# AFF---Persian Gulf

## 1AC

### 1AC — ADV — Regional Stability

#### Advantage one is REGIONAL STABILITY:

#### The US is bolstering its military presence in the Persian Gulf.

Fossum 23 – [Sam, B.A. in journalism from Johns Hopkins. “US Bolstering Defense Posture in the Persian Gulf after Iran Seized Two Merchant Ships in Recent Weeks | CNN Politics.” CNN, https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/12/politics/us-iran-persian-gulf/index.html. May 12, 2023] TDI

“Today, the Department of Defense will be making a series of moves to bolster our defensive posture in the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. US central command will provide additional details on those reinforcements in coming days,” he continued.

The decision by the US to take further security measures in and around the strategically critical Middle East waterway comes after two internationally flagged merchant vessels were seized by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy in recent weeks, [according to the US Navy](https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3382689/second-merchant-vessel-seized-within-a-week-by-iran/) who added that Iran has interfered with or attacked 15 internationally flagged merchant ships over the past two years.

In the coming weeks, according to Kirby, the US will also be increasing its coordination and interoperability with the International Maritime Security Construct, which is a coalition of 11 nations formed two years ago to help reassure and protect merchant shipping in the area.

The Strait of Hormuz is vital to the global economy, serving as the only way to move oil from the Persian Gulf to the world’s oceans.

The US 5th fleet will increase the rotation of ships and aircraft patrolling the Strait of Hormuz and further increase security collaboration with partners and allies, according to a US Navy statement.

“Iran’s unwarranted, irresponsible and unlawful seizure and harassment of merchant vessels must stop,” Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, who oversees US Naval forces in the region, said in the statement, adding the US is “committed to protecting navigational rights in these critical waters.”

And against the backdrop of all this, the US and Iran have repeatedly had tense interactions at sea the last several years over a fraught relationship that has only continued to deteriorate. The US has sharply condemned Iran’s crackdown on widespread protests against its governing regime and its morality police, while Iran’s Supreme Leader has blamed the US for the unrest. Washington has also criticized and sanctioned Iran for providing armed drones to Russia which Russian forces have used in Ukraine.

This isn’t the first time this year the US military has [bolstered its presence](https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/31/politics/us-bolsters-forces-middle-east/index.html) in the region. Back in March, the US strengthened its military forces in the Middle East following a series of attacks on US troops in Syria attributed to Iranian-affiliated militias, according to the Pentagon.

As part of that, the US ordered a carrier strike group to remain in the region to support US forces in Central Command, which covers the Middle East, and a squadron of A-10 attack aircraft to the region.

The US also responded with precision air strikes on facilities associated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

There are roughly 900 US troops in Syria as part of the ongoing mission to defeat ISIS.

#### On-the-ground presence fuels regional instability, not military leadership.

Wasser 21 – [Becca, fellow in the defense program at the Center for a New American Security. “Drawing down the U.S. Military Responsibly.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/05/18/drawing-down-u.s.-military-responsibly-pub-84527>, May 18, 2021] TDI

THE CASE AGAINST U.S. BASES

From a strategic standpoint, U.S. presence in the Middle East is not directly linked to core U.S. interests. Critics argue that continued U.S. presence contributes to, if not fuels, the ongoing instability in the Middle East, often driving U.S. operations. Such arguments cite diminishing U.S. reliance on oil and gas originating in the Middle East and the emergence of regional terrorist organizations intent on attacking U.S. troops specifically to force a military withdrawal.

Operationally, continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East comes directly at the expense of U.S. forces in other, more critical regions. At the same time, critics argue that continued U.S. presence contributes to the inability or unwillingness of regional states to develop their own military capabilities. They also highlight the growing risks to U.S. forces as the capabilities of regional adversaries like Iran advance and claim that forward presence is no longer required thanks to new technological advancements in warfare.

The supporting evidence bears out these arguments. U.S. troops have been attacked by terrorist organizations, notably the [Khobar Towers bombing](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/africa/062696binladen.html) in 1996 and the more recent [rocket attacks](https://www.wsj.com/articles/rocket-attack-on-iraqi-base-kills-two-u-s-troops-british-soldier-11583966210) by Iranian-backed groups in Iraq. The U.S. military presence has also added to the security of Middle Eastern autocracies, which has emboldened these authoritarian regimes to crackdown on their citizens—for example, in Bahrain after the February 14, 2011, uprisings.

The presence of U.S. forces and the unspoken U.S. security commitment has also meant that many regional countries have not invested heavily in building up their militaries. Some partners, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have used their nascent capabilities in ways that [work against U.S. interests.](https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-biden-yemen-int/biden-ends-u-s-support-for-saudi-arabia-in-yemen-says-war-has-to-end-idUSKBN2A4268)

Furthermore, the growing capabilities of regional adversaries has placed U.S. military installations at risk. Iran, especially, poses a risk to the survivability of U.S. forces and could impede U.S. military operations, as Tehran [builds up](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Iran_Military_Power_LR.pdf) its missile capabilities, employs new technologies like [unmanned aerial vehicles](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-exclusive/exclusive-u-s-probe-of-saudi-oil-attack-shows-it-came-from-north-report-idUSKBN1YN299), and proliferates its capabilities to proxy forces. Moreover, while advancements in U.S. military capabilities enable remote operations, they are unlikely and unable to replace forward-based operations in the Middle East—either in the case of an Iran contingency or to respond to terrorist threats.

#### The depth and breadth of US military presence motivates Iran’s naval expansion.

Bagheri Dolatabadi & Kamrava 22 – [Ali, Department of Political Science, Yasouj University; Mehran, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University Qatar "Iran’s changing naval strategy in the Persian Gulf: motives and features." British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2022.2105815>, July 27, 2022] TDI

Iran’s motives for developing naval capabilities

While the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are dependent on the United States for their security needs, Iran feels a sense of security independence in its immediate region. This security independence rests on Iran’s assumption of conventional military superiority vis-à-vis Arab neighbours.6 When it comes to naval forces, Iran does indeed have by far the largest navy of all the littoral states of the Persian Gulf.7 Iranian naval force, in fact, has undergone a steady expansion in size and hardware in recent years.

This expansion, meant to augment Iran’s naval capabilities, and the evolving strategic postures that have been adopted, is the result of several considerations, the most important of which include heightened tensions—and occasional military confrontation —with the United State (including the shooting down of a US drone in 2019); assumptions about the vulnerability of the Bushehr nuclear power plant and the oil facilities located in the southern Iran; expansive US military presence in and around the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula and the strategic importance to Iran of the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. In the mid-2010s, approximately 93% of Iranian exports and 13% of the country’s imports passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

Critically, much of Iran’s efforts at developing its naval capabilities in the Persian Gulf have been driven by the depth and breadth of the US military presence there and also by the naval strategies adopted by America’s regional allies. The history and depth of the US military presence in the Persian Gulf has been well documented.9 This presence has been significantly expanded since the early 1990s, resulting in the semi-permanent presence of US naval warships as well as permanent bases across the Persian Gulf. According to a study by the Rand Corporation, ‘Because the United States does not anticipate large-scale land-warfare with Iran, much less with China, maritime war-fighting capabilities, such as for sea-based strike, are considered key’.

This has not gone unnoticed in Tehran. Iranian military officials consider the country’s southern borders as the only area where the United States can enter and deploy troops on Iranian soil.11 This is borne out by historical experience. In World War II, Allied forces entered Iran through the country’s southern ports, and in both the First and Second Persian Gulf Wars, the US also sent troops to Iraq through the waterway. Iranian strategists were particularly alarmed when the United States not only invaded Iraq in 2003 but also proceeded to overthrow Saddam Hussein.12 They therefore believe that ‘one of the most dangerous ways to threaten the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran is by sea’.13 This has resulted in a concerted campaign to enhance the country’s naval power and to deny potential invaders any access to Iranian territory from the sea. As one IRGCN commander put it, ‘it is our obligation to challenge American military superiority in the Persian Gulf’ in order to protect the country.14 As far back as 1985, in fact, Iran devised a comprehensive military strategy for the protection of its maritime borders in both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. As part of this strategy, the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) was given the responsibility for the Caspian Sea and the waters east of the Hormuz Strait, and the newly established Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) was placed in charge of ensuring the security of the Persian Gulf.

#### A strong IRGC increases maritime disputes and harassment operations along the Strait of Hormuz.

Hossein al-Shahrani 21 – [Saad, Ph.D. in economics at Washington State University, fellow professor of economics at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, and vice chairman of the board of directors of the Saudi Economic Association “IRANIAN MARITIME ORIENTATIONS: OBJECTIVES, CHALLENGES, AND SCOPE OF INFLUENCE” Journal for Iranian Studies, <https://rasanah-iiis.org/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/IRANIAN-MARITIME-ORIENTATIONS-OBJECTIVES-CHALLENGES-AND-SCOPE-OF-INFLUENCE.pdf>, October 2021] TDI

3.4 Placing Pressure on US Military Presence in the Region

Iranian boats harassing US military vessels passing through the Arabian Gulf has increased recently. Nearly 30 harassment operations were recorded against vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian missile boats in 2016. The harassments continued through 2017(41) as well as in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Definitely, the United States closely follows the growth of Iran’s naval capabilities. The US Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) issued a report, forecasting that by the time the arms embargo is lifted in 2020, Iran’s naval forces will significantly boost their fleet after Tehran is allowed to purchase new naval vessels.

Iranian military leaders have continued to threaten US bases and interests in the Arabian Gulf region.(43) US reports indicated that Iran has deployed a range of anti-ship missiles in the region overlooking the Strait of Hormuz.(44) Iranian boats also harassed US warships in the Arabian Gulf. Iran threatened to target US commercial ships in the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, in case any Iranian oil tankers faced US attacks in the Caribbean.

In the same context, the IRGC established a new mockup jet carrier off Iran’s southern coast to carry out potential drills using live ammunition. This decoy plane carrier was previously used in February 2015 during a military drill dubbed “The Great Prophet IX.” This operation indicates that the IRGC was preparing to sink a mockup carrier — similar to the one it carried out in 2015.

The maritime dispute between Iran and its foes, especially the United States, escalated after the latter seized Iranian oil tankers that were bound for Venezuela, and confiscated what was aboard the vessels. The UK also seized the Iranian oil tanker Grace 1 in July 2019 at the Strait of Gibraltar. Moreover, Israel targeted a number of Iranian oil tankers in 2021 in the Mediterranean on their way to Syria. US national security agencies followed in June 2021 the movements of two Iranian vessels — the Iranian modern frigate Sahand and the former oil tanker Makran which has been turned into a floating base. Iranian authorities said that the latter will reassert Iran’s presence in the Atlantic Ocean and at the international level.(45)

#### Conflicting leadership interests ensure minor conflicts around the Strait of Hormuz escalate quickly.

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The tension between the United States (US) and Iran has yet to improve. It started with negative perceptions of the two after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The US-Iran relationship continued to deteriorate during the Gulf War between Iraq and Iran throughout 1980 and the imposition of an embargo by the US on Iran during the Bill Clinton administration (Raharjo 2012). The worsening of US-Iran relations peaked after the US, under Donald Trump’s administration, left the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that deals with Iran’s nuclear program. The US-Iran conflict flared up in mid-2019 when the US blamed Iran for attacking merchant ships and oil tankers around the Strait of Hormuz (Reed 2019). On the other hand, Iran was irate since the US included the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the list of international terrorist groups. The tension was further worsened by the killing of top General Qasem Soleimani of the IRCG in early 2020 (Congressional Research Service 2020).

Despite the conflict and different political views, the two countries have common interests in the Strait of Hormuz. The strait is the only access for the Middle East countries to develop their sea-based trading. Thus, the channel becomes essential for the economies of the Middle East region, especially for oil and gas exports, and for countries that depend on energy imports, mainly the US and its allies in the Asia Pacific (Slade 2019). Thus, the US, Iran, and other countries have common interests in ensuring the security and stability of the sea-based trading routes in the Strait of Hormuz. Regrettably, the US and Iran are both interested in dominating the leadership in the strait to ensure the security of the Strait of Hormuz and ships passing through the channel (Gilsinan 2019).

Collaboration and conflict may emerge from the US and Iran’s shared interests. Both the US and Iran desire influential positions in the region due to their strategic interests in the Strait of Hormuz. However, if conflictual relations exaggerate their common interest, a crisis around the Strait of Hormuz most likely occurs. This crisis is latent to disasters as any conflict around the strait will cause an increased risk for tankers operating in these waters. If left unchecked, this conflict will also lead to a more severe security crisis on a larger scale.

The importance of the Strait of Hormuz makes even a minor conflict can become a significant security threat in a short time (Slade 2019). Various reactions from the US and Iran – to show their dominance – have contributed to the crisis and the deteriorating security situation. Therefore, this article explains how the US-Iran conflict impacts the security and stability of the Strait of Hormuz. This article will be divided into several sections, including the concept of conflict of interest and maritime security, an explanation of the conflict of interest in the Strait of Hormuz, the US and Iran conflicts, and the impact of these conflicts on security and stability in the Strait of Hormuz.

Methods to Assess the Impact of the US-Iran Conflictual Relations on the Hormuz Strait’s Stability

In this article, the authors use a qualitative research method with a case study approach to form a conclusion on this issue. With a case study approach, this research intensively focuses on one particular object that becomes the research case. Case study data can be obtained from all involved parties and collected from various primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, these research methods can produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior, which carefully describes the characteristics of a symptom or problem under study and reveal how it happened (Moleong 2007; Mudjiyanto 2018).

Researchers used primary data from interviews with Nostalgiawan Wahyudi, a researcher at the Center for Political Research, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), focusing on Islamic politics and the Middle East. The researchers also collected secondary data from various sources through a literature study related to the research topic. The researchers then validated the data and research results through triangulation before analyzing the data to make conclusions. Triangulation was done to compare the truth of any information obtained from different sources (Bachri 2010). Thus, the data’s basis or truth and validity are very concerning. Therefore, the data obtained by researchers related to the US-Iran conflict and the security of the Strait of Hormuz were validated from different sources based on primary and secondary data findings.

#### Miscalculation causes an open war in the Middle East and jeopardizes global trade.

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The escalation of tension in the Strait of Hormuz poses a security threat to Iran, the US, and countries in the region. The long-term increase in the US deployments of naval, missile defense, intelligence, and asset surveillance in the area prompted Iran to do the same to counter the US. The hope of a peaceful resolution to this crisis is far-fetched because neither side is willing to concede. However, for this crisis to be resolved in a non-violent manner, both parties must reach an agreement and mutual understanding (Slade 2019). If the escalation of tensions in the region continues, a miscalculated move by either side can create an open war that leads to an even greater catastrophe.

Tensions between the US and Iran in the Strait of Hormuz impact three things. The first is regional instability. Tensions in the Strait of Hormuz are not just between Iran and the US. Strait’s user countries, both Middle Eastern countries and outside the region, are also experiencing tensions with Iran. The extension of the tension’s impact happened due to Iran’s activities which significantly increased the scope and rate of missile attacks directed at the oil infrastructure and other countries’ ships sailing through the Strait of Hormuz (Goldenbrg al. 2019). Since the US reimposed economic sanctions targeting Iran’s oil exports in 2018, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated that if Iranian oil cannot exit through the Strait of Hormuz, then oil from other countries must not go through the strait accordingly. The policy underlies several of Iran’s attacks in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran carried out a series of attacks in the form of confiscation and detonation of tankers from other countries such as Britain, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Norway, and even South Korea to threaten these countries to lift their sanctions immediately (Gambrell 2019).

The response to the threats in the Strait of Hormuz from the strait’s user countries was that they join the US-led maritime security operation known as the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC). This maritime security operation was established on November 7, 2019, and mainly aimed to deter Iranian activities. This operation is sponsored by the United States and countries throughout the area to ensure the freedom of sea-based trading and shipping lane in the Strait (IMSC 2021). Iran perceives this US-led maritime security operation as a threat and diplomatic pressure against it. Moreover, Iran has also proposed a security cooperation called Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) with the United Nations so that Middle Eastern countries will also support and participate together with Iran. However, unfortunately, regional governments did not receive the proposal for Iran’s security cooperation well, and they even decided to join the US in IMSC (Vaisi 2020).

Secondly, apart from disrupting regional security, the US-Iran tension on the Hormuz Strait also jeopardized global trade, especially if it is related to the needs of every country in the world for energy and oil flow from the strait. To counter the US, its sanctions, and its alliance, Iran has caused oil infrastructure damage, attacks and seizures of tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz, and other incidents. The attacks in Saudi Arabia, Aramco’s facilities in Abqaiq, and Khurais, for instance, have disrupted the production capacity of 5,7 million barrels per day (BPD) and resulted in the company temporarily halting shipments through the Strait of Hormuz (Goldenbrg et al. 2019).

#### Middle east instability spirals — global war.

Klare 18 – [Michael, Five College Professor of Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. “Gearing Up for the Third Gulf War.” Common Dreams. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/05/14/gearing-third-gulf-war>, May 14, 2018] TDI

A Third Gulf War would distinguish itself from recent Middle Eastern conflicts by the geographic span of the fighting and the number of major actors that might become involved. In all likelihood, the field of battle would stretch from the shores of the Mediterranean, where Lebanon abuts Israel, to the Strait of Hormuz, where the Persian Gulf empties into the Indian Ocean. Participants could include, on one side, Iran, the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and assorted Shia militias in Iraq and Yemen; and, on the other, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). If the fighting in Syria were to get out of hand, Russian forces could even become involved. All of these forces have been equipping themselves with massive arrays of modern weaponry in recent years, ensuring that any fighting will be intense, bloody, and horrifically destructive. Iran has been acquiring an assortment of modern weapons from Russia and possesses its own substantial arms industry. It, in turn, has been supplying the Assad regime with modern arms and is suspected of shipping an array of missiles and other munitions to Hezbollah. Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have long been major recipients of tens of billions of dollars of sophisticated American weaponry and President Trump has promised to supply them with so much more. This means that, once ignited, a Third Gulf War could quickly escalate and would undoubtedly generate large numbers of civilian and military casualties, and new flows of refugees. The United States and its allies would try to quickly cripple Iran’s war-making capabilities, a task that would require multiple waves of air and missile strikes, some surely directed at facilities in densely populated areas. Iran and its allies would seek to respond by attacking high-value targets in Israel and Saudi Arabia, including cities and oil facilities. Iran’s Shia allies in Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere could be expected to launch attacks of their own on the U.S.-led alliance. Where all this would lead, once such fighting began, is of course impossible to predict, but the history of the twenty-first century suggests that, whatever happens, it won’t follow the carefully laid plans of commanding generals (or their civilian overseers) and won’t end either expectably or well. Precisely what kind of incident or series of events would ignite a war of this sort is similarly unpredictable. Nonetheless, it seems obvious that the world is moving ever closer to a moment when the right (or perhaps the better word is wrong) spark could set off a chain of events leading to full-scale hostilities in the Middle East in the wake of President Trump’s recent rejection of the nuclear deal. It’s possible, for instance, to imagine a clash between Israeli and Iranian military contingents in Syria sparking such a conflict. The Iranians, it is claimed, have set up bases there both to support the Assad regime and to funnel arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon. On May 10th, Israeli jets struck several such sites, following a missile barrage on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights said to have been launched by Iranian soldiers in Syria. More Israeli strikes certainly lie in our future as Iran presses its drive to establish and control a so-called land bridge through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Another possible spark could involve collisions or other incidents between American and Iranian naval vessels in the Persian Gulf, where the two navies frequently approach each other in an aggressive manner. Whatever the nature of the initial clash, rapid escalation to full-scale hostilities could occur with very little warning. All of this begs a question: Why are the United States and its allies in the region moving ever closer to another major war in the Persian Gulf? Why now? The Geopolitical Impulse The first two Gulf Wars were driven, to a large extent, by the geopolitics of oil. After World War II, as the United States became increasingly dependent on imported sources of petroleum, it drew ever closer to Saudi Arabia, the world’s leading oil producer. Under the Carter Doctrine of January 1980, the U.S. pledged for the first time to use force, if necessary, to prevent any interruption in the flow of oil from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to this country and its allies. Ronald Reagan, the first president to implement that doctrine, authorized the "reflagging" of Saudi and Kuwaiti oil tankers with the stars and stripes during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War that began in 1980 and their protection by the U.S. Navy. When Iranian gunboats menaced such tankers, American vessels drove them off in incidents that represented the first actual military clashes between the U.S. and Iran. At the time, President Reagan put the matter in no uncertain terms: “The use of the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf will not be dictated by the Iranians.” Oil geopolitics also figured prominently in the U.S. decision to intervene in the First Gulf War. When Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait in August 1990 and appeared poised to invade Saudi Arabia, President George H.W. Bush announced that the U.S. would send forces to defend the kingdom and so played out the Carter Doctrine in real time. “Our country now imports nearly half the oil it consumes and could face a major threat to its economic independence,” he declared, adding that “the sovereign independence of Saudi Arabia is of vital interest to the United States.” Although the oil dimension of U.S. strategy was less obvious in President George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in March 2003, it was still there. Members of his inner circle, especially Vice President Dick Cheney, argued that Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein posed a threat to the safety of Persian Gulf oil lanes and needed to be eliminated. Others in the administration were eager to pursue the prospect of privatizing Iraq’s state-owned oil fields and turning them over to American oil companies (a notion that evidently stuck in Donald Trump’s mind, as he repeatedly asserted during the 2016 election campaign that “we should have kept the oil”). Today, oil has receded, if not entirely disappeared, as a major factor in Persian Gulf geopolitics, while other issues have moved to the fore. Of greatest significance in animating the current military standoff is an escalating struggle for regional dominance between Iran and Saudi Arabia (with a nuclear-armed Israel lurking in the wings). Both countries view themselves as the hub of a network of like-minded states and societies -- Iran as the leader of the region’s Shia populations, Saudi Arabia of its Sunnis -- and both resent any gains by the other. To complicate matters, President Trump, clearly harboring deep antipathy toward the Iranians, has chosen to side with the Saudis big league (as he might say), while Benjamin Netanyahu’s Israel, fearing Iranian advances in the region, has opted to weigh in on the Saudi side of the equation in a major way as well. The result, as suggested by military historian Andrew Bacevich, is the “inauguration of a Saudi-American-Israeli axis” and a “major realignment of U.S. strategic relationships.” Several key factors explain this transition from an oil-centric strategy emphasizing military power to a more conventional struggle among regional rivals that has already deeply embroiled the planet’s last superpower. To begin with, America’s reliance on imported oil has diminished rapidly in recent years, thanks to an oil drilling revolution in the U.S. that has allowed the massive exploitation of domestic shale reserves through the process of fracking. As a result, access to Persian Gulf supplies matters far less in Washington than it did in previous decades. In 2001, according to oil giant BP, the United States relied on imports for 61% of its net oil consumption; by 2016, that share had dropped to 37% and was still falling -- and yet the U.S. remains deeply involved in the region as a decade and a half of unending war, counterinsurgency, drone strikes, and other kinds of strife sadly indicate. By invading and occupying Iraq in 2003, Washington also eliminated a major bulwark of Sunni power, a country led by Saddam Hussein who, two decades earlier, had been siding with the U.S. in opposing Iran. That invasion, ironically enough, had the effect of expanding Shiite influence and making Iran the major -- possibly the only -- winner in the years of war that followed. Some Western analysts believe that the greatest tragedy of the invasion, from a geopolitical point of view, was the ascension of Shiite politicians with close ties to Tehran in post-Hussein Iraq. Although that country’s current leaders appear intent on pursuing a path of their own in the post-ISIS moment, many powerful Iraqi Shiite militias -- including some that played key roles in driving Islamic State militants out of Mosul and other major cities -- retain close ties to Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. While disasters in themselves, the wars in Syria and Yemen have only added additional complexity to the geopolitical chessboard on which Washington found itself after that invasion and from which it has never extricated itself. In Syria, Iran has chosen to ally with Vladimir Putin’s Russia to preserve the brutal Assad regime, providing it with arms, funds, and an unknown number of advisers from the Revolutionary Guards. Hezbollah, a Shiite political group in Lebanon with a significant military wing, has sent large numbers of its own fighters to Syria to help Assad’s forces. In Yemen, the Iranians are believed to be providing arms and missile technology to the Houthis, a homegrown Shiite rebel group that now controls the northern half of the country, including the capital, Sana’a. The Saudis, in turn, have been playing an ever more active role in bolstering their military power and protecting embattled Sunni communities throughout the region. Seeking to resist and reverse what they view as Iranian advances, they have helped armmilitias of an extreme sort and evidently even al-Qaeda-associated groups under attack from Iranian-backed Shiite forces in Iraq and Syria. In 2015, in the case of Yemen, they organized a coalition of Sunni Arab states to crush the Houthi rebels in a brutal war that has included a blockade of the country, helping to produce mass famine and a relentless American-backed air campaign, which often hits civilian targets including markets, schools, and weddings. This combination has helped produce an estimated 10,000 civilian deaths and a singular humanitarian crisis in that already impoverished country. In response to these developments, the Obama administration sought to calm the situation by negotiating a nuclear deal with the Iranians and by holding out the promise of increased economic ties with the West in return for reduced assertiveness outside its borders. Such a strategy never, however, won the support of Israel or Saudi Arabia. And in the Obamayears, Washington continued to support both of those countries in a major way, including supplying massive amounts of military equipment, refueling Saudi planes in midair so they could strike deeper into Yemen, and providing the Saudis with targeting intelligence for their disastrous war. The Anti-Iranian Triumvirate All of these regional developments, in play before Donald Trump was elected, have only gained added momentum since then, thanks in no small degree to the pivotal personalities involved. The first of them, of course, is President Trump. Throughout his election campaign, he regularly denounced the nuclear deal that Iran, the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and the European Union all signed onto in July 2015. Officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement forced Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program in return for the lifting of all nuclear-related sanctions. It was a plan that Iran scrupulously adhered to. Although President Obama, many senior American policymakers, and most European leaders had argued that the JCPOA -- whatever its flaws -- provided a valuable constraint on Iran’s nuclear (and so other) ambitions, Trump consistently denounced it as a “terrible deal” because it failed to eliminate every last vestige of the Iranian nuclear infrastructure or ban that country’s missile program. “This deal was a disaster,” he told David Sanger of the New York Times in March 2016. While Trump, who has filled his administration with Iranophobes, including his new secretary of state and new national security adviser, seems to harbor a primeval animosity toward the Iranians, perhaps because they don’t treat him with the adoration he feels he deserves, he has a soft spot for the Saudi royals, who do. In May 2017, on his first trip abroad as president, he traveled to Riyadh, where he performed a sword dance with Saudi princes and immersed himself in the sort of ostentatious displays of wealth only oil potentates can provide. While in Riyadh, he conferred at length with then-Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the 31-year-old son of King Salman and a key architect of Saudi Arabia’s geopolitical contest with the Iranians. Prince Mohammed, who serves as the Saudi defense minister and was named crown prince in June 2017, is the prime mover behind the kingdom’s (so far unsuccessful) drive to crush the Houthi rebels in Yemen and is known to harbor fierce anti-Iranian views. At an earlier White House luncheon in March 2017, bin Salman, or MBS as he’s sometimes known, and President Trump seemed to reach an implicit agreement on a common strategy for branding Iran a regional threat, tearing up the nuclear agreement, and so setting the stage for an eventual war to vanquish that country or at least to fell the regime that runs it. While in Riyadh, President Trump told a conference of Sunni Arab leaders that, “from Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen, Iran funds, arms, and trains terrorists, militias, and other extremist groups that spread destruction and chaos across the region. It is a government that speaks openly of mass murder, vowing the destruction of Israel, death of America, and ruin for many leaders and nations in this very room.” While no doubt gratifying to the Saudis, Emiratis, Kuwaitis, and other Sunni rulers listening, those words echoed the views of the third key player in the strategic triumvirate that may soon drive the region into all-out war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, also known as “Bibi.” For years, he has railed against Iranian ambitions in the region and threatened military action against any Iranian move that would, as he saw it, impinge on Israeli security. Now, in Trump and the Saudi Crown Prince, he has the allies of his dreams. In the Obama years, Netanyahu was a fierce opponent of the Iranian nuclear deal and used a rare appearance before a joint session of Congress in March 2015 to denounce it in no uncertain terms. He has never -- right up to the days before Trump withdrew from the accord -- stopped working to persuade the president that the agreement should be junked and Iran targeted. In that 2015 speech to Congress, Netanyahu laid out a vision of Iran as a systemic danger that would later be appropriated by Trump and his Saudi confederates in Riyadh. “Iran's regime poses a grave threat, not only to Israel, but also the peace of the entire world,” he asserted in a typically hyperbolic statement. “Backed by Iran, Assad is slaughtering Syrians. Backed by Iran, Shiite militias are rampaging through Iraq. Backed by Iran, Houthis are seizing control of Yemen, threatening the strategic strait at the mouth of the Red Sea. Along with the Straits of Hormuz, that would give Iran a second choke-point on the world’s oil supply.” Now, Netanyahu is playing a major role in driving the already crippled region into a war that could further destroy it, produce yet more terror groups (and terrorized civilians), and create havoc on a potentially global scale, given that both Russia and China back the Iranians. Girding for War Pay attention to the words of Netanyahu in Washington and Donald Trump in Riyadh. Think of them not as political rhetoric, but as prophesies of a grim kind. You’re going to be hearing a lot more such prophesies in the months ahead as the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia move closer to war with Iran and its allies. While ideology and religion will play a part in what follows, the underlying impetus is a geopolitical struggle for control of the greater Persian Gulf region, with all its riches, between two sets of countries, each determined to prevail. No one can say with certainty when, or even if, these powerful forces will produce a devastating new war or set of wars in the Middle East. Other considerations -- an unexpected flare-up on the Korean Peninsula if President Trump’s talks with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un end in failure, a fresh crisis with Russia, a global economic meltdown -- could turn attention elsewhere, lessening the importance of the geopolitical contest in the Persian Gulf. New leadership in any of the key countries could similarly lead to a change of course. Netanyahu, for example, is now at risk of losing power because of an ongoing Israeli police investigation into allegedly corrupt acts of his, and Trump, well, who can say? Without such a development or developments, however, the way to war, which will surely prove to be the road to hell, seems open with a Third Gulf War looming on humanity’s horizon.

Independently, military conflict encourages Iran to block the Strait of Hormuz. Deterrence fails.

CPA 23 – [Center for Preventative Action, “Confrontation with Iran | Global Conflict Tracker.” Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/confrontation-between-united-states-and-iran>, January 6, 2023] TDI

Concerns

A worsening conflict with Iran would have significant economic, political, and security implications for the United States. Should the United States and Iran engage in military conflict, Iran could attempt to block the [Strait of Hormuz](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/why-does-us-protect-strait-hormuz/592654/), through which [30 percent of the world’s oil flows](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/22/oil-tanker-attacks-in-the-strait-of-hormuz-requires-an-international-response-us-envoy-to-iran-says.html), which would raise oil prices globally. Moreover, the United States risks isolating itself from already [beleaguered](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-france/macron-says-he-warned-irans-rouhani-about-breaking-nuclear-commitments-idUSKCN1TS0YU) allies: in June 2019, NATO [refused to commit](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/u-s-gets-no-commitment-from-nato-for-help-on-iran-threat) to working with the United States to secure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. A U.S.-Iran confrontation could trigger an escalation of proxy warfare in countries like Syria and Yemen, or an increase in Iranian missile strikes targeting the [seventy thousand](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-military/us-deploys-more-troops-to-middle-east-blames-iran-for-tanker-attacks-idUSKCN1SU1VQ) U.S. troops in the Middle East.

