



# Survival

## Global Politics and Strategy

ISSN: 0039-6338 (Print) 1468-2699 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tsur20>

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To cite this article: Hal Brands & Peter Feaver (2016) Stress-Testing American Grand Strategy, *Survival*, 58:6, 93-120, DOI: [10.1080/00396338.2016.1257199](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1257199)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1257199>



Published online: 21 Nov 2016.



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# Stress-Testing American Grand Strategy

## Hal Brands and Peter Feaver

The 2016 presidential campaign, and its ultimate outcome, raised sharper questions about the fundamental nature and purpose of the United States' grand strategy than at any time in a generation. In doing so, the campaign also served as a reminder of the critical role of assumptions in shaping US statecraft. In the grand-strategic context, assumptions are the ingrained, overarching ideas that US officials have about how the world works, and about America's role within the global arena. Simply put, such assumptions represent the intellectual foundation upon which American statecraft rests. If the foundation is solid, then American strategy has a decent chance of success. If the foundation is shaky, American strategy is likely in for a world of trouble.

Yet because assumptions are, by their very nature, often implicit rather than explicit, and because the most fundamental assumptions underlying American grand strategy do not frequently surface in the course of day-to-day policy debates, these assumptions are rarely scrutinised or even made explicit to the degree they ought to be. This is dangerous. If assumptions are not identified and stress-tested, how will policymakers know, other than by pure intuition, when those assumptions are no longer valid and the conceptual foundation of strategy has begun to crack?

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Today, the need to critically examine the core assumptions of American grand strategy is becoming ever more pressing. Since the Cold War's end, the United States has pursued a grand strategy centred on maintaining America's global primacy, deepening and extending the liberal international order, and heading off major threats to the generally happy state of the post-Cold War world. That grand strategy has rested upon a set of bedrock assumptions that have also stayed largely constant over time – assumptions about the nature and sustainability of American dominance, the direction in which the world is moving geopolitically and ideologically, the ways in which Washington can best prevent or address emerging threats, and so on. Assumptions about specific policy issues have evolved over time, of course, but the core intellectual premises of American strategy have not been extensively revised for nearly a quarter-century. Collectively, those assumptions have added up to a broadly optimistic view of global affairs – a view that the United States enjoys essentially uncontested supremacy in most key aspects of international relations; that the dominant ideological, geopolitical and economic currents are running Washington's way; and that, with properly vigilant and enlightened American policy, this comparatively benign situation need not be fundamentally disrupted by resurgent great-power conflict or other throwbacks to an earlier and less hopeful age.<sup>1</sup>

Yet today, roughly 25 years into the post-Cold War period, some of the essential assumptions of American grand strategy are either coming under real strain, or are increasingly likely to do so in the next 10–20 years.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that all of these core assumptions have been fully or even largely invalidated, because their residual strength does vary, and because their erosion has not yet, for the most part, reached a critical stage. Moreover, we should remember that critics have prematurely proclaimed the inevitable demise of America's post-Cold War 'unipolar moment' before.<sup>3</sup> Yet these disclaimers aside, there is little question that the validity of these core assumptions is more contested now than at any other time during the post-Cold War era, and that this validity will only become more contested over the next decade or two if current trends hold. As this happens, look out: American officials will have to get used to operating in a world in which they can take less for granted, in which the international environment is

significantly more contested and challenging, and in which it will become steadily harder to sustain the grand strategy – and international order – that the country has pursued since the end of the Cold War.

### **The assumptions of US post-Cold War grand strategy**

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has pursued an ambitious and fairly consistent grand strategy aimed at shaping the international system.<sup>4</sup> The particulars of that approach have shifted from year to year, administration to administration, but from the early 1990s onward, many of the core goals and initiatives of American statecraft have remained largely the same. Every president since George H.W. Bush has committed the United States to maintaining American global primacy, and to deepening and expanding the liberal international order that took hold after the Second World War. Every president has likewise committed to proactively meeting any emerging or resurgent threat that might disrupt this favourable world order in the near term, while also hedging against deeper challenges that could threaten that order over the longer term. And notwithstanding important variations, every president has done all this via initiatives that have also been replicated across administrations: by preserving America's unequalled military capabilities; by maintaining and even extending US alliances and overseas military deployments as sources of stability and influence in key regions; by supporting the spread of democracy, free trade and globalisation; and by being willing to use tools including military force to address major threats to the international system and to US interests, ranging from aggressive regional powers such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the early 1990s, to terrorist groups with global reach today.<sup>5</sup>

One reason that American grand strategy has remained fairly stable during the post-Cold War period is that the core assumptions underlying it have also remained fairly stable. Assumptions, concisely defined, are the intellectual premises on which policy rests. They may be, for example, the core beliefs that policymakers hold about the nature and direction of the international system, their baseline views on a country's particular role within that system, or their unstated theories about how some type of action will lead to some desired geopolitical result. Assumptions can be big

or small: they can deal with the most overarching questions of international order (for example, 'states will remain the primary actors in international politics'), or with specific issues or regions ('there is no viable alternative to a US partnership with Saudi Arabia'). They can be old, dating back generations or even centuries ('America is an exceptional nation'), and they can be newer, relating to issues that have arisen more recently ('a North Korean nuclear capability is a troubling but manageable problem').

And crucially, although assumptions may sometimes be stated explicitly, they more often remain in the background, creating the implicit intellectual guidelines within which policy debates occur. Indeed, precisely because assumptions are, by definition, things that are assumed, they are generally those ideas that are commonly accepted in policy circles *without* having to be explicitly or systematically proven. Assumptions are the received wisdom among the policymaking elite, not the controversial new theses that must be systematically substantiated before they can be accepted.

The core assumptions that have undergirded recent American grand strategy have taken shape over varying lengths of time. Yet many emerged most fully in the wake of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and America's rise to unrivalled international primacy represent the most recent structural transformation of the international system.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore logical that the post-Cold War environment shaped many guiding assumptions of US policy.

To be clear, not all of the important assumptions underpinning American policy have remained stable across the post-Cold War era. The 9/11 attacks caused US policymakers to radically reformulate assumptions about the costs of action versus inaction in confronting terrorist groups and rogue regimes thought to possess weapons of mass destruction, for instance, while the unsatisfying course of the wars that followed led to a further reformulation of these and other assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Yet looking across the post-Cold War era, one can identify a set of assumptions that have been widely shared by US policymakers, and that have remained broadly constant during most or all of this period. One can also discern that a number of these core assumptions are now coming under greater strain.

