for their own security. Each state fears that a hegemon will use its overwhelming power to aggrandize itself at that state's expense and will act defensively to offset hegemonic power. Thus, one of hegemony's paradoxes is that it contains the seeds of its own destruction.

This insight is not merely abstract academic theorizing but is confirmed by an ample historical record. Since the beginning of the modern international system, a succession of bids have been made for hegemony: the Habsburg Empire under Charles V, Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV as well as Napoleon, and Germany under Hitler (and, some historians would argue—al-

though the point is contested—under Wilhelm II). None of these attempts to gain hegemony succeeded. Why did these hegemonic contenders fail?

First, although not actually great powers, one or more states throughout most of international history have clearly been candidates for that status because of their latent power. The threat posed to their security by a rising hegemon has served as the catalyst for these candidates to adopt the necessary policies to mobilize their resources and transform their latent power into actual great-power capabilities. Two prior "unipolar moments" in international history illustrate this point. When France under Louis XIV briefly attained hegemony in Europe, both England and Austria rose from candidate status to great-power status and used their newly acquired capabilities to end France's geopolitical preeminence. Similarly, England's mid-nineteenth-century global preponderance (the fabled Pax Britannica) spurred the United States, Germany, and Japan to emerge as great powers, largely to offset British supremacy. In each of these instances, for reasons of self-defense, states that were candidate great powers were impelled to come forward and emerge as full-fledged great powers in order to ensure that they would not fall victim to the reigning hegemon.[11]

The U.S. alone is able to use multilateral institutions to advance its geopolitical interests.

Second, hegemons invariably are defeated because other states in the international system, frequently spearheaded by newly emerged great powers, form counterbalancing coalitions against them. Thus, the English and the Dutch defeated Philip II. Various coalitions anchored by Holland, the newly emerged great powers of England and Austria, and an established great power in Spain undid Louis the XIV. A coalition composed of England, Russia, Austria, and Prussia rebuffed Napoleon's bid for hegemony. Instead of war, the enervating economic effects of trying to maintain primacy against the simultaneous challenges of the United States, Russia, France, and Germany undermined British hegemony in the nineteenth century. The wartime grand alliance of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union defeated Hitler.

Commenting on this historical record, Henry Kissinger has rightly observed, "Hegemonic empires almost automatically elicit universal resistance, which is why all such claimants sooner or later exhausted themselves."[12] A simple fact explains this pattern: left unbalanced, hegemonic power threatens the security of the other major states in the international system. In the first few decades of the twenty-first century, U.S. primacy will likely prompt the same response that previous hegemonic aspirants provoked: new great powers will emerge to offset U.S. power, and these new great powers will coalesce to check U.S. hegemonic ambitions.

Is the United States Different?

Nothing suggests that the United States will be exempt from the tendency of others to contest its global preeminence. Yet, in the latest twist on "American exceptionalism," U.S. strategists apparently do believe "it won't happen to us." They think that the United States is a qualitatively different type of hegemon: a "benevolent" hegemon whose "soft power" immunizes it against a backlash, that is, its liberal democratic ideology and culture make it attractive to others. U.S. policymakers also believe that others do not fear U.S. geopolitical preeminence because they believe that the United States will use its unprecedented power to promote the common good of the international system rather than to advance its own selfish aims. As then-national security adviser Sandy Berger put it:

> We are accused of dominating others, of seeing the world in zero-sum terms in which any other country's gain must be our loss. But that is an utterly mistaken view. It's not just because we are the first global power in history that is not an imperial power. It's because for 50 years we have consciously tried to define and pursue our interests in a way that is consistent with the common good—rising prosperity, expanding freedom, collective security.[13]

U.S. strategists may believe that others view U.S. hegemony this way, but the "others" do not—a point clearly evident in the articles in "Through the Looking Glass."

Well before September 11, indeed throughout most of the past decade, a strong undercurrent of unease on the part of other states about the *im*balance of power in the United States' favor has existed. This simmering mistrust of U.S. power burst into the open during the final years of the Clinton administration. Russia, China, India, and even European allies such as France and Germany feared that the United States was unilaterally seeking to maintain its global military dominance. As history would lead us to expect, others responded to U.S. hegemony by concerting their efforts against it. Russia and China, long estranged, found common ground in a nascent alliance that opposed U.S. "hegemonism" by seeking to reestablish a multipolar world.