Recent Developments

Since the United States withdrew from the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/122460/full-text-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal.pdf) (JCPOA) in May 2018, tensions have risen between the United States and Iran. While the Donald J. Trump administration pursues a strategy of maximum pressure to bring Iran to the [negotiating table](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/30/us/politics/trump-iran-rouhani.html), Iran has begun to contravene the JCPOA’s restrictions on its nuclear program.

In April 2019, the United States [designated](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/04/11/what-both-trump-and-his-critics-get-wrong-about-the-irgc-terrorist-designation/) Iran’s [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-revolutionary-guards) (IRGC) a terrorist organization—the first time the United States classified part of another government as such. In May 2019, after intelligence suggested Iran and its militias were preparing to attack U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria, the United States [deployed](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/06/us-deploys-aircraft-carrier-and-bombers-after-troubling-indications-from-iran) B-52 nuclear-capable bombers, an aircraft carrier strike group, and additional Patriot [missile batteries](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/pentagon-deploying-patriot-anti-missile-battery-middle-east/story?id=62968486) to the Middle East to deter Iran. The same week, Iran announced a [sixty-day deadline](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iran-to-take-steps-to-reduce-its-commitment-to-landmark-nuclear-deal/2019/05/07/90cc3b1c-70fe-11e9-9331-30bc5836f48e_story.html?utm_term=.00013818af77) for sanctions relief before exceeding the JCPOA’s cap on uranium enrichment levels and later [threatened](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/06/17/iran-threatens-increase-enriched-uranium-stockpile-beyond-limits-set-by-nuclear-deal-days/?utm_term=.2d4270857cbe) to exceed uranium stockpile limits.

Also in May 2019, following a rocket attack on Baghdad’s Green Zone in Iraq—which U.S. [defense officials blamed](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/19/world/middleeast/rocket-baghdad-greenzone.html) on Iran—and the release of [images of missiles](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/world/middleeast/iran-war-usa.html) on IRGC boats in the Persian Gulf that U.S. intelligence officials cited as signs of a growing Iranian threat, nonemergency U.S. government employees were [evacuated](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/us/politics/us-iraq-embassy-evacuation.html) from Iraq. Over the next month, [six oil tankers](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/22/oil-tanker-attacks-in-the-strait-of-hormuz-requires-an-international-response-us-envoy-to-iran-says.html) in or near the Strait of Hormuz were attacked, which U.S. government officials have also [blamed on Iran](https://www.apnews.com/b41cb8ea77da4ff1bb0b19219d0ab5f4), and the United States deployed an additional [2,500](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/send-1000-troops-middle-east-iran-tensions-190617234038566.html) troops to the Middle East. Escalating military tension has been matched by increasingly bellicose rhetoric from government officials. In June, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif [warned](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/10/irans-foreign-minister-warns-us-cannot-expect-stay-safe) that the United States “cannot expect to stay safe,” and President Trump [cautioned](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-05/president-trump-says-there-s-always-a-chance-of-war-with-iran) that there’s “always a chance” of war with Iran.

That cuts off key chemical exports---causes global economic decline and exacerbates conflict in West Asia.

Beacham 19 – [Will, Deputy Editor for ICIS Chemical Business, “Strait of Hormuz Closure Would Cause Chemicals Supply Shock, Hurt Demand.” ICIS, <https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2019/09/26/10422706/strait-of-hormuz-closure-would-cause-chemicals-supply-shock-hurt-demand/>, September 26, 2019] TDI

BARCELONA (ICIS)–Closure of the Strait of Hormuz between Iran and Saudi Arabia would cut off most Middle East chemical exports, causing a severe chemicals supply shock, as well as a knock-on effect on demand from a big spike in oil prices.

New analysis by ICIS suggests that 9.5m tonnes (21%) of global linear low density polyethylene (LLDPE) capacity could be disrupted, along with 6.7m tonnes (16%) of ethylene glycol (EG), 3.9m tonnes (15%) of low density poylethylene (LDPE) and 28.2m tonnes (14%) of world ethylene capacity.

The Strait is an important shipping route for chemicals produced in Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, as well as sites along the east coast of Saudi Arabia.

Closure of the Strait would cut off chemical exports by sea from these sites to the rest of the world. Most product is transported by sea rather than road or rail in this region.

As well as the direct local impact, exports of chemical feedstocks such as natural gas liquids to other parts of the world could be curtailed.

The disruption would potentially be much more severe than that caused by the 14 September attacks on Saudi Arabia’s Khurais oil field and Abqaiq oil processing plant.

These cut chemical feedstock supplies to Saudi facilities initially by between 16-50%, potentially disrupting 10% of global ethylene capacity. Feedstock supplies [have improved](https://www.icis.com/subscriber/news/2019/09/19/10417876/topic-page-saudi-arabia-attacks/) since then.

Chemical prices spiked but then fell back for most products because poor demand and ample supply from other sources compensated for any Saudi capacity losses. Insurance premiums have also risen for ships using the Strait, raising costs for chemicals shippers.

Closure of the Strait of Hormuz could have a more profound impact, with a higher proportion of supply disrupted and subsequent tightening of markets.

DEMAND SHOCK
The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world’s most important shipping lanes. Closure would likely cause an oil price spike. This could hurt the global economy at a time when growth is already slowing thanks to the US-China trade war, Brexit and other macro-economic factors. Higher oil prices suck money out of consumers’ pockets through increased fuel prices.

According to Sophie Udubasceanu,  ICIS Global Crude Oil Editor, the Strait of Hormuz is , at the moment, the “elephant in the room,” keeping investors on edge and triggering questions over security of the ships travelling through.

She said: “The strait is one of the world’s major chokepoints, because it sees almost 21m bbl/day of crude, condensate and petroleum products passing through. That’s over 20% of the global petroleum related liquids consumption. There aren’t many ways to avoid it, only via pipelines in Saudi Arabia and UAE.”

A prolonged period of higher oil prices could even tip some economies into recession, hurting demand for chemicals further. Lower demand might reduce the impact of curtailed Middle East chemical supply to some extent.

John Richardson, ICIS senior consultant for Asia, said: “There would be an economic effect from oil prices potentially spiking to $100/bbl at a time of a trade war and potential recession in Europe. Clearly there would be a supply effect – less feedstock supplies for crackers outside the Middle East and less chemicals directly from the Middle East. But the impact on demand would also be very, very bad.”

ESCALATION
So far there has been no military response to the 14 September attacks. This could be because Saudi Arabia and the US would have a lot to lose from an escalation.

With the rise of shale gas and oil, the US is less reliant on Middle East oil than it once was. Being drawn into a conflict there could be expensive for the US financially. There would also be the risk of military response leading to another wider Middle East conflict.

Saudi Arabia is trying to diversify its economy beyond oil and needs foreign capital, expertise and partnerships to do so.  These efforts would be thwarted by more instability in the region.

Huntsman CEO Peter Huntsman [told ICIS this week](https://www.icis.com/subscriber/news/2019/09/23/10421343/saudi-aramco-attack-could-alter-middle-east-petchems-capex-plans-huntsman-ceo/) that the 14 September attacks could make US chemical companies think twice about investing billions in Saudi Arabian projects.

Richardson believes there is a less than 50% chance of this conflict escalating. He said: “[US president Donald] Trump doesn’t want a war ahead of an election. But by pulling out of the 2015 nuclear deal – which wasn’t perfect – he has pushed Iran into a corner and Iran feels it has less to lose by ramping up military action.”

A US study, supported by the UK, France and Germany, claims the attacks were orchestrated by Iran. Houthi rebels in Yemen said they were responsible for the bombings whilst Iran has denied all responsibility.

Saudi Arabia’s minister of state for foreign affairs, Adel al-Jubeir, this week [told the BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49836080) that all options are being considered, including military action against Iran.

Speaking at the United Nations meeting in New York on 25 September, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters the country wanted “a peaceful resolution with the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

#### Economic crisis triggers global nuclear war AND populism.

Roubini 22 – [Nouriel, Professor of Economics at New York University Stern School of Business, “Dark Destiny” in “MegaThreats: Ten Dangerous Trends That Imperil Our Future, And How to Survive Them”, Little, Brown and Company, October 18, 2022] TDI

Manifestations of economic malaise—stagnant growth, stagnant employment numbers and job losses—will have disturbing political consequences. They can lead to political extremism, usually under the guise of right-wing populism, but the left-wing version shares ,some commonalities. When populism reaches a fever pitch, it tends to vilify pluralistic values associated with liberal democracy and rule of law. Populists of both extremes are united in their callousness or antipathy toward foreigners and against domestic elites. That creates an opening for authoritarian demagogues who denounce their political opponents as elitists, and embrace prejudice against disadvantaged minorities, while praising redistribution of wealth from rich to poor not based on the rule of law, as in China and Russia.

In emerging markets—leaving aside outright dictatorships in some of the poorest countries—authoritarians now run governments in Russia, Belarus, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines, Brazil, Venezuela, Kazakhstan and China, among others. Cascading megathreats will only make that list grow longer.

Latin American nations flirted for decades with populism on the left and right. For a time, after the end of the Cold War, it looked like representative democracy would prevail in many parts of that region. Yet hard times have handed populists a hefty axe to grind. Their recent resurgence has changed the region’s face. Promising democracies have succumbed. Mexico took a populist turn in 2018 with the election of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, its sixty-fifth president. Left-wing populists won presidential elections in 2021 in Chile and Peru, and in 2022 in Colombia. Experts expect elections in 2022 in Brazil to go the same way.

Brazil turned to the semi-authoritarian president Jair Bolsonaro who, in January 2022, thumbed his nose at liberal democracies by planning a trip to meet Vladimir Putin as Russia amassed troops on the border with Ukraine.- And Latin America is not unique. Years of mediocre growth make South Africa—and other parts of Africa—candidates for populism and authoritarian regimes. India, in a perennial struggle to make life bearable for an impoverished population, is still a democracy and a modernizing economy but has some political forces who openly disdain Muslims, independent democratic institutions and the rule of law. This trend is not our friend, and it’s just getting started.

“At the extremes,” Anne Applebaum warned in the November 2021 issue of the Atlantic, “this kind of contempt can devolve into what the international democracy activist Srdja Popovic calls the ‘Maduro model’ of governance, which may be what Lukashenko is preparing for in Belarus. Autocrats who adopt it are ‘willing to pay the price of becoming a totally failed country, to see their country enter the category of failed states,’ accepting economic collapse, isolation, and mass poverty if that’s what it takes to stay in power.

Advanced democracies are vulnerable as well. Populist arguments yanked Britain out of the European Union, as voters went for Brexit. In the United States, populists elected Donald Trump and his allies. We see growing support in advanced countries for right-wing parties that oppose the European Union, immigration, and rescue packages for indebted countries. France, the historical bastion of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, has grown increasingly receptive to the anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant appeal of the recent presidential candidate Marine LePen; she lost the presidential election in 2022 but her nativist message is still popular as economic malaise worsens for those left behind.

For years, political division and polarization, lack of bipartisanship, partisan radicalization, the rise of extreme right-wing groups, and conspiracy theories have been growing and severely dividing the United States. These trends reached one peak after the 2020 election spawned the fiction that the election was stolen from Donald Trump. Lack of evidence notwithstanding, most of his base went along with him. The January 6, 2021, attempted coup revealed a vast base of radicalized white supremacists and other extreme right-wing militia willing to use force to prevent the electoral vote count in Congress and the rightful installation of Joe Biden as president.

Unfolding megathreats and the rising tide of populism will partly decide the 2022 midterm elections in the United States. Debt, inflation, globalization, immigration, climate change, and the rise of China alarm swing voters. Observers predict angry contests and even violence that may threaten to overturn outcomes in the 2024 presidential election.- Conspiracy theories, massive misinformation campaigns, large-scale violence, coup, insurrection, civil war, secession, and insurgency are now terms used in a large number of op-eds, essays, and books. Collectively, we are thinking the once unthinkable.

The 2024 presidential campaign is drawing close. The New York Tinies calls “the prospect of American political conflagration—including insurrection, secession, insurgency and civil war”—a serious threat.- Numerous authors have raised the possibility of a “slow-moving coup,” the pundit Bill Maher told his HBO audience. Writing in The Nation, a left-of-center publication, Robert Crawford predicts a “worst case scenario” for the United States. Chauncey DeVega, in Salon, and British journalist Sir Max Hastings, have voiced concern about secession or large-scale political violence instigated by the loser’s cadres. Titles like How Civil Wars Start, by political scientist Barbara F. Walter, and The Next Civil War, by journalist Stephen Marche, mince no words. In January 2021, after the assault on the Capitol, a poll showed that 46 percent of Americans had the view that their country was headed toward another civil war.- A CIA task force reached the conclusion that “the United States during the Trump presidency regressed, for the first time since 1800, into “anocracy.” That’s how scholars label a system of government that hovers uneasily between democracy and autocracy.—

Like nuclear meltdowns, megathreats turn all matter in their path into fuel. The economic malaise and rising inequality that leads to populism will spur a backlash against free trade and globalization. The fundamental aspect of populist economic policy is economic nationalism and autarkic tendencies. The rise of political and economic populism exacerbates the risk of deglobalization, protectionism, fragmentation of the global economy, balkanization of global supply chains, restrictions to migration, controls of movement of capital, technology, and data, and severe friction between the United States and China.

Dystopian upheaval will turn science inside out. Technology’s dark side threatens Western values. Social media produces echo chambers as news and postings keep a specious rumor mill in high gear, often to advance interests of foreign adversaries. Conspiracy theories—even demonstrably lunatic ones—travel with alarming speed. Initially seen as a tool to launch and organize dissent against autocratic regimes that traffic in lies and hypocrisy (do you remember the Arab Spring, and the Facebook-generated protests against the Egyptian government?), social media today increasingly foments assaults on democratic institutions and orchestrates ethnic violence. Look no further than the January 6 Capitol mob in the United States or the Rohingya massacre in Myanmar. These trends will accelerate as artificial intelligence and machine learning refine ways—via “transformers” technologies—to manipulate minds.

Technology will become autocracy’s handmaiden. Social media and big tech help current autocrats and dictators hold power. The idea that technology would expose authoritarians to justice and defend democracy now sounds naive.— China uses a Great Firewall and other social media tools to control its population in Orwellian ways. A “social credit rating system” restricts access to financial services and punishes socially and politically “deviant” behavior. Now China is exporting these technologies to client regimes, reinforcing autocracy elsewhere.

Unfettered computerization will make jobs vanish, and not just routine, repetitive jobs. Artificial intelligence advancing at warp speed will make cognitive workers obsolete, from Uber drivers, paralegals, and auditors, to eventually brain surgeons. Robots will also populate creative jobs once we reach a point where machines outthink people. Even computer developers will find their seats occupied by robots. Permanent blue- and white-collar technological displacement will extend unemployment lines, adding pressure to a fraying social safety net. Adding irony to injury, robots are already running most HR decisions and will run unemployment offices.

Who controls AI will command enormous economic, financial, and geopolitical power. That is why the United States and China are vying to dominate the industries of the future. And if the United States and China ever enter into open warfare, their respective AI technologies could make the difference between victory and defeat.

To assert control in a world unsettled by megathreats, major powers will reinforce or reshuffle alliances. China's informal geopolitical partnerships with revisionist powers such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea are challenging the United States and the West. The United States is reinforcing and building new alliances in Asia: the Quad, the AUKUS (a security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the Indo Pacific Economic Framework, and now NATO flexing its military muscle in Asia. Revisionist powers challenging the United States and the West cannot yet match Western military strength. The United States alone spends more on military resources than its four revisionist adversaries combined. Those adversaries will increasingly counter American strength with asymmetric warfare that deploys cyber espionage, cyberattacks, and misinformation campaigns to weaken and polarize the United States and the West. But traditional hard power conflict on controlling land masses will not disappear, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the looming conflict over Taiwan show.

Indeed, their logistical disadvantage won’t prevent America’s adversaries from aiming conventional weapons at the United States and the West. Putin’s Russia seeks to partially restore the former Soviet empire by projecting a sphere of influence over former Soviet and Iron Curtain nations; the bloody invasion of Ukraine is a starting salvo of Russia’s attempt to re-create the Soviet Union or its sphere of influence on its “near abroad.” Similar tensions will mount in the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan.

Then there’s North Korea, where sanctions only embolden a mercurial dear leader who demands adoration from a starving people while he embraces long-range missiles and cyberwarfare. In the Middle East, Iran may soon aim nuclear warheads at Israel and Arab states that challenge its dominance; but Israel may try to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities before the country reaches the nuclear point of no return. War in the Gulf would trigger a stagflationary shock from rising oil prices more calamitous than twin spikes produced in the seventies. So many flash points and rivals jockeying for leadership amid geopolitical instability make skirmishes inevitable. They make conventional wars likely, and the horrifying specter of nuclear war possible. In 2022, the war in Ukraine led to risk of its escalation to the Baltics and Central Europe and even a military and nuclear confrontation between Russia and NATO. The specter of nuclear wars—that seemed faded once the Soviet Union collapsed—returned as the war in Ukraine escalated.

#### A substantial reduction in on-the-ground presence preserves resources and prevents instability and extremism in the Gulf.

Manning & Preble 21 – [Robert, fellow with the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council. Previously, he served as a senior strategist at the National Counterproliferation Center in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) from 2010 to 2012, and as the director of long-range energy and regional/global affairs at the US National Intelligence Council’s Strategic Futures Group from 2008 to 2010; Christopher, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute from 2011 to 2020, and director of foreign policy studies from 2003 to 2011. Preble graduated from George Washington University in 1989 and received a PhD in history from Temple University in 2002, “Reality Check #8: Rethinking US Military Policy in the Greater Middle East.” Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/reality-check/reality-check-8-rethinking-us-military-policy-in-the-greater-middle-east/>, June 24, 2021] TDI

Given these realities, the United States should substantially reduce the number of US forces permanently stationed in the region and scale down or eliminate routine US Navy deployments to the Persian Gulf. Occasional joint exercises in and around the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea could include ships on Mediterranean or Indo-Pacific deployments, but the anachronistic requirement to maintain a US carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf poses an unnecessary burden on a US Navy that is already strained to the [breaking point](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/unexpected-maintenance-needs-are-pushing-navy-breaking-point-152041).

The United States should conduct a zero-based review, seeking to trade bases for places: instead of maintaining fixed assets and permanent air and naval facilities, Washington should renegotiate and extend access arrangements with local partners. Greater investments in intelligence and early warning, as well as continued close coordination with regional states—and other countries with an interest in preserving a regional balance of power—will be equally important. In exchange, the elimination of the permanent carrier presence would help the US Navy divert its scarce shipbuilding resources away from those legacy platforms to new technologies (e.g., unmanned aerial and subsurface vehicles, as well as enhanced missile defenses).

The biggest changes to US force posture and force requirements, however, pertain to vulnerable US Army and Air Force bases. This on-the-ground presence dates back to the first Gulf War, and terrorist groups have cited it as a key rationale for numerous attacks against the United States and US personnel. These include the 1993 World Trade Center attack, the bombing of the Khobar Towers in 1996 and US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and the al-pQaeda attacks on September 11, 2001. The George W. Bush administration noted the linkage between a US military presence and terrorism directed against the United States as a reason for wanting to remove troops from Saudi Arabia. As then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz testified before Congress in February 2003, resentment over the stationing of US forces there had “been Osama bin Laden’s principal recruiting device.” Wolfowitz explained that the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq would enable the United States to withdraw from the region. “I can’t imagine anyone here wanting to . . . be there for another 12 years to continue helping recruit [terrorists](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-108hhrg85421/pdf/CHRG-108hhrg85421.pdf).”

Although the al-Qaeda threat has greatly diminished, anger and resentment toward US forces in the region—and Washington’s continued support for unpopular governments—remains. Meanwhile, Iran’s ballistic and cruise missile capabilities are a new factor putting US forces at risk. It is therefore vitally important to US security interests to end or reduce the permanent deployment of forces to Kuwait—the legacy of a war that ended more than a decade before most of the US troops there were born—as well as in other major bases in Iraq, Bahrain, and Oman. These moves could allow for a permanent reduction in the size of the active-duty force. Similarly, the US Air Force should terminate routine overflights in the region, close many of the associated bases that support these operations, and redirect resources to reflect the elimination of this unnecessary mission.

These fundamental changes to US deployments and the composition of US forces might strike some as dramatic, but they are relatively modest given the changes that have occurred since the Carter Doctrine was handed down over forty years ago. US policymakers need to understand the limits of American power and align US resources to secure vital interests. In the Middle East, that means encouraging the emergence of a regional balance of power. It also means combining a reduced US military footprint in the region with robust diplomacy, particularly in facilitating a Sunni-Shia détente in the Gulf. This may be aided by an element of exhaustion, as suggested by recent [secret Saudi-Iranian talks](https://www.ft.com/content/852e94b8-ca97-4917-9cc4-e2faef4a69c8) held in Baghdad.

Pursuing this strategy will require proactive and creative diplomacy on Washington’s part to fashion a sustainable, stable offshore-balancing role and a willingness to shift away from [the military-centric approach](https://www.amazon.com/Americas-War-Greater-Middle-East/dp/0553393952) that has defined US policy for decades. The pace and scope of the transformation suggested here will depend on diplomatic success with Iran.

Defenders of the status quo in the Middle East warn that pressure from Washington risks pushing Gulf states toward the United States’ foreign rivals. However, as Senator Murphy notes, “this argument is a red herring, one that plays on a misunderstanding of both the irreplaceability of military alignment with the United States and the willingness of China and Russia to get their hands dirty in Middle Eastern politics.”

The Greater Middle East holds limited interests for US national security and certainly none that require a continued and de facto permanent military presence there. President Biden’s decision to remove the remaining US forces from Afghanistan reflects a decision to prioritize the Indo-Pacific region. Recalculating US strategic priorities to reflect geopolitical trends is a wise move that should be repeated elsewhere.

### 1AC — Plan

#### The United States ought to substantially reduce its Navy deployments, basing footprint, and on-the-ground military presence in the Persian Gulf region.

### 1AC — ADV — Rightsizing

#### Advantage two is RIGHTSIZING:

#### The US is overcommitted to the Persian Gulf now. The plan frees resources to the Indo-Pacific while retaining influence in the Middle East.

Sweeney 21 – [Mike, Fellow at Defense Priorities and an incoming doctoral student at the Schar School of Policy and Government. “When It’s over: An American Withdrawal Plan for the Middle East.” Modern War Institute, <https://mwi.usma.edu/when-its-over-an-american-withdrawal-plan-for-the-middle-east/>, March 25, 2021] TDI

Is it too early to begin planning for the United States to leave the Middle East? There’s a strong argument to be made it’s not. Over the past few years discussion of the United States decamping from the region—or at least significantly downsizing its basing footprint—has finally entered mainstream foreign policy debates. Articles like [“America’s Middle East Purgatory”](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-12-11/americas-middle-east-purgatory) by Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes in Foreign Affairs and [“The Middle East Isn’t Worth It Anymore”](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-middle-east-isnt-worth-it-anymore-11579277317) by Martin Indyk in The Wall Street Journal examined the ways in which the region has decreased in importance to US interests. As a result, there has been a renewed willingness to look at the necessity of the extensive US basing footprint developed over the past thirty years.

In truth, most intellectual energy is still being spent on whether the United States should leave the Middle East, not how. But, [as I argued in these pages](https://mwi.usma.edu/nothing-forever-us-military-eventually-leaves-middle-east-going-need-plan/) eighteen months ago, a plan will eventually be needed for a US departure for several reasons. Not least of these is that the United States has never attempted to withdraw from a major geographic region since the global expansion of its military footprint in the wake of the Second World War.

In this regard, there is a British precedent that offers some insights. When the United Kingdom quit its role as the region’s default balancer [in the late 1960s](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03086534.2015.1123541?src=recsys&journalCode=fich20), it did so by publicly announcing a ten-year withdrawal plan (later shortened to five years.) The transparency with which London maneuvered out of the region helped limit instability in its wake. This example’s utility has its limits, of course, since the British were handing off to another power. When the United States departs the Middle East, it’ll leave the region without an external balancer for the first time in over a century.

All of that said, it is worth emphasizing that even without its military forces, the United States will retain significant influence in the region—as indeed [it did for most of the Cold War](https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/considering-the-zero-option) when it only maintained two primary bases in the region, at Manama, Bahrain and Incirlik, Turkey. It will still have access to diplomatic and economic levers that have served it well in the past, to say nothing of maintaining security ties through maintenance and technical support to the various weapons systems sold in the region, particularly to the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Moreover, a US departure from the Middle East should not be seen as a wholesale withdrawal from its role in the world by any means. To the contrary, alleviating the requirement to garrison the Middle East will free up forces and funds that are likely [to be badly needed](https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/putting-combatant-commanders-on-a-demand-signal-diet/) as the United States tries to meet its other military commitments in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region. For example, it is worth noting the specific positive impact this could have on aircraft carrier maintenance and deployment schedules, which [have been severely taxed](https://news.usni.org/2020/11/12/no-margin-left-overworked-carrier-force-struggles-to-maintain-deployments-after-decades-of-overuse) by the demands placed on these platforms by US Central Command.

What exactly would such a withdrawal look like? From a logistical standpoint, the United States could evacuate [the forty-two thousand or so ground forces](https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/a-plan-for-us-withdrawal-from-the-middle-east) from the region in as little as a year (or less) if absolutely needed. But that type of mad dash to the door is likely to have precisely the type of deleterious impact the British sought to avoid and which the United States should seek to circumvent as well. Instead, a four-year timeline might be optimal for the first phase of a US departure, during which the bulk of forces would exit the region.

It is attractive to consider a longer timeline from the standpoint of strategic hedging. Taking a decade or even fifteen years to depart would give a clearer look at the impact of the US exit and, presumably, allow for a more gradual transition. Working against this, however, is that as more time passes the region is increasingly likely to experience major societal change. In truth, the mass demonstrations of the Arab Spring in 2011 brought about few lasting changes. The underlying social and economic factors that drove that discontent [still remain](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-10-15/next-arab-uprising). And the region continues to be dangerously dependent on the [rentier economic model](https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/df77a3f0/krane-subsidies-pomeps.pdf), which essentially [buys acquiescence](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-10-15/next-arab-uprising) to authoritarian rule with the fruits of energy sales. There are ample reasons to think this situation cannot obtain indefinitely.

The United States might not have the luxury of a decade or two to decamp. The worst-case scenario would be a replay of the 2011 situation in Bahrain, where the United States [first cautioned](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-usa/obama-speaks-to-bahrains-king-urges-restraint-idUSTRE71H5L420110219) against action to repress demonstrators then had to acquiesce as [precisely that](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html) occurred. A replay on a broader scale could not only further damage US standing in the region but risk reprisal attacks against US deployments or even the unwanted entangling of US forces in new civil strife.

With four years as a baseline, the basic question then becomes which forces move where. The center of gravity of US regional posture lies on the western bank of the Persian Gulf in four small Arab states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. These “core four” account for [about thirty thousand troops](https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/a-plan-for-us-withdrawal-from-the-middle-east) and the most extensive physical infrastructure in the US regional network. Kuwait alone has six major facilities for US use and currently hosts more American military personnel ([13,500](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21513.pdf)) than any other country save Germany, Japan, and South Korea. In addition, as headquarters of the Fifth Fleet, Bahrain facilitates rotational naval deployments, including carrier battle groups, each of which adds approximately 7,500 personnel to US regional presence totals. If the United States is to withdraw from the Middle East, then, it is these four countries that will factor most prominently in any scheme.

#### A reduction in deployments and alliance commitments signals a return to offshore balancing that shifts foreign policy towards restraint and modesty.

Arafat 20 – [Alaa Al-Din, formerly taught in the National Security and Defence Studies programme at Oman National Defence College and Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. He was a professor of Middle East Studies at the French University in Egypt and an Associate Researcher at London University. “Regional and International Powers in the Gulf Security.” Middle East Today, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-43316-1>, April 22, 2020] TDI

The offshore balancing was Washington’s security policy toward the region from the 1970s to 1990s. While the onshore balancing was Washington’s security policy toward the region from the 1990s to 2010s. In fact, the American onshore balancing proved failure. Since 2013, America simply cannot reshape the region through force. Neither US interventions nor substantial military deployments have increased the stability of the region or the security of the United States. Instead, far too often, American involvement in the Middle East has done exactly the opposite. Despite the deaths of over 6500 US service members (and an estimated 300,000 civilians) in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as costs of more than $3.4 trillion, the Middle East is no more stable, democratic, or prosperous than it was two decades ago.133 In fact, since 2003, the region has witnessed the inability Washington to ensure the regional security, considerable deterioration of the American relations with most regional powers, increasing terrorist threats, including ISIS and al-Qaeda which despite losing most of its original leaders, al-Qaeda has metastasized across the region.134 Furthermore, the current status of Iraq, nuclear technology of Iran, the role on non-state actors, the roles of other external actors, proved that US effort to establish a suitable approach in the region has failed. Similarly, Persian Gulf countries have also failed to establish a security framework for the region. Given these failures, it is time to try something different: a return to offshore balancing. Obama’s 2010 and 2012 NSSs have ushered Washington’s strategic thinking to return to its offshore balancing. In fact, a strategy of offshore balancing would define US interests much more narrowly. It would focus on key interests and on the potential for regional hegemons to arise.135 The return to the initial American strategy of offshore balancing could be an ideal par excellence. Offshore balancing envisions a dramatic reduction in America’s overseas military deployments and alliance commitments, and a shift toward greater restraint and modesty in US policy writ large. It is premised on the idea that this type of retrenchment will actually produce better security outcomes at a better price.136 The offshore balancing is not passive security approach, but it is strategy that depends on setting clear priorities, emphasizing reliance on regional allies, and reduces the danger of being drawn into unnecessary conflicts. Accordingly, Washington can enhance regional security and not get bogged down fighting the wars of its regional partners.137 The offshore balancing in the Persian Gulf means that the United States will use of air and naval capabilities to counter threats, while also enhancing its commitment to its GCC allies by bolstering their defense capabilities through arms sales and military training. These elements can help the United States develop a balanced strategy to limit the threat posed by Iran, but also show America’s capability to provide security to the Middle East.138 In this context, Washington would transfer to the states of the region the tasks of maintaining their regional security, including the costs and risks of their defense, and upholding the balance of power in their own neighborhood. In this context, the Gulf States would be the first defense line of the region. The regional states would be responsible for providing security for their region, rather than asking Washington to do this for them.139 In this approach, the United States would dramatically reduce its military footprint in the region, leaving only the bare minimum of the current arrangements in place.140 These include keeping the headquarters of the 5th Fleet would remain in Bahrain, Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, keeping some prepositioned equipment in Kuwait and Qatar and intelligence-gathering facilities. Generally, Washington should refrain from deploying large numbers of US forces in the Persian Gulf. Instead, Washington could simply rely on equipment stored on container ships stationed at Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean.141 In short, offshore balancing would allow for US military presence in the region to be reduced dramatically. With offshore balancing, Washington should not provide Gulf States with a “blank cheque” that might drag it too directly into many of the region’s conflicts in places such as Syria and Yemen.142 Furthermore, 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.143

The offshore balancing would also relieve the United States of its burden of managing the security affairs of turbulent Persian Gulf.144 Importantly, a shift to that strategy would result in defense-related savings of perhaps 16–29% relative to the relevant post-Cold War figures. Such savings are certainly not trivial.145 For instance, the January 2012 US Defense Strategy Review envisaged an 8% reduction in the defense budget over a ten-year period—a fairly gradual reduction expected to shave around $50 billion off the defense budget each year.146 Additionally, it becomes difficult for Washington to sustain the level of larger military deployment of forces overseas. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq cost between $4 trillion and $6 trillion and killed nearly 7000 US soldiers and wounded more than 50,000.147 Offshore balancing also helps reducing terrorist attacks against the US targets. The less the United States is involved in the Middle East, the less its people are likely to be attacked by terrorists from the region. It is no accident that Switzerland does not suffer from Middle Eastern terrorism.148 Osama bin Laden was among the earliest critics of America’s regional presence, justifying his barbaric terrorist attacks with a narrative of resistance to occupation. He accused the United States of “occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula” and called for every Muslim to kill Americans until US troops withdrew from Saudi Arabia.149 Furthermore, the American people are mostly against the US involvement in the region. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2013, 52% of Americans polled believed that the United States “should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along as best they can on their own.”150 Likewise, an April 2016 Pew poll found that 57% of Americans agree that the United States should “deal with its own problems and let others deal with theirs the best they can.”151 On the other hand, the Arab people demonstrates fatigue with the American policy. A poll by the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), covering 84% of the population of the Arab world in 2011, shows that 73% of the people in the region regard the United States and Israel as the two most threatening countries to their interests.152

#### Restraint is effective. Only offshore balancing in the Persian Gulf preserves primacy, ensures domestic development, and checks terrorism and proliferation.