Accordingly, this article critically examines seven vital assumptions that are either becoming more contested today, or are likely to become so over the

next 10–20 years. For analytical purposes, these assumptions can be divided into two groups. The first group (assumptions 1 through 4) addresses the fundamental geopolitical structure of the post-Cold War world – the idea that the United States and its allies enjoy a massive and essentially unchallenged preponderance of global power, and that this situation is unlikely to be disturbed by the emergence of a hostile great-power challenger or the resurgence of great-power war. The second group (assumptions 5 through 7) addresses the more amorphous, but no less important, conviction that the United States is on the right side of history – that the deeper ideological, economic and technological trends shaping the international system all favour America, and that those trends are likely to continue indefinitely.<sup>8</sup> The fact that both groups of assumptions are now becoming more contested indicates that the international system is changing in ways that will pose significant challenges for US strategy in years to come.

*Assumption 1: The United States enjoys and will continue to enjoy uncontested military primacy, not just globally, but in all key strategic theatres*

Perhaps the primary geopolitical effect of the Cold War's end was to kill off the only country that was anything like a military peer to the United States. The subsequent years have thus been defined by unrivalled American military primacy. This primacy has been clearly evident at the global level, at which Washington has enjoyed uncontested leads in overall military might, crucial power-projection capabilities and the ability to control the global commons. It has also been evident in virtually every key strategic theatre around the globe, where the US could deploy combat power superior to anything a potential challenger could amass even within its own regional backyard.<sup>9</sup>

For a quarter-century, this asymmetry has been a fundamental enabler of America's post-Cold War strategy. It has underwritten the country's overseas presence and security guarantees in key regions, numerous military interventions to confront challenges to America's preferred concept of international order, and the general overbalance of power that has so greatly favoured Washington and its allies during this period. To be sure, every post-Cold War administration recognised that the United States might one day confront a new rival for military primacy, at least in key regions, and

yet every administration saw that prospect as a far-off challenge on the distant horizon. The idea that American military primacy should and will persist for the foreseeable future has thus been a fixture of virtually every post-Cold War strategy document.<sup>10</sup>

So what is the state of US military primacy today? At the global level, the United States continues to possess impressive advantages in key power-projection capabilities – from aircraft carriers and airborne warning and control systems to nuclear-powered submarines and fifth-generation tactical aircraft – that will not be equalled for decades.<sup>11</sup> Yet the assumption of uncontested primacy is nonetheless coming in for greater challenge, particularly as key regional balances have shifted against the United States.

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*Russia's military modernisation has allowed it to achieve local overmatch*

A two-decade military build-up in China, for instance, is rapidly changing the military balance in East Asia, threatening US access to the area within the first island chain (and perhaps eventually beyond it), and complicating America's ability to intervene in contingencies involving Taiwan and perhaps other allies and partners. 'Over the next five to 15 years, if US and PLA forces remain on roughly current trajectories, Asia will witness a progressively receding frontier of US dominance', one RAND Corporation report concludes.<sup>12</sup> In Eastern Europe, a major Russian military-modernisation programme has allowed Moscow to achieve local overmatch along NATO's eastern frontier, and to contest the United States' ability to intervene on behalf of its allies should conflict break out.<sup>13</sup> Looking beyond Russia and China, the broader proliferation of precision-strike capabilities, integrated air-defence systems and other advanced capabilities are threatening, or at least decreasing, US superiority. Add in the fact that Washington is now facing a larger number of significant regional challenges than at any other time in decades – in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and East Asia simultaneously – and the stresses on US military primacy in each of these areas come into even sharper relief.

To understand how significantly the testing of American regional primacy might affect US strategy, consider just one aspect of that phenome-

non: the waning of American air supremacy in key theatres. Air supremacy, defined as ‘that degree of air superiority wherein the opposing force is incapable of effective interference within the operational area using air and missile threats’, is the highest level of advantage recognised by Air Force doctrine.<sup>14</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has enjoyed virtually unchallenged air supremacy in every shooting conflict in which it has been engaged. In other words, US ground forces have never faced a serious threat from the air in any military operation they have conducted for the past 25 years. Yet that supremacy is now being severely challenged. In East Asia, and particularly near China’s coastline, the combination of adverse geography and vastly improved Chinese air-defence and air-superiority capabilities is confronting American planners with the prospect of a much more contested aerial environment. In Eastern Europe and the Baltics, the tyranny of distance and Russia’s modernisation of its own air-defence and air-superiority capabilities is creating similar problems.<sup>15</sup>

This means that, in some of the most likely contingencies in these regions (a NATO-led defence of the Baltic allies, or an American-led defence of Taiwan), American strategists would have to contemplate deploying ground and naval forces in settings where they could come under sustained air attack. Indeed, although the loss of air supremacy does not necessarily mean that enemy forces would enjoy a decisive battlefield advantage, it does mean that the costs of conflict for US forces would quite likely increase, significantly and perhaps even dramatically. No one in the US armed forces has combat experience in such an exceedingly demanding environment. No living American political leader has had to make a use-of-force decision involving that cruel calculus. As it is, serious strategists consider the human toll of the Iraq War, which lasted eight years, to be devastating. Will American officials be willing to countenance combat operations when a butcher’s bill of comparable magnitude could come due in mere days?

By complicating US decisions about how and where to use force, the straining of American primacy over the next 10–20 years will also have broader strategic ramifications. This trend will certainly make it harder for the United States to uphold its alliance commitments in Europe and Asia than at any time in the post-Cold War era. It may thereby unnerve US allies that have long



depended on American protection, while tempting adversaries and rivals to pursue revisionist aims.<sup>16</sup> More broadly, because military power unavoidably casts a shadow over diplomacy and other international interactions, this trend could well mean that Washington and its allies will find it more difficult to get their way on important issues of regional or international order. The challenging of American military primacy, then, could introduce far greater uncertainties into the post-Cold War international system.

*Assumption 2: US allies are the richest, most capable countries in the world*

America's post-Cold War supremacy has not derived solely from its own strengths, but also from those of its core allies in Europe and Asia. In 1994, those allies commanded roughly 47% of global GDP and 36% of global defence spending, in addition to America's own 24% and 38%, respectively. And after the United States, America's closest allies – France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom – rounded out the top five in both of these categories.<sup>17</sup> Add in the fact that Russian power was in free fall during the early 1990s, and that other US competitors (or potential competitors) possessed mere fractions of global wealth and power, and this situation created great benefits for US policy.

