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## Navigating the Future of Global Challenges: Analyzing U.S. Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

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**NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES: ANALYZING U.S.  
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Chance Hepola

August 2024

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# **NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES: ANALYZING U.S.**

## **FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, August 2024

Master of Science

Chance Hepola

### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, traditional American foreign policy norms have been rocked by dissent and challenges to the status quo. The rise of American populism, the 2016 election, and the admiration of ‘America First’ policies have contributed to the shift of modern American internationalism and statecraft to a retreat towards isolationism and a wariness to the international order. More so, questions regarding the United States’ role in NATO, approach to Ukrainian aid, and the ever-evolving Israel-Hamas War have all but exacerbated the issue of the American approach to foreign policy. Members of Congress, both from the left and the right, are deeply divided on America’s place in the world. The questions remain - Where does America belong in the international space, how should the United States approach foreign policy, and what does the world look like if America is not at the forefront as the liberal superpower? With U.S. adversaries on the rise and becoming increasingly more aggressive, the United States must come to a consensus on its foreign policy principles. A 2024 Presidential Election is fast approaching, and a divergent view of American foreign policy is on full display between the sitting President and the leading candidate of the opposition party. This thesis attempts to examine America’s historical foreign policy roots, evaluate three specific competing ideological differences, and ultimately, identify key recommendations of the United States’ approach towards foreign policy.

**KEYWORDS:** foreign policy, retrenchment, isolationism, China, Russia, Middle East

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States' global role has a long, complicated, and drawn-out history. While many policymakers and everyday Americans view U.S. foreign policy through a limited viewpoint of events and U.S. actions over the past twenty years, the approach to foreign policy has much more nuance than conventional wisdom might assume. For 235 years, the American foreign policy pendulum has swung back and forth based on the changing of international events, executive and legislative decisions, and the opinions of the American public. Yet, for more than four decades, the U.S. foreign policy approach has received bipartisan support and consistency among the executive and legislative branches. Though there had been few differences between both the left and the right on the U.S. approach to the rest of the world, both parties have universally agreed on America's international standing. From a global leader focused on deterrence, security alliances, and American supremacy in the 20th century to Congress universally authorizing military force in Afghanistan in 2001 and later an overwhelming majority of Congress supporting action in Iraq in 2003, U.S. foreign policy has been predicated on a consistent narrative with few dissenting factions in U.S. foreign policy. However, beginning in the early stages of the 2016 presidential election, American foreign policy perceptions began to shift. No longer has 'America First' or 'isolationism' received the negative reactions of the past, but it has become popularized by those on the right and embraced by members on the left (though, there are clear semantic differences and even substantive differences).

By the onset of the 2016 election, and the rise of isolationist sentiments, 'America First' ideology dominated the Trump Presidency and has since become a cornerstone of the Republican Party. Outside of Republican circles, Progressive Democrats have dissented from their centrist

colleagues - both Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders vowed to cut defense spending, end military interventions, and reform the global economy during the 2016 democratic primary election cycle. Democrats and left-leaning individuals are starkly divided on U.S. support for conflicts abroad, specifically with the conflict between Israel-Hamas. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, progressives have demanded the United States cease military and financial support to Israel because of their view of alleged “genocide” occurring in the Gaza Strip. Russia’s subsequent second invasion of Ukraine, Israel’s war with Hamas, China’s persistent aggression towards territorial claims to the South China Sea and Taiwan, and Iran’s ever influential proxies in the Middle East, have put foreign policy front and center for President Joe Biden, Congress, and the American public.

This thesis not only revisits the historical roots and development of American foreign policy, but it paints a picture of American foreign policy from the founding of the United States to the modern-day. In addition, this thesis seeks to identify and explain the differing foreign policy perspectives and competing ideologies, and ultimately, identifies a direction and key recommendations for policymakers in the future.