Similarly, U.S. European allies were openly expressing the view that something must be done geopolitically to rein in a too powerful United States. French president Jacques Chirac and his foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, gave voice to Europe's fears. Arguing that U.S. economic and military dominance is so formidable that the term "superpower" is inadequate to convey the true extent of U.S. preeminence, Vedrine called the United States a "hyperpower" and added, "We cannot accept either a politically unipolar world, nor a culturally uniform world, nor the unilateralism of a single hyperpower. And that is why we are fighting for a multipolar, diversified, and multilateral world."[14]

Ironically, it was U.S. intervention in Kosovo that crystallized fears of U.S. hegemony. As a result, an incipient anti-U.S. alliance comprising China, Russia, and India began to emerge. Each of these countries viewed the U.S.-led intervention in Kosovo as a dangerous precedent establishing Washington's self-declared right to ignore the norm of international sovereignty and interfere in other states' internal affairs. The three states increased their military cooperation, especially with respect to arms transfers and the sharing of military technology, and, like the Europeans, declared their support for a "multipolar" world, that is, a world in which countervailing power offsets U.S. power. The Kosovo conflict—fought in part to validate NATO's post–Cold War credibility—had the perverse effect of dramatizing the dangerous disparity between U.S. and European geopolitical power. It prompted Europe to take its first serious steps to redress that power imbalance by acquiring through the European Defense and Security Policy (EDSP) the kinds of military capabilities it needs to act independently of the United States. If the European Union (EU) fulfills EDSP's longer-term goals, it will emerge as an independent strategic player in world politics. The clear objective of investing Europe with the capacity to brake U.S. hegemonic aspirations will have driven that emergence.

States that seek hegemony invariably end up being less, not more, secure.

If any doubt remained that U.S. hegemony would trigger a nasty geopolitical "blowback," it surely was erased on September 11. The Middle East is an extraordinarily complex and volatile place in terms of its geopolitics, and the reaction there to U.S. hegemony is somewhat nuanced. Nothing, however, is subtle about the United States' hegemonic role in the Persian Gulf, a role that flows inexorably from the strategy of U.S. primacy. With the onset of the Persian Gulf War, the United States began to manage the region's security directly. The subsequent U.S. policy of "dual containment"—directed simultaneously against the region's two strategic heavyweights, Iran and Iraq—underscored the U.S. commitment to maintaining its security interests through a hegemonic strategy, rather than a strategy of relying on local power balances to prevent a hostile state from dominating the region or relying on other great powers to stabilize the Gulf and Middle East.

The U.S. role in the Gulf has rendered it vulnerable to a hegemonic backlash on several levels. First, some important states in the region (including Iran and Iraq) aligned against the United States because they resented its intrusion into regional affairs. Second, in the Gulf and the Middle East, the self-perception among both elites and the general public that the region has

long been a victim of "Western imperialism" is widespread. In this vein, the United States is viewed as just the latest extraregional power whose imperial aspirations weigh on the region, which brings a third factor into play. Because of its interest in oil, the United States is supporting regimes—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Gulf emirates—whose domestic political legitimacy is contested. Whatever strategic considerations dictate that Washington prop up these regimes, that it does so makes the United States a lightning rod for those within these countries who are politically disaffected. Moreover, these regimes are not blind to the domestic challenges to their grip on power. Because they are concerned about inflaming public opinion (the much talked about "street"), both their loyalty and utility as U.S. allies are, to put it charitably, suspect. Finally, although U.S. hegemony is manifested primarily in its overwhelming economic and military muscle, the cultural dimension to U.S. preeminence is also important. The events of September 11 have brought into sharp focus the enormous cultural clash, which inescapably has overtones of a "clash of civilizations," between Islamic fundamentalism and U.S. liberal ideology.