It meant, for instance, that most key allies were less dependent on American protection than they had been during the Cold War, and that they were now security exporters that could contribute significantly to the out-of-area military interventions that figured prominently in US strategy. More broadly, it meant that the danger of serious counter-hegemonic balancing against the United States was assessed to be extremely low, and that Washington could generally (although not always) count on having the most powerful second-tier countries on its side on crucial issues of international order, from deterring aggression and preserving stability in key areas, to promoting democracy and human rights.<sup>18</sup> These advantages – and the core assumption of allied strength and vitality underlying them – have long played a key role in augmenting US superiority, and in enabling America's assertive approach to the post-Cold War world.

Since the early 1990s, however, a great deal has changed. Although a few US allies have increased their relative global wealth and power, the broader

trend has been one of decline. The aggregate share of global GDP possessed by core US allies in Asia and Europe had fallen to 39% by 2014; the aggregate share of global defence spending had fallen to 26%. During this period, many US allies, particularly in Europe, slashed defence outlays as a percentage of GDP and shed large portions of their air, naval and ground forces.<sup>19</sup> This trend was somewhat masked by the vast increase in US defence spending after 9/11, which kept the aggregate 'United States plus allies' total very high, but which also left an increasingly imbalanced load on America's shoulders.

Meanwhile, the combination of rapid economic growth and double-digit annual percentage increases in defence spending has carried China rapidly up the global power rankings, giving it 11.4% of global GDP and 11.2% of global military spending in 2014, shares far larger than those of any single US ally. And while Russia remains an economic basket case, its own military modernisation, combined with European military decline, has allowed Moscow to reassert local primacy along NATO's eastern flank. With significant long-term demographic and economic problems on all sides, the long-term trajectory of America's allies and rivals alike remains uncertain. To date, moreover, US allies' loss of relative military power far outstrips any loss of relative economic power. Nevertheless, the assumption that America's allies are the most powerful, capable and dynamic countries in the world after the United States has become far more tenuous.

How might the relative decline of America's friends affect American strategy? Broadly speaking, it means that the advantages Washington has enjoyed by dint of having such powerful allies are waning, as the liabilities of its alliance relationships become more pronounced. As evidenced by the Libyan war of 2011 and the campaign against the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) today, US allies have already become less capable of contributing meaningfully to out-of-area interventions than they were at the outset of the post-Cold War era, even as the Middle Eastern instability that has traditionally called forth such interventions is more pronounced than ever.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as US allies' power declines relative to their chief competitors, those allies are becoming more dependent on the Pentagon to protect them at a time when American military power is also under strain. 'Europe's decision to abdicate on defense spending', one US official remarked in 2013,

‘increasingly means it can’t take care of itself.’<sup>21</sup> Not least, the relative decline of countries that share the US vision of a liberal international order can only weaken the foundation of that order at a time when illiberal powers such as Russia and China are starting to challenge it more assertively than at any time since the end of the Cold War.

Of course, complaints about the United States shouldering allied dead-weight are as old as America’s alliances themselves. And, to be clear, America’s allies still add tremendously to US power, and provide pronounced geopolitical advantages over any challenger. But the relative power and dynamism of those allies, and thus the degree of American advantage, has been fading, and burden-sharing arrangements have become more skewed over time. This situation will only complicate the prospects of American statecraft at a time when America’s own primacy is increasingly being contested.

*Assumption 3: A richer and more globally integrated China will also be a freer and more peaceful China*

A third assumption involves the possibility of a great-power challenge to the post-Cold War order. Since the mid-1990s, American officials have understood that an increasingly powerful China could eventually challenge US interests and dominance in East Asia, and perhaps globally as well. But a fundamental assumption has been that Washington can avert this danger by promoting constructive change in Chinese politics and policy. In particular, American officials have wagered that, as China becomes richer, it will also become more democratic, because an increasingly prosperous population will demand a greater say in how it is governed. US officials have equally wagered that, as China becomes more integrated into the global economy and other global interactions, it will also become more peaceful, because it will have less incentive to upset a system in which it plays such a significant and rewarding role. The dominant viewpoint, writes Aaron Friedberg, has been that, via intensive integration and engagement, ‘the Beijing regime would come to see itself as having a substantial stake in supporting the prevailing order and a strong need to avoid actions that might lead to its disruption’.<sup>22</sup>

For roughly two decades, this assumption has pushed US policymakers to consistently emphasise the need to engage Beijing both economically and diplomatically, and to lay aside concerns that doing so might simply end up 'creating a monster'.<sup>23</sup> During this period, the US has done more than any other country to facilitate China's astounding rise, by opening US markets to Chinese goods, paving China's way into international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), involving China in myriad high-level diplomatic efforts and other measures.<sup>24</sup> As they have done so, US leaders have sought to balance this engagement with other efforts that would serve as a hedge if China's rise proved destabilising: deepening long-standing treaty relationships, developing new strategic partnerships with non-allied Asian powers and maintaining defence-modernisation programmes designed to meet future threats. Nevertheless, the balance between engagement and hedging has been tilted markedly in the direction of engaging China and cultivating it as a 'responsible stakeholder'.

But what if this great geopolitical wager does not pay off? China has indeed become far more prosperous: its GDP rose from \$359 billion in 1990 to \$10.35 trillion in 2014, and its per capita GDP skyrocketed from \$316 to \$7,587.<sup>25</sup> Yet politically, China has not become more liberal, and it may even be turning more repressive, particularly in recent years. Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Communist Party has rejected any opening toward a more competitive, pluralistic system; it has assiduously repressed civil society and human-rights activists; and it has so strictly censored information flows that in 2015 China was ranked last in the world in terms of internet freedom.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the current government of Xi Jinping has ruthlessly centralised power to a degree not seen in decades. The widely used Polity IV dataset still lists China as one of the world's most repressive countries, with no positive change for nearly four decades.<sup>27</sup> Freedom House has labelled China 'a role model' for political repression.<sup>28</sup>

Nor does China seem to be becoming more peaceful, in the sense of becoming more reconciled to the existing order. China specialists dispute just how assertively China is now behaving, the extent of its geopolitical ambitions, and whether its behaviour is driven by offensive or defensive motives.<sup>29</sup> But the past several years have witnessed a pattern of increas-

ingly disruptive Chinese behaviour, manifested in expansive maritime claims with little basis in international law; efforts to control and militarise disputed features in the South China Sea; the use of economic, military and paramilitary coercion against countries from Japan to Indonesia; and persistent efforts to undermine US alliances in East Asia. Moreover, for more than two decades, China has been undertaking a massive military build-up that seems to indicate dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs in Asia, and a corresponding determination to develop the capabilities that might allow it to revise the status quo in its favour.<sup>30</sup>

Such behaviour may simply be what one should expect from a proud civilisation whose power has been growing rapidly. But since US policy has been premised on the idea that a richer China will be a tamer and more liberal China, this assumption would seem to be coming under real strain. If current trends continue, the resulting challenges could be profound. America's post-Cold War grand strategy has always identified the emergence of a hostile peer competitor as the principal long-term threat to be forestalled; China's recent trajectory raises the prospect that this eventuality may be materialising sooner than expected. At the very least, then, US strategists may soon have to confront sharper trade-offs between engagement with China and efforts to preserve American primacy and the US-led international order. Over time, the United States might find that, rather than facing a China that has become more democratic and more reconciled to the global status quo, it faces an authoritarian, revisionist China that American policy has done much to empower.