Regarding structure, Chapter One establishes a theoretical framework. While there are a multitude of nuanced approaches and ideologies, I have identified three competing approaches in American foreign policy. These three approaches are meant to be distinguished as the most important and persistent approaches by most policymakers and the average foreign policy observer. In this chapter, the three approaches are identified with real-world examples that includes the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Chapter Two provides the historical overview of American foreign policy. The chapter gives the reader context and the historical knowledge of the U.S. approach to the international realm. Furthermore, Chapter Two focuses on



policies, events, legislation, and public opinion that has helped shape American grand strategy. From early American history to the more recent foreign policy maneuvers, the chapter helps give the reader an understanding of how the United States arrived in its place in the world. To avoid creating a “history encyclopedia” and a laundry list of historical events, this thesis only identifies a limited number of policies and events that helped shape U.S. grand strategy. Throughout the chapter, and by the end, the three competing ideologies are interwoven based on the historical analysis that is presented.

Chapter Three details the current state of U.S. foreign policy and the most persistent issues that the United States faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this chapter, the focus is on three persistent and future consistent adversaries – China, Russia, and the terrorist groups and regimes of the Middle East. Chapter Four touches on the fallacies of global retrenchment, isolationism, and the issues of accepting spheres of influence. In addition, Chapter Four explains why the U.S. should continue to embrace its global role, and why it is important for the United States to lead. Chapter Five offers’ recommendations and analyzes key considerations for policymakers, the national security apparatus, and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before examining the history of American foreign policy in Chapter II, this chapter lays out the practical framework for future analysis. Though there are several different ideologies, viewpoints, and practices when it comes to U.S. engagement with the rest of the world, this chapter, and the rest of this thesis, lays out three specific world views – global retrenchment (isolationism), accepting spheres of influence, and asserting American leadership and dominance. While there are possibly more foreign policy viewpoints, these three approaches are the most significant ones in current American discourse. Specifically, I will reference and explain three specific *Foreign Affairs* articles from three different competing perspectives. This thesis identifies three articles suggesting different approaches to the role of the United States in the world. Throughout history the United States has implemented a form of one of the three perspectives. In addition, the three foreign affairs articles help readers establish a practical framework with real-world ramifications. While it is important to understand the theory of foreign policy implementation, it is even more important to understand the practical and real-world consequences that come with it. The three perspectives follow:

### **Global Retrenchment**

In his piece, “The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn’t Dominate the World,” Stephen Wertheim touches on why the United States should not dominate the world. According to Wertheim, the United States had an unfettered leadership in the international community after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Many others claim that the United States was the sole

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Wertheim, "The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn't Dominate the World," *Foreign Affairs*, 2020, 19, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2020-02-10/price-primacy>.

superpower. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have seen a rise in different powers - China with its military and geopolitical expansion and advancements, has risen; Russia maintains an aggressive military posture reflected in the invasion of Ukraine; North Korea remains an unbalanced and unpredictable nuclear threat to the Korean peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region; and Iran seems bent on a nuclear weapon capability while they export terrorism across the Middle East. The United States is the unchallenged leader in Europe and the Pacific, a persistent voice in the UN, and is almost unmatched militarily and economically. While the United States is limited in its unilateral leadership in the United Nations because of the veto power of the “Big 5” on the Security Council, it remains the voice of democratic governance around the world.

With this global dominance both in the 20th and 21st centuries, Wertheim argues the United States has focused entirely too much on dominance and supremacy and has failed to realize its consequences. In a scathing assessment regarding United States’ foreign policy over the past two decade, Wertheim states the following:

Rather than practice and cultivate peace, Washington pursued armed domination and launched futile wars in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011. These actions created more enemies than they defeated. They killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and overextended a generation of U.S. service members. They damaged laws and institutions that stabilize the world and the United States. They made the American people less safe.<sup>2</sup>

Wertheim continues by stating the United States failed to address the AIDS pandemic, climate change, and other human rights issues while focusing too much on militarization.<sup>3</sup> More so, he goes on to list several consequences of American primacy: financial costs, strategic overreach, and geopolitical backlash.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Instead of global primacy, Wertheim argues the United States should pursue diplomacy over militarized coercion, multilateralism and international cooperation, restraint in the use of military force, and selective engagement.<sup>5</sup> For the approach to Russia and China, he recommends reducing the U.S. military presence in Asia and Europe, while retaining the ability to intervene if either power becomes a threat to its respective region.<sup>6</sup> Though, one might argue that maintaining a force large enough to intervene is similar to maintain primacy. Furthermore, providing allies with the tools and resources they need to repel an attack by either great power would be beneficial compared to U.S. military enforcement.<sup>7</sup> In a dissent from previous views of Russia, Wertheim recommends the United States pursue a policy “that respects Russia’s consistent view of its vital interests - preserving its regime, avoiding hostile governments in its ‘near abroad,’ and participating in core European security and diplomatic discussions.”<sup>8</sup>