Walt & Mearsheimer ‘16 – [John J., R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. Stephen Walt is Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, "The Case for Offshore Balancing," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>, July/August, 2016] TDI

Americans’ distaste for the prevailing grand strategy should come as no surprise, given its abysmal record over the past quarter century. In Asia, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are expanding their nuclear arsenals, and China is challenging the status quo in regional waters. In Europe, Russia has annexed Crimea, and U.S. relations with Moscow have sunk to new lows since the Cold War. U.S. forces are still fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, with no victory in sight. Despite losing most of its original leaders, al Qaeda has metastasized across the region. The Arab world has fallen into turmoil—in good part due to the United States’ decisions to effect regime change in Iraq and Libya and its modest efforts to do the same in Syria—and the Islamic State, or ISIS, has emerged out of the chaos. Repeated U.S. attempts to broker Israeli-Palestinian peace have failed, leaving a two-state solution further away than ever. Meanwhile, democracy has been in retreat worldwide, and the United States’ use of torture, targeted killings, and other morally dubious practices has tarnished its image as a defender of human rights and international law.

The United States does not bear sole responsibility for all these costly debacles, but it has had a hand in most of them. The setbacks are the natural consequence of the misguided grand strategy of liberal hegemony that Democrats and Republicans have pursued for years. This approach holds that the United States must use its power not only to solve global problems but also to promote a world order based on international institutions, representative governments, open markets, and respect for human rights. As “the indispensable nation,” the logic goes, the United States has the right, responsibility, and wisdom to manage local politics almost everywhere. At its core, liberal hegemony is a revisionist grand strategy: instead of calling on the United States to merely uphold the balance of power in key regions, it commits American might to promoting democracy everywhere and defending human rights whenever they are threatened.

By husbanding U.S. strength, an offshore-balancing strategy would preserve U.S. primacy far into the future.

There is a better way. By pursuing a strategy of “offshore balancing,” Washington would forgo ambitious efforts to remake other societies and concentrate on what really matters: pre­serving U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere and countering potential hegemons in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Instead of policing the world, the United States would encourage other countries to take the lead in checking rising powers, intervening itself only when necessary. This does not mean abandoning the United States’ position as the world’s sole superpower or retreating to “Fortress America.” Rather, by husbanding U.S. strength, offshore balancing would preserve U.S. primacy far into the future and safeguard liberty at home.

SETTING THE RIGHT GOALS

The United States is the luckiest great power in modern history. Other leading states have had to live with threatening adversaries in their own backyards—even the United Kingdom faced the prospect of an invasion from across the English Channel on several occasions—but for more than two centuries, the United States has not. Nor do distant powers pose much of a threat, because two giant oceans are in the way. As Jean-Jules Jusserand, the French ambassador to the United States from 1902 to 1924, once put it, “On the north, she has a weak neighbor; on the south, another weak neighbor; on the east, fish, and the west, fish.” Furthermore, the United States boasts an abundance of land and natural resources and a large and energetic population, which have enabled it to develop the world’s biggest economy and most capable military. It also has thousands of nuclear weapons, which makes an attack on the American homeland even less likely.

These geopolitical blessings give the United States enormous latitude for error; indeed, only a country as secure as it would have the temerity to try to remake the world in its own image. But they also allow it to remain powerful and secure without pursuing a costly and expansive grand strategy. Offshore balancing would do just that. Its principal concern would be to keep the United States as powerful as possible—ideally, the dominant state on the planet. Above all, that means main­taining hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

Unlike isolationists, however, offshore balancers believe that there are regions outside the Western Hemisphere that are worth expending American blood and treasure to defend. Today, three other areas matter to the United States: Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. The first two are key centers of industrial power and home to the world’s other great powers, and the third produces roughly 30 percent of the world’s oil.

In Europe and Northeast Asia, the chief concern is the rise of a regional hegemon that would dominate its region, much as the United States dominates the Western Hemisphere. Such a state would have abundant economic clout, the ability to develop sophisticated weaponry, the potential to project power around the globe, and perhaps even the wherewithal to outspend the United States in an arms race. Such a state might even ally with countries in the Western Hemisphere and interfere close to U.S. soil. Thus, the United States’ principal aim in Europe and Northeast Asia should be to maintain the regional balance of power so that the most powerful state in each region—for now, Russia and China, respectively—remains too worried about its neighbors to roam into the Western Hemisphere. In the Gulf, meanwhile, the United States has an interest in blocking the rise of a hegemon that could interfere with the flow of oil from that region, thereby damaging the world economy and threatening U.S. prosperity.

Offshore balancing is a realist grand strategy, and its aims are limited. Promoting peace, although desirable, is not among them. This is not to say that Washington should welcome conflict anywhere in the world, or that it cannot use diplomatic or economic means to discourage war. But it should not commit U.S. military forces for that purpose alone. Nor is it a goal of offshore balancing to halt genocides, such as the one that befell Rwanda in 1994. Adopting this strategy would not preclude such operations, however, provided the need is clear, the mission is feasible, and U.S. leaders are confident that intervention will not make matters worse.

HOW WOULD IT WORK?

Under offshore balancing, the United States would calibrate its military posture according to the distribution of power in the three key regions. If there is no potential hegemon in sight in Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Gulf, then there is no reason to deploy ground or air forces there and little need for a large military establishment at home. And because it takes many years for any country to acquire the capacity to dominate its region, Washington would see it coming and have time to respond.

In that event, the United States should turn to regional forces as the first line of defense, letting them uphold the balance of power in their own neighborhood. Although Washington could provide assistance to allies and pledge to support them if they were in danger of being conquered, it should refrain from deploying large numbers of U.S. forces abroad. It may occasionally make sense to keep certain assets overseas, such as small military contingents, intelligence-gathering facilities, or prepositioned equipment, but in general, Washington should pass the buck to regional powers, as they have a far greater interest in preventing any state from dominating them.

If those powers cannot contain a potential hegemon on their own, however, the United States must help get the job done, deploying enough firepower to the region to shift the balance in its favor. Sometimes, that may mean sending in forces before war breaks out. During the Cold War, for example, the United States kept large numbers of ground and air forces in Europe out of the belief that Western European countries could not contain the Soviet Union on their own. At other times, the United States might wait to intervene after a war starts, if one side seems likely to emerge as a regional hegemon. Such was the case during both world wars: the United States came in only after Germany seemed likely to dominate Europe.

In essence, the aim is to remain offshore as long as possible, while recognizing that it is sometimes necessary to come onshore. If that happens, however, the United States should make its allies do as much of the heavy lifting as possible and remove its own forces as soon as it can.

Offshore balancing has many virtues. By limiting the areas the U.S. military was committed to defending and forcing other states to pull their own weight, it would reduce the resources Washington must devote to defense, allow for greater investment and consumption at home, and put fewer American lives in harm’s way. Today, allies routinely free-ride on American protection, a problem that has only grown since the Cold War ended. Within NATO, for example, the United States accounts for 46 percent of the alliance’s aggregate GDP yet contributes about 75 percent of its military spending. As the political scientist Barry Posen has quipped, “This is welfare for the rich.”

The aim is to remain offshore as long as possible, while recognizing that it is sometimes necessary to come onshore.

Offshore balancing would also reduce the risk of terrorism. Liberal hegemony commits the United States to spreading democracy in unfamiliar places, which sometimes requires military occupation and always involves interfering with local political arrangements. Such efforts invariably foster nationalist resentment, and because the opponents are too weak to confront the United States directly, they sometimes turn to terrorism. (It is worth remembering that Osama bin Laden was motivated in good part by the presence of U.S. troops in his homeland of Saudi Arabia.) In addition to inspiring terrorists, liberal hegemony facilitates their operations: using regime change to spread American values undermines local institutions and creates ungoverned spaces where violent extremists can flourish.

Offshore balancing would alleviate this problem by eschewing social engineering and minimizing the United States’ military foot­print. U.S. troops would be stationed on foreign soil only when a country was in a vital region and threatened by a would-be hegemon. In that case, the potential victim would view the United States as a savior rather than an occupier. And once the threat had been dealt with, U.S. military forces could go back over the horizon and not stay behind to meddle in local politics. By respecting the sovereignty of other states, offshore balancing would be less likely to foster anti-American terrorism.

A REASSURING HISTORY

Offshore balancing may seem like a radical strategy today, but it provided the guiding logic of U.S. foreign policy for many decades and served the country well. During the nineteenth century, the United States was preoccupied with expanding across North America, building a powerful state, and establishing hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. After it completed these tasks at the end of the century, it soon became interested in preserving the balance of power in Europe and Northeast Asia. Nonetheless, it let the great powers in those regions check one another, intervening militarily only when the balance of power broke down, as during both world wars.

During the Cold War, the United States had no choice but to go onshore in Europe and Northeast Asia, as its allies in those regions could not contain the Soviet Union by themselves. So Washington forged alliances and stationed military forces in both regions, and it fought the Korean War to contain Soviet influence in Northeast Asia.

In the Persian Gulf, however, the United States stayed offshore, letting the United Kingdom take the lead in preventing any state from dominating that oil-rich region. After the British announced their withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968, the United States turned to the shah of Iran and the Saudi monarchy to do the job. When the shah fell in 1979, the Carter administration began building the Rapid Deployment Force, an offshore military capability designed to prevent Iran or the Soviet Union from dominating the region. The Reagan administration aided Iraq during that country’s 1980–88 war with Iran for similar reasons. The U.S. military stayed offshore until 1990, when Saddam Hussein’s seizure of Kuwait threatened to enhance Iraq’s power and place Saudi Arabia and other Gulf oil producers at risk. To restore the regional balance of power, the George H. W. Bush admin­istration sent an expeditionary force to liberate Kuwait and smash Saddam’s military machine.

For nearly a century, in short, offshore balancing prevented the emergence of dangerous regional hegemons and pre­served a global balance of power that enhanced American security. Tellingly, when U.S. policymakers deviated from that strategy—as they did in Vietnam, where the United States had no vital interests—the result was a costly failure.

Events since the end of the Cold War teach the same lesson. In Europe, once the Soviet Union collapsed, the region no longer had a dominant power. The United States should have steadily reduced its military presence, cultivated amicable relations with Russia, and turned European security over to the Europeans. Instead, it expanded NATO and ignored Russian interests, helping spark the conflict over Ukraine and driving Moscow closer to China.

In the Middle East, likewise, the United States should have moved back offshore after the Gulf War and let Iran and Iraq balance each other. Instead, the Clinton administration adopted the policy of “dual containment,” which required keeping ground and air forces in Saudi Arabia to check Iran and Iraq simultaneously. The George W. Bush administration then adopted an even more ambitious strategy, dubbed “regional transformation,” which produced costly failures in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Obama administration repeated the error when it helped topple Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya and when it exacerbated the chaos in Syria by insisting that Bashar al-Assad “must go” and backing some of his opponents. Abandoning offshore balancing after the Cold War has been a recipe for failure.

HEGEMONY’S HOLLOW HOPES

Defenders of liberal hegemony marshal a number of unpersuasive arguments to make their case. One familiar claim is that only vigorous U.S. leadership can keep order around the globe. But global leadership is not an end in itself; it is desirable only insofar as it benefits the United States directly.

One might further argue that U.S. leadership is necessary to overcome the collective-action problem of local actors failing to balance against a potential hegemon. Offshore balancing recognizes this danger, however, and calls for Washington to step in if needed. Nor does it prohibit Washington from giving friendly states in the key regions advice or material aid.

Other defenders of liberal hegemony argue that U.S. leadership is necessary to deal with new, transnational threats that arise from failed states, terrorism, criminal networks, refugee flows, and the like. Not only do the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans offer inadequate protection against these dangers, they claim, but modern military technology also makes it easier for the United States to project power around the world and address them. Today’s “global village,” in short, is more dan­gerous yet easier to manage.

This view exaggerates these threats and overstates Washington’s ability to eliminate them. Crime, terrorism, and similar problems can be a nuisance, but they are hardly existential threats and rarely lend themselves to military solutions. Indeed, constant interference in the affairs of other states—and especially repeated military interventions—generates local resentment and fosters corruption, thereby making these transnational dangers worse. The long-term solution to the problems can only be competent local governance, not heavy-handed U.S. efforts to police the world.

Nor is policing the world as cheap as defenders of liberal hegemony contend, either in dollars spent or in lives lost. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq cost between $4 trillion and $6 trillion and killed nearly 7,000 U.S. soldiers and wounded more than 50,000. Veterans of these conflicts exhibit high rates of depression and suicide, yet the United States has little to show for their sacrifices.

Defenders of the status quo also fear that offshore balancing would allow other states to replace the United States at the pinnacle of global power. On the contrary, the strategy would prolong the country’s domi­nance by refocusing its efforts on core goals. Unlike liberal hegemony, offshore balancing avoids squandering resources on costly and counterproductive crusades, which would allow the government to invest more in the long-term ingredients of power and prosperity: education, infrastructure, and research and development. Remember, the United States became a great power by staying out of foreign wars and building a world-class economy, which is the same strategy China has pursued over the past three decades. Meanwhile, the United States has wasted trillions of dollars and put its long-term primacy at risk.

Another argument holds that the U.S. military must garrison the world to keep the peace and preserve an open world economy. Retrenchment, the logic goes, would renew great-power competition, invite ruinous economic rivalries, and eventually spark a major war from which the United States could not remain aloof. Better to keep playing global policeman than risk a repeat of the 1930s.

Such fears are unconvincing. For starters, this argument assumes that deeper U.S. engagement in Europe would have prevented World War II, a claim hard to square with Adolf Hitler’s unshakable desire for war. Regional conflicts will sometimes occur no matter what Washington does, but it need not get involved unless vital U.S. interests are at stake. Indeed, the United States has sometimes stayed out of regional conflicts—such as the Russo-Japanese War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the current war in Ukraine—belying the claim that it inevitably gets dragged in. And if the country is forced to fight another great power, better to arrive late and let other countries bear the brunt of the costs. As the last major power to enter both world wars, the United States emerged stronger from each for having waited.

Furthermore, recent history casts doubt on the claim that U.S. leadership preserves peace. Over the past 25 years, Washington has caused or supported several wars in the Middle East and fueled minor conflicts elsewhere. If liberal hegemony is supposed to enhance global stability, it has done a poor job.

Nor has the strategy produced much in the way of economic benefits. Given its protected position in the Western Hemisphere, the United States is free to trade and invest wherever profitable opportu­nities exist. Because all countries have a shared interest in such activity, Washington does not need to play global policeman in order to remain economically engaged with others. In fact, the U.S. economy would be in better shape today if the government were not spending so much money trying to run the world.

Offshore balancing may seem like a radical strategy today, but it provided the guiding logic of U.S. foreign policy for many decades.

Proponents of liberal hegemony also claim that the United States must remain committed all over the world to prevent nuclear proliferation. If it reduces its role in key regions or withdraws entirely, the argument runs, countries accustomed to U.S. protection will have no choice but to protect themselves by obtaining nuclear weapons.

No grand strategy is likely to prove wholly successful at preventing proliferation, but offshore balancing would do a better job than liberal hegemony. After all, that strategy failed to stop India and Pakistan from ramping up their nuclear capabilities, North Korea from becoming the newest member of the nuclear club, and Iran from making major progress with its nuclear program. Countries usually seek the bomb because they fear being attacked, and U.S. efforts at regime change only heighten such concerns. By eschewing regime change and reducing the United States’ military footprint, offshore balancing would give potential proliferators less reason to go nuclear.

Moreover, military action cannot prevent a determined country from eventually obtaining nuclear weapons; it can only buy time. The recent deal with Iran serves as a reminder that coordinated multi­lateral pressure and tough economic sanctions are a better way to discourage proliferation than preventive war or regime change.

#### Chinese ascension to regional hegemony risks global transition wars and nuclear conflict.

Minemura and Mearsheimer '20 [Kenji and John; August 17; Researcher at Hokkaido University Public Policy School; Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, Ph.D. in Political Science from Cornell University; The Asahi Shimbun, "Interview/ John Mearsheimer: U.S.-China rift runs real risk of escalating into a nuclear war," <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13629071>]

Answer: The real Cold War started before the coronavirus, and the coronavirus doesn't matter much. And ideology doesn't matter much. What matters is the balance of power. And the fact is, China has become so powerful over the past 20 years.

There is a serious chance that (China) could become a regional hegemon in Asia. And the United States does not tolerate peer competitors. The idea that China is going to become a regional hegemon is unacceptable to the United States.

So, it's this clash of interests that are generated by this fundamental change that's taking place in the balance of power. It is driving the competition. And I would note that you'll hear a lot of talk about the fact that the United States is a liberal democracy, and that China is a communist state. And, therefore, this is an ideological clash.

Q: In “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,” the book you published in 2001, you said there would never be a peaceful emerging of China and predicted the U.S.-China conflict. When do you think the critical turning point was for their bilateral relationship?

A: That's a difficult question to answer, because it really started in the early 1990s when China began to grow. That's when it started.

It was China's rise in the unipolar moment that is driving the train in this process. And there were a number of events along the way that mattered greatly. Most importantly, it was China's admission to the WTO in 2001, which really allowed the Chinese economy to accelerate, to the extent that you can pinpoint a date where the United States recognized that the rise of China was a problem and that China would have to be contained.

Q: Some analysts in the United States and Japan have argued that since U.S.-China bilateral economic ties and political relations have grown over 14 years under the so-called engagement policy, it is not feasible for either country to instigate an open war. Do you agree?

A: Well, there were many experts who said the same thing before World War I. They said there was a tremendous amount of economic interdependence in Europe. And nobody would dare start a war because you would end up killing the goose that lays the golden egg. But nevertheless, we had World War I. And what this tells you is that you can have economic cooperation, and at the same time, you have security competition.

And what sometimes happens is that the security competition becomes so intense that it overwhelms the economic cooperation and you have a conflict. But I would take this a step further and say that if you look at what's happening in the world today, that economic cooperation between the United States and China is slowly beginning to disappear, and you're getting an economic competition as well as security competition.

As you well know, the United States has its gun sights on Huawei. The United States would like to destroy Huawei.

The United States would like to control 5G. The United States would like to remain on the cutting edge of all the modern sophisticated technologies of the day and they view the Chinese as a threat in that regard. And that tells you that not only are you getting military competition, but you are also getting economic competition.

Q: Unlike in the Cold War era, no one knows exactly how many nuclear weapons China possesses. You have said that since Eastern Asia has no central front like Europe, the possibility that a war between the United States and China could occur over East Asia is high. Many countries surrounding China, particularly Japan, as well as other countries that do not possess a nuclear weapon, would be vulnerable to an attack from China. Do you think that we may see a war breaking out in East Asia in the future?

A: Let me start by talking a little bit about the Cold War and then comparing the situation in East Asia and with the situation in Europe during the Cold War. During the Cold War, the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was centered on central Europe. We used to talk about the central front, where you had the Warsaw Pact on one side, and NATO on the other side.

And when we talked about U.S.-Soviet war, it involved the central front. Now, the central front was populated by two giant sets of armies, that were armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. That meant if we had World War III in central Europe, you would have two huge sets of armies crashing into each other, with thousands of nuclear weapons.

Not surprisingly, when we ran war games during the Cold War, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to get a war started in central Europe, because nobody in his or her right mind, would start a war given the possibility of nuclear Armageddon.

Now, contrast that with the situation in East Asia, which is the central flash point between United States and China, the three places where you could possibly have a war involve the South China Sea, Taiwan and the East China Sea.

Those areas are not the equivalent of the central front. And it's possible to imagine a limited conventional war breaking out in one of those three areas. It's much easier to imagine that happening, than a war on the central front during the Cold War.

This is not to say that a war in East Asia is axiomatically going to happen. I'm not arguing that, but it is plausible that the United States and the Chinese and some allies of the United States like Japan may end up in a shooting match with the Chinese in say, the East China Sea.

Now, if China is losing, or if the United States is losing that military engagement, there will be a serious temptation to use nuclear weapons as the United States is committed to use nuclear weapons to defend Japan if Japan is losing a conventional war. And one might say, it's unimaginable that the United States or China would use nuclear weapons.

But I don't think that's true, because you would be using those nuclear weapons at sea. You would not be hitting the Chinese mainland in all likelihood. And, therefore, it's possible to think in terms of a "limited nuclear war," with limited nuclear use.

So, I worry greatly that not only will we have a war between the United States and China, but also that there's a serious possibility nuclear weapons would be used. And I think in a very important way, it was much less likely that would happen during the Cold War.

#### Rightsizing, not retrenchment. Eliminating a permanent presence in the Persian Gulf is critical.

Wasser ’21 – [Becca, fellow in the defense program at the Center for a New American Security. “Drawing down the U.S. Military Responsibly.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2021. https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/05/18/drawing-down-u.s.-military-responsibly-pub-84527] TDI

LINKING INTERESTS TO MISSIONS

Any changes to U.S. posture in the Middle East will need to be done responsibly to not impinge on core U.S. interests or military operations and keep relationships with regional partners intact. This is a tall order, but one that is well overdue. The [U.S. Global Force Posture Review](https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2494189/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-the-initiation-of-a-glo/) announced by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in February 2021 is an opportunity to set the groundwork for a revision of U.S. presence in the Middle East, as the review seeks to better link the global U.S. military footprint to national interests.

The importance of the initial interests that undergirded U.S. presence in the region have faded over time, with energy no longer holding the same salience it once did. Moving forward, the U.S. military presence should be driven by current strategic value, rather than supporting legacy targets, with core U.S. interests and objectives directly mapped to missions. This should, in turn, dictate the number and location of forces and the capabilities required to achieve those missions.

For example, ensuring the freedom of navigation in critical maritime chokepoints throughout the Middle East is now arguably a secondary objective. With this in mind, rethinking the appropriate level of effort and resources required for this responsibility is in order, especially against the backdrop of [eroding U.S. naval readiness](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/01/us/politics/aircraft-carrier-nimitz-iran-biden-persian-gulf.html) and [overtaxed intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA388-1.html). Such a mission should not require a carrier strike group, nor should it be the justification for a continuous carrier presence in the region. Performing this mission with a different level of resourcing would require regional partners and other allies—many of whom also have an interest in maintaining the free flow of energy—to take on additional responsibilities.

In the current strategic landscape, the most crucial U.S. objective in the Middle East has become stability, as linked to the core U.S. interest of protecting its homeland. With this in mind, the United States needs to retain access to a few key bases in the Middle East in case of contingencies involving Iran or a nonstate actor, to conduct limited counterterrorism operations, and to undertake peacetime security cooperation activities. This will undoubtedly alter the location, size, and type of forces that make up the U.S. military footprint in the Middle East.

ACHIEVING A RESPONSIBLE MILITARY DRAWDOWN

Mapping forces to the key missions as outlined above will determine where the United States will need to maintain a military presence in some form, although this presence need not be permanent. The key will be to retain enough forces and capabilities in the Middle East, and negotiate the right access arrangements to manage ongoing operations against the Islamic State and a range of potential contingencies, including other nonstate actors or Iran.

Instead of relying on major operating bases, the United States should embrace a [distributed basing structure](https://warontherocks.com/2020/12/small-distributed-and-secure-a-new-basing-architecture-for-the-middle-east/). This would involve developing a constellation of smaller bases located throughout the region—especially those farther away from Iranian territory, like Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan or Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia—to host rotations of U.S. forces. Many of these would be so-called warm bases, operated and maintained by host nations with the United States retaining contingency access. Washington would also shift several installations deemed unessential for key U.S. missions from “hot” to warm, and return these bases to host nations.

The U.S. footprint at larger operating bases—particularly those within range of Iranian weapons—should be reduced. This includes bases like Camp Arifjan and Al Udeid, which are largely bloated vestiges of older wars. Personnel and capabilities in the region should also be rightsized to reflect updated requirements. For instance, the number of personnel at the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain could be reduced without impacting naval operations, while the Armored Brigade Combat Team earmarked for the Middle East—once needed for ground operations in Iraq—would be reassigned to another region. Meanwhile, rotational forces would cycle in for security cooperation activities intended to strengthen partner capabilities and limited counterterrorism operations.

Additionally, the United States would pre-position equipment identified as necessary to defend against a range of threats or required for potential contingencies at these bases, as well as the logistics equipment required to enable these missions. Limited numbers of key capabilities and forces required for critical intelligence or counterterrorism missions, such as ISR and special operations forces, would remain in theater, with an emphasis on assets able to fulfill multiple requirements, such as remotely piloted aircraft that can be used for ISR and airstrikes.

The preservation of U.S. military access and overflight is critical to providing the United States the flexibility it requires to untie itself from permanent presence at brick-and-mortar bases in the Middle East. This task is, arguably, difficult—bases have become symbols of the U.S. security commitment and act as tripwires in case of adversary aggression. Conveying to regional partners that this is rightsizing rather than retrenchment, so as to not damage these relationships, will be no small feat, but one that is critically important to the success of any future U.S. footprint. To ensure that the United States does not find itself embroiled in regional conflicts that would again require an outsized military footprint, [diplomacy](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east) will be essential to preserving U.S. relationships with key regional partners and guaranteeing continued U.S. military access.

#### The plan sends a fast, clear and certain signal to allies that protects international standing.

Pillar et al. ’20 – Pillar, Paul, Andrew Bacevich, Annelle Sheline, and Trita Parsi. “A New U.S. Paradigm for the Middle East: Ending America’s Misguided Policy of Domination.” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, July 2020. https://quincyinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ending-America%E2%80%99s-Misguided-Policy-of-Domination\_FINAL\_COMPRESSED.pdf. TDI

Conventional wisdom holds that the presence of United States forces in the Middle East makes America and the region more secure. To the contrary, the U.S. military’s large footprint in the region, combined with voluminous U.S. arms sales and support for repressive regimes, drives instability and exacerbates grievances and conditions that threaten the United States. This presence has made Americans less safe and undermined U.S. standing abroad; it also leaves America less prepared to address more dangerous nonmilitary challenges such as pandemics and climate change, as the Covid–19 crisis makes clear.

Given the manifest failure of the current strategy, growing calls for a demilitarized approach to the region should come as no surprise. However, translating concepts of military restraint into practical policy requires sustained effort. This paper is intended to move the debate forward by operationalizing a holistic approach to the region based on a narrow definition of vital U.S. interests, in accordance with a foreign policy centered on military restraint and responsible statecraft.

U.S. policy toward the Middle East should be guided by two core interests: Protect the United States from attack; and facilitate the free flow of global commerce.

While these objectives require the U.S. to prevent hostile states from establishing hegemony in the region, they are best served by enhancing peace and security within a framework of international law. Neither warrants a major U.S. military presence in the Middle East, let alone regional military dominance.

A basic reorientation of U.S. policy is long overdue. Rather than allowing bilateral friends and adversaries define regional policy, the U.S. should center policy decisions across the region on their direct implications for U.S. interests, rigorously defined. Bilateral relations should be adjusted to this regionwide policy, not the other way around. A new approach based on responsible statecraft would not disengage from the Middle East, but would instead prioritize diplomatic and economic involvement over military domination, military interventions, and arms sales. This paper explains what such a shift would entail in practice and makes the following recommendations:

• Time to come home To preserve Americans’ physical and economic well-being more effectively, the U.S. should significantly draw down its military presence in the region over a period of five to ten years. Preventing hostile hegemony in the Middle East does not mean the United States must play the role of hegemon itself, nor does it require the current level of U.S. arms sales in the region. Instead, Washington should recognize multipolarity as a reality, appreciate that it precludes regional domination by any other state, and exploit it to protect U.S. interests.

• A deliberative drawdown... The United States should immediately begin discussions with regional powers currently hosting U.S. troops to allow them to prepare for the U.S. drawdown. This decision may not be popular among some U.S. partners, but it is the course that best serves U.S. interests and regional stability.

• ...regardless of stability milestones The United States should convincingly signal that rightsizing its military presence will proceed regardless of any potential stability milestones. If the drawdown is made contingent upon regional stability first being achieved, the United States will risk giving countries that enjoy U.S. protection an incentive to destabilize the Middle East to prevent American troops from ever going home.

• Support a new security architecture... The United States should instead encourage the development of a new regional security architecture for the Persian Gulf based on the models of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, while maintaining an offshore military presence that allows for intervention if necessary to protect the United States. Consequently, the U.S. must cease its maintenance of an artificial power balance predicated on a permanent U.S. military presence, military assistance, and massive arms sales.

• ...but don’t lead it For such a security architecture to be successful and durable, it needs regional buy-in and ownership. Regional states should lead and drive this process themselves. They cannot own the process if the U.S. controls it.

• Talk to everyone The United States has isolated itself from important players in the Middle East. It has become a belligerent in many conflicts and lacks relations with key states and actors, effectively ceding diplomatic maneuverability to Russia and others. U.S. policy toward the Middle East must entail active engagement with all players in the region—friends and foes alike. The United States should abandon the objective of regime change due to its immorality, counterproductivity, and destabilizing effect.

• Normalize relations with Iran The prevailing policy of isolating Iran lacks a strategic rationale and has failed on all fronts. It fuels tensions in the Middle East and leaves the United States and Iran unnecessarily close to military confrontation. To maximize U.S. diplomatic maneuverability, the United States should seek to normalize relations with Iran and find constructive ways to manage differences, beginning with a return to full compliance, on both sides, with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

• Do not make Iraq into a battlefield with Iran Iraq should not be turned into one more front in an obsessive campaign to isolate and weaken Iran. While the U.S. should continue to provide security assistance to Iraq, Washington should draw down its military presence, as the Iraqi government has requested.