*Assumption 4: Great-power war is obsolete*

The shifting geopolitical balance, and the rise of an authoritarian and increasingly assertive China, bear on a fourth key assumption having to do with the prospect of great-power war. During the Cold War, the world lived in fear of a great-power conflict that could escalate to a nuclear cataclysm. Yet after the Cold War, it became increasingly common to think that great-power wars, and particularly the danger of a great-power nuclear war, were things of the past. George W. Bush gave expression to this belief in 2002: at no time since the 'rise of the nation state in the seventeenth century', he

said, had there been such bright prospects 'to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war'.<sup>31</sup>

This assumption that the world was turning the page on the great-power conflicts that had marked the twentieth century – and much of human history – was based on several sub-premises. In part, it was based on the idea that supranational institutions such as the European Union (EU) were reducing historical great-power rivalries, while leaps in economic interdependence were simultaneously making great-power war less profitable. In part, it was based on the fact that the United States and its powerful allies now formed a 'security community' in which war was almost unthinkable.<sup>32</sup> In part, it was based on the decline of rival ideologies, particularly communism, that had previously spurred international conflict. And in part, it was a reflection of America's sheer military dominance, which made it difficult to imagine any other major power seriously challenging the international order that Washington supported. 'America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge', Bush declared in 2002, 'thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.'<sup>33</sup>

This assumption is now being tested, however, as the spectre of great-power war revives. Russia and China – two key powers that were never fully reconciled to the post-Cold War order – are now pushing back against that order more assertively than ever before. Russian President Vladimir Putin has used force to halt the feared spread of Western influence and institutions into the former Soviet space. He has also used Russia's revived military power to intimidate US allies in the Baltics and Eastern Europe, and to harass US and NATO forces in international waters and airspace. China, as noted previously, is likewise using military and paramilitary forces to coerce US allies, to adjust maritime boundaries by force and to exert pressure on neighbours from Japan to Vietnam.

Both Moscow and Beijing, moreover, are developing warfighting capabilities and strategies designed to deny Washington access to their 'near-abroads', and to prevail in a limited military conflict with the United States and its allies. As one US Navy official has noted, Chinese forces have been training for a 'short sharp war' with Japan – and presumably, by extension,

with America as well.<sup>34</sup> For its part, Moscow has regularly staged major military exercises along NATO's eastern flank, and has re-emphasised nuclear weapons in its rhetoric and planning.<sup>35</sup> In other words, neither Russia nor China is acting – or talking – like it believes that great-power war is obsolete. And neither, for that matter, is the United States, as the Pentagon invests in a Third Offset Strategy meant to re-establish American military dominance vis-à-vis great-power rivals.<sup>36</sup>

At present, few analysts believe that either Russia or China wants a war with Washington, and there are still powerful brakes on the possibility of great-power conflict. But it is clear that America once again has great-power rivals, that those rivals are increasingly willing to assert themselves even at risk of heightened geopolitical tensions, and that the risk of great-power conflict has therefore risen to a level higher than at any time since 1989. As the US National Military Strategy warned in 2015, 'Today, the probability of US involvement in interstate war with a major power is assessed to be low but growing.'<sup>37</sup> If great-power geopolitical competition continues to intensify in the coming 10–20 years – as most commentators expect it will – American assumptions about the obsolescence of major-power war, and the striking great-power peace that has characterised the post-Cold War era, will only be further challenged. We may find that the seeming respite from history that accompanied the end of the Cold War is finally coming to an end; the world, and the United States, may find itself heading 'back to the future' of international affairs, as John Mearsheimer predicted a quarter-century ago.<sup>38</sup>

*Assumption 5: The advance of democracy is unstoppable and irreversible*

Might the world be trending against the United States more generally? Although post-Cold War American strategists have found plenty of dangers to worry about in the short run, and plenty of more distant threats to hedge against in the long run, these concerns were always counter-balanced by the conviction that the world's deeper ideological, economic and technological trends favoured the United States. Indeed, there has been a certain whiggishness to post-Cold War grand strategy – a tendency to believe that the things that were good for America had also been proven to be good for the world, and that, despite the temporary disruptions of malevolent forces, we



should expect those things to continue their advance. Yet that conviction is today being challenged on multiple fronts.

This can be seen, firstly, in the return to a more competitive ideological environment. When the Cold War ended, democracy was on a historic winning streak that saw the number of electoral democracies increase from 39 to 76 between 1974 and 1990, and eventually to 120 by the year 2000.<sup>39</sup> A guiding assumption of post-Cold War US grand strategy has been that this trend is unstoppable and irreversible – that with the support of the US and its liberal friends, the world will continue to move in a more democratic direction, and that this progression will also make the international environment more peaceful, prosperous, stable and congenial to US interests and ideals alike. This concept was expressed most forthrightly in the 2002 *National Security Strategy*, which proclaimed that the combination of ‘freedom, democracy, and free enterprise’ now represented the ‘single sustainable model for national success’.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the post-Cold War era, this assumption has guided concrete policies, from the bipartisan, multi-administration commitment to promoting democracy and human rights overseas, to the broader US commitment to extending and deepening the liberal international order.<sup>41</sup>

Today, however, democracy’s future has become cloudier. Over the past 10–15 years, authoritarian regimes have become more subtle and skilful at repressing dissent, and more tenacious in clinging to power.<sup>42</sup> In countries such as Venezuela and Turkey, illiberal leaders have taken power through democratic means and then set about dismantling the checks and balances that previously constrained them. Meanwhile, illiberal great powers such as Russia and China have been pushing back against the spread of democracy in their own geopolitical neighbourhoods, opposing anti-authoritarian regime change overseas (in Syria, for instance), and touting the benefits of their own centralised models. Even in the West, democracy’s prospects now seem less certain. The rise of illiberal right-wing governments in Hungary and now Poland has created pockets of quasi-authoritarianism within NATO and the EU; Hungary’s Viktor Orbán has proudly and openly proclaimed the weakness of liberal society and the rise of the ‘illiberal state’.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the 2008 financial crisis raised questions about whether democratic systems can



deliver the economic goods as well as their authoritarian counterparts, and America itself has experienced levels of political gridlock and polarisation – as well as the rise of quasi-authoritarian sentiment in some quarters – that hardly speak well for the form of government it champions.