Overall, Wertheim’s “camp” and beliefs are generally consistent with isolationist tenants - retreating from the global stage, restraining from conflicts, and allowing other hostile regimes to flourish and not pushing back against them. With the debacle in Afghanistan, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Americans are truly questioning the U.S. role in the rest of the world. Wertheim ultimately argues that the United States should reevaluate its place in the world, retreat to regional influence rather than international leadership, and focus on diplomacy more than anything. Above all else, Wertheim’s camp believes the United States should retreat from its militarily alliances, bring home U.S. servicemen and servicewomen, and embrace global retrenchment.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 25.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

## Accepting New Spheres of Influence

The second competing approach is introduced in “The New Spheres of Influence” by Graham Allison. In this article, Allison discusses the evolving dynamics of global power and influence in the 21st century. Allison argues that the traditional notion of spheres of influence, where great powers dominate specific regions, is being reshaped by technological advancements, economic interdependence, and unconventional warfare tactics.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Allison defines spheres of influence as the “ability of other powers to demand deference from other states in their own regions or exert predominant control there...”<sup>10</sup> Examples of spheres of influence throughout history has been the Soviet Union’s influence in Eastern Europe and the United States enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America. Shortly after World War II, the United States accepted there would be areas of the world that would be under Soviet Union. According to the author, despite the terrible consequences, the “best course for the United States was to bolster those powers on the periphery of this Soviet sphere while reinforcing the strength and unity of its own sphere.”<sup>11</sup>

In the modern-age, Allison highlights China's rising influence, particularly in Asia, and its challenge to the existing U.S.-led order. He warns against a simplistic return to Cold War-style containment strategies, advocating instead for a nuanced approach that recognizes the complexities of contemporary geopolitics.<sup>12</sup> He emphasizes the importance of understanding and engaging with the diverse range of actors and factors shaping global power dynamics to navigate this new era effectively.

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<sup>9</sup>Graham Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, 2020, 32, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence>.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 30.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 31.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Allison argues for “somewhere in the middle.” Unlike the opposing views between isolationism and interventionism, the United States should find an approach between the two by allowing other spheres of influence and the opportunity to share the globe with others. Allison lists the several different decisions by China and Russia that are challenging traditional Western spheres of influence and creating spheres of their own such as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the newfound issue of cyber warfare.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, Allison argues that different approaches are necessary to the world we see today.

The United States has seen a pragmatic approach to foreign policy before, especially under the Nixon and Ford Administrations. Overall, Allison contends that accepting shared spheres of influence across the globe will lead to peace and alleviate the contentious nature of the world in its current state. Spheres of influence advocates believe the United States should accept that U.S. adversaries have an influence throughout the world. By accepting spheres of influence, the United States would acknowledge the “reality” that countries like Russia, China, and Iran are not going away. The author ends his piece by exclaiming: “Going forward, U.S. policymakers will have to abandon unattainable aspirations for the worlds they dreamed of and accept the fact that spheres of influence will remain a central feature of geopolitics.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Asserting American Leadership**

The third, and final, perspective this thesis evaluates is the support for American hegemony and leadership throughout the world. Thomas Wright’s editorial in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Folly of Retrenchment: Why America Can’t Withdraw from the World,” takes a deep dive into why the United States should not retreat from its responsibilities, alliances, or place in the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 32.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 40.

world. The author argues for maintaining the historic “status quo” of U.S. foreign policy. Wright states: “Although successive administrations had major disagreements over the details, Democrats and Republicans alike backed a system of alliances, the forward positioning of forces, a relatively open international economy, and, albeit imperfectly, the principles of freedom, human rights, and democracy.”<sup>15</sup> Wright contends that both the fringe left, and the fringe right, have accustomed themselves to a retrenchment of American foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