• Participate in diplomatic efforts to end the wars in Syria and Yemen America should be part of the solution in Syria and Yemen by taking part in efforts to find political settlements to these two civil wars. In Syria, the U.S. should withdraw all troops, given that the original reason for their dispatch—to defeat ISIS—is now obsolete. The U.S. should declare a moratorium on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE until they cut off all support to parties to the Yemen conflict.

• No more cartes blanches for partners Unconditional U.S. support for regional security partners has tended to disincentivize them from diplomatic efforts to peacefully resolve tensions with neighbors. For instance, overt U.S. backing of the Saudi regime has often encouraged greater belligerence than when the Saudis have been less sure that the U.S. would intervene on their behalf. Unquestioned U.S. support for Israel has facilitated its continued occupation of Palestinian territory and reduced incentives to pursue a peaceful resolution of the conflict. A significant reduction of U.S. troops in the Middle East will help instill greater restraint and reduce the tendency toward destabilizing behavior among partner governments.

• On human rights, lead by example U.S. policy should reflect strong commitments to human and political rights in the Middle East while recognizing that intervention cannot be the principal means of achieving respect for those rights. U.S. policy must apply standards consistently to all parties in the region and must be based on the U.S. itself demonstrating respect for human rights at home and abroad, for multilateral cooperation, and for international law.

#### Now is the best time to get out of the Gulf.

Kirshner 23 – [Jonathan, Ph.D. from Princeton, Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Boston College. Kirshner was the first World Politics Visiting Fellow at Princeton University’s Institute for International and Regional Studies, and was the director of the Economics and National Security Program at the Olin Institute at Harvard University from 2000-04, “It’s a Good Time to Leave the Persian Gulf.” The National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/lebanon-watch/it%E2%80%99s-good-time-leave-persian-gulf-206332>, March 22, 2023] TDI

Such responses are not surprising. The United States, after all, likes to think of the Persian Gulf as its turf. It maintains a very large military presence throughout the region, tends to fight wars there, and for decades has been the ultimate guarantor that Gulf oil will not be impeded from reaching world markets. Those long-invested in these and attendant commitments do have reason to calculate that American political influence is on the wane in the Middle East, and, perhaps alarmingly, that China’s is on the rise.

It is important not to allow the fanfare to run ahead of the facts. However welcome (or, to some eyes, unwelcome) this one agreement may be, the region remains rife with intricately enmeshed political conflicts and rivalries. What the People’s Republic of China wants to achieve, and what it has the capacity to achieve—plausibly little more than contributing to stability in a region that has been the site of violent and bitter political contestation, with the bonus of reducing the Americans to spectators of their diplomatic accomplishments—remains to be seen.

Likely not by coincidence, Saudi Arabia has apparently now [communicated its price](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/us/politics/saudi-arabia-israel-united-states.html) for normalizing relations with Israel: more explicit security guarantees for the kingdom from the United States, the right to purchase more advanced weapons, and support for its development of an, ahem, “civilian” nuclear program. (Notably absent are concerns for the de-facto Israeli absorption of most of the West Bank, or the fate of the millions of Palestinians living there.) This would be an exceedingly high price for the Americans to pay, which is why the timing of these proposals cannot but convey the suggestion that, with potential alternatives to American patronage perhaps visible on the horizon, the United States is in little position to drive a hard bargain with its Saudi friends.

The good news is, none of this is bad news. In fact, it presents a golden opportunity for the United States to engage in a long-overdue reassessment of its military and political commitments in the region. And by reassess, I mean withdraw.

Such a reassessment rests on good realist reasoning. Realism has gotten a bum rap recently, as some loud, prominent, self-proclaimed realists bask in the infamy of making outrageous claims (arguments, ironically, often at odds with their own theories). But realism comes in many stripes, and many of its incarnations are intellectually robust and analytically insightful, and it remains an approach that can serve as a valuable guide to understanding world politics and informing foreign policy. And although realists can and will disagree on much—the paradigm reflects a common analytical disposition, not a shared playbook—one would be hard-pressed to find a realist who would argue that deep military and political engagement in the Gulf can today be defined as in the American national interest.

This was not always the case. In the 1970s and 1980s, when Gulf oil ran the world and the advanced industrial economies were dependent on it, it was reasonable that the United States would want to ensure that no single hostile power would come to dominate the region, and, more narrowly, to prevent the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—commitments made explicit by the Carter and Reagan administrations.

Fast forward forty years, however, and this posture can only be described as vestigial and anachronistic. Regarding the Gulf, the United States is now in the position summarized by Bob Dylan: “I used to care/but things have changed.” World energy markets have been transformed. The United States is now the world’s third-largest oil exporter and second-largest exporter of natural gas. Gulf oil now flows largely to China (which is why the People’s Republic has an interest in regional stability). Moreover, given the challenge of global climate change, it makes little sense for the Americans to be subsidizing the world price of oil by providing the security guarantees that ensure its flow.

It is also very hard to make the case that active U.S. engagement in the region has been a smashing success—although it has smashed much, from its support of the overthrow of democracy in Iran in 1953 to its catastrophic war against Iraq a half-century later. If the United States indeed has any remaining interests in the Gulf, history suggests perhaps it would be better served by just getting out of the way.

But what are those interests? America’s most intimate partner, Saudi Arabia, is an amalgam of personalist authoritarianism and radical theocracy—not obvious foundations for a shared vision of political goals. (And in assessing the American interest in the Middle East more generally, it is worth noting that should Israel choose to join a club of illiberal theocracies, it will become increasingly difficult to define exactly what ties bind that long-standing special relationship.)

Perhaps most significantly, faced with daunting domestic political problems and confronted with shifts in the global balance of power, the United States, mighty but not inexhaustible, must better align its capabilities with its interests. With regard to defending the American national interest, some parts of the world—in particular Europe and East Asia—are much more important than others.

In sum, rather than bemoaning the prospect of China’s increasing influence in the region, the United States should, in an orderly fashion, disentangle from its commitments, withdraw its forces, and reallocate them in the service of more important and pressing priorities. Because although the United States has no high-priority national security interest in the Persian Gulf, it does have other vital interests in the world, well-articulated by the logic of realism—in particular the contributions of classical realists like George F. Kennan and Arnold Wolfers, inflected with a hint of Carl von Clausewitz. The greatest contribution that latter figure—counterintuitively for some who would reduce the insights of this combat-hardened Prussian general to the aphorism “war is politics”—was his insistence on the primacy of politics, and that always and everywhere actors must be able to articulate plainly their political goals, especially when contemplating the use of force and in forging grand strategy.

On the evolving world stage, regarding the American national interest, two primary and pressing political goals stand out. It remains vital for the United States that its allies and affiliates in Europe remain secure, democratic, and well-disposed toward each other. This is an example of what Arnold Wolfers called “milieu goals”—which are especially important for countries like the United States that do not face present and immediate military threats at the border.

As Wolfers insightfully described, milieu goals relate to foreign policy measures taken to influence world politics in ways that make the international environment conducive to the thriving of national values, and one in which political allies feel secure and content in their shared affinities. For a great power, this, more than anything, is the stuffing of foreign policy in practice.

Pulling out of the Persian Gulf, then, is not the first step in a broader disengagement from world politics. Despite an increasingly audible chorus calling for the United States to withdraw from the NATO alliance, such a move would prove disastrous. The question is not, as some proponents of “restraint” emphasize, whether the alliance has accomplished the mission for which it was originally designed. The only measure that matters is whether the political benefits of continued American participation in NATO outweigh its costs. And for all the protestation about the “costs” of the alliance to the United States, and (more understandable) grumblings about whether some members ought to be making greater contributions to the collective defense, it is unlikely that the United States, which if anything seems inclined to increase its already very high levels of military spending, would save some—indeed save any—money by pulling out of NATO. But the political costs (and geopolitical dangers invited) could be extremely high, as active American engagement in Europe has had, as Wolfers would anticipate, numerous salutary effects. It has bolstered the fortunes of like-minded, friendly countries in one of the world’s geopolitical and economic epicenters, and has made war there—wars that would be exceedingly ruinous to the American interest—much less likely. From a grand strategic perspective, rather than a costly albatross, NATO has been a bargain, the best we have ever had.

Another major strategic priority is East Asia. Following the classical logic best associated with Kennan, it is a vital national interest of the United States that no single power comes to politically dominate this enormous and dynamic region. That fraught-with-peril prospect is not inconceivable, as China’s increasing might makes clear.

The implications of this for policy are commonly mischaracterized. Many in Washington appear spoiling for a fight, or at least a militarized confrontation, with China. This disposition is unnecessary, imprudent, and unwise. Following Kennan, although the stakes in East Asia are enormous, both the challenge and the requisite response are political in nature. Military capabilities matter, but not in the service of trying to win a regional arms race, or to assert (increasingly unachievable) local predominance, but rather as a component of a broader political strategy. Sustained and deep U.S. engagement with traditional allies and like-minded actors will buttress their confidence and wherewithal to do what they would like to do—resist China’s political pressure. Should the Americans withdraw, in contrast, many will make the dispiriting calculation that they have no choice but to politically bandwagon with China, and accede to its political domination. From a U.S. perspective, that would result in a much more dangerous world, and one in which its political influence would be considerably diminished.

In sum, from the perspective of the American national interest, Europe and East Asia matter; the Persian Gulf does not. (At best it is a distant also-ran in a changing world where the United States must be more attentive to matching its resources with its priorities.) We have also proven serially incapable of steering our foreign policy in the Gulf without getting mired in a swamp.

Energy-hungry China has more at stake in the region than the United States. There is even a world in which, unlike the United States, it is well positioned to play the role of honest broker regarding local disputes. In addition, as a practical matter, the prospect of China asserting a position as the dominant external player in the region is years if not decades away. But if China wants to try and sit in the geopolitical driver’s seat in the Gulf—or even if it doesn’t—we’d be fools not to flip the keys to that lemon on the counter, write off our security deposit, walk away, and count ourselves lucky.

## 1AR — ADV — Regional Instability

### 1AR — AT: Israeli Isolation

#### No Israeli first strike.

Beres 15 – [Louis, Professor of political science and international law at Purdue University. \*\*Leon Edney is a retired US Navy admiral, NATO supreme allied commander, and distinguished professor of leadership at the US Naval Academy. “What -Now for Israel?” US News, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/07/14/after-the-iran-nuclear-agreement-what-are-israels-security-options>, July 14, 2015] TDI

To be sure, following careful assessments of the new Iran agreement, Israel's prime minister will need to make an 11th-hour decision on preemption. In principle, at least, considering any such defensive first strike against Iranian nuclear assets and infrastructures could still make strategic sense if the following conditions were assumed: 1. Iran will inevitably become militarily nuclear; 2. Iran will very likely plan to use its new nuclear forces in a first-strike aggression against Israel; and 3. Iran's key decision makers will likely be irrational. Regarding core definitions, irrational decision-makers would be those Iranian leaders who could sometime value certain preferences or combinations of preferences (e.g., certain Shiite religious expectations) more highly than Iran's national survival. In the absence of any one of these three critical assumptions, the expected retaliatory costs to Israel of any contemplated preemption would plausibly exceed the expected benefits. Moreover, there would be nothing genuinely scientific about making such difficult policy choices. For one thing, all of the associated probability judgments would need to be overwhelmingly subjective. How, for example, could Israeli analysts say anything meaningfully predictive about unique or unprecedented circumstances? In science, probabilities must always be based upon the determinable frequency of past events. Here, however, in pertinent history, there exists no usable guidance. To wit, exactly how many preemptive attacks have already been launched by a nuclear state against a nearly-nuclear state? The "zero" answer is obvious and irrefutable. It must, therefore, be a cautionary reply. An additional complication exists. The nearly-nuclear state, Iran, will still possess large conventional and chemical rocket forces. Many other threatening missiles will remain under the operational control of its sub-state terrorist proxies. Hezbollah, the well-armed Shiite militia, already has more rockets in its arsenal than do all NATO countries combined; it is even less likely than Iran's own leaders to hold back on any post-preemption retaliations. All things considered, Israel's best security plan, going forward, would be to enhance its underlying nuclear deterrence posture, and to render this critical enhancement as conspicuous as possible. More precisely, this means that Jerusalem should do everything possible to signal to any future Iranian aggressor that its own nuclear forces are plainly survivable, and capable of penetrating any of Tehran's ballistic missile or other active defenses. Correspondingly, it will also become necessary for Israel to move very carefully beyond its traditional posture of deliberate nuclear ambiguity, or the so-called "bomb in the basement." In the irremediably arcane world of Israeli nuclear deterrence, it can never be adequate that enemy states should simply acknowledge the Jewish State's nuclear status. It is equally important that these adversarial states believe Israel to hold usable and survivable nuclear forces, and be willing to employ these weapons in certain clear and readily identifiable circumstances. Israel's nuclear doctrine and weapons are necessary to various scenarios that could require conventional preemptive action, or more residually, a specifically nuclear retaliation. In any event, for Israel, the core purpose of its nuclear weapons must always be deterrence ex ante, not revenge ex post. An integral part of Israel's multi-layered security system lies in maintaining effective ballistic missile defenses, primarily, the Arrow or "Hetz." Yet, even the well-regarded and successfully-tested Arrow could never achieve a sufficiently high capacity for missile intercept, a quality needed to adequately protect Israeli civilians from any Iranian nuclear attack. In essence, this means that Israel can never rely too heavily upon active defenses for its national protection. What about the prospect of an irrational Iranian adversary? Any Israeli move from ambiguity to disclosure, however selective, might not help in the particular case of an irrational nuclear enemy . It remains possible, or even plausible, that certain elements of Iranian leadership will determinedly subscribe to certain end-times visions of a Shiite apocalypse. Still, taken by itself, such subscription does not automatically or even persuasively call for an Israeli preemption.

### 1AR — AT: Hormuz

#### A hardline newspaper editor appointed by the Supreme Leader started a trial balloon—motive certainly exists.

The National 22 – [“Hardline Iranian Editor Suggests Closing Strait of Hormuz over Mahsa Amini Protests.” The National, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iran/2022/12/15/hardline-iranian-editor-suggests-closing-strait-of-hormuz-over-mahsa-amini-protests/>, December 15, 2022] TDI

A hardline newspaper close to Iran’s ruling clerics on Wednesday suggested that authorities close the [Strait of Hormuz](https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/why-is-the-strait-of-hormuz-the-most-important-oil-tanker-route-1.875169), a crucial waterway for global energy supplies, in response to alleged foreign support for the [nationwide protests](https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iran/2022/12/12/second-protester-executed-in-iran-as-judiciary-speeds-through-trials/) gripping the country.

The suggestion came from the editor-in-chief of the Kayhan newspaper, who is appointed by supreme leader Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](https://www.thenationalnews.com/tags/ali-khamenei/), in an editorial considered to be a trial balloon.

“Closing the Strait of Hormuz to western countries’ oil tankers and commercial vessels is Iran’s legal right,” Hossein Shariatmadari wrote.

“We can even seize a part of their commercial cargo as compensation for the financial damage they have done to our country.”

### 1AR — AT: Laser Weapons

#### Iran matches laser weapons.

Saballa 22 – [Joe, author at the defense post. “Iran Claims Development of Laser Cannon for Aerial Targets.” The Defense Post, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/03/14/iran-laser-aerial-targets/>, March 14, 2022] TDI

Iran claims it has produced and begun deploying a laser weapon capable of countering aerial threats, including enemy drones.

Called the “Sateb,” the laser cannon can reportedly shoot down aerial targets using powerful laser beams and is being utilized to protect “sensitive regions.”

The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) said that the weapon system is one of the country’s most important military achievements.

Two decades ago, an Iranian electronics company announced that it had acquired the necessary know-how to develop laser weapons. It even claimed that its laser weapons could neutralize radar-evading composite drones.

“High speed is one of the advantages of using such systems; as long as energy exists, shooting continues,” IRNA [explained](https://en.irna.ir/news/84680506/Iran-among-6-world-countries-producing-laser-weapons). “Due to its complication and high technology, just a few countries like Iran could enter the area of laser weapons.”

A Potential Addition to Arsenal

If the reports are to be believed, the weapon would be a major addition to the country’s military arsenal.

Last year, the Iranian Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced that it had acquired [indigenous weapons and equipment](https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/07/09/iran-new-weapons/) such as precision-guided missiles and long-range combat and reconnaissance drones.

It also introduced upgraded anti-tank missile systems and combat helicopters equipped with Iranian-made Qaem-114 missiles.

The IRCG also unveiled [two underground military bases](https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/03/07/iran-underground-drones-missiles/) housing high-powered missiles and unmanned aerial systems earlier this year.

### 1AR — AT: ME War Defense

#### Iran controls the Gulf now despite ‘permanent’ military presence.

Bing 23 – [West, served as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Reagan administration. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, he served in Vietnam with Marine Force Recon and Combined Action Platoons. While serving as assistant secretary, he chaired the U.S. Security Commissions with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, South Korea, and Japan.  “Iran Is Gaining Control of the Persian Gulf.” Hoover Institution, <https://www.hoover.org/research/iran-gaining-control-persian-gulf>, May 9, 2023] TDI

The theocracy of Iran is America’s implacable enemy. For decades, a bedrock American policy has been to contain Iran’s employment of political pressure, sedition, and proxy forces in order to emerge as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region. Since 2018, sanctions have prohibited the export of Iranian oil until that country ceases its nuclear weapons program. But that canon of containment is breaking down.

An estimated 70 foreign vessels were illicitly transferring Iranian oil in 2020; today, that number [stands at 322](https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/blog/stop-hop-ii-ghost-armada-grows). Four years ago, illegal oil exports by this so-called “ghost armada” were estimated at 500,000 barrels per day; by 2023, it had[doubled to one million barrels per day](https://www.dw.com/en/how-iran-is-boosting-oil-exports-despite-us-sanctions/a-64562167).

On March 10, 2022, U.S. law enforcement [seized the oil cargo of two “ghost fleet” tankers](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-iran-bahamas-c0577bf7718055d730a3b72802c132c2), worth about $38 million. On March 2, 2023, U.S. Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](https://www.reuters.com/world/new-us-sanctions-target-iranian-shipping-petrochemicals-2023-03-02/) imposed explicit sanctions upon 20 of those 322 vessels in the ghost armada. A week later, [China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia issued a joint statement](https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/03/30/riyadh-s-motivations-behind-saudi-iran-deal-pub-89421) announcing the restoration of diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Tehran after a rupture of eight years. Obviously, Saudi Arabia is hedging against the erosion of American power. Then on March 23, a Shiite militia group [fired missiles](https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3339691/us-conducts-airstrikes-in-syria-in-response-to-deadly-uav-attack/) into a U.S. base in Syria, killing an American contractor and wounding several U.S. soldiers. In retaliation, two U.S. aircraft struck back. Only after that strike did the U.S. press learn there had been [78 such attacks](https://www.npr.org/2023/03/24/1165975073/u-s-strikes-iran-backed-militias-in-syria-after-attack-on-american-base) in Syria by Iranian-backed militias in the last several years.

On April 27, Iran retaliated to protect its ghost fleet. In a heliborne raid, Iranian marines [seized a massive supertanker](https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/iran-captures-us-ship/285-ef28a0fc-d694-45e1-b85a-6831ef0173a5) as large as an aircraft carrier, with a carrying capacity of 1.5 million barrels of crude oil, three times the value of the oil cargo seized by the U.S. the previous year. The shipment of Kuwaiti oil was purchased by Chevron and destined for unloading in Houston. Iran took video that was shown on nation-wide television. Here in the U.S. mention of the seizure appeared only in financial news.

The [U.S. Navy complained](https://www.cusnc.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3382465/second-merchant-vessel-seized-within-a-week-by-iran/#:~:text=Iran%E2%80%99s%20continued%20harassment%20of%20vessels%20and%20interference%20with%20navigational%20rights%20in%20regional%20waters%20are%20unwarranted%2C%20irresponsible%20and%20a%20present%20threat%20to%20maritime%20security%20and%20the%20global%20economy.)that Iran had seized five commercial vessels in the past two years, to include the employment of mines on two occasions. “Iran's continued harassment of vessels and interference with navigational rights in regional waters,” the U.S. Navy said in a statement, “are a threat to maritime security and the global economy.” Unimpressed, on May 3 [Iran seized another supertanker](https://apnews.com/article/iran-us-oil-tanker-seizure-strait-of-hormuz-e838ea969907ee39a8c7f949a96aa777). In response, the U.S. Navy released video from a drone showing a dozen small craft herding the tanker to an Iranian port.

Given the seizure one week earlier, our navy had sufficient warning to position armed drones, aircraft, and ships. Our navy commander should have requested permission to open fire on the small pirate craft, while avoiding the tanker. Had that request been made, the president would decide publicly, yes or no. The U.S. Navy took instead video, acting as a de facto flack to publicize Iran’s brazen coup.

For seven decades, our navy has been the guarantor of commerce and safe passage in international waters. Now our navy does nothing when Iran indulges in open piracy. Iran is gaining control of the Persian Gulf.

### 1AR — ! — Populism

#### Populists will ensure nuclear war.

Hymans ’22 [Jacques; 2022; PhD, Government, Harvard University, Professor, International Relations, University of Southern California; The Nonproliferation Review, “Responses to Meier and Vieluf,” vol. 28] TDI5

I have argued that nuclear-armed establishments are more dangerous than Meier and Vieluf suggest. Now I will also argue that nuclear-armed populists are dangerous for even more reasons than Meier and Vieluf enumerate.

Meier and Vieluf’s article does not do enough with its basic definition of nationalist populism as a black–white oppositional stance toward internal as well as external enemies. If we take that definition seriously, it becomes apparent that the biggest problem stemming from the rise of populists is not that they might ignore the advice of traditional nuclear and defense establishments and behave carelessly toward foreign powers. The biggest problem is that populism is a gateway drug to internal political violence, revolution, and civil war.12 And, perhaps needless to say, serious domestic upheaval in a nuclear power also increases the likelihood of a nuclear incident of some kind.

Perhaps the first-ever populist government in history was led by the Jacobin faction that drove the French Revolution forward from 1792 to 1794.13 The Jacobins expressed a radical populist faith in the power of “redemptive violence” by “the people.” 14 They made war both inside and outside France. To quote historian Brian Singer, the Jacobins’ violence was directed neither “at a well-defined enemy” nor “at some limited, short-term end, but to the creation of a new regime, a new humanity.” 15 In short, they wanted to raze the old world to the ground—or die trying. The Jacobins’ favorite metaphor for their violence was lightning, which materializes from out of nowhere to simultaneously destroy and enlighten the dark world it strikes. Their interest in lightning was not only metaphorical; Jacobin ideologues such as Jean-Paul Marat were serious students of the new science of electricity.16 France and the world are lucky that nuclear physics was not very far advanced in the Jacobins’ day.

None of the contemporary nuclear-armed populist leaders listed by Meier and Vieluf is a modern-day Jacobin. Most populists are merely unprincipled con artists who prey on atomized and insecure sections of the public, manipulating them to gain personal wealth and power. Even so, the language of populism is the language of revolution and civil war, and pretend revolutionaries can easily be carried along by the tide of social resentments that they have irresponsibly stirred up. Take, for instance, Trump and his followers’ dismal trajectory to January 6, 2021. We need to consider worst-case scenarios.

Trump did not actually want a civil war in the United States, but his rhetoric emboldened the not-so-small number of Americans who do. A rigorous time-series analysis found that Trump’s presidential run in 2016 was associated with an abrupt, statistically significant, and durable increase in violent attacks by domestic far-right extremists.17 For instance, the leading ideologist of the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division, James Mason, wrote in July 2017, “I am not ashamed to say that I shed a tear of joy at [Trump’s] win.” 18 Far from standing back and standing by, Mason preached direct action to “accelerate” the onset of a society-purifying race war that he believed would push the Trump administration into embracing full-blown fascism. In May 2017, an Atomwaffen member, National Guard veteran, and onetime physics major named Brandon Russell was arrested for plotting to attack the Turkey Point nuclear power plant, among other targets. Police later also found traces of thorium and americium in Russell’s bedroom.19

The domestic divisions fomented by populists do not have to arrive at their logical end point of revolution and civil war to increase deterrence instability and the chances of a nuclear incident. Below I elaborate three more specific hypotheses on the deterrence consequences of internally divisive populist governments. The hypotheses are speculative, but they logically follow from the definition of populism and should therefore serve as useful points for further discussion of Meier and Vieluf’s core idea.

Hypothesis 1. Populists are likely to be insensitive to nuclear threats to the political strongholds of their domestic opponents. Meier and Vieluf observe that the credibility of US extended-deterrence promises to America’s allies suffered massively under the Trump administration. That is certainly true, but the question of whether the United States would be willing to trade “Pittsburgh for Paris” (p. 19) has been around for decades. The new problem that populism creates is that even homeland deterrence starts to suffer from the same credibility dilemmas as extended deterrence. In addition to the “Pittsburgh for Paris” question, we now also have to ask whether a populist administration in Washington would be willing to trade Pittsburgh for Portland.

In a country where populist leaders revel in dividing society against itself, deterrence theory’s standard assumption that a nuclear threat to any part of the homeland will be treated as a threat to the whole homeland can no longer be taken for granted.20 Whatever the president’s true intentions, foreign powers could potentially calculate that they will not be punished for striking at certain targets within the country’s borders.21 For instance, the longest-range North Korean missile that is currently operational, the Hwasong-14, has enough range for a nuclear attack against Seattle but not Mar-a-Lago. 22 Would the same president who formally designated Seattle as an “anarchist jurisdiction” in an attempt to starve it of federal dollars be greatly concerned by a credible threat of a North Korean strike against it? 23 Probably—but is “probably” a good enough answer for homeland deterrence credibility?

Another dimension of this same hypothesis has to do with the precise locations where populists choose to install military installations that are likely to become nuclear targets. During the Nixon administration, the objections of congressional Democrats to the planned construction of Sentinel anti-ballistic-missile facilities near their political strongholds such as Boston and Seattle led Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to move the projects to less populated areas.24 President Nixon believed that he needed to work constructively with the Democrats on core national security issues. By contrast, a populist president would love to see his political opponents sweating the targets he put on their backs.25

Populists in power may even be slow to help their political opponents’ regions recover from an actual nuclear attack. There is a lesson for nuclear analysts in the Trump administration’s intentional slow-walking of congressionally mandated emergency aid to the US territory of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017, one of the deadliest natural disasters in US history.26 Having long held a low opinion of Puerto Ricans, Trump reportedly told his chief of staff and budget director that he “did not want a single dollar going to Puerto Rico.” 27 Would Trump have been any more helpful if the island had been hit by a man-made bomb instead of a natural one? Maybe if Puerto Rico could do something for him in return, which leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Populists are likely to exploit their control over homeland deterrence to demand political concessions from their domestic political opponents. At the heart of populism is a disrespect for the principle of equal application of the laws. Instead, governance becomes a pure power game, and populist rulers notably exploit crises as opportunities to bring domestic political opponents to their knees. There is every reason to assume that a populist in full command of the nuclear and defense establishment would similarly take advantage of a nuclear crisis to conduct such a shakedown. In other words, populists in power will charge a high price for adequately responding to nuclear threats against their domestic opponents’ political strongholds.

Let us continue with the example of the Trump administration. The mass-destructive COVID-19 pandemic offers a highly relevant analogy for thinking about the internal political dynamics of a potential nuclear crisis under populist rule. Public-administration scholars have labeled Trump’s governing approach as “chaotic transactional federalism,” a cynical power system that “removes any vestige of certainty as decisions are shaped based on a desire to reward or punish other political actors, or left to subnational actors entirely. Expertise matters very little in these political, partisan transactions.” 28 In line with this, Trump responded to the COVID-19 crisis by pitting the 50 states against each other in bidding wars for vital medical supplies and for his political favor.29 The president publicly criticized Vice President Mike Pence for reaching out to all the state governors in his role as the coordinator of the national pandemic response, telling the press that he wanted Pence to deal only with those governors who were sufficiently “appreciative.” 30 Trump administration officials were even blunter in private. Trump’s son-in-law and closest adviser Jared Kushner reportedly said that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo “didn’t pound the phones hard enough to get PPE [personal protective equipment] for his state … . His people are going to suffer and that’s their problem.” 31 Trump’s response to the Democratic governors’ pleas for PPE to defend against the virus was essentially the same as his response to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s pleas for weapons to defend against Russia: “I would like you to do us a favor though.” 32

The hypothesis that populists will demand concessions from their domestic political opponents in exchange for issuing nuclear-deterrent threats on their behalf may at first glance appear to be only a matter of internal politics, but the distractions caused by internal political wrangling could greatly affect the denouement of a time-sensitive nuclear crisis. Foreign powers could also be tempted to initiate a nuclear crisis precisely in order to intensify their adversary’s domestic divisions. In addition, when facing the double burden of a nuclear threat and simultaneous shakedown by the president, politicians from disfavored regions would likely appeal to friendly elements of the military for assistance. That possibility tees up the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. The establishment’s reaction to populism is likely to increase deterrence instability at least as much as the actions of the populists themselves. Meier and Vieluf’s article implies that the fate of the world hangs on the establishment’s ability to keep populist fingers off the nuclear button. But the establishment’s effort to fend off the populists could itself dramatically increase deterrence instability, for instance by sowing confusion about the chain of command. This hypothesis is not mere speculation. Reacting to widespread fears that Trump might be tempted to launch a nuclear attack against China or another country after his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden, in January 2021, General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, quietly worked the phone lines to reassure key people at home and abroad that he personally would not allow the president to do anything of the sort. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs is legally outside the chain of command for the execution of the president’s military strategy. Indeed, neither he nor anyone else has the legal authority to prevent a determined president from launching a nuclear strike.33 Yet Milley told Pelosi, “The president alone can order the use of nuclear weapons. But he doesn’t make the decision alone. One person can order it, several people have to launch it.” 34 Essentially, Milley was saying that if push came to shove, the military would mutiny. Meier and Vieluf seem to think that Milley did the right thing (pp. 15–16). Maybe so, but he also set an ominous precedent.

As I mentioned at the outset, these comments are simply intended to spark further discussion about the important issues raised by Meier and Vieluf’s stimulating article. I would be relieved to discover that I am being overly pessimistic about humanity’s chances of survival with either the establishments or the populists in charge of nuclear arsenals. But the more I study the issue, the more pessimistic I become.

### 1AR — AO — Environmental Destruction

#### Bases cause environmental destruction.

Behnam 20 – [Reza, Ph.D., political scientist whose specialties include American foreign policy and the history, politics and governments of the Middle East “America’s Devastating Legacy of Endless Wars in the Middle East.” Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, <https://www.wrmea.org/2021-january-february/americas-devastating-legacy-of-endless-wars-in-the-middle-east.html>, December 14, 2020] TDI

PRESIDENT-ELECT Joseph Biden has advocated for domestic policies focused on equity, decency, justice and climate change. These noble principles cannot be achieved at home if they are not practiced abroad. If the new administration is serious about establishing America’s moral authority in the world, it must change its behavior in the Middle East—a region that has suffered profoundly as a result of policies that have been devoid of these ethical precepts.