The terrorism of Osama bin Laden results in part from this cultural chasm, as well as from more traditional geopolitical grievances. In a real sense, bin Laden's brand of terrorism—the most dramatic illustration of U.S. vulnerability to the kind of "asymmetric warfare" of which some defense experts have warned—is the counterhegemonic balancing of the very weak. For all of these reasons, the hegemonic role that the strategy of preponderance assigns to the United States as the Gulf's stabilizer was bound to provoke a multilayered backlash against U.S. predominance in the region. Indeed, as Richard K. Betts, an acknowledged expert on strategy, presciently observed several years ago, "It is hardly likely that Middle Eastern radicals would be hatching schemes like the destruction of the World Trade Center if the United States had not been identified so long as the mainstay of Israel, the shah of Iran, and conservative Arab regimes and the source of a cultural assault on Islam."[15] (Betts was referring to the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center.)

In the wake of U.S. diplomatic and battlefield success in the first phase of the war on terrorism, some doubtless will conclude that victory has erased the paradox of U.S. power. The United States, after all, stands at the zenith of its hegemonic power—militarily, diplomatically, economically, and culturally. When even potential rivals such as China and Russia have been folded into the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism, concluding that U.S. primacy is secure for a long, long time is tempting indeed. The outlook for U.S. primacy, however, may not be quite so rosy. Appearances can be deceiving, and the paradox of U.S. power remains.

Looking into the Crystal Ball

In the short term, if the United States expands the war on terrorism, especially by confronting Iraq and Saddam Hussein, fears of U.S. hegemony will resurface quickly. If the United States moves against Iraq, the fracture of its current coalition is a near certainty, with both NATO and Middle Eastern clients refusing to support the United States. In the longer term, even if the coalition holds together for a time (assuming that Washington foregoes attempting to oust Hussein), believing that the wartime coalition represents a permanent accommodation by others to U.S. hegemony would be unwise. To think otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of international politics.

The articles in "Through the Looking Glass" are a very good predictor of expected events, both in the war on terrorism and beyond. Other states remain profoundly uneasy about U.S. primacy and, to rein in the United States, will step up calls for Washington to act multilaterally rather than unilaterally. The reasoning is simple: they want to constrain U.S. power by pressuring the United States to refrain from taking actions that the coalition, formal alliances such as NATO, and international institutions such as the UN do not sanction. Their desire to bind U.S. power in a web of multilateral restraints is understandable, but the United States must retain its capacity for acting unilaterally in defense of its national interests. At the same time, to avoid triggering counterhegemonic blowback, the United States must act with self-restraint.

Considering whether the United States should act unilaterally or multilaterally involves a false dichotomy. In international politics, great powers always put their self-interest first; they must. International politics is an especially competitive realm, as Realist scholars of international politics have argued since the time of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. In the jargon of international relations scholars, international politics is an "anarchic" system because no central authority makes and enforces laws and maintains order. Consequently, international politics is also a self-help system in which each actor must rely primarily on its own efforts to ensure its survival and security and in which each can employ the means of its choice, including force, to advance its interests. "States operating in a self-help world almost always act according to their own self-interest and do not subordinate their interests to the interests of other states, or to the interests of the so-called international community. The reason is simple: it pays to be selfish in a self-help world."[16] The nature of international politics impels great powers to think of themselves first; their natural inclination is to act unilaterally. Whether confronting Iraq or building a national missile defense, the United States should never subject policies that affect U.S. inter-

ests to multilateral processes that require others to acquiesce before Washington can act.

Unilateralism, the default strategy of great powers, does not mean that they should never cooperate or ally with other states. In alliances, however, a great power must never lose sight of some fundamental tenets of international politics. States that form alliances and coalitions typically have one common interest, and many conflicting ones. The interest that binds together allies or coalition partners is the threat that a common adversary poses to the security of all. To defeat that threat, the other, divisive issues among alliance or coalition partners may be forced into the background, but they do not vanish. Even in wartime, coalition partners jockey to gain advantage in the postwar world. Occasionally, coalitions fissure during wartime because reconciliation of the partners' competing interests proves impossible. In any event, once the threat had been disposed, the glue binding an alliance or coalition surely dissolves, and the partners go their separate ways—the inevitable outcome in a self-help system.