While leading Republican and Democrat members of Congress are committed to the United States’ traditional role in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, there are simmering beliefs within each party that Washington should retreat from its alliances and enter an era with the United States not as the global leader. Wright contends that though retrenchment seems appealing to some, it would become detrimental for U.S. interests and global stability. Especially in today’s international environment, a retreat to isolationism would cede ground to U.S. adversaries such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. To Wright, and others like him, retrenchment would worsen regional security competition in Europe and Asia, it would increase and worsen nuclear proliferation, heighten nationalism and xenophobia, and threaten regional stability.<sup>17</sup>

Wright concludes that, for all of the flaws with retrenchment, it would be wrong to pretend that the world would change for the better if the United States did not maintain global leadership and the status quo.<sup>18</sup> Meaning, U.S. policymakers who espouse retrenchment and isolationism assume the nation and the world would be a safer place if the United States retreated

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Wright, "The Folly of Retrenchment: Why America Can't Withdraw From the World," *Foreign Affairs* 2020, 10, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/folly-retrenchment>.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 12-15.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, 17.

from its historic foreign policy approach of the past eighty years. Yet, he states the United States should pick and choose when to implement retrenchment in certain areas of the world. For instance, Wright advocated for the ending of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. Those who agree with Wright advocate for an American foreign policy that honors its alliances, asserts its leadership, and challenges adversaries. Wright's views reflect an ideology of U.S. economic and military leadership that has been the norm since the end of World War II.

In summation, American lawmakers and policymakers have several different "options" when developing the future of American foreign policy. Retrenchment, a policy of diminished U.S. presence abroad, has become increasingly attractive for policymakers that span across party lines. Whether it be "America First" from the right, or retrenchment from the left, Congressional members have flirted with the idea that U.S. leadership is no longer needed abroad. The presence of U.S. troops and bases around the globe are perceived as aggressive, unwarranted, and not of American interest. As for the acceptance of new spheres of influence, policymakers could conclude that Chinese and Russian influence over their respective regions is now the new normal. This would mean Russia has a dominant influence over Eastern Europe, while China would exert its influence throughout East Asia and the Pacific. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has experienced global influence and unipolarity. But with the resurgence of an aggressive China and Russia, Congress may have to come to terms with the reality that both nations have an outsized influence in their broader regions. Despite the resurgence of these two foreign policy views, there are still several policymakers who value the "status quo" of American leadership. This foreign policy view not only values American military and economic presence abroad, but it pushes back against new spheres of influence throughout Europe, Asia, and the



Middle East. As world events continue to evolve, the United States will surely grapple with the direction of American grand strategy.

## **CHAPTER II: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY**

To understand contemporary and prospective American foreign policy, one must understand the history of U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, one must understand how particular events and policy positions guided American foreign policy from the nation's founding and beyond. Globalization, internationalism, and security assurances were outgrowths of a post-World War II era, and the commencement of the Cold War. Yet, the United States has more than 200 years of differing foreign policy approaches that were overwhelmingly popular for decades. America's history with the rest of the globe is complicated, and it has differing distinctions throughout each presidency. This chapter tries to explain the U.S. role in foreign affairs in a clear, concise, organized, and understandable manner. As mentioned previously; to avoid creating a history encyclopedia and a long list of historical events, this thesis only identifies a limited number of policies and events that helped shape U.S. grand strategy.