The Bush administration’s decision after the attacks of 9/11 to use force in Afghanistan, Iraq and in its “war on terror,” has damaged and destabilized a region already struggling with severe political and environmental difficulties. Although America’s endless wars have been a windfall for the Pentagon and weapons manufacturers, the human toll has been enormous.

Less attention, however, has been paid to the devastating impact on the region’s land, air and water caused by the military’s industrialized warfare. Additionally, as the major arms dealer, the U.S. has catalyzed conflict in a volatile part of the world.

For decades, the U.S. military’s main purpose in the Persian Gulf has been to safeguard the flow of oil. It uses a massive amount of fossil fuel defending its access to the fossil fuel of the Gulf and in protecting the autocratic regimes that guarantee U.S. control. The Pentagon—the largest institutional user of petroleum—consumes more than 320,000 barrels of oil a day (not including fuel used by contractors).

In protecting its investment, the U.S. has wreaked havoc on the environment of the Middle East. Exempt from climate agreements, the Pentagon is one of the world’s biggest polluters. Since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, it is estimated that the U.S. military has emitted 1.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide—blamed for global warming—into the atmosphere.

An environmental assessment, conducted by the United Nations Environment Program after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, concluded that, “Iraq’s environmental contamination is one of the more serious cases of conflict pollution that UNEP has investigated.”

The war has caused irreversible environmental damage not only to Iraq, but to its neighbors. In its spurious pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—a stated intent of the war—the U.S. has overwhelmed the country with the toxic remains from our own WMD. Military debris including unexploded ordnances, spent cartridges, abandoned military vehicles and depleted uranium from munitions, has contaminated Iraq’s soil, its water supply, and has been linked to an epidemic of birth defects and cancer.

Once the breadbasket of the Middle East, Iraq now imports 80 percent of its food. Its food chain has been disrupted by war-related toxins such as white phosphorous, mercury and lead, which are used in making bullets and bombs. Destruction of military garbage in burn pits has exposed civilians, as well as U.S. soldiers, to dangerous toxins. Radioactive depleted uranium weapons were used in Iraq hundreds of thousands of times, and again during U.S. bombing assaults on Syria.

Acute chemical pollution from the bombing of chemical, industrial and military sites such as weapons factories and oil refineries, which can burn for years, have further stressed the region’s natural ecosystem. In 2019, the U.S. dropped 7,423 bombs and other munitions in Afghanistan alone.

Military bases are among the worst polluters. The U.S. currently has at least 35 military installations in nine Persian Gulf countries, including five in Iraq. Hazardous chemicals commonly used on military and air bases, such as solvents, pesticides, heavy metals, asbestos and jet fuel, often seep or spill into local aquifers, drinking water and soil.

#### Extinction.

Abegão ’22 [João L. R.; Ph.D. Candidate in Environmental History at the University of Lisbon, Master's Degree in Ecology and Environment, “The Limits of Sustainability: Lessons from Past Societal Collapse and Transformation, for a Civilization Currently Defying Humanity’s Safe Operating Space,” Sustainable Policies and Practices in Energy, Environment and Health Research: Addressing Cross-Cutting Issues, p. 439-440]

1 Introduction

Twenty-First Century industrial society (hereafter, civilizational project) remains bound by the same constraints that brought about the collapse or transformation of past complex societies. However, the current anthropic impact and the degree of complexity are far apart from anything humanity has previously achieved. Indeed, a case can certainly be made that the biophysical limits that govern the safe operating space for humanity have or are being breached (Rees 2020; Rockström et al. 2009; McLaughlin 2018; Dasgupta 2021). Thus, concern over the potential fate of modern industrial society has been raised (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 2013; Gowdy 2020; Capon 2020); as ecosystems shift or collapse (Kareiva and Carranza 2018), non-human life declines or slips into extinction (McCauley et al. 2015; Dirzo et al. 2014); the climate is disrupted through anthropogenic action (Ripple et al. 2019), and deforestation and population grow unimpeded (Bologna and Aquino 2020; Bystroff 2021). As the fabric of human civilization is eroded (Convention on Biological Diversity 2020), the way humans can inhabit this Earth will be transformed (Halstead 2018; Steffen et al. 2018), with global catastrophic risks being elevated to an eminent concern (Carpenter and Bishop 2009; Kuhlemann 2019; Beard et al. 2021).

As a result, more than 250 scientists and academics have published a letter (Weyhenmeyer et al. 2020) alerting to the risk of societal collapse, where they affirmed:

As scientists and scholars from around the world, we call on policymakers to engage with the risk of disruption and even collapse of societies […] Researchers in many areas consider societal collapse a credible scenario this century.

Many explanations have been advanced to make sense of the historical trends and sporadic events that have led to profound transformations or the collapse of past complex societies. ‘Collapse’ in itself has become a popular word, with its meaning dissolved. However, it is explicit that it relates to a political, demographic, economic, ecological cause or some sequence or amalgamation of these1 (Johnson 2017; Middleton 2017; Bárta 2020). Under these circumstances, it is argued that the determinants that led to crises and protracted recovery or collapse of former complex societies do not just remain fully at work but are more significant than ever. This is linked to cumulative historical influence, changes to their severity (how bad the consequences can become), magnitude (how many people are affected), probability (likelihood of materialization), and loss of resilience (the capacity to absorb disturbances and rebound).

## 1AR — ADV — Rightsizing

### 1AR — AT: Retrenchment Turn

#### Afghanistan and Iraq thump OR misperception is inevitable.

Lopez 23 – [Todd, Writer and Editor, United States Department of Defense, “Defense Official Says U.S. Remains Committed to Middle East.” U.S. Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3417495/defense-official-says-us-remains-committed-to-middle-east/>, June 5, 2023] TDI

"The significant capabilities across our Navy, our Air Force, our Army and our Marines — it's still in the region," Dana Stroul told the Jerusalem Post during an interview yesterday in New York City. "And they're still doing those important activities every day."

Although the U.S. at one time had more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan and more than 160,000 troops in Iraq, the military pulled out of Afghanistan completely in 2021. And, in Iraq, operations are limited now to just a handful of troops performing advise-and-assist missions only.

But elsewhere in U.S. Central Command, the U.S. force presence hasn't changed, said Stroul. Despite a public focus on the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. has maintained troop levels and a presence.

"Our senior leaders talk about China as the pacing challenge and Russia as the acute threat," Stroul said. "What our friends and allies in the Middle East don't hear is ... how the United States racks and stacks the threats and how we're going to prepare for them. And people are nervous. They think it means that the United States and the U.S. government is deprioritizing the Middle East."

#### More thumpers – nuclear deal, Saudi relations, Afghanistan.

Hale 23 – [Erin, reporter. “Can China Replace the US in the Middle East?” Business and Economy | Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/4/25/can-china-replace-the-us-in-the-middle-east>, April 25, 2023] TDI

All of this comes at a time when the influence of the United States — traditionally the biggest power broker in the Middle East — has waned, according to many analysts. The US decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal, its blow-hot-blow-cold relationship with Saudi Arabia, and its long occupation and chaotic withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan have hurt its credibility. Domestic politics have also kept the US distracted, as has a growing wariness among the American public about the country’s decades-long role as a global policeman.

#### It's impossible to predict or quantify and military presence emboldens adversarial acquisition.

Logan 20 – [Justin, director of defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He is an expert on U.S. grand strategy, international relations theory, and American foreign policy. His current research focuses on the shifting balance of power in Asia—specifically with regard to China—and the limited relevance of the Middle East to U.S. national security. “The Case for Withdrawing from the Middle East” Defense Priorities, <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/the-case-for-withdrawing-from-the-middle-east>, September 30, 2020] TDI

A concern related both to the fear of a regional hegemon and to Israel’s well-being concerns the longstanding U.S. goal of slowing or preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. U.S. policymakers have generally opposed the spread of nuclear weapons to both its partners and its adversaries since the dawn of the nuclear age. Washington opposes nuclear acquisition in its partners because it would diminish U.S. influence with those countries and grant them more say in decisions about their own defense. Washington opposes nuclear acquisition in its adversaries because, as Kenneth Waltz wrote, “if weak countries have some, they will cramp our style. Militarily punishing small countries for behavior we dislike would become much more perilous.”30

The U.S. presence in the Middle East likely makes its partners feel somewhat more secure and its adversaries somewhat less secure. If we were able to quantify the two effects, we could judge their value against one another, but they are impossible to quantify.

Even given the U.S. presence in the region, American partners in the Middle East seem to have an unslakable thirst for protection and reassurance. In the words of one former Pentagon official, they “are always trying to get us to pour more concrete.”31 Israel and the Gulf Arab states persistently request U.S. security assistance and claim their insecurity requires it. The U.S. provides almost $4 billion in military aid to Israel each year32 and the Gulf Arabs purchase tens of billions of dollars of military hardware each year.33

At the same time, Iran sees itself surrounded by hostile states, all of whom are backed to one degree or another by the U.S. American political leaders have consistently threatened Iran with preventive attack, made fanciful demands of it, and attacked Iraq and Libya while leaving North Korea alone. The obvious lesson has not been lost on Tehran.34 Even so, Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015, which made the prospect of a nuclear Iran during the period covered by the agreement close to zero. Some analysts, including this author, questioned whether Iran would feel it could trust American commitments under the agreement, but it did so, complying with its own commitments under the deal—until the Trump administration reneged, of course.35

If the U.S. withdrew its troops from the Middle East, Saudi Arabia in particular may amplify its hints at interest in a nuclear deterrent.36 It is possible that Iran could then race for the bomb as well, though the shift in U.S. policy would undermine its incentives to do so. But the logics of nuclear acquisition apply to these states just as to any other state. Neither country has meaningful offensive military capability and nuclear weapons do not let states simply get their way in international politics. This limits their appeal, particularly given the significant economic and political costs of going nuclear.

Historically, the spread of nuclear weapons has been slow and halting, for reasons that have little to do with American regional domination.37 Americans should oppose the spread of nuclear weapons, but keeping in mind the consequences and with an eye on what is most effective. The present policy makes adversaries more likely to seek them.

### 1AR — AT: ! — Asian Prolif

#### **Asian allied prolif is necessary for deterrence, inevitable and no impact. San Antonio for Seoul makes nuclear war more likely.**

Kelly ’22 — [Robert, professor of political science at Pusan National University. “The U.S. Should Get Out of the Way in East Asia’s Nuclear Debates” *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/15/us-south-korea-japan-east-asia-nuclear-debates-nonproliferation/>, July 15, 2022] TDI

Alternatives to direct South Korean/Japanese nuclear deterrence of North Korean WMDs are soft. Extended nuclear deterrence is weakly credible if it means nuked U.S. cities to defend South Korea or Japan. Missile defense does not work well enough to provide a roof against as many weapons North Korea appears to be building. China will not take serious action to stop Pyongyang. A negotiated deal — the best solution and hence discussed at length below — might control Pyongyang’s programs somewhat via missile or warhead limits or inspector access. But North Korea seems unwilling to negotiate seriously, is an untrustworthy counterparty, is unlikely to cut enough to relieve the existential threat its WMDs now pose to South Korea and Japan, and would demand exorbitant counter-concessions as payment.

This poor option set is already forcing “thinking the unthinkable” discussions in the region. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol has suggested preemptive strikes on North Korean missile sites in a crisis, and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe suggested the return of U.S. nuclear weapons to the region. The sheer precarity of South Korean and Japanese exposure to a nuclearized/missile Orwellian tyranny — which will be evident yet again this year if Pyongyang tests another nuclear weapon as predicted — will make it increasingly awkward for the United States to hegemonically insist that Seoul, and Tokyo even, may not investigate all security options.

Worse, U.S. resistance to allied nuclearization assumes a traditional American internationalism that is no longer assured. One of the United States’ two parties increasingly disdains alliances and admires authoritarianism. If former U.S. President Donald Trump — or a similar Trumpist — retakes the U.S. presidency in 2024, American opposition to East Asian allies’ nuclearization will decline dramatically — if only because the United States will no longer care what they do. As president, Trump was more interested in personal relationships with regional autocrats like Chinese President Xi Jinping or North Korean leader Kim Jong Un than with traditional U.S. partners. He notoriously “fell in love” with Kim and signaled a desire to “blow up” the US-ROK alliance if re-elected. He also hinted at breaking the 1951 U.S.-Japan security treaty. So, there is a reasonable chance that South Korea will nuclearize after 2024 regardless of what the Americans think. U.S. abandonment of South Korea would also push the Japanese nuclearization discussion to the right.

This would not be the first time the United States has tacitly accepted another country’s nuclearization. Ostensibly, the United States has supported the NPT for decades. In practice though, Washington tolerates at least five other states — Britain, France, Israel, India, and Pakistan — being unwilling to build down their stockpiles. Using the vague standard implied by these examples — friendship with the United States; reasonable state capacity; and at least theoretically, democratic rule — South Korea and Japan more than clear the bar for what is effectively a U.S. NPT exemption.

Judged by U.S. behavior toward NPT contravention, the NPT is better understood as a U.S. effort to prevent unfriendly or hostile states from nuclearizing rather than as a blanket, “Global Zero” commitment to fewer nuclear weapons in the world. The United States does not pressure friendly nuclear weapons states, including itself, to meet NPT requirements. It gave up sanctioning India and Pakistan’s violation after just three years. Applying this more honest standard of U.S. interests to arms control, the NPT is of questionable utility in East Asia.

China, Russia, and North Korea already possess nuclear weapons and show no signs of building down. So there is no regional nuclearization cascade for South Korea or Japan to provoke, because it has already happened. . And Taiwanese nuclearization is unlikely, as Taiwanese elites are quite aware that their nuclearization would provoke China.

Next, there is an under-discussed NPT downside: It provokes the alliance-debilitating, “New York for Paris” debates mentioned above. If U.S. allies do not nuclearize and must rely on U.S. nuclear weapons for nuclear deterrence, then they will inevitably question whether the United States will use those weapons in their defense if that might incur a retaliatory nuclear strike on the U.S. homeland. The answer to that question is almost certainly no, as then-French President Charles de Gaulle realized 61 years ago. The easiest way to reduce this bitter, alliance-undermining dissension is to let U.S. allies self-insure via indigenous nuclearization.

Finally, South Korean/Japanese nuclearization could serve shared regional interests by providing supplemental, local deterrence (as British and French nukes did during the Cold War) and by improving alliance burden-sharing. Further, the threat of South Korean/Japanese nuclearization might finally prompt Pyongyang and Beijing to take North Korean denuclearization negotiations seriously. Should South Korea and Japan respect the NPT and Global Zero plan while China, Russia, and North Korea do as they will, the effective outcome is unilateral disarmament. This is politically and strategically infeasible; we regrettably live in a world of persistent nuclear armament.

Global Zero advocates, such as political scientist Scott Sagan, worry about the transactional issues of WMD possession because they are uniquely dangerous weapons. Indeed, theft, loss, rogue scientists, and so on are legitimate fears. But they are no more resonant with South Korea or Japan than with any other nuclear weapons state. Indeed, as liberal democracies with robust state capacities and preexisting, well-managed nuclear energy programs, they will likely be quite responsible, as Britain and France have been.

No one seriously believes Seoul or Tokyo will launch an out-of-the-blue, nuclear-first strike on an opponent; set up something like the A.Q. Khan proliferation network; sell WMDs to terrorists or other rogues; put Homer Simpson in charge of nuclear safety; or be so sloppy as to require something like the Nunn-Lugar program. Even Pakistan and India have been better with their arsenals than the panic of the late 1990s suggested. Even dictatorships have been cautious about these issues. And as democracies with a history of foreign-policy restraint, democratic peace theory suggests they would be good stewards, certainly better than East Asia’s autocratic nuclear powers.

There is generalized anxiety about a regional arms race, which South Korean/Japanese nuclearization might exacerbate. Perhaps, but as noted above, there is no local cascade to be sparked because it has already occurred. China, Russia, and North Korea have all moved first. China and Russia have established nuclear arsenals and no intention of complying with the build-down imperative. Russia’s growing rhetorical invocation of its nuclear weapons is a disturbing evolution. North Korea repeatedly agreed, non-bindingly since 1992, to avoid nuclear weapons — only to exit the NPT and keep building. It now has intercontinental ballistic missiles and several dozen nuclear warheads.

Ostensibly, South Korea and Japan are not competing in this race — but only because they outsource their nuclear deterrence to the United States. Extended deterrence does not remove the U.S.-Japan-South Korea alliance on WMDs from the East Asian security discussion. It only means they are not located in-theater. That may have value in keeping China from building more WMDs (although it is already doing so) or Russia from playing the nuclear card in the region as it does in Europe. But it is not stopping North Korea. And that is the core issue—always and again.

### 1AR — AT: Chinese Hegemony

#### China is certainly capable of regional hegemony in Asia.

**Brown 21** [Gerald, Defense Analyst, Valiant Integrated Services; Arms Control Association, "Understanding the Risks and Realities of China’s Nuclear Forces," <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-06/features/understanding-risks-realities-chinas-nuclear-forces>, June 1, 2021] TDI

Unlike Russia and the United States, China has found nuclear weapons to be of rather limited utility in war-fighting. It built what it describes as a “lean and effective” nuclear deterrent, with the intentions of deterring a nuclear attack and preventing nuclear coercion.1 Strategists in Beijing have long thought that the destructive force of nuclear weapons limits their utility, while conventional forces are more flexible and usable in conflict. Conventional forces are thought to be where wars are won or lost.2 In that sense, China’s nuclear forces are intended to check U.S. nuclear dominance while winning conventional conflicts at lower levels of escalation. To make that happen, China is seeking to build a nuclear force capable of surviving a nuclear first strike and retaliating with an unacceptable level of damage. Experts have perhaps best described China’s nuclear strategy as one of “assured retaliation.”3 Instead of seeking parity with other nuclear states and being able to engage in counterforce campaigns, China finds it sufficient to maintain a more modest, secure, and survivable force. If China can sufficiently absorb a first strike and retaliate, even with only a few warheads, Beijing believes an adversary is unlikely to decide that the risk of attacking China is worth the benefit.

Since China’s first nuclear test in 1964, it has consistently maintained a public, declaratory no-first-use policy, adhering to what it describes as a “self-defensive nuclear strategy” that would anticipate using nuclear weapons only as a “counterattack in self-defense.”4 Western analysts have rightfully pointed out that a no-first-use pledge may not be entirely credible on its own. Although the pledge may be sincerely held, during a crisis, escalation could be unpredictable. Additionally, a small number of Chinese analysts have suggested that what China defines as a counterattack may be ambiguous under certain, limited conditions, such as conventional attacks seeking to neutralize China’s nuclear forces.5

Despite Western doubts, the fact remains that Chinese strategists believe that the pledge holds true. An unambiguous no-first-use stance remains the official stance of the Chinese government, and China’s nuclear strategy is built around this concept. Authoritative texts on Chinese military thinking have described three major missions for Chinese nuclear forces. In peacetime, they seek to deter enemies from launching a nuclear war with China. In wartime, they constrain the scope of war, preventing a conventional conflict from escalating to a nuclear exchange. If war does escalate to nuclear conflict, they serve to conduct nuclear counterattacks.6 The texts consistently describe only one envisioned use of nuclear weapons, the nuclear counterattack operation, in response to a nuclear strike.7

Operational practices have reinforced this. Beijing maintains a highly centralized nuclear warhead storage and handling system, with warheads typically thought to be stored unmated from their delivery vehicles rather than loaded and ready for launch.8 Further, training for nuclear brigades reflects the practice of counterattacking under nuclear conditions. Yet, there are indications of evolution. Recent U.S. government reports have suggested that some People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) brigades may spend time on higher alert and may seek to shift to a launch-on-warning posture in the future in order to increase survivability under nuclear attack. China has been developing a space-based early-warning system with assistance from Russia that could support this.9

Nuclear Force Projections

As the U.S. annual threat assessment noted, there are signs of recent substantial changes in Chinese nuclear forces. The most important changes have been primarily qualitative, but notable quantitative changes are also occurring. These are understandably alarming to U.S. policymakers. Although the size of Chinese nuclear forces may still be dwarfed by the U.S. arsenal, its growth represents a substantial complication for the United States. Further, although the United States and Russia are modernizing their arsenals, they have been reducing their stockpiles over the past few decades slowly but significantly. China’s nuclear expansion represents a concerning shift away from its obligations under the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to reduce its arsenal, and that is likely to impact U.S. and Russian decision-making.

Yet, understanding these changes in the context of China’s nuclear strategy is important. Instead of trying to reach parity with or exceed the U.S. nuclear arsenal, China seems intent on ensuring that it has an assured retaliatory capability following U.S. strikes. Given U.S. nuclear and technological superiority, China likely has never had a sufficiently survivable nuclear deterrent against the United States, a goal that was more aspirational than anything else. Revolutions in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technologies, coupled with advances in conventional precision weapons, have long rendered China’s nuclear forces vulnerable. The U.S. ballistic missile defense program threatens to intercept any surviving retaliatory force, further jeopardizing China’s retaliatory capability.

For the first time in history, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) seems to be moving toward a survivable nuclear force capable of executing a second strike. Research suggests that Chinese nuclear expansions and modernization are oriented toward creation of a more mobile and redundant force that can survive U.S. counterforce capabilities, including conventional systems such as the Conventional Prompt Global Strike system, and its missiles being able to penetrate U.S. missile defense systems.10 Consequently, although China’s nuclear force size will expand, it does not appear likely to expand to the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal in the near future.

There is understandable doubt about the claim of China doubling its nuclear arsenal, but it does not appear to be out of the question. China is fielding an increasing number of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle weapons, such as the DF-5B deployed in 2015 and the recently deployed DF-5C and DF-41, that improve the ability of China’s intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) arsenal to penetrate the U.S. missile defense system.11 Defense Department estimates do not appear to include the DF-41, which is just starting to be deployed. Installing multiple warheads on these weapons will quickly expand the number of nuclear weapons in China’s arsenal. Further, PLARF brigades have been increasing at an unprecedented rate. The number of PLARF brigades reportedly increased from 29 to 40 between 2017 and 2020, and brigades continue to be added as new missile types are fielded.12

China’s shift to a nuclear triad will further increase the number of its nuclear warheads as these new systems are equipped. China is creating a more survivable nuclear submarine force, expanding the number of Type 094 ballistic missile submarines and developing the quieter Type 096 submarine with the JL-3 sea-launched ballistic missile as a complement. The PLA Air Force is also adopting a nuclear mission by developing a new air-launched ballistic missile that may be nuclear capable, as well as the nuclear-capable H-20 strategic bomber.13

[Chart omitted]

Significantly, not all of China’s nuclear weapons are intercontinental forces capable of striking targets located in the continental United States. China has invested in nuclear weapons that specifically threaten the immediate region. Its new air capabilities, along with recently deployed midrange and intermediate-range ballistic missiles such as the DF-21E and the DF-26, hold regional adversaries and U.S. overseas bases at risk. China also recently deployed a new hypersonic glide vehicle, the DF-17, that may be nuclear capable. Importantly, although China’s nuclear expansion may be oriented toward a strategy of assured retaliation, that does not prevent Beijing from orienting its expanding nuclear capabilities toward a more threatening posture in the future. As China’s capabilities expand, its operational doctrine may well follow suit.

Emboldened Conventional Operations

China’s nuclear forces can be considerably more concerning when not considered in isolation from other tools of war. Analysts and policymakers need to look at how nuclear weapons can affect the broader picture of warfare, including how they impact PLA conventional operations and the type of wars China envisions fighting.

China’s military strategy is focused on “winning informationized local wars,” effectively local, high tech wars in which the information domain will play a dominant role. Although the PLA’s reach is increasingly global, it has oriented itself toward local conflicts, with a particular emphasis on maritime conflicts, as the main war-fighting domain. This primarily concerns Taiwan but also the East and South China seas among others.14 In 2015, the PLA made a drastic change to its command structure, orienting itself into joint war-fighting theater commands, directly geared to fighting in these regions. The PLA seeks to deter the United States from intervening in these local wars or to defeat the United States locally if it does.

In these local wars, nuclear overmatch against the United States is hardly necessary. Instead, China is more concerned with preventing U.S. nuclear coercion and intervention and constraining the scope of any war that may erupt. PLA strategists appear to believe that the United States would not intervene in a conflict that did not directly threaten the United States if there was a risk that the conflict could escalate to the nuclear level.15 As Zhao Xijun, former deputy commander of the Second Artillery Force, has said, states “become very cautious” when contemplating military intervention against other nuclear-armed states.16

Evidence suggests that a secure second-strike force may even embolden the PLA in local conventional conflicts, allowing them to accept greater risks at lower levels of escalation. That especially holds true when considering that all sides in China’s multiple territorial claims perceive themselves as defending the status quo.17 Research has revealed the PLA’s overconfidence in its ability to control conventional escalation. Unlike in the case of nuclear weapons, Chinese documents emphasize “seizing the initiative” early in conventional conflicts. They envision using tools such as cyberwarfare and conventional missiles early, hard, and fast, even preemptively.18 Although the focus of these writings is not nuclear weapons use, conventional operations could be emboldened by perceptions of nuclear stability.

## 1AR — CP — Integrated Posture

### 1AR — SD — General

#### Can’t solve either advantage. Military solutions encourage regional competition, prop up dictators, and don’t serve national security interests.

Goldenberg & Thomas 20 – [Ilan, former Senior Fellow and Director of the Middle East Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. He is a foreign policy and defense expert with extensive government experience covering Iran’s nuclear program, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the broader challenges facing the Middle East. He holds a master’s degree in international Affairs from Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs, & Kaleigh, former Associate Fellow for the Middle East Security Program and 2020 recipient of the 1LT Andrew J. Bacevich Jr., USA Award at CNAS. Kaleigh has her master’s degree in international peace and conflict resolution from American University, where her studies focused on peacebuilding and terrorism. “Demilitarizing U.S. Policy in the Middle East.” Center for a New American Security, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/demilitarizing-u-s-policy-in-the-middle-east#:~:text=U.S.%20military%20interventions%20in%20Iraq%20and%20Libya%E2%80%94and%20to,in%20places%20such%20as%20Egypt%20and%20Saudi%20Arabia>, July 20, 2020] TDI

America’s policies in the Middle East over the past 20 years have exacerbated this dynamic. U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Libya—and to a lesser extent in Syria and Yemen—have fueled the fires of civil war. Propping up dictators has entrenched corrupt ineffective governments. The sale of billions of dollars in weapons has only entrenched the security state in places such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Taking sides in the intense competition between different regional blocs has encouraged competition. Common among all these mistakes is the emphasis on military solutions—not diplomatic and economic ones. This stands in strong contrast to U.S. policy in Asia and Europe, where the U.S. military is certainly part of the equation but not the exclusive driver.

Reimagining U.S. Policy: A More Sustainable, Limited Approach to the Middle East

America’s militarized policies in the Middle East do not serve its national security interests. In reimagining America’s approach to the region, U.S. policy should be crafted around the following four principles.

Define U.S. interests in the region more narrowly.

The United States needs to start by redefining its interests in the region.[8](https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/demilitarizing-u-s-policy-in-the-middle-east#fn8) The nation does not need to be in the Middle East because of oil. Thanks to the shale revolution today, America is a net exporter that gets almost no oil from the Middle East. Global markets are still significantly impacted by the flow of oil out of the region, but not to the extent that justifies the United States playing the role of singularly guaranteeing the flow of energy resources through the region’s key choke points. U.S. regional presence is also not about defending Israel, which has the most powerful military in the Middle East and a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) higher than those of most countries in Western Europe. It is a valuable partner of the United States, but the days of its dependence on America to defend it are over.

Nor should U.S. policy be concerned with rolling back Iran’s influence everywhere in the Middle East.[9](https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/demilitarizing-u-s-policy-in-the-middle-east#fn9) While Iran is often portrayed as a boogeyman, it is ultimately a weak middling power with the GDP of New Jersey but nine times as many residents.[10](https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/demilitarizing-u-s-policy-in-the-middle-east#fn10) It is a problematic actor that needs to be countered, contained, and, when possible, engaged, but making that the centerpiece of U.S. policy in the region is a mistake. And the United States cannot intervene in every conflict in the region in the name of preventing terrorism. The United States should certainly take steps to defend itself and contain and manage the threat, but trying to “solve” or eliminate terrorism is a near impossible goal.

#### International standing. Reducing military contact is key.

Gholz 21 – [Eugene, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, currently on leave as a Visiting Fellow at the Defense Priorities Foundation. He served as chair of the international security section of the International Studies Association (2019-2021) and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously held faculty positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Williams College, the University of Kentucky, and George Mason University. His Ph.D. is from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, <https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/>, June 24, 2021] TDI

Given the low risk of regional hegemony in the Middle East, what might the United States military nevertheless do to serve the U.S. national interest? First, the United States might reasonably choose to cut back on its current tool of choice in the region. For decades, much of the non-combat U.S. effort has emphasized attempts to train local forces that the United States has considered to be “friendly.” These efforts have had little payoff in terms of apparent improvements in local force quality.[54](https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/#fn54-6327) Notably, heavily trained Iraqi forces melted away in the face of ISIS attacks, and U.S.-trained Saudi forces performed poorly in Yemen, struggling against Houthi militias while killing and injuring many non-combatants. Perhaps more important, even successful training, if it were to improve Middle Eastern militaries’ ability to execute modern combined arms tactics, would augment the locals’ capabilities on both the offensive and the defensive, offering little leverage over the core issue for the U.S. national interest, namely locals’ ability to bid for regional hegemony. Reducing U.S. military contact with regional militaries could also improve the U.S. image among the people of the Middle East — or at least mitigate the conspiratorial image that the United States is the real power controlling local politics and setting the local agenda. Even those people inclined to be hostile to the United States would tend to view the U.S. military as a more distant influence rather than as a day-to-day priority on their list of complaints.[55](https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/#fn55-6327)

#### Any sustainable and stable regional order requires complete drawdown.

Gholz 21 – [Eugene, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, currently on leave as a Visiting Fellow at the Defense Priorities Foundation. He served as chair of the international security section of the International Studies Association (2019-2021) and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously held faculty positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Williams College, the University of Kentucky, and George Mason University. His Ph.D. is from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, <https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/>, June 24, 2021] TDI

If the United States genuinely seeks a more stable Middle East, it must remove its weight from the scales and allow the region to recalibrate according to its actual multipolar balance of power. By allowing regional states to balance against each other, a more sustainable regional order can emerge, one not dependent on the eternal presence of thousands of U.S. troops. This approach would better serve U.S. interests, as a multipolar balance will both prevent hostile hegemony in the region and ensure that no party can close the Strait of Hormuz.

Consequently, to preserve Americans’ physical and economic well-being more effectively, the United States should significantly draw down its military presence in the region over a period of five to 10 years.

The United States should immediately begin discussions with regional powers currently hosting U.S. troops to allow them to prepare for the U.S. drawdown. If the drawdown is made contingent upon regional stability first being achieved, the United States will risk giving countries that enjoy U.S. protection an incentive to destabilize the Middle East to prevent American troops from ever going home.

### 1AR — SD — Missile Defense

#### Allies won’t share intelligence, cooperation is slow, and mistrust and technical hurdles make a regional defense shield impossible.