In concrete terms today, Western Europe, China, Russia, and Japan are aligned with the United States to deal with the common threat of terrorism. Because the coalition partners have differing interests, the coalition may fragment if the United States acts unilaterally to expand the war on terrorism. Even if the coalition should hold together until the war on terrorism is terminated, the conflicting geopolitical interests that divide the United States and its partners will then surely resurface because coalitions and alliances are never more than marriages of convenience. Western Europe again will seek to counterbalance U.S. "hyperpower." The Europeans, Russia, and China will oppose U.S. missile defense deployment. Russia will be suspicious of NATO expansion into the Baltic States and the projection of U.S. power into Central Asia. China will continue to pursue its great-power emergence and will contest the United States for supremacy in East Asia. The war on terrorism, in other words, is merely an interlude in international politics, not the harbinger of everlasting global harmony based on acceptance of U.S. primacy.

> Whether the U.S. should act unilaterally or multilaterally is really a false dichotomy.

Although U.S. policymakers have convinced themselves that the United States is a benign hegemon, no such animal exists in international politics. A hegemon is a threat to the security of others simply because it is so powerful. The United States is not immune to the kind of geopolitical blowback experienced by previous hegemonic aspirants. Thus, in a self-help world the United States must perform the strategic equivalent of threading a needle.

It cannot abrogate its freedom to act unilaterally to defend its interests, but Washington needs simultaneously to find a grand strategy that reduces fears of U.S. preponderant power, thereby reducing incentives to engage in counterhegemonic balancing directed at the United States. A good starting point is the war on terrorism itself.

Having overthrown the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and rooted out Al Qaeda terrorists based there, sentiment is strong in the Bush administration, Congress, and the foreign policy establishment for settling the Gulf War's unfinished business by toppling Hussein. Opponents of this policy advance military and diplomatic arguments for caution. The military argument is easily dismissed. Given enormous U.S. military superiority, a war against Iraq would be a cakewalk for the United States. The diplomatic argument—that the antiterror coalition would fragment—is somewhat more serious. Undoubtedly, if the United States launches a full-scale war against Iraq, most, if not all, U.S. Middle Eastern clients would defect from the coalition. Although the alliance's collapse would cause practical military-logistic reasons for concern (to replay the Gulf War, the United States would need ports of entry and staging bases contiguous to Iraq), the abstract goal of preserving the coalition for its own sake should not prevent the United States from confronting Iraq. After all, coalitions and alliances are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Another diplomatic concern is the possibility of an anti-U.S. backlash in the Islamic world. This worry cannot be dismissed so easily, even though in both the Gulf War and, at least to this point, in the war on terrorism, fears of massive Islamic opposition to U.S. policy have not materialized. Still, the possibility of a strong reaction against the United States must be taken into account.

A benign hegemon? No such animal exists in international politics.

Those who advocate a hard-line policy toward Iraq seldom consider one other concern. What would happen to Iraq once Hussein was removed from power? A post-Hussein Iraq is not going to be a liberal, Western-style democracy. That a successor regime ultimately would prove more pliable than the current one is not guaranteed. If Hussein were removed, however, the possibility always exists that Iraq would fragment, an outcome that could further destabilize the region. Certainly, the United States does not want to end up "owning" Iraq and being saddled with the difficult and probably dangerous job of imposing a new government there.[17]

Avoiding a full-scale war against Iraq does not mean that Washington should stand aside and allow Hussein to develop weapons of mass destruction and support terrorists. Instead of using a sledgehammer approach, the

United States could use a focused, finely calibrated strategy to remove Iraqi threats to U.S. security. Washington's goal should be to remove the sources of threat. It does not have to force a regime change, which would open a geopolitical Pandora's box, to achieve that goal. As U.S. experiences in Kosovo and Afghanistan have demonstrated, if the United States has good intelligence about where key targets are located, those targets can be destroyed in precision air and missile strikes. Moreover, by developing a full range of intelligence and covert operational capabilities, the United States can sabotage Iraq's (or any other hostile state's) weapons of mass destruction program by interdicting the inflow of key components and materials, destroying plants and research facilities, and eliminating the scientists and engineers without whose expertise such weapons could not be developed. Dealing with the Iraqi problem in this manner would be a much better strategy for the United States because, by reducing its geopolitical footprint in the Middle East, Washington would reduce substantially the dangers that U.S. policy could trigger an antihegemonic backlash.