### **Establishing a Foundation**

Long before the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the creation of the American governance framework through the approval of the U.S. Constitution in 1783, the Founding Fathers had a millennia of foreign policy history to study. For centuries, war, global alignments, and great-power competition had plagued the "Old World"-- specifically the European continent. Death and destruction were a reality for all too many in Europe. The alliance and competing nations of the Old World may have influenced the founders' thinking when establishing the new nation. There are multiple examples of entangled alliances, and cyclical warfare on the European continent before the founding of the United States, but this section only identifies a few. For

example, the "Hundred Years" War lasted more than a century between the 14th - 15th centuries as both France and Britain vied for political, economic, and geographic dominance.<sup>19</sup> The War of Grand Alliance in the late 17th century was fought between the French and a British led coalition that consisted of the Dutch and the Austrians.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the French and Indian War, a segment of the broader Seven Years' War, hit colonists closer to home. Though, some colonists exacerbated the conflict by expanding to the West themselves. The competitive nature of the European powers had expanded beyond the European continent and the North American colonies became a breeding ground for European competition. In the current age of perceived perpetual conflict and conversations revolving around "endless wars," British, French, Dutch, and Spanish descendants of the colonial era encountered continuous conflict among their European ruling nations.

While official U.S. foreign policy did not officially begin until the Constitutional Convention and the George Washington presidency, the framers approached foreign affairs based on their immediate experience with the European powers. If the American experiment was going to work early on, many of the Founders believed in a nation that was not subjugated to the alliances and wars of the past. Leading up to the writing of the Constitution, the *Federalist Papers* not only had a profound impact on the contemporary U.S. system of governance, but the literature was not silent on the subject of foreign policy. Arguing that foreign policy is superior under a unified government rather than a confederation of states, John Jay in *Federalist No. 3* asserted that the United States had an obligation to national security, should apply treaties

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<sup>19</sup>"Hundred Years' War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Hundred-Years-War>.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

consistently on behalf of the states, and participate in commerce abroad.<sup>21</sup> While this was simply a skeletal argument on why foreign policy is better under a centralized government rather than individual states, it laid a foundation for the early Republic.

The Constitution of the United States gives foreign policy powers to both the executive and legislative branches. Article I enumerates several foreign affairs matters to the legislative branch – “regulate commerce with foreign nations, declare war, raise and support armies, provide and maintain a military, and make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces.”<sup>22</sup> Article II lays out presidential powers in foreign affairs - the President is the “commander and chief of the army and navy.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, the President has the authority to make treaties and appoint ambassadors with the advice and consent of the Senate.<sup>24</sup> The framers agreed that foreign policy would be a core issue of the American Republic. While implicit and explicit powers were given to Congress and the president regarding foreign affairs, it was up to policymakers and America’s leaders to define the United States’ place in the world. For decades on, American leadership would grapple with varying foreign policy approaches.

For much of the first century, the United States had long followed the foreign policy precedent of the presidency of George Washington and his Farewell Address. President Washington’s foreign policy focused on protecting the new nation’s sovereignty and avoiding expensive and debilitating wars.<sup>25</sup> This new democratic experiment had to be protected against encroaching powers. The Founders’ believed in a robust domestic policy focused on advancing

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<sup>21</sup>John Jay, “The Federalist Papers : No. 3,” The Avalon Project : The Federalist Papers No. 3, 2024, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed03.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed03.asp).

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8.

<sup>23</sup>U.S. Constitution, art 2, sec 2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Lindsay Chervinsky, "Foreign Affairs," *Miller Center*, 2024, <https://millercenter.org/president/washington/foreign-affairs>.

liberty at home, but a foreign policy that was restrained, non-interventionist, and neutral.

Though, the United States wanted to extend commercial and diplomatic ties with other nations.

As mentioned previously, President Washington wanted to protect the fragile nation from external forces. As Europe experienced several new wars and the French Revolution came to fruition, the United States had a choice – intervention or neutrality. Washington’s Administration declared a policy of neutrality in the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 in a response to the raging wars and revolution taking place in Europe. It is important to note that Washington’s secretaries unanimously agreed on neutrality, but there had been some disagreements on the extent of neutrality between the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans.<sup>26</sup> The proclamation stated: “The duty and interest of the United States require... that they [the United States] should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent Powers.”<sup>27</sup> The United States remained neutral, but also offered “friendly” and “impartial” relations with other nations. Not without critics, many individuals viewed the neutral position as a retreat from U.S. commitments to France, which helped the U.S. achieve victory over the British in the War for Independence. One anonymous correspondence to the president stated, “The cause of France is the cause of man, and neutrality is desertion.”<sup>28</sup> The United States had previously signed two treaties with France - one defensive in nature and one establishing economic relations. The Treaty of Alliance in 1778 acknowledged U.S. independence and was defensive in nature.<sup>29</sup> The Treaty of Amity and Commerce established diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>“Neutrality Proclamation of 1793, Presidential Proclamations, George Washington Administration, Records of the U.S. Senate,” *National Archives*, 2024, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=15>.