Seligman & Ward 22 – [Lara, Defense reporter, covers the Pentagon for POLITICO. Her reporting on the military and the defense industry has taken her around the world, from the Middle East to Mongolia to the backseat of an Air Force Thunderbird, & Alexander, national security reporter and former associate director in the Atlantic Council's Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security where he worked on military issues and U.S. foreign policy, “Biden Wants a Middle East Air Defense ‘alliance.’ But It’s a Long Way Off.” POLITICO, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/12/biden-middle-east-air-defense-alliance-00045423>, July 12, 2022] TDI

JERUSALEM — The Biden administration is urging Arab nations to team up with Israel to counter Iranian missiles, but continued mistrust and technological differences mean any kind of alliance could be years away.

Officials and experts say a more realistic goal would be for Israel to share some intelligence with Arab states, conduct tabletop exercises together and perhaps even purchase additional compatible weaponry. That’s more attainable than a regional defense shield linking shooters with radars, satellites and other sensors, they say.

“It’s hard enough to get the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy sensors and effectors into a common command-and-control system,” said Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “It’s even more challenging when you have them coming from multiple countries in multiple languages.”

Still, Biden is expected to discuss the effort when he meets with officials in Israel and Saudi Arabia this week. The U.S. is in talks with nations in the region about “a truly more cooperative air defense” in the face of the growing threat from Iran, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters last week ahead of Biden’s trip.

“There is a growing convergence among nations in the region of concern about [Iran’s] advancing ballistic missile program and their support to terror networks,” Kirby said. Officials are “exploring the idea of being able to kind of integrate all those air defenses together, so that there truly is a more effective coverage to deal with the growing Iranian threat,” he added.

The prospect of Israel and Arab nations working together on air defense is more plausible now than when Vice President Biden visited Israel in 2016. Back then, Jerusalem had ties with only Egypt and Jordan. But Tehran’s increasingly aggressive actions in the region, coupled with several deals brokered by the Trump administration, have drastically changed the diplomatic landscape.

The Abraham Accords normalized relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco — all big buyers of U.S. weapons systems — as well as Sudan.

In recent years, Tehran and its proxies have carried out dozens of missile and drone attacks on military bases and critical infrastructure in the region, such as the 2019 strikes on oil processing facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais in Saudi Arabia. In March, Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthis claimed responsibility for a [drone attack on Saudi energy facilities](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/attack-refinery-riyadh-did-not-affect-petroleum-supplies-spa-2022-03-10/).

“The Iranians have pushed them together,” said Karako, referring to increased cooperation between Israel and Arab nations to counter threats from Tehran. “And the difference now is there is some water under the bridge with the Abraham Accords.”

Easing another potential logistical hurdle, U.S. Central Command officially assumed responsibility for Israel last September. Israel had been U.S. European Command’s responsibility.

For their part, Israeli officials have said cooperation on air defense to counter Iranian attacks is already underway, with help from the Pentagon.

“Over the past year I have been leading an extensive program, together with my partners at the Pentagon and in the U.S. administration, that will strengthen the cooperation between Israel and countries in the region,” Defense Minister Benny Gantz said last month. “This program is already operative and has already enabled the successful interception of Iranian attempts to attack Israel and other countries.”

Gulf nations have not yet acknowledged the plan. But a senior Israeli official said the goal of the so-called Middle East Air Defense Initiative is to “build some kind of architecture that integrates regional actors.”

“Whether or not you want to use the word ‘alliance,’ it’s your business but that’s the idea,” the person said on the condition of anonymity to speak freely about a sensitive issue, adding that “there is still a long way to go.”

The concept is not new: U.S. officials attempted to integrate Gulf air defenses at the end of the George W. Bush administration. But even without Israel complicating the picture, the effort failed due to mistrust between the different Arab nations, which are reluctant to share intelligence, experts said.

“I certainly think it’s more plausible and more realistic than it was 15 years ago, but I still think that you still have this roadblock of intelligence sharing,” said Mark Kimmitt, a former top Pentagon official in the Bush administration and deputy director of operations and chief military spokesperson in Iraq. “We had the same challenges 15 years ago … when you throw Israel into the mix you have other challenges.”

One of the largest hurdles is the reluctance of countries in the region to share intelligence, experts said. Nations might be more willing to contribute threat information to a “digital backbone” provided by the U.S., but it’s unlikely they would provide real-time threat data, said David Des Roches, an associate professor at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C.

“Would Israelis want to share what defense systems it has around the Damona nuclear site?” Des Roches said. “Nobody wants to show a vulnerability.”

The fact that Israel is willing to participate in an agreement like this is a positive step, he said, but “we’re nowhere near the NATO model where a multinational HQ prioritizes the threat.”

U.S. leadership is necessary for the effort to move forward, even on a limited basis, experts said.

“The region is not ready today to self-generate an integrated air and missile defense system. But the conditions exist toward making it a reality with U.S. coordination and leadership,” said R. Clarke Cooper, former assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs and now an expert at the Atlantic Council. “The U.S. has to work with the [Gulf Cooperation Council] and with each state in the Middle East to overcome information-sharing and trust issues.”

Aside from the diplomatic challenges, there are geographic and technical hurdles to overcome. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all have sophisticated air defenses: Israel operates the native Iron Dome and David’s Sling missiles, among others, while the Arab nations have bought U.S.-made Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system. In recent years, the U.S. has also deployed Patriot missile systems across Saudi Arabia.

More sensors placed in strategic locations, for instance in Qatar, are needed for more effective coverage, Karako said.

“You just need lots and lots of distributed sensors,” he noted. “There’s not enough radars in Israel to completely wallpaper the region.”

But one problem is that Saudi and the UAE also operate Chinese and Russian systems, which can’t integrate with Western equipment.

Another issue is that while Patriot and THAAD are effective against ballistic missiles, they are less potent in countering cruise missiles and drones, which are designed to hug the terrain and evade air defenses. The sensors need to be able to see “360 degrees” to detect and identify such weapons, Karako said.

“The challenge is you can have something that’s low down 360, but range will be limited by the curvature of the Earth,” he noted.

The idea of a loose missile-defense alliance alone reflects a shift toward normalization between former adversaries coalescing around a more hawkish stance toward Iran, said Caroline Rose, an analyst at the New Lines Institute.

The problem is “it’s going to take quite some time to achieve a fully-integrated air defense system between countries, in both the Gulf and the region at large.”

“Issues that stymied efforts to establish a system, such as lack of trust over information-sharing and system communications, still exist, particularly as new countries — many having served as former adversaries — enter the coalition’s fold,” she said.

#### Threshold is low. There is uncertainty about missile defense, and escalation threat is growing.

Cordesman 20 – [Anthony H., Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the CSIS in Washington, D.C. Consultant on Afghanistan to the DOD and the DOS, “The Gulf and the Challenge of Missile Defense: Net Assessment Indicators” CSIS, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gulf-and-challenge-missile-defense-net-assessment-indicators>, February 24, 2020] TDI

So far, the United States and Arab partner response is unclear. The scale and nature of the U.S. commitment to the Gulf region is becoming less and less certain, and the self-destructive tensions between Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – along with the uncertain role of Oman and Kuwait – create further major uncertainties as to what process will really be made in missile defense.

Moreover, the growing tensions between Iran, the Arab Gulf states, and the United States have already led to significant clashes at low to moderate levels that warn that deterrence has weakened and that there is both a growing threat of long wars of attrition and escalation to much higher levels of conflict. This is particularly true because Iran deals with intense pressure from U.S. sanctions and internal unrest, and the Arab partner states face a common need to fund major economic and social reform although they are already spending far more of their GDP on military forces than the United States – Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are spending close to 10%.

There is no easy way deal with so many complex and unstable variables, and much of the open literature and data now available are dated or uncertain. As a result, it seems better to present the range of key variables that now shape any net assessment of the present and future role of missile defense than to focus on a given set of scenarios with such uncertain data and constantly evolving changes.

## 1AR — DA — Terrorism

### 1AR — Terror — Link

#### Foreign military presence inspires more acute terrorism.

Gholz 21 – [Eugene, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, currently on leave as a Visiting Fellow at the Defense Priorities Foundation. He served as chair of the international security section of the International Studies Association (2019-2021) and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously held faculty positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Williams College, the University of Kentucky, and George Mason University. His Ph.D. is from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, <https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/>, June 24, 2021] TDI

Terrorism

The threat of terrorism is frequently invoked as a justification for the U.S. military to maintain a presence in countries from Afghanistan to Syria. Yet after twenty years of fighting a global war on terror (GWOT), the evidence is irrefutable: Militaries are ineffective at combating terrorism. Instead, preventing terrorism has significant parallels to preventing crime, in that it can never be fully eliminated but can be reduced through effective governance and policing activities. In contrast, the presence of a foreign military force consistently generates both grievances and acts of violence that inspire additional acts of terrorism. Foreign military occupation in particular makes the threat of terrorism more acute.

Instead of repeating the failed strategies that followed 9/11, the United States should focus on preventing any major act of foreign terrorism in domestic territory, something that it has successfully accomplished since 2001. The full elimination of all terrorist threats would require a level of state authoritarianism that Americans would find intolerable and anathema to their values; instead, the security establishment has successfully eliminated some threats and continues to monitor others. Finally, if U.S. leaders perceive the presence of a foreign terrorist threat, the U.S. military has demonstrated its ability to eliminate targets without a significant troop presence on the ground.

#### Military presence is costly and makes terror more likely.

Logan 20 – [Justin, director of defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He is an expert on U.S. grand strategy, international relations theory, and American foreign policy. His current research focuses on the shifting balance of power in Asia—specifically with regard to China—and the limited relevance of the Middle East to U.S. national security. “The Case for Withdrawing from the Middle East” Defense Priorities, <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/the-case-for-withdrawing-from-the-middle-east>, September 30, 2020] TDI

Finally, there is terrorism. Here the striking fact is that less than two decades after the 9/11 attacks, the Washington establishment has almost completely moved on from the subject, yet it retains a central place in U.S. foreign policy.38 One never hears reference to a Global War on Terrorism. There are no longer any discussions of whether terrorism represents an “existential” threat.

Moreover, since the basic contours of American policy in the region predate 9/11 by decades, it is strange to think that a concern that emerged after a policy began explains the policy. But there is no evidence that terrorism is a threat that warrants an effort to manage the Middle East militarily.39 The chance of an American being killed by terrorism outside a war zone from 1970 to 2012 was roughly one in 4,000,000.40 By any conventional risk analysis, this is an extraordinarily low risk. As early as 2002, smart analysts were asking questions about counterterrorism policy such as “How much should we be willing to pay for a small reduction in probabilities that are already extremely low?”41

To the extent American policy and politics still turn on fears about terrorism, Al-Qaeda’s twitching carcass has been displaced by fears of ISIS. Its brutality and initial run of success made it sensational, but the ease with which its vaunted caliphate was dispatched indicates that it is no colossus requiring thousands of American troops to fight. Its scattered remnants, already being chased by local actors, require far less.42

Terrorist groups with serious political ambitions discover that hit-and-run insurgencies are less satisfying than seizing power and governing. Then they discover that behaving like a state makes you supremely vulnerable to American—and regional—firepower.43

The amount Americans pay now to fight Islamist terrorism—conservatively, somewhere between $50–100 billion per year, depending on how one counts—is absurdly divorced from the risk it chases.44 If someone ran a hedge fund assessing risk the way the U.S. government has responded to terrorism, it would not be long for the world. Moreover, it is difficult to identify how U.S. policy across the region—with the possible exception of some drone strikes and special operations raids—has reduced the extremely low probability of another major terrorist attack in the U.S. If anything, our policies may have increased them.45

## AT: DA---Assurances

# NEG---Persian Gulf

## CP — Integrated Posture

### 1NC — CP — Integrated Posture

#### The United States ought to:

#### ---create integrated consultative mechanisms and conduct joint contingency planning vis-à-vis Iran in missile defense and maritime domains with Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

#### An integrated posture with regional allies deters Iran, counters terrorists, and reduces hedging. It also ensures a smooth rotation of forces towards the Indo-Pacific.

Saab & Pavel ’21 – [Bilal, senior fellow and director of the Defense and Security Program at the Middle East Institute, and Barry, senior vice president and director of the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. “Diplomacy Is the Key to Reducing US Forces in the Mideast.” Defense One, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/12/diplomacy-key-reducing-us-forces-mideast/187302/>, December 6, 2021] TDI

U.S. military posture is a perfect example of the interdependence between defense strategy and foreign policy. Defense professionals in the Pentagon can come up with the best ideas for where and how the United States should station its troops and military assets overseas, but without the necessary U.S. diplomacy to secure security agreements or understandings with global allies and partners, those concepts will not be implementable.

The more enduring, robust, and predictable those bilateral (and multilateral) relationships are, generally, the more flexibility is afforded for U.S. posture. Thus, U.S. forces stationed on the territory of close treaty allies such as the United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan, and Australia enjoy greater flexibility for training, exercises, and even re-stationing than those deployed in other countries.

In the Middle East, however, the United States has relatively less latitude and room for creativity when it comes to its posture, largely because many of its regional partners insist on a visible and continuous U.S. military presence on their territory.

A primary reason why Mideast security partners have such strong preferences is because unlike America’s European and Asian allies, they don’t have legally binding mutual defense treaties with the United States. This fixation on a physical U.S. presence, which has only heightened in recent years because of fears of U.S. desertion, is understandable because it is the closest thing they have to a formal U.S. commitment to their defense.

The Biden administration’s [just-released Global Posture Review](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2856053/biden-approves-global-posture-review-recommendations/&source=gmail-imap&ust=1639165909000000&usg=AOvVaw1a5TNDW9Njlnrqd32aZNNz) will not enact a massive shift of U.S. military assets from the Middle East to other priority regions. However, consistent with the forthcoming National Defense Strategy, the review assumes that the pressures for a greater U.S. military presence in the Indo-Pacific to support Washington’s strategic competition with China will, inevitably, entail greater movement—though still modest—of American forces away from the Middle East.

Partners such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and others don’t want the United States to further reduce its military footprint in the region because they believe this will weaken deterrence and embolden Iran. The United States, on the other hand, believes it is relatively over-invested militarily in the Middle East and must free up some of its forces to better deter China in the Indo-Pacific.

On the surface, it sounds like an unsolvable dilemma. But in reality, it isn’t. As we [argued](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ACUS_ArtfulBalance_WEB.pdf&source=gmail-imap&ust=1639165909000000&usg=AOvVaw1m1WTbejI3xp2Arcjs8wPZ) in 2015, the conversation about the future of U.S. military posture in the region, and elsewhere, should not start with numbers of American troops, aircraft carriers, fighter jets, or missile-defense batteries.

The emphasis should always be on military effectiveness and how best to achieve the stated objectives of the National Defense Strategy. In other words, posture planning should be strategy-driven and capabilities-based, not the result of random moves that look good in isolation.

For the purposes of U.S. posture in the Middle East, the most effective and efficient way to counter terrorists, deter Iran, and fight Iran if deterrence fails is by erecting an integrated posture with regional partners, most crucially in the missile defense and maritime domains. U.S. forces should be postured to contribute to the self-defense of its regional partners, not assume that responsibility entirely, like it did in the past.

Integrated deterrence, which will be a core element of the new National Defense Strategy, is precisely what Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [highlighted](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/2849921/remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-middle-east-security-at-t/&source=gmail-imap&ust=1639165909000000&usg=AOvVaw3plACOzy45K2HjuUTlrlff) in Manama on Nov. 20. Though a sound strategic concept and priority, integrated deterrence is extraordinarily difficult to implement in the real world, especially in the Middle East.

Strengthening the key U.S. partnerships in the region will take serious diplomatic efforts, because it will require doing things that Arabs and Americans have never done before, including creating highly integrated consultative mechanisms and conducting joint contingency planning vis-à-vis Iran. In this case, integrated deterrence means first and foremost tightly orchestrated military efforts with the exercise of other instruments of national power across U.S. departments and regional partners’ relevant national security ministries.

Those regional partners have a say in what happens in the U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran, and they have military capabilities, too. It’s about time Washington registers their security interests, which it failed to do before signing the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and incorporates their growing military power into its strategic approach to the region.

Once those processes—especially those related to integrated deterrence—start to develop and mature, regional partners will probably be less focused on the raw number of American military forces in the region, and stop or at least reduce their hedging towards China and Russia. Only then will the United States acquire the posture flexibility it covets in the Middle East to pursue its challenging priority in the Indo-Pacific.

### 1NC — CP — Missile Reserves Plank

#### ---substantially reduce missile and bomb reserves in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

#### Integrated missile defense solves regional instability, but a reduction in missile reserves is key.

Elnagdy 22 – [Alex, assistant director at the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative, where he assists in the management and program support of a sustainable security architecture in the region. Prior to joining the Atlantic Council, Elnagdy worked as a researcher for the congressionally funded National Endowment for Democracy, where he supported the work of foreign activists, scholars, and journalists on the frontlines of democratic battles abroad. He also assisted grantmaking for partners in the Middle East and oversaw the implementation of 501(c)3 incorporation trainings for Afghan grantees relocated after the US withdrawal. Previously, Elnagdy worked at Ploughshares Fund, where he contributed to their research on the nexus between societal inequalities and security concerns within nuclear states, “US missile defense can put a stop to the Middle East arms race” Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-missile-defense-can-put-a-stop-to-the-middle-east-arms-race/>, October 20, 2022] TDI

---IAMD = Integrated Air and Missile Defense

US policymakers can slow down the Middle East arms race while also protecting US interests in the region by marrying missile-defense assistance with missile and bomb reductions.

On a Middle East tour in July, US President Joe Biden set about resetting relations with pivotal leaders in the region. And in the face of rising missile threats from Iran, Biden took the opportunity to articulate the United States’ commitment to working with Middle East partners on an “[integrated and regionally-networked](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/16/fact-sheet-the-united-states-strengthens-cooperation-with-middle-east-partners-to-address-21st-century-challenges/)” air- and missile-defense architecture, a commitment reiterated in the Biden administration’s long-awaited [National Security Strategy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf).

Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) is within reach, and because of the cooperation among Middle East partners that it would require, it could potentially address deeper regional disputes. Thus, the United States should back IAMD in the Middle East—but not without reaching an agreement to reduce missile and bomb reserves for participating nations. Otherwise, the United States risks further enabling Saudi bombing campaigns of the kind that made Yemen the [world’s largest](https://www.unfpa.org/yemen) humanitarian crisis. Now the Biden administration is considering scaling back military support for Saudi Arabia in the wake of the decision by the group of oil-producing nations known as OPEC+ to [slow oil production](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/opec-heads-deep-supply-cuts-clash-with-us-2022-10-04/). IAMD tied to cutting offensive stockpiles could be the middle ground Biden is looking for.

The US Congress has indicated that it shares the White House’s political appetite for setting up IAMD in the Middle East. In June, US lawmakers introduced the Deterring Enemy Forces and Enabling National Defenses ([DEFEND](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4366/all-info)) Act, which could lead to transnational information and technology sharing architecture needed for IAMD. This call for a security alliance among Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Iraq stems from the diplomatic momentum started by the [Abraham Accords](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/israels-bennett-advances-regional-architecture-abu-dhabi). In parallel, Congress has increased authorizations for missile-defense initiatives (equipment, upgrades, testing, administration, etc.) from roughly $6.6 billion for fiscal year [2022](https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ81/PLAW-117publ81.pdf) to $6.9 billion for [2023](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy23_ndaa_bill_text2.pdf). This US-led IAMD diplomacy and missile-defense funding has great stabilizing potential for the Middle East if US policymakers carry them out with careful forethought.

## ADV — Regional Stability

### 1NC — CENTCOM

#### The plan jeopardizes relations with GCC allies, as Biden doubles back on Israel’s inclusion in the CENTCOM AOR. That causes regional instability and Israeli isolation.

Cooper 22 – [Clarke, nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, former assistant secretary at the US Department of State, a former senior intelligence officer for the US Joint Special Operations Command, and a combat veteran. “US Interests and Capacity for Middle East Stability Exist, but President Biden Must Convey Will .” Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/us-interests-and-capacity-for-middle-east-stability-exist-but-president-biden-must-convey-will/>, July 13, 2022] TDI

If US President Joe Biden wants to foster regional stability, bolster US relationships in the Middle East, and advance normalization with Israel—in addition to the [anticipated](https://www.jpost.com/israeli-news/article-711901) Jerusalem Declaration to re-affirm US-Israeli security cooperation and commit to denying nuclear capability to Iran—the president has two significant tools provided to him when he took office in 2021.

The Donald Trump administration led the [Abraham Accords](https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/) in 2020 and the January 2021 decision to include Israel in the US Central Command’s (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). This compelled all Arab capitals to reassess their relationship with Israel. The Abraham Accords were the first official reciprocal agreement any Arab country had signed with Israel in twenty-six years. Furthermore, [expansion](https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2021/09/07/us-central-command-absorbs-israel-into-its-area-of-responsibility/) of the CENTCOM AOR brought regional militaries into the US-led security cooperation space, where Arab military personnel are now able to conduct exercises and training with Israeli counterparts.

Until September 2020, accord signing countries Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) didn’t have any official economic or personal relationships with Israel. Moreover, until Israel transferred into the CENTCOM AOR, Bahrain, the UAE, and non-signatory states, like Saudi Arabia, wouldn’t have considered coordinating with Israel on air or maritime defense, or any sort of security cooperation. Factor in the Biden administration’s efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, threats from Iranian state-sponsored terrorist groups, such as Lebanese Hezbollah, and [increasing](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-condemns-troubling-houthi-missile-attacks-on-saudi-arabia-uae/) missile and drone attacks from the Iran-sponsored Houthis in Yemen, and Israel and Gulf states justifiably sought to fulfill sovereign defense requirements while also taking into consideration the [viability](https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/02/08/arab-israeli-missile-defense-has-a-shot-says-centcom-nominee/) of regional integrated air and missile defense. When in the region this week, President Biden will hear what the US needs to do to remain fully involved in the momentum of the Abraham Accords and enable stability in the Middle East.

First, as Israel is cautious about pulling the region into a conflict with Iran, President Biden needs to acknowledge the legitimate regional imperative to address the shared threats emanating from Tehran beyond securing the Jerusalem Declaration. The Middle East, however, won’t wait ad infinitum for the US to show tangible security commitments to the region. If the US is unable or perceived as unwilling to fulfill sovereign defense [requirements](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/05/u-s-ambassadors-to-blinken-send-the-weapons-00043971) for Middle East partners, US allies and adversaries will further seek to fill defense gaps in the sale or transfer of arms and technology. A worse-case scenario would be for US ambivalence and absence to inadvertently enable China and Russia to disrupt long-term US relationships in the Middle East.

In the past year, there has been growing evidence of China trying to create a [wedge](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-is-trying-to-create-a-wedge-between-the-us-and-gulf-allies-washington-should-take-note/) between the US and the Gulf, creating friction for US investment and relationships in the region. President Biden will hear from allies that the US needs to play an active leadership and coordinating role for there to be an effective integrated defense in the region. Leaders in the region will likely recommend that states be able to opt into an Integrated Air Missile Defense (IAMD) [coalition](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/iran-deal-or-not-gulf-nations-need-integrated-air-and-missile-defense/), assuming there is an all-or-nothing approach for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

Additionally, Middle East leaders will affirm that they want an improved relationship with the US. This includes solidifying official lines of communication with senior US counterparts. Moreover, they will also share concerns about the lack of a declared US national security strategy and confusion over incongruous strategic planning for the globally impactful Middle East. Leaders of GCC states have reason to highlight their respective state’s global impact. The region, especially Qatar and the (UAE), stepped up to [assist](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/taliban-qatar-mediator-afghanistan/2021/08/31/6a787b2c-0992-11ec-a7c8-61bb7b3bf628_story.html) during and after the problematic US withdrawal from Afghanistan. President Biden will see an open door for the US to work with major Arab oil producers to counter Russia’s coercive energy diplomacy. He will likely be reminded how Israel and Egypt are contributing to the global response to the Ukraine war by [assisting](https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-signs-gas-deal-with-israel-egypt-in-bid-to-wean-itself-off-russian-supplies-11655299886) Europe to wean itself off of Russian gas.

Finally, being in the center of gravity for global energy markets and ground zero for climate impacts, President Biden will receive some practical counsel about climate adaption and energy diversification in relation to the broader stability [issues](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/09/24/mena-has-a-food-security-problem-but-there-are-ways-to-address-it) of food insecurity, water scarcity, and mass migration. Israel and the GCC+3 neighbors—Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq—will make clear they are already managing climate issues. Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, has pragmatically noted (since Sharm El-Sheikh was announced to host the [2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference](https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/116122/FM-reviews-Egypt%E2%80%99s-vision-for-COP27-in-World-Economic-Forum)) that “COP27 will focus on adaption vice mitigation.” He has also consistently stated that private sector engagement is required to reduce climate risks effectively. In some cases, economically viable opportunities have arisen to address conditions of instability. Beyond the seeming intangibility of carbon renewal targets, Israel and GCC+3 regional water re-use and desalinization [efforts](https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/06/14/413981435/israel-bringing-its-years-of-desalination-experience-to-california) yield agriculture and consumption results. Such efforts will likely be noted for their relevance to the ever-increasing water needs in the US.

Stability and prosperity are shared interests for Israel and the states participating in the GCC+3 this week. President Biden need not be ambivalent about America’s Middle East strategic partners seeking to defend themselves against immediate state-sponsored kinetic threats, while they seek solutions toward global existential risks of water scarcity and food insecurity. The US has the tools to be fully engaged in the region and, during his trip, the US president needs to strongly declare it to the entire region.

#### The perception of Israeli isolation goes nuclear.

McConnell 17 – [Scott, PhD in History from Columbia University, Founding Editor of The American Conservative, Former Editorial Page Editor of The New York Post, and Writer for Fortune, The New Criterion, National Review, and Commentary, “The Special Relationship with Israel: Is It Worth the Costs?”, Middle East Policy Council, Volume XVII, Number 4, <https://mepc.org/special-relationship-israel-it-worth-costs>, Winter 2017] TDI

NO EXIT

So why does the United States stay in the relationship? Surely domestic politics accounts for a good deal of the explanation. But there is another, strategic, reason that is seldom mentioned publicly. It was expounded clearly by Ariel Roth, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and an Israeli army veteran. In an essay in International Studies Perspectives, Roth argued that the key U.S. interest in the Middle East is stability and unfettered access to the region’s oil. This is indisputable; it is the point James Forrestal made to President Truman more than 60 years ago. And what is the greatest threat to stability? Well, says Roth, it is Israel itself. Because of its unique history and the heavy weight of the Holocaust in the consciousness of Israeli leaders, Israel is uniquely terrified of being “alone” in the international arena. As a result, any suspicion on the part of its leaders that the United States is backing away from it might incite Israel to behave more aggressively than it already does. Those who decry the special relationship “are blinded to how Israel’s sense of vulnerability causes. . . behaviors that have the potential to undermine American interests.” Israel needs constant “reassurance” that it “does not stand alone.” Supporting Israel through “constant affirmation” and generous arms shipments is the best way to pursue American interests “without the fear of a panicked and unrestrained Israel bringing a cataclysm to the Middle East.”20

This claim is at once alarming and compelling. Roth is asserting that the principal ally of the United States in the twenty-first century — its main source of strategic advice, the nation whose leaders have an unequaled access to American political leadership — is not a rational actor. The United States is in the position of a wife whose spouse is acting erratically. A “panicked and unrestrained Israel,” armed with an estimated 200 nuclear weapons, could do an extraordinary amount of damage. The only conclusion one can draw is that the special relationship would now be very difficult to exit, even if Israel had no clout whatsoever within the American political system, even if the United States desired emphatically to pursue a more independent course.

I submit that this argument has long been internalized by those U.S. officials who recognize that the special relationship brings the United States far more trouble than benefits. It is the principal reason no major American figure has ever advocated simply walking away from Israel. Even those who argue that America should make its aid conditional on a more forthcoming Israeli attitude towards peace with the Arabs invariably recommend that the necessary Israeli territorial withdrawals be rewarded by iron-clad American defense guarantees and other sweeteners. Most intelligent people understand there is something uniquely evil about the Holocaust and the circumstances under which Israel came into existence, even as they are uneasy with the current special relationship. For those who recommend a U.S. security guarantee following a peace settlement, the overture made by the Arab League — offering full recognition and normalized relations with an Israel that relinquished its 1967 conquests and allowed a viable Palestinian state — is a development of enormous promise. Regrettably Israel has ignored this opening.

Can the costs of America’s special relationship with Israel be quantified? Is it, as A.F.K. Organski put it in his 1990 book, the “$36 billion dollar bargain?” That figure, derived from military and financial assistance to Israel form 1951 to 1983, led Organski to conclude, not surprisingly, that Israel’s net value as a Cold War ally is blindingly obvious. Or is the figure closer to $3 trillion, as economist Thomas Stauffer estimated after factoring in the rise in the price of oil, the financial assistance to neighboring states, the cost of the agreements to guarantee Israel’s oil supplies and myriad other factors?21 I believe the answer is nearer to Stauffer’s figures, but it is plainly a judgment call. The essence of the relationship is not its dollar cost, but the fact that the United States has come to perceive its interests in the Middle East through Israel’s eyes. This is what renders it special. One can debate how important Israel was in encouraging the United States to invade Iraq, but there is no doubt that, if Israel had opposed the invasion, no American politician would have supported it. The same can be said about the possibility of an attack on Iran.

This is also the case with the outbreak of Islamophobia in the United States. The editor of a major liberal magazine — a high-profile intellectual — has written that he doesn’t feel First Amendment protections should apply to Muslims. Would Martin Peretz have arrived at this independently of his feelings for Israel? It would be hard to find a knowledgeable person who believes so. Peretz is hardly alone. Thus, one can likely chalk up a portion of America’s retreat from its own liberal principles to Israel.

In the coming years, as the prospect of a two-state solution disappears, it is likely that Israel will continue its inexorable march toward becoming a state between the Jordan River and the sea, with one set of laws for Jews, who will have the rights of citizens, and another for Arabs, who will be denied full citizenship. What will it cost America’s broader relationship with the Muslim world to maintain a special bond with a state based on this kind of ethnic discrimination? That also would be difficult to quantify. And yet this scenario may be impossible to escape. The threat of Israel’s turning itself into a nuclear-armed desperado striking at will at the oil states in the Gulf cannot, alas, be entirely dismissed. That may be, as Ariel Roth argues, a compelling reason to maintain the special relationship pretty much unchanged.

### 1NC — Re-Interventions

#### Restraint fails. American exit causes re-interventions that destabilize the Persian Gulf.

Brands 19 – [Hal, Henry A. Kissinger Distinguished Professor of Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins-SAIS and senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. He served as special assistant to the secretary of defense for strategic planning in 2015–16. “Why America Can’t Quit the Middle East” Hoover Institution, <https://www.hoover.org/research/why-america-cant-quit-middle-east>, March 21, 2019] TDI

One of the most persistent myths about U.S. foreign policy is the idea that America desires—due to greed, messianic ideological impulses, or simple imperial presumptions—to dominate the Middle East. In reality, American policy has long been torn by two conflicting imperatives: The need to protect enduring U.S. interests, on the one hand, and the desire to stay clear of the region’s unending headaches, on the other. Paul Wolfowitz [remarked](https://books.google.com/books?id=wcljXYTZVnUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=rise+of+the+vulcans&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMsZTm7M3gAhWhc98KHU7-AIAQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=sunlight&f=false) once that his shift from focusing on the Middle East to working on East Asia was like “walking out of some oppressive, stuffy room into sunlight and fresh air.” To borrow the metaphor, American officials have long desired to walk toward the sunlight—while understanding that they cannot fully escape the darkness.