Changing U.S. Grand Strategy to Reflect the Times

In the longer term, regardless of future developments in the war on terrorism, the paradox of U.S. power will not disappear. Looking beyond the war, the big question confronting U.S. strategists in coming years is how to reduce the risks of U.S. hegemony. To lower the risk, the United States must change its grand strategy. One grand strategic alternative to primacy is offshore balancing.[18]

Like primacy, offshore balancing is a strategy firmly rooted in the Realist tradition. Primacists regard multipolarity—an international system comprised of three or more great powers—as a strategic threat to the United States, while offshore balancers see it as a strategic opportunity for the United States. Offshore balancing is predicated on the assumption that attempting to maintain U.S. hegemony is self-defeating because it will provoke other states to combine in opposition to the United States and result in the futile depletion of the United States' relative power, thereby leaving it worse off than if it accommodated multipolarity. Offshore balancing accepts that the United States cannot prevent the rise of new great powers either within (the EU, Germany, and Japan) or outside (China, a resurgent Russia) its sphere of influence. Offshore balancing would also relieve the United States of its burden of managing the security affairs of turbulent regions such as the Persian Gulf/Middle East and Southeast Europe.

Offshore balancing is a grand strategy based on burden shifting, not burden sharing. It would transfer to others the task of maintaining regional power bal-

ances; checking the rise of potential global and regional hegemons; and stabilizing Europe, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf/Middle East. In other words, other states would have to become responsible for providing their own security and for the security of the regions in which they live (and contiguous ones), rather than looking to the United States to do it for them.

The events of September 11 make offshore balancing an attractive grand strategic alternative to primacy for two reasons. First, looking beyond the war on terrorism, the Persian Gulf/Middle East region is clearly, endemically unstable. If the United States attempts to perpetuate its hegemonic role in the region after having accomplished its immediate war aims, the probability of a serious geopolitical backlash within the region against the United States is high. Second, because the U.S. victory in the war on terrorism will underscore U.S. predominance in international politics, victory's paradoxical effect will be to heighten European, Russian, and Chinese fears of U.S. power. By adopting an offshore balancing strategy once the war on terrorism ends, the United States would benefit in two ways.

First, others have much greater intrinsic strategic interests in the region than does the United States. For example, Western Europe, Japan, and, increasingly, China are far more dependent on the region's oil than the United States. Because they live next door, Russia, China, Iran, and India have a much greater long-term security interest in regional stability in the Persian Gulf/Middle East than the United States. By passing the mantle of regional stabilizer to these great and regional powers, the United States could extricate itself from the messy and dangerous geopolitics of the Persian Gulf/Middle East and take itself out of radical Islam's line of fire.

Second, although a competitive component to U.S. relations with the other great powers in a multipolar world would be inescapable, multipolar politics have historically engendered periods of great-power cooperation. On the cooperative side, an offshore balancing strategy would be coupled with a policy of spheres of influence, which have always been an important item in the toolbox of great-power policymakers. By recognizing each other's paramount interests in certain regions, great powers can avoid the kinds of misunderstandings that could trigger conflict. Moreover, the mere act of signaling that one country understands another's larger security stake in a particular region, a stake that it will respect by noninterference, allows states to communicate a nonthreatening posture to one another. By recognizing the legitimacy of other interests, a great power also signals that it accepts them as equals. An offshore balancing strategy would immunize the United States against a post–war-on-terrorism backlash against U.S. hegemony in one other way. By accepting the emergence of new great powers and simultaneously pulling back from its primacy-driven military posture, the United States would reduce perception of a "U.S. threat," thereby lowering the chances that others will view it as an

overpowerful hegemon. In this sense, offshore balancing is a strategy of restraint that would allow the United States to minimize the risks of open confrontation with the new great powers.

Being Panglossian about the reemergence of multipolarity in international politics would be silly. Multipolarity is not the best outcome imaginable. The best outcome would be a world in which every other state willingly accepted U.S. hegemony—an outcome about which some may dream, but one that will never be realized in the real world. That outcome, however, is much better than the predictable outcome if the United States continues to follow a grand strategy of primacy. The outcome of that strategy will be really bad: not only will new great powers rise, they will also coalesce against what they perceive to be a U.S. threat.