<sup>28</sup>“Neutrality Proclamation,” *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 2024, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/neutrality-proclamation/>.

<sup>29</sup>“Treaty of Alliance, 1778.” *Avalon Project Yale Law School*, February 6, 1778, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fr1778-1.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fr1778-1.asp).

A lasting, and by far the most consequential precedent established by Washington, was his 1796 Farewell Address. Often quoted by his successors and scholars alike, Washington's Farewell Address guided the nation towards a foreign policy that has been characterized as "isolationist" in nature. Washington noted that foreign relationships should focus on commercialization and neutrality rather than alliances and entanglements. In his reasoning, Washington made clear that disallowing alliances and foreign interventionism within the U.S. foreign policy apparatus was integral to the success of liberty and stability at home.

Furthermore, the outgoing president remained steadfast in citing the geographic advantage of the United States: "Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?"<sup>30</sup> His Farewell Speech had been consumed with the subject of foreign policy, and why the United States should remain at arm's length with other foreign nations. What Washington may have not realized is that his administration and speech would be the catalyst for grand strategy for decades to come. As we discover in following chapters, Washington's clarities, and emphasis on neutrality in global conflicts are understandable and applicable.

The "Virginia Dynasty," the first four presidents who hailed from the state of Virginia, carried on Washington's foreign policy legacy. With the French Revolution still raging, and the rest of Europe continuing its competing rivalries, the United States still maintained a neutral and hands off approach to the rest of the world. The weak and feeble nation sought to avoid the conflicts and alliances that Washington warned of in his Farewell Address. Yet, U.S. neutrality had been challenged by the Quasi War - an undeclared conflict between the United States and

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<sup>30</sup>George Washington, "George Washington Papers, Series 2, Letterbooks -1799:" *Letterbook 24, April 3, 1793 - March 3, 1797. April 3, - March 3, 1797, 1793*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mgw2.024>.

France. French privateers began to seize American shipping in the Caribbean shortly after the election of President John Adams. In an effort to end the privateers' illegal seizures and quell a broader conflict, pulling the U.S. into a war it did not want nor was ready for, President Adams pursued diplomatic options. Yet, this diplomatic pursuit failed.

In response to the failed diplomatic mission, the United States sent the newly established Navy to defend U.S. shipping and its interests. After a seemingly short war, the United States and France signed the Treaty of Mortefontaine. While this war does not gain the recognition of other significant wars in American history, it played a significant role in shaping further foreign policy. Once Adams passed the torch to Jefferson, the 3rd President of the United States reaffirmed U.S. foreign policy motives in his inaugural address. President Jefferson declared: "Peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none."<sup>31</sup>

Only a few weeks after the Louisiana Purchase, Napoleon declared war on Great Britain. Once again caught in the middle, Jefferson was at a crossroads. British naval ships began to impress American sailors into the Royal Navy. Such an act outraged Americans with many calling for a declaration of war on their former colonial power. In response, Jefferson subsequently banned all British ships from U.S. ports, ordered state Governors to raise thousands of militiamen, and suspended trade with the entirety of the European continent.<sup>32</sup> Known as the Embargo Act (1807), this policy pushed by Congress and the president decimated the American economy. By the spring of 1808, American exports had dropped substantially from \$108 million to \$22 million.<sup>33</sup> In his last days in the Executive Branch, Jefferson and Congress replaced the

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<sup>31</sup>Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson Inaugural Speech," March 4, 1801, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2020782247/>.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Onuf, "Thomas Jefferson: Foreign Affairs," *Miller Center*, 2024, <https://millercenter.org/president/jefferson/foreign-affairs#:~:text=By%20spring%201808%2C%20however%2C%20the,settle%20upon%20the%20mercantile%20Northeast.>

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

Embargo Act with the Non-Intercourse Act, which banned trade with England and France, but allowed globalized commerce with the rest of the world.<sup>34</sup> Long before trade wars were part of the 24/7 news cycle of the current age, the early Republic found itself in similar and precarious situations.