Nor is the stalling of democracy's advance merely an anecdotal phenomenon: the trend is evident in statistical measures of democracy's breadth and strength. The number of democracies in the world has roughly plateaued since around 2006, hovering between 114 and 119, while the rate of 'democratic breakdowns' has increased. And within a number of countries, the past decade has seen some degree of erosion in terms of political freedom,

human rights and the rule of law. As one expert notes, Freedom House statistics show 'that in each of the eight consecutive years from 2006 through 2013 more countries declined in freedom than improved'.<sup>44</sup> At the very least, the world is experiencing democratic stagnation; a modest democratic recession may even be under way.

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*The rate of  
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has increased*

If assumptions about democracy's continued advance were to be further undermined in the coming 10–20 years, this phenomenon would complicate American strategy in meaningful ways. For example, it would confront US policymakers with the challenge of dealing with political illiberalism within America's core alliances, in a way that would force starker trade-offs between security and ideological issues than Washington has generally had to face in recent decades. A less liberal world might also be a world in which it is more difficult to rally opposition against authoritarian rivals – just look at how Vladimir Putin has reportedly sought to weaken NATO and the EU by supporting illiberal European politicians.<sup>45</sup> More broadly, this scenario would presumably heighten the difficulties and costs of promoting democracy and human rights overseas, and thus force American policymakers to reassess how much emphasis to place on these efforts. Finally, though no less significantly, the stalling or even moderately significant reversal of democracy's progress could undermine one of the fundamental enthusiasms underlying post-Cold War statecraft – the idea that history is moving inexorably in America's direction – and cast the country into an uncertain and adverse ideological climate.

human rights and the rule of law. As one expert notes, Freedom House statistics show 'that in each of the eight consecutive years from 2006 through 2013 more countries declined in freedom than improved'.<sup>44</sup> At the very least, the world is experiencing democratic stagnation; a modest democratic recession may even be under way.

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*Assumption 6: Globalisation is inexorable*

Ominous developments in international politics are matched by troubling economic trends that seem to put at risk a sixth key assumption: that the advance of globalisation is inexorable, beneficial for humanity and beneficial for the United States, because it will ultimately lead to a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic world. This assumption firmly took root in the 1990s, when the end of the Cold War tore down geopolitical barriers to economic integration, just as technological advances were themselves enabling the integration of global finance and economics as never before. Since that time, US officials have acknowledged the dislocations that globalisation can bring, but they have nonetheless argued that its progression is inevitable and ultimately beneficial. ‘Efforts to resist the powerful technological and economic forces behind globalization ... are misguided and, in the long run, futile’, Clinton administration officials first argued in the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, this belief has structured virtually all aspects of US foreign economic policy, from the creation of international economic institutions such as the WTO, to the promotion of free-trade and investment agreements meant to impel economic integration forward.

Most US officials would still aver that globalisation is a good thing, even as they would acknowledge all of the familiar ways that it also invites instability and insecurity. Less certain is whether that advance is really as inexorable as previously thought. From a historical perspective, the progression of globalisation has been neither linear nor uninterrupted – dramatic advances in one era have often been followed by stagnation or even abrupt reversals in subsequent periods.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore reasonable, at least, to consider the numerous indications that the current wave of globalisation may not actually be unstoppable.

Consider five specific issues. Firstly, although a truly epic economic disaster was ultimately averted in 2007–08, the global financial crisis did indicate that the international financial and economic system is perhaps more vulnerable than previously thought to the sort of systemic crisis that has disrupted globalisation before.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the recent British vote to leave the EU, along with that institution’s decade-long struggle to foster renewed

economic growth, has shown that institutions commonly associated with globalisation may be more fragile than previously believed. Thirdly, in the US and throughout the West, political processes are revealing greater disillusion not just with economic integration per se, but also with the broader climate of national and societal openness that comes with globalisation.<sup>49</sup> The election of Donald Trump – following a campaign in which both major parties evinced strong scepticism of economic openness – is simply the most dramatic recent manifestation of this trend.

Fourthly, the return of serious great-power frictions – between NATO and Russia in Europe, and between the United States and its allies and China in East Asia – has revived the possibility that geopolitics might once again thwart globalisation, or simply cause leading powers to take a more zero-sum approach to foreign economic policy. If US–China tensions continue to rise, for instance, how long will the pursuit of unfettered economic integration between the two countries seem a wise policy? For that matter, what would a Sino-Japanese war over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands do to regional integration in Asia? Finally, some have argued that the internal engine of globalisation – the revolution in global supply-chain manufacturing and the distributed production of the information age – may itself be slowing, and could even reverse.<sup>50</sup> One can, perhaps, envision a retreat from ‘off-shoring’ back to ‘on-shoring’ as 3-D printing and robotics make manufacturing even in high-wage societies profitable.<sup>51</sup>

Admittedly, challenges to and changes in globalisation are still comparatively nascent, and the emphasis of government policy in the United States and other key nations remains on initiatives (such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP) that are designed to drive globalisation forward. But it is nonetheless becoming easier to see how this progress might be challenged, or even potentially reversed, over the next 10–20 years, and to identify plausible scenarios – economic, political or geopolitical – that could fundamentally challenge this assumption. Were this to occur, it would significantly complicate a US foreign economic policy that has made promoting globalisation its overarching *raison d’être* in the post-Cold War era, while also significantly distorting the broader American conception of where the world is headed.<sup>52</sup>

*Assumption 7: Technological innovation will lead to greater human flourishing and freedom, and will disproportionately favour the United States*

A final source of long-term American confidence has been the belief that the benefits of technological innovation trump its dangers, both for humanity as a whole and for the US in particular. This idea has been a recurring theme in American strategy for generations, and has been particularly pronounced since the end of the Cold War. In the economic realm, this assumption was informed by the way that technological advances helped transform the global economy from the 1970s onward, simultaneously uplifting vast numbers of individuals around the globe and strengthening America's own economic power. In the realm of ideas, this assumption was fostered by the role of technological innovation in empowering people vis-à-vis states, and thereby contributing to the remarkable democratic wave from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s. In the security realm, this assumption was promoted by the way in which the United States harnessed information-age technologies to leap ahead of the Soviets during the 1980s, and to establish an astounding post-Cold War primacy. Throughout the post-Cold War era, the view that technological change has been basically good for the flourishing and freedom of people around the world – and that the United States is best placed to exploit and adapt to such change – has thus been central to the country's strategic outlook, and it has been fundamental to the belief that America and its guiding principles will ultimately win the future.<sup>53</sup>

It would be an enormous exaggeration to say that this optimism has been fully or even largely discredited in recent years. In many ways, a capacity for technological innovation remains a key comparative advantage for the US, both economically and militarily.<sup>54</sup> Technological innovation also continues to produce remarkable gains in human prosperity, and to create pathways for individuals to mobilise against dictatorial regimes, as demonstrated by the use of social media in recent anti-authoritarian uprisings. Yet there are nonetheless important respects in which this assumption is being tested – in which the balance sheet on technological advance may be shifting in unfavourable ways.