> **Offshore balancing is a grand strategy based on burden *shifting*, not burden sharing.**

Notwithstanding the events of September 11, U.S. hegemony is the salient fact that defines the U.S. role in international politics. The articles in "Through the Looking Glass" reflect a deep mistrust of U.S. power that the temporary convergence of interests brought about by the war on terrorism will not wash away. Indeed, the reverse is true. In attaining victory in the war's opening round, the United States underlined its dominant role in the international system, and talk of a "new U.S. empire" echoes inside the beltway. Underscoring the paradox of U.S. power is the paradox of victory. Flushed with triumph and the awesome display of U.S. might, U.S. policymakers may succumb to hubris and overreach strategically in the false belief that U.S. hegemony is an unchallengeable fact of international life. Other states, however, will draw the opposite conclusion: that the United States is too powerful and that its hegemony must be resisted. Now, more than ever, having a great debate about future U.S. grand strategy is imperative. As that debate unfolds, offshore balancing will become the obvious successor strategy to primacy because it is a grand strategic escape hatch by which the United States can avoid the fate that has befallen previous hegemons in modern international history.

Notes

1. Chong Guan Kwa and See Seng Tan, "The Keystone of World Order," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 99.
2. Wu Xinbo, "To Be an Enlightened Superpower," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 63–71; Dimitri Trenin, "Less Is More," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 135–44.

3. Pascal Boniface, "The Specter of Unilateralism," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 155–62; Peter Ludlow, "Wanted: A Global Partner," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 163–71; Michael Sturmer, "Balance from Beyond the Sea," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 145–53; Akio Watanabe, "First among Equals," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (summer 2001): 73–81.
4. See Pamela Constable, "Anti-American Sentiment Spreading in Pakistan," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2001, sec. A, p. 1; Barry Bearak, "In Pakistan, a Shaky Ally," *New York Times*, October 2, 2001.
5. Joseph Kahn, "U.S. Is Planning an Aid Package for Pakistan Worth Billions," *New York Times*, October 27, 2001.
6. Joseph Kahn, "I.M.F. Bankers Get Ready to Give Pakistan a Loan," *New York Times*, September 20, 2001.
7. T. R. Reid and William Drozdiak, "Allies Express Solidarity and Caution," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2001, sec. A, p. 19; Patrick E. Tyler and Jane Perlez, "World Leaders List Conditions on Cooperation," *New York Times*, September 19, 2001; Suzanne Daley, "A Pause to Ponder Washington's Tough Talk," *New York Times*, September 16, 2001.
8. Richard Boudreaux, "A Superpower's Sorrow, Comeuppance," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2001.
9. For many of the key articles on U.S. grand strategy published during the past decade, see Michael E. Brown et al., *America's Strategic Choices* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).
10. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs: America and the World* 70, no. 1 (1990/1991): 23–33.
11. For extended discussion of the argument made in this paragraph, see Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17, no. 4 (spring 1993): 5–51.
12. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Long Shadow of Vietnam," *Newsweek*, May 1, 2000, p. 50.
13. Sandy R. Berger, "American Power," speech, fall 1999 (given while President Bill Clinton's national security adviser). The speech was posted during the Clinton administration on the Web site for the National Security Council.
14. Christopher Layne, "What's Built Up Must Come Down," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1999, sec. B., p. 1.
15. Richard K. Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January/February 1998): 41.
16. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 33.
17. See Dan Byman, "Iraq after Saddam," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (autumn 2001): 151–162.
18. For fuller descriptions of offshore balancing, see Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz, "A New Grand Strategy," *Atlantic Monthly* 289, no. 1 (January 2002): 36–42; Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (summer 1997): 86–124; Christopher Layne, "American Grand Strategy after the Cold War: Primacy or Blue Water?" in Charles F. Hermann, ed., *American Defense Annual 1994* (New York: Lexington, 1994), pp. 19–43; Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion," pp. 45–51. See generally Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (especially chapters 7 and 8).