Before James Madison's ascendancy to the White House, he was a key player in the founding of the country. Often referred to as the "Father of the Constitution," Madison served as Secretary of State in the Jefferson Administration. Madison entered office with insurmountable odds: trade relations with France and Britain suffered greatly through the Non-Intercourse Act, the U.S. economy had plummeted due to the trade war, and both France and Britain had continued to undermine U.S. independence.

Like the Embargo Act, the Non-Intercourse Act had struggled to gain traction and persuade the warring powers from involving the United States in their fight. By May of 1810, Congress passed legislation stating that if either power lifted their trade restrictions on the United States, then the United States would lift restrictions on the respective country.<sup>35</sup> France had met such standards, but Britain remained committed to seizing American merchant ships and restricting trade.

While the United States had avoided direct and declared war between any of the European powers, pressure to act against Britain intensified. The United Kingdom continued to restrict U.S. maritime rights while encouraging Native American hostility towards American citizens.<sup>36</sup> Congressmen Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun were a few of several members of

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Donald Hickey, "American Trade Restrictions during the War of 1812," December 1981, 522, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1901937?seq=6>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 524.



Congress becoming increasingly hawkish towards Great Britain.<sup>37</sup> These war hawks continued to apply pressure on President Madison to act against the British for their actions. Though the House and the Senate were divided on the prospects of war, Congress officially declared war for the first time in the nation's history on June 18, 1812.<sup>38</sup>

By end of the war, the British pursued an armistice with the United States. Peace talks between the two nations ended with the Treaty of Ghent. While it is debated who was the clear “winner” of this war, the United States took this as a victory as it was once more able to maintain its sovereignty and independence, especially from the hands of the British.

Consistent with Washington's Farewell Address, the United States pursued a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. The United States understood that the democratic experiment, the principles espoused in the founding documents, and the pursuit of a society driven by meritocracy was an idealist vision. But Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and future U.S. presidents understood that the world was anarchic. European powers such as France and Britain made decisions based on their own self-interest and driven by their desire to conquer one another. The founders understood that for liberty and independence to be protected at home, The nation must be pragmatic and realistic abroad. Most, if not all, of the conflicts that occurred in the early Republic were defensive in nature and of “last resort.” The early presidents understood the United States could not stand if it involved itself in the full-scale conflicts and rivalries of the European continent.

Because of Washington's assertions in his farewell address, and the lack of commitments and alliances with other nations, many have labeled the United States as isolationist. Though the term isolationism is defined as a “policy of national isolation by abstention from alliances and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

other international political and economic relations,” the term had not been coined until the early 20th century.<sup>39</sup> Author Lawrence Kaplan, in a chapter titled “Toward isolationism: the Rise and Fall of the Franco-American Alliance 1775-1801,” believed Washington’s farewell speech was defined as a symbol of isolationism.<sup>40</sup> In the modern-day, advocates for isolationism and retrenchment might argue a return to the “tradition” of isolationism in the early republic. Yet, isolationism of the early republic is a myth, and the Founders’ never intended to be fully shielded from the world.

While it is easy to categorize the United States as isolationist, it is important to note the Founders sought peaceful coexistence with other world powers as well as commercial, economic, and trade ties with the outside world. In keeping with the early presidents pursued diplomatic missions, the United States sent Benjamin Franklin on the first overseas mission to Paris, and then John Adams to the Netherlands. As is evident, the United States avoided offensive wars and declared neutrality in international conflicts. Yet, with the nation’s commercial and diplomatic ties, the early Republic was far from isolationist. According to Caspar Weinberger in his piece, “George Washington, Isolationist?,” Weinberger made two important distinctions in George Washington’s address and early Republic assumptions on isolationism. First, the author argued that Washington and other Founders did not believe that the Republic should cut itself off from external commercial relations; he only advised it to remain impartial.<sup>41</sup> Second, Washington understood that the country was at the time a weak and fragile nation that was geographically blessed.<sup>42</sup> Circumstance seemed to be the prevailing tendency. The United States had isolationist

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<sup>39</sup>“Isolationism,” *Merriam Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isolationism>.