Technological advances are empowering individuals to challenge dictators, but they are also empowering dictators to monitor and repress citizens.

Internal-security services in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries have used activists' Facebook profiles to map and disrupt protest networks, and they have used advances in information technology more broadly to better surveil groups that threaten their rule.<sup>55</sup> For its part, China has emerged as a veritable case study in how autocrats can use technological change to fortify themselves in power. Communist Party officials have worked to seize the 'commanding heights' of the internet, by using the state's technological prowess to monitor emerging sources of discontent, to censor threatening information or commentary, to spread propaganda and misinformation, and to harass and intimidate dissidents. State employees flood the information battlespace, churning out social-media posts that praise party rule and attack regime opponents. 'Social media can allow autocrats to become stronger, more informed, and more adaptable', argues analyst Simon Denyer. It is 'a potential tool of subtle control and manipulation ... that often works more effectively than brute-force suppression'.<sup>56</sup> Experts continue to debate whether the forces of liberalism or illiberalism are more effectively harnessing technology, but it can no longer simply be assumed that the former will triumph.

In the military sphere, too, it is increasingly unclear whether technological innovation will increase or decrease America's advantages. For all the discussion in the early post-Cold War era of a US-led 'revolution in military affairs', technological change now seems to act more as an equaliser for American adversaries. Since the 1990s, for instance, China has been a 'fast follower', using intensive resource investments (along with, reportedly, healthy doses of industrial theft and espionage) to catch up rapidly in several key areas. The People's Liberation Army has leapt forward by perhaps two generations in capabilities such as fighter aircraft, ballistic missiles and other key components of the precision-strike complex; these and other aspects of Chinese modernisation 'have come extraordinarily quickly by any reasonable historical standard', as RAND corporation analysts put it.<sup>57</sup> The Chinese build-up, in other words, is not simply a matter of numbers. Rather, Beijing is also cutting into America's lead, and contesting its customary advantages, by harnessing technological innovation to make some remarkable qualitative improvements.

Nor is this the only way in which the geopolitical results of innovation seem more adverse than advantageous. The spread of anti-satellite and cyber-warfare capabilities to a number of rivals and malign actors is complicating American superiority in, and unimpeded access to, the space and cyberspace domains. Hostile non-state groups such as Hizbullah have increasingly gained access to weapons systems, from man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) to guided surface-to-surface rockets, that allow them to mimic certain capabilities of technologically advanced powers. Meanwhile, the proliferation of 'lone-wolf' and 'wolf-pack' terrorism demonstrates how extremist groups have harnessed the power of the internet to achieve radicalisation and mount attacks over great distances, in a way that US and European security services have so far found devilishly difficult to forestall.<sup>58</sup> Across a variety of dimensions, then, technology is narrowing the power gap between the United States and its adversaries. Here as in the political realm, the darker side of technological advancement is increasingly coming into view, raising pointed questions about who will win the future after all.

### **The will to adapt**

Since the end of the Cold War, American grand strategy has been rooted in generally bullish assumptions about where the world is headed and the feasibility of sustaining America's dominance. Now, however, the world is changing geopolitically, economically and ideologically, and central assumptions are being tested more strenuously than at any previous time in the post-Cold War era. There will be fewer favourable givens for the United States in the emerging international environment – America is entering an era in which global affairs will be more contested, more competitive and more uncertain.

This does not necessarily mean that America's post-Cold War strategy is doomed, or that radical retrenchment will soon be required. Key assumptions of US globalism have been tested before – in the period after the Vietnam War, for instance – and American leaders proved capable of gradually making the adjustments needed to reinvigorate US strategy in light of global changes.<sup>59</sup> Today, then, the fate of US strategy will depend in sub-

stantial measure on whether Washington can do so again – whether it will make the investments necessary to shore up US military primacy against growing challenges; whether it will offset the decline of traditional allies by forging more diverse partnerships with a range of other key international actors; and whether it will invest the political capital needed to revitalise the free-trade/globalisation agenda amid domestic resistance. In other words, the country has options: it need not simply be a bystander to a shifting international environment. The key policy question is thus whether the US can mobilise its still pre-eminent resources and energies to effectively adapt to a world in which its core strategic assumptions are being tested.

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### *What if this time is different?*

The answer to that question bears on a final core assumption – that decline is a choice that Americans can reject, because the US political system will ultimately support the decisions and sacrifices needed to sustain an effective, primacist grand strategy. This assumption significantly predates the post-Cold War period. Throughout the post-war era, the United States has confronted doubts about the resilience of its power, the validity and sustainability of its policies, and its ability to deal with new global challenges. This was the case following the first Soviet A-bomb test in the late 1940s, the launching of *Sputnik* in the 1950s, the traumas of Vietnam and the oil shocks in the 1970s, and in several other instances.<sup>60</sup> In each case, the US political system ultimately proved capable of taking the steps necessary to once again put America on an upward trajectory – for instance, by undertaking the military build-up associated with NSC-68 in the early 1950s, by rebuilding US military power after Vietnam, and by addressing budget deficits during the 1980s and early 1990s. And so for many political and policy elites, a bedrock intellectual assumption has been that, just as the US has overcome great challenges before, it can do so again. As former president Bill Clinton aptly put it in 2012: ‘Every single person that’s bet against America has lost money because we always come back.’<sup>61</sup>

But what if this time is different? What if this assumption does not hold, because the American political system has become less capable of enabling good grand strategy? One hardly needs to be an alarmist to wonder whether this may be the case.