Today, calls for the United States to disengage militarily from the Middle East are commonplace. Those calls reflect deep frustration with the travails of American interventions over the past two decades, as well as the belief—entirely correct—that the United States faces greater challenges elsewhere. Yet U.S. interests in the region have not disappeared, and the prospect that Middle Eastern troubles will impact America if left unattended is as high as ever. If the United States rushes for the exits, it may find that it is pulled back under worse circumstances, and at higher costs, in the future. President Trump is giving voice to a powerful and understandable urge to cut cleanly and get out of the Middle East. The best approach, however, may be one that reflects America’s longstanding ambivalence about the region.

The interests that have long kept the United States involved in the Middle East are fairly clear. Coming out of World War II, American strategists resolved that the United States must prevent any hostile force from dominating a region of critical geopolitical or geo-economic significance. The Middle East, with its vast oil reserves, certainly fit that description. True, America never got a particularly large portion of its oil from Middle Eastern sources. But its allies did: “The Marshall Plan for Europe,” [noted](https://books.google.com/books?id=nGqoAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA267&dq=what+good+is+grand+strategy+middle+east+oil+forrestal&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjM7JyJ7c3gAhWKc98KHXGRAg0Q6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=what%20good%20is%20grand%20strategy%20middle%20east%20oil%20forrestal&f=false) Truman’s first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, “could not succeed without access to the Middle East oil.” Moreover, the fact that oil was traded on a global market meant that a disruption of price or supply in one region would cause disruption on a far larger scale.

At present, the United States is again becoming a net energy exporter and a swing producer in the global oil market. Yet so long as the countries of the Middle East sit atop huge energy reserves that confer great wealth and power on whoever controls it, the strategic importance of the Middle East—and the imperative of keeping it out of hostile hands—will remain.

Other issues have also kept the United States engaged. Since the 1970s, America has had a critical interest in preventing or combating international terrorism, much of which emerges from the Middle East. American policymakers have been properly concerned with confronting aggression against friendly nations and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction to rogue states or non-state actors. Then there is the American interest in promoting peace, democracy, and human rights in the Middle East—one that has never been as important as the other U.S. interests, that has affected how even the most cynical, “realist” administrations have approached the region.

Over a period of decades, these issues have exerted a strong gravitational pull on American policy, making it impossible for U.S. officials to ignore the region. And yet American policymakers have often been equally aware of the problems that U.S. engagement presents.

The situation in the Middle East, Dean Acheson once [commented](https://books.google.com/books?id=nGqoAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA55&dq=what+good+is+grand+strategy+karl+marx&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiUjKb77M3gAhWNmeAKHQXeDNMQ6AEILjAB#v=onepage&q=what%20good%20is%20grand%20strategy%20karl%20marx&f=false), “might have been devised by Karl Marx himself.” A combination of stunted development, stifling socio-political conditions, and resentment of foreign influence made the region ripe for radicalism and inherently difficult for outside powers to manage. Getting deeply involved in the Middle East ran the risk of making America the target of that radicalism and anger; it also ran the risk of distracting the United States from other areas where the prospects for constructive change seemed more promising. The Middle East, Wolfowitz [lamented](https://books.google.com/books?id=wcljXYTZVnUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=rise+of+the+vulcans&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMsZTm7M3gAhWhc98KHU7-AIAQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=sunlight&f=false), was an area “where people only know how to create problems.” The result has been a perpetual tension: The Middle East might require American attention and management, but it was also a source of dangers and distractions that most U.S. officials would have been just as happy to avoid.

This tension has been omnipresent as the U.S. role in the Middle East has expanded since the 1970s, following the British withdrawal from the region. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the United States [built up](https://books.google.com/books?id=bKA9DAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=making+the+unipolar+moment&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjsutKm7c3gAhXiYd8KHSzBAsgQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=making%20the%20unipolar%20moment&f=false) the military capabilities necessary to prevent the Soviet Union (or perhaps a hostile Iran) from dominating the region. During the Iran-Iraq War, the Reagan administration supported Saddam Hussein as a bulwark against Tehran’s influence. But at the same time, the United States refrained from a significant “onshore” military presence in the Persian Gulf out of fear of inciting terrorist attacks, offending local sensitivities, or discrediting friendly regimes. Once the Iran-Iraq War ended, American military capabilities started flowing out of the region, to be refocused on other priorities.

That trend was reversed after Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait prompted a massive, U.S.-led intervention to restore the regional balance of power, as well as a persistent post-conflict military presence to keep an eye on Saddam’s wounded but still dangerous regime. As early as 1990-91, however, U.S. officials had been deeply [ambivalent](https://books.google.com/books?id=bKA9DAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=making+the+unipolar+moment&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjsutKm7c3gAhXiYd8KHSzBAsgQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=making%20the%20unipolar%20moment&f=false) about the idea of permanently stationing American forces in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries. They worried that such a presence might make American forces the target of terrorist groups that opposed authoritarian governments in the Persian Gulf—warnings that seemed vindicated when al-Qaeda began taking aim at U.S. targets in the region and far beyond.

The 9/11 attacks offered evidence that the Middle East’s problems could reach out and touch the United States in disastrous ways. The George W. Bush administration responded with the massive projection of American power into the region, focused on defeating al-Qaeda, toppling hostile governments in Afghanistan and Iraq, birthing stable democracies, and thereby transforming the region for the better. When that project proved vastly more costly and difficult than expected, the Obama administration sought to limit U.S. engagement in the region as a way of husbanding resources, avoiding blowback, and “pivoting” to more promising areas. Yet even Obama, so skeptical of American intervention in the region, was unable to get out entirely: The persistent threat of terrorism compelled continuing engagement in Afghanistan; humanitarian concerns triggered military action in Libya; the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and inaction in Syria contributed to a regional meltdown that ultimately compelled re-intervention to deal with a new and terrifying threat from ISIS. The story of American policy in the Middle East has been one of engagement—sometimes remarkably intensive and violent engagement—but also one of recurring ambivalence about that engagement.

Today, the Trump administration is manifesting the same ambivalence. The president reportedly referred to Syria as a country offering only “sand and death,” and he announced plans for a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops.  Trump appears to be eyeing the exits in Afghanistan as well. But at the same time, a familiar set of factors is making other U.S. officials reluctant to countenance a broad withdrawal. The U.S. intelligence community has warned that a complete pullout from Afghanistan could lead to a major terrorist attack on the American homeland within two years. There are also concerns that American retrenchment would open the door for hostile actors—Iran and Russia—to exert dominant influence in a region that still matters. Trump is a most unorthodox president, but he faces the same dilemma that has long afflicted U.S. policy in the Middle East. Indeed, that dilemma may explain why the president—after insisting for months that the United States would withdraw entirely from Syria, just recently indicated that a token American force might remain.

So what can this history tell us about how to proceed today? Three key points are in order.

First, there is a critical need to meter U.S. involvement in the Middle East. This is not simply because large-scale interventions have proven so unrewarding over the past two decades. It is also because the need to confront other, more important issues—namely the threats posed by China and Russia—is undeniable. There is a finite amount of resources, time, and political will the United States can devote to foreign policy issues. And when Washington overcommits to a region as frustrating as the Middle East, it risks undermining public support for U.S. foreign policy not just in that region but around the world. If the United States goes big in the Middle East, it will sooner or later face strong pressures to go home.

Second, however, it is a fantasy to think that the United States can disengage from the Middle East without consequence. This is because America still has pressing interests in that region—and because those interests are as unlikely to protect themselves today as they ever have been in the past. Growing Russian influence, Iran’s hegemonic ambitions, the potential resurgence of key terrorist organizations, and the massive political instability and violence that plagues large swaths of the region are real problems that demand competent management. America’s partners in the region can do more to manage those problems than they have done to date, but they remain manifestly incapable of doing so without significant U.S. support.

Third, hasty withdrawals are likely to be followed by hasty re-engagements. After the United States left Iraq in 2011, the state nearly collapsed, ISIS surged to prominence, and an emergency military intervention—which has now lasted nearly five years—was needed to repair the damage. If the United States disengages from Syria and Afghanistan today and the result is a significant terrorist attack, the pressure to get back into the region and take decisive military action will be strong indeed—even if that means shortchanging other geopolitical priorities. If America goes home from the Middle East, it will sooner or later face pressures to go big.

Whatever policies the Trump administration pursues in the Middle East, then, the United States will continue to face the same conflicting imperatives that have long shaped its approach to that region. America will be drawn toward the Middle East by enduring interests and pressing threats. But it will be tempted to depart the region because of the dangers and costs U.S. engagement causes.

In these circumstances, a responsible strategy would focus on minimizing the dangers and costs of engagement by suppressing the most serious threats at the lowest expenditure of resources. This might entail using a select subset of capabilities—special operations forces, tactical airpower, support for local forces—to keep the pressure on the most dangerous terrorist groups and prevent them from mounting major external attacks. (This was, in essence, the strategy the United States was following prior to Trump’s Syria withdrawal announcement.) Likewise, it might focus on empowering—with intelligence, diplomatic, and military support—anti-Iran actors in the region and thereby maintaining a tolerable balance of power. In Afghanistan, this might mean continuing to push for a negotiated peace deal, but only with adequate assurances that an American withdrawal would not turn that country into a terrorist playground—and without telegraphing a near-term retreat that will only make such assurances harder to obtain.

The worst strategies, by contrast, would be those that skew toward the extremes of deeper engagement or precipitate withdrawal, inviting some adverse development that would cause an overcorrection in the future. “Muddle through” is rarely the sort of advice that wins a lot of applause. But it may be the best approach to managing America’s continuing strategic ambivalence about the Middle East.

### 1NC — Lasers Weapons

#### Laser weapons and the integration of the Longbow Hellfire onto combat ships deters Iranian small boats.

Bailey 22 – [Michelle, Lieutenant, United States Navy, BS, San Diego State University, “The Iranian Maritime Challenge.” Naval Postgraduate School, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1200387.pdf>, September 2022] TDI

The United States has developed various strategies for effectively dealing with Iran’s kinetic swarm tactics. Attempting to use Harpoon or Tomahawk missiles has proved infeasible due to cost implications from the millions of dollars’ worth of missiles that far exceed the cost of Iranian swarm vessels.131 Accordingly, the U.S. Navy has opted to use kinetic-energy or laser weapons with the forerunner, laser weapons-armed ship the USS Ponce already in operation in the Middle East. Unlike conventional missiles, Lasers are cheap, spending just several cents to fire. Furthermore, while a ship is limited to carrying a finite number of missiles, lasers allow U.S. naval ships almost an infinite ammunition stockpile that comes in handy in responding to the threat posed by the Iranian speedboats swarm.132

Besides lasers, other U.S. Navy ventures to solve the Iranian speedboat threats involve integrating the Longbow Hellfire surface-to-surface missile module (SSMM) system onto U.S. Navy’s littoral combat ships. Accordingly, the U.S. Navy has successfully tested the Longbow Hellfire missile system mounted on a Littoral Combat Ship. In the mid-June simulations off the Virginia coast, the Longbow Hellfire modified missiles effectively destroyed a swarm of small boat targets, including 7 out of the overall 8 targets engaged by the system, with the sole miss blamed on target issue unrelated to the capability of the missile.133 The test simulated the engagement of numerous fast-attack crafts such as those employed by Iran’s navy. The Guided Test Vehicle-1 simulation demonstrated the effectiveness of the proposed Longbow Hellfire launched missile coupled with a seeker in dealing with the threat posed by Iran’s high-speed maneuvering surface targets (HSMSTs) in the form of FACs and FIACs.134 Furthermore, the “fire and forget” Raytheon’s Griffin IIB missiles held by littoral combat ships enable the firing of numerous missiles simultaneously.135

Like most navies around the world, the more training invested in its people, the better potential exist to be prepared to combat a quick acting threat like Iran’s small boats. Additionally, complacency and the sense of “this is normal behavior” cannot be overstated as the biggest threat to U.S. capability to defend its assets in the region. Taking into consideration the ROE for the operational area combined with increasing pressure from IRGCN tactics, Commanding Officers are placed in a challenging quid pro quo position of: take action to protect my ship and crew possibly starting a political nightmare, or absorb a first attack and retaliate also possibly starting a political nightmare. The ultimate goal is to remain de-escalatory, but defend the ship and its crew. This is an area that remains to be studied and researched.

### 1NC — Hormuz

#### The Strait of Hormuz is fine, but only because of increased US presence.

Al-Khair 23 – [Waleed Abu, journalist, “Increased US, International Presence in Strait of Hormuz Reassures Region.” Al, <https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2023/05/22/feature-01>, May 22, 2023] TDI

The [increased presence of US and international forces in the Strait of Hormuz](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2023/05/16/feature-02) after a spate of unlawful Iranian seizures of oil tankers has brought a sense of reassurance to the region, military analysts said.

A fleet of high-speed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) craft on May 3 surrounded and seized the Panama-flagged, Greek-owned Niovi as it travelled from Dubai to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The [vessel's seizure in the Strait of Hormuz](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2023/04/28/feature-01) came six days after a similar incident in Gulf waters, when helicopter-borne Iranian navy commandos abseiled onto the deck of a US-bound Marshall Islands-flagged tanker, Advantage Sweet.

On May 12, Iranian state media announced that Iran had seized a third tanker, the Panama-flagged Purity.

US Coast Guard ships patrol the Strait of Hormuz on May 17. The US 5th Fleet has increased the rotational presence of forces in the key maritime strait after Iran seized three vessels in three weeks. [USCG]

The US Department of Defense on May 12 announced it would bolster its defensive posture in the region to counter Iranian aggression.

"Iran's unwarranted, irresponsible and unlawful seizure and harassment of merchant vessels must stop," said [Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2019/01/03/feature-01) commander Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, who also heads the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and the US Navy's 5th Fleet.

The United States is "committed to protecting navigational rights in these critical waters", he added.

Military assets already in place, including aircraft and ships, will be used for "increased rotational patrols to enhance our presence specifically in and around the [Strait of Hormuz](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2022/12/26/feature-03)", 5th Fleet spokesman Tim Hawkins said.

The increased surveillance will be conducted through the 11-nation International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) and the eight-nation [European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2021/03/19/feature-02) (EMASoH).

Joint forces from Bahrain, France, the United Kingdom and United States on May 14 conducted a multilateral patrol over the Strait of Hormuz, the US 5th Fleet said.

In response to heightened concerns about international shipping, the United States has prepared a fleet of 100 unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) that reportedly will be ready to operate within a few months.

Security partnerships

Reactions in the Gulf region to the US military reinforcements were "very positive at all levels", former Kuwaiti army officer Nasser Rashed told Al-Mashareq.

He noted that oil prices were not affected by Iran's latest vessel seizures, after the United States announced it would boost its military presence.

He also noted that countries of the region, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait, have strategic partnerships with the United States already.

"Iran has spewed misinformation about the reason why it carried out these hostile acts," Rashed said, referring to the recent tanker seizures.

It once again has demonstrated it cannot be trusted, he added, "despite the recent political developments and its [attempt to seek rapprochement](https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2023/05/17/feature-01) with the Gulf states".

Iranian affairs researcher Fathi al-Sayed of al-Sharq Centre for Regional and Strategic Studies noted that the incidents closely preceded the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia.

"This confirms Iran's real intentions, based on its continued aggression against maritime traffic and its lack of respect for international covenants," he said.

Maritime security

The rapid US intervention contributed to a sense of safety in the region in the face of Iranian aggression, whether in the form of attacks against vessels or illicit smuggling of arms and drugs, al-Sayed said.

The Gulf states consider maritime security "a red line that cannot be crossed", al-Sayed said, adding that the United States' reinforcement of its military units is a signal of US determination to stop Iranian aggression.

"The close relationship with the United States is a safety valve [for the region] due to the enormous capabilities that the US naval vessels in the Gulf possess," he said.

By bolstering its presence in the region, the United States "meant to send a message to the Iranian side underscoring the magnitude of the US-Gulf partnership and the US commitment to the security and stability of the region", said Saudi military expert Mansour al-Shehri.

It was a message of reassurance to the region that the United States is "fully and completely committed to maintaining security against any danger, especially the persistent and growing Iranian threat", he told Al-Mashareq.

Creation of new task force

The US-led CMF, a multinational naval coalition, on Monday (May 22) established a new task force that will train partner navies and improve operational capabilities to enhance maritime security in the Middle East.

During a ceremony at US 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain, leaders commissioned Combined Task Force 154 (CTF 154) -- the 34-nation CMF's fifth task force.

CTF 154 will organise frequent training events that address maritime awareness, law, interdiction, rescue and assistance, as well as leadership development.

"Our navies are at their very best when we train, operate and work together," said CMF commander Cooper.

"Establishing CTF 154 demonstrates our deep commitment to strengthening and expanding partnerships through new training opportunities that will enhance regional maritime security," he said.

The new task force is commanded by a US Navy captain who will build and lead a multinational staff, CMF said in a statement.

Another nation will assume command as early as this autumn.

CTF 154's core staff will be augmented by CMF partners during key training opportunities such as the task force's inaugural event, Compass Rose, which will kick off this week in Bahrain.

More than 50 participants from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and United States began arriving Sunday for the drill.

#### Iran won’t close the strait.

Kaushal 19 – [Sidharth, Research Fellow for Seapower at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies in London. “Would Iran Really Try to Close the Strait of Hormuz?” The National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/would-iran-really-try-close-strait-hormuz-174120?page=0%2C1>, First Appeared 2019, re-published on December 11, 2020] TDI

The Limited Risk of Iran Closing Hormuz

While the Iranian Navy and IRGC(N) retain the capabilities to, on paper, substantially disrupt transit through the Strait of Hormuz, a scenario specific analysis illustrates that the ability of Iran to accomplish this end is overstated. Take, for example, Iran’s significant stockpile of around five thousand naval mines. To close the Strait of Hormuz, the Iranians[would have to](https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/57443/O%27Neil-2009-Costs%20and%20Difficulties%20of%20Blocking%20the%20Strait%20of%20Hormuz.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) emplace at least one thousand such mines across the twenty-five kilometers strait unobserved. The IRINs Kilo class submarines, which are twenty-five meters from the keel, would struggle to navigate these waters. Alternatively, Iranian forces could rely on the IRGCNs fleet of small boats or requisitioned civilian vessels to accomplish this end but would struggle to avoid detection if it mustered the number of vessels needed to do this in a short time span. Moreover, given that usable shipping channels span around 20 percent of the strait’s width, this would entail a modest concentration of around two hundred mines per channel. To open the straits for shipping in the short term, the United States and its allies would need to open one or more shipping channels, not clear every Iranian mine in the area.

Iran could attempt to disrupt minesweeping efforts with anti-ship missiles like the Chinese C-802 launched from shore-based launchers or the IRGCNs fleet of guided missile boats. However, firing missiles requires targeting data from vulnerable shore-based radar—which will likely be hit early in a conflict scenario. Moreover, the particularities of the Gulf operating environment do not favor missile salvos. Cruise missiles guided by heat and infrared seekers that rely on differentials between an object’s heat emissions and the background temperature[would have their operations confounded](https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/57443/O%27Neil-2009-Costs%20and%20Difficulties%20of%20Blocking%20the%20Strait%20of%20Hormuz.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) by gulf climatic conditions and would struggle to approach targets such as mine clearing vessels or civilian vessels, which do not emit a distinctive heat signature. Radar-guided missiles would also lose effectiveness amid the cluttered environment of the Gulf, which is characterized by features such as islets and oil rigs all of which have a radar cross section sufficiently large to divert a missile. Kinetic and non-kinetic missile defense by U.S. destroyers in the form of jamming radars, spoofing seekers and shooting down missile salvos would further degrade the effectiveness of cruise missile salvos. Perhaps most notably, however, the islands which house the IRGCNs fast-attack craft would likely come under sustained air assault and perhaps occupation. During Operation[Earnest Will,](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R42335.pdf) for example, the U.S. Navy considered the bombardment and occupation of Abu Musa and Farsi Island as a means of cutting off the IRGCNs fast-attack craft. As such, launching salvos of potentially ineffective cruise missiles entails uncertain benefits and substantial risks with regards to the expansion of the war to Iranian soil.

One might argue that Iran does not need to shut down the flow of oil through the Gulf completely—merely destroy enough ships for commercial companies to avoid the straits or insurance companies to raise premiums to levels inimical to commerce. However, if historical precedent is anything to go by, even sustained attrition of commercial vessels may not accomplish this. During the Iran-Iraq tanker war, for example, traffic through the Gulf[continued](https://www.strausscenter.org/hormuz/tanker-war.html) partially because shipping companies higher premiums were offset by could charge customers higher rates on delivery as prices came to factor in the risks undertaken. This, moreover, was the case in a scenario where both parties were able to impose significant costs on the others shipping for a protracted period—something unlikely to be the case if Iran tries to close the Strait of Hormuz today.

As such, demonstrations of force in the straits have little utility for Iran vis-a-vis either the United States or Gulf states. A limited act of coercion typically only makes sense as a signal of one’s willingness to take an even more escalatory step if pushed further. Given just how poorly placed Iran is to make good on such a threat regardless of its intentions, it is unclear that limited coercive steps serve this role.

### 1NC — Middle East War

#### Middle East war is more unlikely than ever because of our permanent military presence.

Karlin & Wittes 19 – [Mara, International Studies Professor at John Hopkins University, Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development 2015-2016, & Tamara Cofman Wittes, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs from 2009-2012. “America’s Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less”, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2019] TDI

LESS RELEVANT REGION In response to the Iraq war, the United States has aimed to reduce its role in the Middle East. Three factors have made that course both more alluring and more possible. First, interstate conflicts that directly threatened U.S. interests in the past have largely been replaced by substate security threats. Second, other rising regions, especially Asia, have taken on more importance to U.S. global strategy. And third, the diversification of global energy markets has weakened oil as a driver of U.S. policy. During the Cold War, traditional state-based threats pushed the United States to play a major role in the Middle East. That role involved not only ensuring the stable supply of energy to Western markets but also working to prevent the spread of communist influence and tamping down the Arab-Israeli conflict so as to help stabilize friendly states. These efforts were largely successful. Beginning in the 1970s, the United States nudged Egypt out of the pro-Soviet camp, oversaw the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty, and solidified its hegemony in the region. Despite challenges from Iran after its 1979 revolution and from Saddam Hussein’s Iraq throughout the 1990s, U.S. dominance was never seriously in question. The United States contained the Arab-Israeli conflict, countered Saddam’s bid to gain territory through force in the 1990–91 Gulf War, and built a seemingly permanent military presence in the Gulf that deterred Iran and muffled disputes among the Gulf Arab states. Thanks to all these efforts, the chances of deliberate interstate war in the Middle East are perhaps lower now than at any time in the past 50 years.

### 1NC — Economic Decline

#### A consensus of scholarly literature agrees peace is served by economic pessimism AND downturns reinforce deterrence.

Posen 20 – [Barry, Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT and Director Emeritus of the MIT Security Studies Program; Foreign Affairs, “Do Pandemics Promote Peace?” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-23/do-pandemics-promote-peace>, April 23, 2020] TDI

As the novel coronavirus infects the globe, states compete for scientific and medical supplies and blame one another for the pandemic’s spread. Policy analysts have started asking whether such tensions could eventually erupt into military conflict. Has the pandemic increased or decreased the motive and opportunity of states to wage war?

War is a risky business, with potentially very high costs. The historian Geoffrey Blainey argued in The Causes of War that most wars share a common characteristic at their outset: optimism. The belligerents usually start out sanguine about their odds of military success. When elites on both or all sides are confident, they are more willing to take the plunge—and less likely to negotiate, because they think they will come out better by fighting. Peace, by contrast, is served by pessimism. Even one party’s pessimism can be helpful: that party will be more inclined to negotiate and even accept an unfavorable bargain in order to avoid war.

When one side gains a sudden and pronounced advantage, however, this de-escalatory logic can break down: the optimistic side will increase its demands faster than the pessimistic side can appease. Some [analysts worry](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/04/15/the_plas_exploitation_of_the_coronavirus_pandemic_115204.html) that something like this could happen in U.S.-Chinese relations as a result of the new coronavirus. The United States is experiencing a moment of domestic crisis. China, [some fear](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/asia/coronavirus-china-us-military-south-china-sea-intl-hnk/index.html), might see the pandemic as playing to its advantage and be tempted to throw its military weight around in the western Pacific.

What these analysts miss is that COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, is weakening all of the great and middle powers more or less equally. None is likely to gain a meaningful advantage over the others. All will have ample reason to be pessimistic about their military capabilities and their overall readiness for war. For the duration of the pandemic, at least, and probably for years afterward, the odds of a war between major powers will go down, not up.

Pax Epidemica?

A cursory survey of the scholarly literature on war and disease appears to confirm Blainey’s observation that pessimism is conducive to peace. Scholars have documented again and again how war creates permissive conditions for disease—in armies as well as civilians in the fought-over territories. But one seldom finds any discussion of epidemics causing wars or of wars deliberately started in the middle of widespread outbreaks of infectious disease. (The diseases that European colonists carried to the New World did weaken indigenous populations to the point that they were more vulnerable to conquest; in addition, some localized conflicts were fought during the influenza pandemic of 1919–21, but these were occasioned by major shifts in regional balances of power following the destruction of four empires in World War I.)

That sickness slows the march to war is partly due to the fact that war depends on people. When people fall ill, they can’t be counted on to perform well in combat. Military [medicine](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2022-02-28/when-antibiotics-stop-working) made enormous strides in the years leading up to World War I, prior to which armies suffered higher numbers of casualties from disease than from combat. But pandemics still threaten military units, as those onboard U.S. and French aircraft carriers, hundreds of whom tested positive for COVID-19, know well. Sailors and soldiers in the field are among the most vulnerable because they are packed together. But even airmen are at risk, since they must take refuge from air attacks in bunkers, where the virus could also spread rapidly.

Ground campaigns in urban areas pose still greater dangers in pandemic times. Much recent ground combat has been in cities in poor countries with few or no public health resources, environments highly favorable to illness. Ground combat also usually produces prisoners, any of whom can be infected. A vaccine may eventually solve these problems, but an abundance of caution is likely to persist for some time after it comes into use.

The most important reason disease inhibits war is economic. Major outbreaks damage national economies, which are the source of military power. COVID-19 is a pandemic—by definition a worldwide phenomenon. All great and middle powers appear to be adversely affected, and all have reason to be pessimistic about their military prospects. Their economies are shrinking fast, and there is great uncertainty about when and how quickly they will start growing again.

Even China, which has slowed the spread of the disease and begun to reopen its economy, will be hurting for years to come. It took an enormous hit to GDP in the first quarter of 2020, ending 40 years of steady growth. And its trading partners, burned by their dependence on China for much of the equipment needed to fight COVID-19, will surely scale back their imports. An export-dependent China will have to rely more on its domestic market, something it has been attempting for years with only limited success. It is little wonder, then, that the International Monetary Fund [forecasts](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz56lV17s9o) slower growth in China this year than at any time since the 1970s.

Even after a vaccine is developed and made widely available, economic troubles may linger for years. States will emerge from this crisis with enormous debts. They will spend years paying for the bailout and stimulus packages they used to protect citizens and businesses from the economic consequences of social distancing. Drained treasuries will give them one more reason to be pessimistic about their military might.

Less Trade, Less Friction

How long is the pacifying effect of pessimism likely to last? If a vaccine is developed quickly, enabling a relatively swift economic recovery, the mood may prove short-lived. But it is equally likely that the coronavirus crisis will last long enough to change the world in important ways, some of which will likely dampen the appetite for conflict for some time—perhaps up to five or ten years. After all, the world is experiencing both the biggest pandemic and the biggest economic downturn in a century.

Most governments have not covered themselves with glory managing the pandemic, and even the most autocratic worry about popular support. Over the next few years, people will want evidence that their governments are working to protect them from disease and economic dislocation. Citizens will see themselves as dependent on the state, and they will be less inclined to support adventures abroad.

At the same time, governments and businesses will likely try to reduce their reliance on imports of critical materials, having watched global supply chains break down during the pandemic. The result will probably be diminished trade, something liberal internationalists see as a bad thing. But for the last five years or so, trade has not helped improve relations between states but rather fueled resentment. Less trade could mean less friction between major powers, thereby reducing the intensity of their rivalries.

In the Chinese context, less international trade could have positive knock-on effects. Focused on growing the domestic economy, and burdened by hefty bills from fighting the virus, Beijing could be forced to table the Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious trade and investment project that has unnerved the foreign policy establishments of great and middle powers. The suspension of the BRI would soothe the fears of those who see it as an instrument of Chinese world domination.

Interstate wars have become relatively rare since the end of World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a four-decade Cold War, which included an intense nuclear and conventional arms race, but they never fought each other directly, even with conventional weapons. Theorists debate the reasons behind the continued rarity of great-power conflict. I am inclined to believe that the risk of escalation to a nuclear confrontation is simply too great. COVID-19 does nothing to mitigate such risks for world leaders—and a great deal to feed their reasonable pessimism about the likely outcome of even a conventional war.

### 1NC — Populism

#### Populism is stable and independent from financial motives.

Bartels 17 – [Larry, May Werthan Shayne Chair of Public Policy and Social Science at Vanderbilt University. He has written extensively on American electoral politics, public opinion, representation, and public policy. “The ‘wave’ of right-wing populist sentiment is a myth.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/21/the-wave-of-right-wing-populist-sentiment-is-a-myth/?noredirect=on>, June 21, 2017] TDI

Last year’s Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump and electoral gains by right-wing populist parties in countries as diverse as Hungary, Switzerland and Denmark seem to demonstrate that right-wing populist sentiment is on the rise in affluent democracies. But in Europe, at least, that’s simply not the case.

In fact, the attitudes fueling right-wing populism have been remarkably stable since at least 2002. Political entrepreneurs may be getting better at exploiting those attitudes. But the “wave” of populist sentiment is really more like a reservoir — and its political potential is still largely submerged.

According to The Washington Post’s Adam Taylor, “the global wave of populism … turned 2016 upside down.” And while some have interpreted recent setbacks in France and elsewhere as “a rebuttal of claims that a right-wing populist wave is sweeping through Europe,” political scientist Pippa Norris countered here at the Monkey Cage that “the wave of populist nationalism” is “hardly finished.” Time added that “the wave to come … may well spill over into the rest of the world.”

Even when they disagree about the direction of this political wave, observers are in impressive agreement about the forces propelling it. According to Foreign Affairs, “Two core issues lie at the root of today’s rising populism: the challenge of migration and the lingering euro crisis.”

Scholars, too, have pointed to “a prolonged global financial downturn, rising unemployment in a number of areas and a loss of faith in perceived elite projects like the European Union” and “a retrenchment of the welfare state, immigration, and, above all in recent years, the Eurocrisis.” In short, “it shouldn’t be too surprising that the worst economic crisis since the 1930s has led to the worst political crisis within liberal democracies since the 1930s.”