Consider the issue of whether the US can adequately resource its grand strategy. By historical standards, the percentage of GDP devoted to the overall national-security budget – the combined costs of defence, foreign diplomacy, foreign aid and intelligence – is fairly small. American defence spending, for instance, has never been higher than 4.7% of GDP since the mid-1990s, compared to more than 12% at the height of the Cold War.<sup>62</sup> Yet in recent years, national-security spending has come under intense downward pressure. The culprit is not declining national wealth, but rather historically high levels of political gridlock and polarisation.<sup>63</sup> By most statistical measures, these forces are now at generational highs, and since 2011 in particular, they have made it essentially impossible for the country to address issues of deficits and spending in a reasonable way. Instead, they led to a sequestration mechanism that has inflicted significant defence cuts, caused crippling budgetary inflexibility and uncertainty, and played havoc with US force structure, modernisation and readiness – all at a time when threats to American primacy are becoming more severe. Looking ahead, if the United States does not find a way of overcoming surging polarisation and addressing spending issues more strategically, then exploding entitlement costs will consume ever-larger chunks of federal spending, crowding out defence and further corroding the military pillar of American strategy.

Nor is this the only issue about which there is cause for concern. As noted, the American political system seems to be becoming more resistant to free trade and globalisation. During the 2016 presidential campaign, both major parties' candidates opposed TPP, and anti-trade rhetoric loomed larger than at any time in at least a generation. The election ultimately brought to power a candidate who – in his campaign rhetoric, at least – had fundamentally critiqued key elements of American globalism, from US support for international institutions to the maintenance of US alliances. How Donald Trump actually governs remains to be seen, of course. Yet all of this is nonetheless enough to make one wonder whether America's post-Cold War strategy is running out of steam.

Of course, one should not overstate the degree to which this assumption has been invalidated. Public-opinion polling paints a somewhat brighter picture, with polls taken in 2015 and 2016 showing that public support for many key aspects of American internationalism remains (superficially, at



least) fairly strong.<sup>64</sup> And it may be that the political system will, over the long run, continue to produce leaders and policies that will sustain US leadership.

But given recent trends, it is hard not to worry that this most fundamental assumption of US grand strategy – that the country can effectively cope with the problems before it – may be becoming shakier as well. And if this assumption is further undermined over the next 10–20 years, it would significantly compound the effects of all the other global changes discussed here – and augur a bleak future for both American grand strategy and the post-Cold War order it supports.

## Notes

- 1 To be sure, US grand strategy was not premised *entirely* upon optimistic assumptions, as it also identified a range of threats and challenges that warranted an assertive response. But those problems stood out in sharp relief against a broader backdrop that was assumed to be basically favourable to US power, values and interests.
- 2 For a more comprehensive compilation of the assumptions underlying US grand strategy since the end of the Second World War, see Peter Feaver, William Inboden, Hal Brands and Paul Miller, ‘Planning Assumptions in American Grand Strategy’, paper prepared for the National Intelligence Council, August 2015. This longer list of assumptions was initially prepared for the National Intelligence Council in support of the *Global Trends 2035* report.
- 3 See Christopher Layne, ‘The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise’, *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 4, Spring 1993, pp. 5–51.
- 4 ‘Grand strategy’ is defined here as the ‘purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so’. Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 3.
- 5 On post-Cold War grand strategy, see Peter Feaver, ‘American Grand Strategy at the Crossroads: Leading from the Front, Leading from Behind, or Not Leading at All’, in Richard Fontaine and Kristin Lord, *America’s Path: Grand Strategy For the Next Administration* (Washington DC: Center for New American Security, May 2012), pp. 59–70; and Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: US Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), especially Chapter 6 and the conclusion. As this description indicates, we believe there was a coherent post-Cold War grand strategy, a position that is supported at greater length in the works cited here and other sources.
- 6 It has sometimes been argued that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 represented

- such a change, but 9/11 did not fundamentally alter structural global power dynamics to anywhere near the same degree as did the end of the Cold War.
- 7 On the Bush administration's approach to counter-terrorism and grand strategy, see Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*, Chapter 4; and Peter Feaver and Stephen Biddle, 'Assessing Strategic Choices in the War on Terror', in James Burk (ed.), *How 9/11 Changed Our Ways of War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).
  - 8 The argument we are making here is *not* that these seven assumptions are necessarily the seven most important assumptions in American grand strategy, although they are all fundamentally important. Rather, these are the seven most important assumptions that are now increasingly open to challenge.
  - 9 See Barry Posen, 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony', *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 1, Summer 2003, pp. 5–46.
  - 10 See, for instance, Barton Gellman, 'Keeping the US First; Pentagon Would Preclude a Rival Superpower', *Washington Post*, 11 March 1992; and George W. Bush, 'Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York', 1 June 2002, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=62730&st=&st1=>.
  - 11 Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century', *International Security*, vol. 40, no. 3, Winter 2015–16, pp. 7–53.
  - 12 Eric Heginbotham et al., *The US–China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), especially p. xxxi.
  - 13 David Shlapak and Michael Johnson, 'Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics', RAND Corporation, January 2016.
  - 14 *Countering Air and Missile Threats, Joint Publication 3-01* (Ft. Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 23 March 2012). 'Air supremacy' is distinguished from 'air superiority', a lesser degree of advantage.
  - 15 See Heginbotham et al., *US–China Military Scorecard*, chapters 3–6; David Barno and Nora Bensahel, 'The Catastrophic Success of the US Air Force', *War on the Rocks*, 3 May 2016; Elbridge Colby and Jonathan Solomon, 'Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe', *Survival*, vol. 57, no. 6, December 2015–January 2016, pp. 21–50.
  - 16 For a classic work on shifting balances and international statecraft, see Marc Trachtenberg, 'A "Wasting Asset": American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949–1954', *International Security*, vol. 13, no. 3, Winter 1988–89, pp. 5–49.
  - 17 The defence-spending figures in this section are drawn from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) annual data on global military spending. The GDP figures are drawn from Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, 'GDP Shares by Country and Region Historical', <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/international-macroeconomic-data-set.aspx>. The data used here were drawn