But did the economic crisis really fuel populist attitudes?

The notion that the decade-old global economic crisis has somehow unleashed a wave of right-wing populist sentiment seems common-sensical. But as it turns out, even a cursory examination of the evidence shows that the notion is flatly wrong.

First, the direct role of economic disaffection in generating support for right-wing populist parties has been greatly exaggerated. In the 10 countries included in the 2014-2015 European Social Survey where right-wing populist parties have attracted appreciable support (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), the strongest statistical predictors of that support were right-wing ideology and anti-immigrant sentiment, followed by anti-E. U. sentiment, dissatisfaction with democracy and distrust of politicians, parties and parliaments.

Dissatisfaction with the state of the national economy had a significant independent impact in just a few countries — Sweden, Netherlands, France. And even there, it was trumped by other factors.

But perhaps citizens’ frustrations with immigrants, the European Union and democratic politics are themselves products of economic distress?

Not really. Over seven waves of the European Social Survey covering 23 countries from 2002 to 2015, actual economic conditions (changes in gross domestic product, unemployment, government spending, and immigration) had no apparent impact on the prevalence of right-wing ideology, anti-immigrant sentiment, or anti-E. U. sentiment — and only small, mixed effects on levels of political distrust and democratic disaffection.

The Wall Street meltdown of 2008 and its global fallout provided a massive natural experiment for scholars of mass politics in tough times. The results could not be clearer: The worst economic crisis since the 1930s did remarkably little to fuel right-wing populist sentiment.

Indeed, anyone tracking European attitudes over the past 15 years would have a hard time guessing that anything at all had happened. Anti-immigrant sentiment actually declined slightly, despite millions of new immigrants. Only dissatisfaction with the state of the national economy increased noticeably in 2008-2009. But it soon subsided to pre-crisis levels — and my statistical analysis suggests that economic disaffection itself generated little support for right-wing populist parties in any case.

Individual countries experienced only minor shifts in populist sentiment following the economic crisis. And the places where overall right-wing populist sentiment (as measured by a weighted average of all six factors) did increase, like Spain, Ireland and Slovenia, are not places where right-wing populist parties actually gained much support.

There is no clear relationship between levels of populist sentiment and actual support for right-wing populist parties.

## ADV — Rightsizing

### 1NC — Retrenchment

#### Military presence is key to hard power. A general withdrawal makes offshore balancing impossible.

Wechsler 21 – [William, senior director of the Rafik Hariri Center and Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council. Wechsler is a graduate of Cornell University and received a master’s degree from Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs. He has been an adjunct lecturer at SIPA and is currently an executive committee member of the SIPA alumni association, “No, the US Shouldn’t Withdraw from the Middle East.” Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/no-the-us-shouldnt-withdraw-from-the-middle-east/>, June 24, 2021] TDI

Make no mistake: this is a call to repeal the Carter Doctrine, shut down the US Fifth Fleet (headquartered in Bahrain), and eliminate much of the infrastructure, built over more than half a century, that allows the United States the placement and access required to protect US national security interests. This would be no mere redeployment or retrenchment. It’s an argument for ending the routine projection of US power into the region through the air and over the seas and removing all US military personnel stationed within key partner nations, regardless of the preferences of their leaders. No matter how artfully described, such a policy would be immediately and correctly recognized by all regional leaders as a general US withdrawal.

At that point, the biggest flaw in this plan would become immediately evident. The authors assert that, in order to protect US interests, the United States should then make “greater investments in intelligence and early warning,” seek “close coordination with regional states,” and engage in “robust diplomacy.” While these are worthy goals, in the context of a general withdrawal they are entirely unrealistic.

My colleagues assume that our relationships with host country policymakers and security-sector officials would freeze in place and remain after departure. They assign zero value to the day-to-day interactions between US forces and intelligence professionals, the influence this allows the United States to wield, and the atmospherics that can be gathered as a result. They ignore the criticality of military relationship building and how the strength of those relationships transfers into improved interoperability and common strategic perspectives. They ascribe limited agency to US partners, assuming that these partners will not feel abandoned by the United States and seek out alternative arrangements to meet their security needs. You can surge a lot of things, but as Admiral William McRaven has said, “[you can’t surge trust](http://securitydebrief.com/2012/07/27/you-cant-surge-trust-insights-from-the-opening-of-the-aspen-security-forum/).”

Furthermore, the calls for greater reliance on diplomacy in the region would come as a surprise to almost every modern US president—with Trump, perhaps, the sole exception—and their secretaries of state, each of whom dedicated disproportionate time to exactly that. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton became the personal action officers for diplomacy at Camp David between Israel and Egypt and between Israel and the Palestinians, respectively. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger first made an art of “shuttle diplomacy” in the region, and Secretaries James Baker and John Kerry proudly boasted of the number of trips they had taken there. President George H. W. Bush spent countless hours on the personal diplomacy necessary to build a coalition to liberate Kuwait, and thus restore the status quo, while his son, who upended that status quo, had regular personal calls with the leaders of Iraq and Afghanistan.

This diplomacy was possible only in the wider context of American military strength, a self-evident linkage of hard power and diplomatic prowess. Now that Russia has reentered the region militarily, it too has successfully leveraged its newfound position for its diplomatic ends. At the same time, former regional powers that have long since withdrawn militarily do not tend to find themselves at the center of regional diplomacy. A simple trade-off seeking to replace military power with diplomatic power is wishful thinking, at best.

This approach is particularly infeasible when applied to US counterterrorism objectives. The authors argue that “adequate counterterrorism capacity can be maintained primarily with more robust access agreements and cooperation from local partners,” without explaining how access agreements are supposed to improve in the context of US withdrawal—or how the United States is supposed to maintain cooperation with people who feel it is in the process of deserting them. The approach assumes, as my colleagues write, that the “threat is mostly local and manageable with only a small, residual US military presence, if that” (emphasis added). In reality, Salafi jihadists have a near-perfect record of shifting to external attacks once they have attained a local sanctuary, and successful indirect action requires the United States to take on [more risk, not less](https://nationalinterest.org/feature/delegating-the-dirty-work-us-allies-smart-counterterrorism-19430).

Similarly, as recent events clearly demonstrate, a requirement for “over the horizon” counterterrorism and “offshore balancing” requires more regional naval presence rather than less. With no shortage of irony, the US departure from Afghanistan has recently necessitated the deployment of the [only aircraft carrier based in Asia](https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-aircraft-carrier-leaving-asia-to-help-with-afghanistan-troop-withdrawal-11622034089) toward the Middle East. Moreover, since the new policy is to support Afghan national security forces from afar—exactly as my colleagues prefer—it will require the United States to keep more ships and aircraft in the Gulf region, operating out of many of the same bases that the authors want to close.

#### A general withdrawal destabilizes the region, draws the US back in, and stokes fears of retrenchment.

Dubowitz et al. 20 – [Mark, Chief Executive, Behnam Ben Taleblu, Senior Fellow, and Varsha Koduvayur Koduvayur, Valens Global, “Countering the Iranian Threat in the Persian Gulf.” FDD, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-countering-iranian-threat-in-the-persian-gulf/#:~:text=Consistent%20with%20the%202017%20National%20Security%20Strategy%202,4%29%20securing%20freedom%20of%20navigation%20in%20international%20waters>, December 15, 2020] TDI

The U.S. military cannot ignore partner military readiness and capability, either. Given the threats from Tehran and others, enhancing partner capability not only enables burden-sharing, [17](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-countering-iranian-threat-in-the-persian-gulf/#easy-footnote-bottom-17-112917) but also represents the only path to a safe and durable withdrawal of some U.S. forces from the region. Ignoring this important strategy would only increase the chances Washington would have to return in haste in the future – likely at a greater cost.[18](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-countering-iranian-threat-in-the-persian-gulf/#easy-footnote-bottom-18-112917)

The United States must also consider the impact of a withdrawal on our efforts to halt Iran’s efforts to destabilize the region through material and political support for violent non-state groups. An excessive reduction of U.S. forces in the Gulf would reduce Washington’s ability to detect, interdict, and expose weapons proliferation. That would make it easier for Tehran to conduct its operations directly or by proxy and to advance its arms proliferation strategy.[20](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-countering-iranian-threat-in-the-persian-gulf/#easy-footnote-bottom-20-112917)

Lastly, America’s transformation into a net energy exporter does not mean Washington no longer has an interest in the free flow of energy in the Gulf region. American energy consumers and producers remain vulnerable to what happens in the Gulf. A supply disruption anywhere that spikes the global price of oil impacts consumers and producers everywhere.

Energy flows in the region also impact great power competition. China, as well as key U.S. allies like Japan and South Korea, remains deeply dependent on Gulf energy supplies. The United States effectively controls the lines of communication that deliver that oil.

If competing with China is America’s number one challenge in the coming decades, voluntarily relinquishing control over such a chokepoint makes little sense. Such an unforced error by the United States would stoke fears of U.S. retrenchment among Gulf allies, potentially creating more economic, energy, and military opportunities in the region for Moscow and Beijing.

Suggesting that China take over policing this key maritime chokepoint, as some have done, is short-sighted.[21](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-countering-iranian-threat-in-the-persian-gulf/#easy-footnote-bottom-21-112917) An authoritarian regime that aggressively pursues its narrow security, economic, and geopolitical aims via predatory tactics will not be committed to keeping waterways open for all actors.

#### Retrenchment worsens regional security competition, emboldens regional powers, causes nuclear prolif in East Asia, and US miscalculation from domestic backlash makes extinction inevitable.

Wright 20 – [Thomas, Director of the Center on the United States and Europe and a Senior Fellow in the Project on International Order and Strategy at the Brookings Institution. He is the author of All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-first Century and the Future of American Power. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-02-10/folly-retrenchment>, February 10, 2020] TDI

The realists and the progressives arguing for retrenchment differ in their assumptions, logic, and intentions. The realists tend to be more pessimistic about the prospects for peace and frame their arguments in hardheaded terms, whereas the progressives downplay the consequences of American withdrawal and make a moral case against the current grand strategy. But they share a common claim: that the United States would be better off if it dramatically reduced its global military footprint and security commitments. This is a false promise, for a number of reasons. First, retrenchment would worsen regional security competition in Europe and Asia. The realists recognize that the U.S. military presence in Europe and Asia does dampen security competition, but they claim that it does so at too high a price—and one that, at any rate, should be paid by U.S. allies in the regions themselves. Although pulling back would invite regional security competition, realist retrenchers admit, the United States could be safer in a more dangerous world because regional rivals would check one another. This is a perilous gambit, however, because regional conflicts often end up implicating U.S. interests. They might thus end up drawing the United States back in after it has left—resulting in a much more dangerous venture than heading off the conflict in the first place by staying. Realist retrenchment reveals a hubris that the United States can control consequences and prevent crises from erupting into war. The progressives’ view of regional security is similarly flawed. These retrenchers reject the idea that regional security competition will intensify if the United States leaves. In fact, they argue, U.S. alliances often promote competition, as in the Middle East, where U.S. support for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has emboldened those countries in their cold war with Iran. But this logic does not apply to Europe or Asia, where U.S. allies have behaved responsibly. A U.S. pullback from those places is more likely to embolden the regional powers. Since 2008, Russia has invaded two of its neighbors that are not members of NATO, and if the Baltic states were no longer protected by a U.S. security guarantee, it is conceivable that Russia would test the boundaries with gray-zone warfare. In East Asia, a U.S. withdrawal would force Japan to increase its defense capabilities and change its constitution to enable it to compete with China on its own, straining relations with South Korea. The second problem with retrenchment involves nuclear proliferation. If the United States pulled out of NATO or ended its alliance with Japan, as many realist advocates of retrenchment recommend, some of its allies, no longer protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, would be tempted to acquire nuclear weapons of their own. Unlike the progressives for retrenchment, the realists are comfortable with that result, since they see deterrence as a stabilizing force. Most Americans are not so sanguine, and rightly so. There are good reasons to worry about nuclear proliferation: nuclear materials could end up in the hands of terrorists, states with less experience might be more prone to nuclear accidents, and nuclear powers in close proximity have shorter response times and thus conflicts among them have a greater chance of spiraling into escalation. Third, retrenchment would heighten nationalism and xenophobia. In Europe, a U.S. withdrawal would send the message that every country must fend for itself. It would therefore empower the far-right groups already making this claim—such as the Alternative for Germany, the League in Italy, and the National Front in France—while undermining the centrist democratic leaders there who told their populations that they could rely on the United States and NATO. As a result, Washington would lose leverage over the domestic politics of individual allies, particularly younger and more fragile democracies such as Poland. And since these nationalist populist groups are almost always protectionist, retrenchment would damage U.S. economic interests, as well. Even more alarming, many of the right-wing nationalists that retrenchment would empower have called for greater accommodation of China and Russia. A fourth problem concerns regional stability after global retrenchment. The most likely end state is a spheres-of-influence system, whereby China and Russia dominate their neighbors, but such an order is inherently unstable. The lines of demarcation for such spheres tend to be unclear, and there is no guarantee that China and Russia will not seek to move them outward over time. Moreover, the United States cannot simply grant other major powers a sphere of influence—the countries that would fall into those realms have agency, too. If the United States ceded Taiwan to China, for example, the Taiwanese people could say no. The current U.S. policy toward the country is working and may be sustainable. Withdrawing support from Taiwan against its will would plunge cross-strait relations into chaos. The entire idea of letting regional powers have their own spheres of influence has an imperial air that is at odds with modern principles of sovereignty and international law. A fifth problem with retrenchment is that it lacks domestic support. The American people may favor greater burden sharing, but there is no evidence that they are onboard with a withdrawal from Europe and Asia. As a survey conducted in 2019 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found, seven out of ten Americans believe that maintaining military superiority makes the United States safer, and almost three-quarters think that alliances contribute to U.S. security. A 2019 Eurasia Group Foundation poll found that over 60 percent of Americans want to maintain or increase defense spending. As it became apparent that China and Russia would benefit from this shift toward retrenchment, and as the United States’ democratic allies objected to its withdrawal, the domestic political backlash would grow. One result could be a prolonged foreign policy debate that would cause the United States to oscillate between retrenchment and reengagement, creating uncertainty about its commitments and thus raising the risk of miscalculation by Washington, its allies, or its rivals. Realist and progressive retrenchers like to argue that the architects of the United States’ postwar foreign policy naively sought to remake the world in its image. But the real revisionists are those who argue for retrenchment, a geopolitical experiment of unprecedented scale in modern history. If this camp were to have its way, Europe and Asia—two stable, peaceful, and prosperous regions that form the two main pillars of the U.S.-led order—would be plunged into an era of uncertainty.

#### BUT a secure Middle East deters Iran and ensures access to the Indo-Pacific.

Coffey 21 – [Luke, Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation. “US Military Presence in the Gulf Is a Strategic Priority.” Arab News Japan, <https://www.arabnews.jp/en/opinion/article_60376/>, November 27, 2021] TDI

There is no shortage of challenges and threats facing the US and its allies and partners in the Middle East. Obviously, the biggest threat comes from Iran. Since 1979, Tehran has pursued a policy of destabilization that has had a ripple effect across much of the region. The support and funding of proxy groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen has made Iran one of the world’s largest state sponsors of terrorism.

Iran’s cavalier behavior in the Gulf is reminiscent of 19th-century piracy. Tehran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons is not only a threat to the region, but also to world peace.

As US policymakers in the Pentagon put the final touches to the Global Posture Review, there are three important points they should not forget.

First, Iran remains a serious threat. While China might be the “pacing” threat for the US, for many of Washington’s allies and partners, it is Iran that deserves such a title. In recent years, there has been no greater threat to US military personnel in the region than from Iran. The Global Posture Review needs to acknowledge that, as long as Iran pursues an aggressive foreign policy, the US military presence in the Middle East must remain robust.

Second, US policymakers need to understand how the Indo-Pacific region is connected, and in some cases integrated, into the broader Middle East region. It is not possible to have a serious China strategy without stability and security in the Middle East.

For example, the transit zones found in the Middle East region, such as the Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz and Bab Al-Mandab Strait, are important to Washington’s security interests because they provide access to the Indo-Pacific. The security and stability of these maritime transit routes for the US Navy are also critical in terms of America’s ability to respond to a crisis in the Indo-Pacific in a timely manner.

Finally, the US needs to be more engaged in the region. Even if the Global Posture Review ends up increasing the number of US troops in the Middle East, additional forces must be accompanied by a stronger diplomatic presence. Biden needs to restore US trust in the region and could start to do so by visiting the Middle East himself. At a minimum, he should be routinely speaking to his counterparts in the Gulf — but there is no substitute for face-to-face contact.

Considering the high stakes, his absence from the region amounts to geopolitical negligence. It is hard to believe that, 10 months into his presidency, he has not set foot in the Middle East.
With the Biden administration hoping that nuclear talks with Iran will resume in the coming weeks, the White House could be tempted to reduce the US military footprint in the Gulf as a gesture of goodwill to Tehran. However, this would send a dangerous signal to Iran at a time when US prestige and commitment are already questioned in light of the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

As long as US national security interests demand a military presence in the Middle East, and as long as the countries in the region are happy to welcome and host Americans, Washington should maintain, if not increase, troop levels in the region.

### 1NC — Rightsizing

#### Wholesale withdrawal erodes our competitive advantage against China.

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Dealing first with the contention that American military forces in the Middle East are wastefully ineffective, it is true that military-led nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been [dismally ineffective](https://fee.org/articles/19-billion-wasted-in-failed-afghanistan-nation-building-efforts-report-shows/). Unfortunately, these massive (and [expensive](https://www.militarytimes.com/opinion/commentary/2020/02/06/the-iraq-war-has-cost-the-us-nearly-2-trillion/)) failures of military-led nation-building efforts in the Middle East (and beyond) conflate and mask the highly successful counterterrorism (CT) operations that have consistently [decapitated the leadership of terrorist organizations](https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1999751/us-forces-kill-isis-founder-leader-baghdadi-in-syria/), smashed [terrorist strongholds throughout the region](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47678157), and limited the ability of terrorist groups to conduct [external operations](https://www.lawfareblog.com/al-qaedas-continuing-challenge-united-states) on U.S. soil. Bluntly, the failures of the American military’s nation-building efforts in the Middle East are exceeded only by the successes of its CT efforts. Recognizing the stark and monumental outcome differences between military-led nation-building operations and CT operations allows for a more balanced and accurate assessment of the American footprint (and its true costs) in the Middle East. While American military forces may be susceptible to enemy attacks from their forward positions in the Middle East, they also prosecute operations that disrupt terrorism in tangible ways that continue to keep Americans safe. In short, in the conduct of its CT mission, forward-deployed troops are more often the predator (on America’s behalf) than the prey. Arguments advocating for the wholesale withdrawal of American forces from the Middle East jeopardize American lives to exactly the extent that they fail to distinguish the difference between successful (and still required) CT operations and failed nation-building efforts.

If a failure to recognize the security imperatives of a persistent American military presence in the Middle East represents the strongest myth perpetuating calls for American disengagement, a dogmatic belief in the “zero-sum” resource ledger for GPC efforts represents the loudest. According to this position, military commitments in the Middle East automatically decrease military readiness for GPC threats in a “zero-sum” relationship and thus threats from great power competitors require the American military to [rebalance towards competition with China and Russia](https://warontherocks.com/2019/02/confusion-in-the-pivot-the-muddled-shift-from-peripheral-war-to-great-power-competition/). Given the stakes of GPC, certainly a reprioritization of resources is prudent and necessary. But how much and from what elements of national power?

For those who take the increasingly old-fashioned view that the job of the U.S. military is to fight and win the nation’s wars in armed conflict, there are plenty of reasons to doubt the logic of removing American forces from the Middle East in exchange for GPC contributions. The obtuse belief that the military exists to fight and win in armed conflict establishes that the further away the military gets from conducting tasks associated with combat, the less useful and effective such military operations become (this is why military-led nation-building fails). But in GPC, operations short of armed conflict will, by design, be the norm. In fact, given the established role of [nuclear deterrence](https://www.amazon.com/Realism-International-Politics-Kenneth-Waltz/dp/0415954789/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=kenneth+waltz+realism&qid=1617005855&s=books&sr=1-1) that has prevented “hot war” between great powers since World War II, it is reasonable to conclude that “hot war” (featuring the kinds of activities that the U.S. military is best suited for) will not occur until/unless a great power nation solves the [second-strike equation](http://internationalrelations.org/second-strike-capability/) of nuclear deterrence. Notice, at issue here is not whether or not GPC nations pose critical threats to the United States—they do—but what instruments of national power are best suited to deal with them in the current and projected environment. Thus, empowering the diplomatic, information, and economic elements of national power (i.e., those elements explicitly designed to compete in alternate arenas apart from armed conflict) to assume a leading role in addressing GPC threats makes more sense than “[militarizing](https://www.amazon.com/How-Everything-Became-War-Military/dp/147677787X)“ American foreign policy in areas where it need not be militarized and at the expense of areas where it must remain “[militarized](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/10/20/how-to-downsize-the-us-presence-in-the-middle-east/)“ (i.e., the Middle East). Plainly, if GPC requires competitive actions short of war, and if credible security threats to the American people persist in the Middle East requiring war-like combat capabilities, then it makes little sense to shift the military from tasks that it is best suited for and align it against tasks for which it is less suited (compared to other elements of national power).

Not only does “zero-sum” thinking misalign military resources away from its core and essential purpose, but it discounts and undermines the enduring advantages of the American military vis-à-vis GPC nations. One of the most striking attributes of the modern Chinese military is its [inexperience in projecting combat force](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/chinese-military-has-one-weakness-it-cant-fix-no-combat-experience-38952) outside of the Chinese mainland. What, for instance, does China know about deploying, sustaining, and fighting with large combat forces far from home, in different environments, and for long periods of time? The answer is not nearly as much as the American military that has been doing precisely that for over twenty continuous years. To be sure, this is not to suggest unending commitments to American “forever wars” or that the American military should keep its forces in the Middle East simply to outpace the Chinese military in combat experience. Rather, it is to highlight that as the U.S. military performs its critical and still-required CT mission in the Middle East, it simultaneously and naturally (out-) competes with China in significant ways that help preserve military advantages in GPC. Re-framed this way, any hasty “realignment” of forces away from the Middle East to support GPC efforts elsewhere (for activities short of war) automatically represents an erosion of the American military competitive advantage against China.

### 1NC — China Hegemony

#### Chinese regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific is impossible. The US is the exception, not the rule.

Walt 23 – [Stephen, columnist at Foreign Policy and the Robert and Renée Belfer professor of international relations at Harvard University. “Stop Worrying About Chinese Hegemony in Asia” Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/31/stop-worrying-about-chinese-hegemony-in-asia/>, May 31, 2023] TDI

Why Regional Hegemony Is (Nearly) Impossible to Achieve

Regional hegemony may be desirable in theory, but history suggests that it is an elusive goal. As Jonathan Kirshner [points out](https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691166773/an-unwritten-future), several different great powers have launched bids for regional dominance in the modern era and all but one of these attempts ended in disaster. France failed under Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte, Germany was beaten decisively in both world wars, and Japan’s attempt to establish a hegemonic order in Asia ended in total defeat as well. Only the United States managed to pull off becoming the sole great power in its region. In the modern world, in short, the success rate is less than 20 percent.

Furthermore, the failures were not just minor setbacks: They were unmitigated disasters for the countries that made the attempt. Perhaps a million Frenchmen lost their lives in the Napoleonic Wars, and Bonaparte died in exile on a remote island in the South Atlantic. Germany suffered mightily in both world wars and ended up divided into separate states for more than 40 years. Japan was firebombed in World War II, had two cities destroyed by atomic bombs, and its political order was remade by a foreign occupier. Being a regional hegemon might be desirable, but trying to become one almost always makes a state less, rather than more, secure.

Bids for hegemony fail for two main reasons. First, as defensive realists have long [emphasized](https://www.amazon.com/Origins-Alliances-Cornell-Studies-Security/dp/0801494184), there is a powerful tendency for major powers to balance against threats. When a powerful state is nearby, when its military forces seem tailored to project power against others, and when it seems to have revisionist ambitions, nearby powers typically band together to deter or defeat them. If a would-be hegemon reveals its aims by starting a war, balancing behavior becomes even more pronounced and effective.

The second barrier to regional hegemony is nationalism. As Napoleon discovered when he invaded Spain, as the Soviet Union and United States both learned in Afghanistan, and as Moscow is now being reminded in Ukraine, local populations will make enormous sacrifices to repel invaders. Even nations that have been temporarily vanquished often remain restive and eager to throw off an aspiring hegemon’s yoke. The dissolution of the European colonial empires during the 20th century further illustrates how the spread of nationalist doctrines has strengthened resistance to foreign dominance.

The United States is the one exception to this recurring tendency: It is the only regional hegemon in the modern era. Other would-be hegemons faced coordinated opposition from formidable and well-organized nation-states, but the United States was an ocean away from the other great powers and able to expand across North America without having to fight another major power or overcome a balancing coalition. The Indigenous population tried to resist, but it was weakened by its susceptibility to European diseases and divided into many loosely organized tribes and nations. Although Indigenous opposition to American expansion [persisted](https://wwnorton.com/books/9781631496998) until the late 19th century, the native tribes faced insurmountable collective-action problems and a dwindling population and were eventually swamped by an irresistible demographic tide. To put it plainly, the United States got lucky.

Could China Become a Regional Hegemon Today?

The conditions that allowed the United States to dominate the Western Hemisphere and exclude other major powers do not exist in Asia today. China may be stronger than any of its neighbors, but several of them are major industrial powers with considerable potential to check Chinese power, and the world’s other major power—the United States—remains committed to helping defend them. India’s population is now larger and significantly younger than China’s and its economy is growing more rapidly. Many of China’s neighbors are already balancing more energetically: Defense budgets are [rising](https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/Geopolitical-powder-keg-Asia-jacks-up-global-military-spending) sharply, and Australia, India, and Japan are coordinating with each other and with the United States. The greater their fear of Chinese hegemony, the more vigorous such responses will be.

In addition, India already has a nuclear arsenal and Japan or South Korea could acquire a nuclear deterrent if the need arose. Officials in [Tokyo](https://thebulletin.org/2022/08/the-legacy-of-shinzo-abe-a-japan-divided-about-nuclear-weapons/) and [Seoul](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65333139) have previously made it clear that they see this as a viable option should circumstances require, and possessing their own deterrent would further limit China’s ability to intimidate them. If China does not want more of its neighbors to acquire nuclear weapons, therefore, it should limit its ambitions and make such a step unnecessary.

Nor are Asian powers likely to be swayed by Chinese President Xi Jinping’s [suggestion](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201405/t20140527_678163.html) that “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia.” Such statements are obviously intended to make the U.S. role in Asia seem less legitimate, but the belief that a shared “Asian” identity will override each individual state’s self-interest ignores the power of modern nationalism, which did not exist when the pre-modern, Sino-centric tributary system was in place. Nationalism is a powerful force in China, of course, but also in India, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and Vietnam. It is hard to imagine any of these states preferring subordination to Beijing to national autonomy.

Lastly, modern surveillance and communications technology makes it much easier for states to identify threatening powers and coordinate defensive responses. A Chinese bid for hegemony in Asia would be impossible to disguise, and states threatened by this attempt could share concerns, pool resources, and formulate a collective response quickly. As the rapid and vigorous Western response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine illustrates, countries facing a common danger can act with surprising swiftness when necessary.

### 1NC — Offshore Balancing

#### Offshore balancing fails – can’t solve terror, prolif, and unipolarity empirically improves security ties.

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Offshore balancing, then, would probably not pay great dividends on essential security issues like terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and, in key respects, it would likely cause more harm than good. But how does offshore balancing fare when one considers the broader and even more crucial issue at hand—the question of how successful that strategy will be in preserving U.S. global influence and maintaining a comparatively stable and advantageous international environment? A core assumption of offshore balancing is that retrenchment will not imperil that environment. Offshore balancers believe that a more circumspect grand strategy will lessen great power frictions, compel free-riding American allies to bear more of the load, and thus sustain basic global stability at a reduced price. As noted earlier, some proponents of the strategy also believe that offshore balancing will, counterintuitively, enhance American influence overseas. Here as elsewhere, the central claim of offshore balancing is that less activism and engagement will produce equal or even better results. Here as elsewhere, however, that argument is deeply suspect. Grasping this point requires understanding that offshore balancers’ critique of the inherited U.S. strategy is considerably overdrawn. From reading arguments in favor of offshore balancing, one often gets the impression that American strategy actively undercuts the nation’s influence and interests, by eliciting widespread systemic resistance and making Washington more enemies than friends. Yet the reality is not nearly so bleak. Yes, American power and interventions undoubtedly appear threatening to U.S. rivals, and certain post-Cold War endeavors—particularly the invasion of Iraq—were highly unpopular overseas.91 But even so, it is misleading to suggest that American policy causes such widespread, systematic alienation and pushback as offshore balancers believe. As several leading scholars have noted, for example, the importance of anti-U.S. “soft balancing” is frequently exaggerated, because empirical support for that phenomenon is actually quite weak, and because it is really Washington that most frequently utilizes the tools of “soft balancing”—international institutions, diplomatic coalition-building, and others—to achieve its foreign-policy preferences.92 Moreover, and contrary to what one might expect from reading the offshore balancing literature, the dominant tendency of the post-Cold War era has been for countries to align with, rather than against, America. This has been true in Europe, where the United States has not simply maintained NATO but taken on 12 additional allies since the outset of the unipolar period. It has also been true in Asia, where American defense, security, and political relationships have frequently been upgraded, intensified, and expanded since the mid1990s. Even during the George W. Bush administration—the years when anti-American sentiment was probably at its peak—Washington actually increased and improved its security ties with a wide range of second- and third-tier states that saw American influence not as a threat but as a source of reassurance and protection vis-à-vis rising regional powers like Russia and China. Certain American policies may elicit widespread global disapproval, but the recent trend has been one of “balancing with” the United States rather than “balancing against it.”93 Far from being a geopolitical liability, in fact, America’s forward presence and engagement have long been deeply interlinked with both U.S. influence and international stability. On the subject of influence, the security that America has provided its friends and allies has, in turn, provided America with substantial leverage in shaping those partners’ policies. “The more U.S. troops are stationed in a country,” one statistical analysis of this question finds, “the more closely that country’s foreign policy orientation aligns with that of the United States.”94 Historical evidence supports this assertion. From the early Cold War to the present, U.S. officials have often invoked the sway afforded by America’s forward presence to prevent allies from pursuing nuclear weapons, to gain more beneficial terms in trade and financial pacts, and even to impact the makeup of its allies’ governments.95 In the trade and financial realm, for instance, U.S. troop presence provided a bargaining chip that Washington employed to get NATO allies to bolster the dollar during the 1960s. Over 40 years later, the U.S.-South Korea security relationship provided leverage that American negotiators used to obtain better terms in the U.S.­ South Korea Free Trade Agreement.96 More broadly, American alliances have served as mechanisms for influencing economic, political, and security agendas in key regions, and for projecting Washington’s voice on a wide array of matters. Admittedly, that voice might not be as strong as U.S. officials desire or some international observers believe, but it has nonetheless been quite powerful and pervasive by any meaningful comparison.