- from these data sets in November 2015. Figures for US allies include the NATO countries, US treaty allies in the Asia-Pacific and Taiwan (thanks to its quasi-treaty-ally status).
- 18 US and allied interests did not always converge on particular issues: consider the growing divergence between French and US–British positions on Iraq as the 1990s progressed.
- 19 See F. Stephen Larrabee et al., *NATO and the Challenge of Austerity* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012); Adrian Croft, ‘Defense Cuts “Hollowing Out” European Armies: US Envoy’, Reuters, 17 June 2013.
- 20 See, for instance, Thom Shanker, ‘Defense Secretary Warns NATO of “Dim” Future’, *New York Times*, 10 June 2011.
- 21 Steven Erlanger, ‘Shrinking Europe Military Spending Stirs Concern’, *New York Times*, 23 April 2013. See also Michael Swaine et al., *Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Strategic Net Assessment* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), especially p. 2.
- 22 Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: Norton, 2011), especially pp. 91–2.
- 23 See Thomas Christensen, ‘Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and US Policy toward East Asia’, *International Security*, vol. 31, no. 1, Summer 2006, pp. 81–126.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 See World Bank, ‘GDP at Market Prices (Current US\$)’, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>; and World Bank, ‘GDP Per Capita (Current US\$)’, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CN>.
- 26 Edward Wong, ‘China Ranks Last of 65 Nations in Internet Freedom’, *New York Times*, 29 October 2015.
- 27 See ‘Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946–2013’, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.
- 28 Chantal Yuen, ‘Freedom House Says China “Role Model” for Oppressive Countries, Flags SCMP Sale to Alibaba’, *Hong Kong Free Press*, 28 January 2016.
- 29 For a sceptical take on the idea that there has recently been a significant change in China’s policies, see Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?’, *International Security*, vol. 37, no. 4, Spring 2013, pp. 7–48.
- 30 See Department of Defense, ‘Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2016’, <http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2016%20China%20Military%20Power%20Report.pdf>; and Andrew Erickson and Conor Kennedy, ‘China’s Maritime Militia: What It Is and How to Deal With It’, *Foreign Affairs*, 23 June 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2016-06-23/chinas-maritime-militia>.
- 31 See Bush’s introduction to *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington DC: White House, 2002).
- 32 Robert Jervis, ‘Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace’, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 96, no. 1, March 2002, pp. 1–14.

- 33 Bush, 'Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York'.
- 34 'Navy Official: China Training for "Short Sharp War" with Japan', *USNI News*, 18 February 2014.
- 35 Max Fisher, 'How World War III Became Possible: A Nuclear Conflict with Russia is Likelier than You Think', *Vox*, 29 June 2015, <http://www.vox.com/2015/6/29/8845913/russia-war>.
- 36 See Robert Work, 'The Third Offset Strategy and its Implications for Partners and Allies', Washington DC, 28 January 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606641/the-third-us-offset-strategy-and-its-implications-for-partners-and-allies>.
- 37 General Martin Dempsey, 'National Military Strategy of the United States of America', June 2015, p. 4.
- 38 John Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, vol. 15, no. 1, Summer 1990, pp. 5–55.
- 39 Statistics from Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2013: Democratic Breakthroughs in the Balance', 2013, p. 29, <https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet.pdf>; Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 25.
- 40 See Bush's introduction to *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.
- 41 Paul Miller, 'American Grand Strategy and the Democratic Peace', *Survival*, vol. 54, no. 2, April–May 2012, pp. 49–76.
- 42 On this point, see William J. Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, 2012).
- 43 See Michael Boyle, 'The Coming Illiberal Order', *Survival*, vol. 58, no. 2, April–May 2016, especially pp. 35–6.
- 44 Larry Diamond, 'Facing Up to the Democratic Recession', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 25, no. 1, January 2015, pp. 141–55, especially pp. 142, 147–8.
- 45 See Peter Foster and Matthew Holehouse, 'Russia Accused of Clandestine Funding of European Parties as US Conducts Major Review of Vladimir Putin's Strategy', *Telegraph*, 16 January 2016.
- 46 Joan Spero, 'The Challenges of Globalization', remarks at the World Economic Development Congress, Washington DC, 26 September 1996, <http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/960926.html>.
- 47 See Peter Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- 48 For an optimistic interpretation of the crisis, see Daniel Drezner, *The System Worked: How the World Stopped Another Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For more pessimistic interpretations, see Jonathan Kirchner, *American Power after the Financial Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); and Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
- 49 See, for instance, Diego Zuluaga, 'Public Opinion Is Turning Against Free Trade and Globalisation', Institute of Economic Affairs, 27 June 2016, <http://www.iea.org.uk/blog/public-opinion-is-turning-against-free-trade-and-globalisation>.

- 50 T.X. Hammes, 'The End of Globalization? The International Security Implications', *War on the Rocks*, 2 August 2016.
- 51 See 'Made in America, Again: Fourth Annual Survey of US Based Manufacturing Executives', Boston Consulting Group, December 2015.
- 52 Conceivably, a reversal or major shift in globalisation could impact US grand strategy in an even more fundamental way. If the United States were to become less dependent on global supply-chain manufacturing, perhaps because of an accelerated return to 'on-shoring', then Washington might have less incentive to continue patrolling the global commons and taking other stabilising measures traditionally geared, at least in part, toward ensuring the smooth functioning of the global economy.
- 53 See, for example, Adam Segal, *Advantage: How American Innovation Can Overcome the Asian Challenge* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).
- 54 See Brooks and Wohlforth, 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century'; Michael Beckley, 'China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure', *International Security*, vol. 36, no. 3, Winter 2011–12, pp. 41–78.
- 55 See Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve*.
- 56 Simon Denyer, 'The Internet Was Supposed to Foster Democracy. China Has Different Ideas', *Washington Post*, 10 July 2016. See also Seva Gunitsky, 'Social Media Helps Dictators, Not Just Protestors', *The Monkey Cage*, 30 March 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/30/social-media-helps-dictators-not-just-protesters/>.
- 57 Heginbotham et al., *US–China Military Scorecard*, especially p. xxx.
- 58 On this point, see Isaac Chotiner, 'A Lone-Wolf Terrorist Is Never Quite Alone', *Slate*, 13 June 2016.
- 59 See Peter Feaver (ed.), *Strategic Retrenchment and Renewal in the American Experience* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the Army War College, 2014); and Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*.
- 60 See Samuel Huntington, 'The US – Decline or Renewal?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 2, Winter 1988–89, pp. 76–96.
- 61 'Transcript of Bill Clinton's Speech to the Democratic National Convention', *New York Times*, 5 September 2012.
- 62 See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 393; World Bank, 'Military Expenditure (% of GDP)', <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?page=3>.
- 63 On these forces, see Pew Research Center, 'Political Polarization in the American Public', June 2014, especially pp. 6–15.
- 64 See Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *America Divided: Political Partisanship and US Foreign Policy*, October 2015. See also Craig Kafura and Dina Smeltz, 'On Eve of NATO Summit, Majority of Americans Say Alliance Is Essential', Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 6 July 2016, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/eve-nato-summit-majority-americans-say-alliance-essential>.