<sup>40</sup>Marie-Jeane Rossignol, “Early Isolationism Revisited: Neutrality and Beyond in the 1790s,” *Journal of American Studies*, 1995, 215 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27555923?seq=1>.

<sup>41</sup>Caspar Weinberger, “George Washington, Isolationist?” *The National Interest*, 1986, 88, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894419?read-now=1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894419?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

tendencies, but never truly embraced isolationism. The lack of military alliances was because of circumstances and the geopolitical ramifications of the day.

Though there has not been a nation that has embraced total isolationism, there are examples of those who have embraced forms of an inward foreign policy. Japan implemented a form of isolationism for 250 years throughout the Tokugawa Period, as has the “Hermit Kingdom” of North Korea. U.S. foreign policy has much more nuance than being labeled “isolationist” vs. “interventionist.” The United States remained *neutral* rather than *isolationist* in nature. Washington’s administration, and other successive administrations, pursued neutrality, but also commercial relations with other nations.

Forms of isolationism are not a new phenomenon in American foreign policy. As discussed in this section, and future sections, the United States is, at times, weary of global engagement. Washington’s Farewell Address established strong precedent to avoid military entanglements and alliances. But early U.S. foreign policy was driven on circumstance, historical experience, and to protect the fragile nation. The United States’ declared neutrality and choosing not to involve itself in the French Revolution, were clear indications of America’s foreign policy motives. Yet, retrenchment in the modern age is a far too idealistic approach.

The modern-day isolationist, or advocate of global retrenchment, contends that avoiding military alliances, defense treaties, and American military presence across the world leads to greater peace and stability. As evidenced in the early republic, however, that is simply not true. Though the United States chose to stay neutral and avoid alliances, it still faced outside aggression. To name a few, the United States fought the French in the Quasi War after the French began seizing U.S. naval ships in the Caribbean; the Navy battled with the Barbary States after piracy threatened U.S. commerce; and the United States engaged in the War of 1812 over

British violations of U.S. maritime rights. Despite the efforts of U.S. policymakers to remain neutral and avoid war, the United States still engaged in broader conflict. But according to isolationists and retrenchment advocates, wouldn't avoiding defense commitments and military "aggression" lead to peace? History tells a different story. The Founders did everything modern-day isolationists aspire for – avoiding entanglements, remaining neutral, and limiting military presence across the world. Yet, the United States still engaged with overtly aggressive nations and pirates. As the commencing sections and chapters reveal, peace is found in military strength, not isolation and retrenchment. Early Republic presidents were keen on avoiding war but were pulled in despite their "wishes." Assuming retrenchment leads to less war, and more peace, is a dangerous fallacy.

### **The Monroe Doctrine**

The seeds of the Monroe Doctrine had been evident throughout previous administrations, but not to the fullest extent, as enunciated in President Monroe's policy declaration. President James Monroe's term as President began in 1817, but his monumental foreign policy doctrine had not been articulated and established until 1823. In his 7th annual State of the Union, on December 2, 1823, President James Monroe declared his administration's stance in the Western Hemisphere and the way forward for U.S. engagement with European powers.<sup>43</sup> Monroe exclaimed: "that the American continents...are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."<sup>44</sup> This bold and profound doctrine helped forge an American foreign policy that would guide the country's interactions with the rest of the world for

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<sup>43</sup>James Monroe, "Monroe Doctrine," *Annual Message to Congress*, December 2, 1823, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/monroe>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

the rest of the century and beyond. The Monroe Doctrine was one of the first significant policy assertions by the United States regarding grand strategy.

The doctrine emerged in response to the changing dynamics in European politics. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Austrians, Prussians, Russians, and British formed the Quadruple Alliance under the Treaty of Paris in 1815.<sup>45</sup> Three years later France would be added to the Alliance.<sup>46</sup> After the French revolution, European leaders feared the threat of revolution in their respective countries. Austrians quelled a series of revolts in Italy, the French defeated an uprising in Spain, and the entirety of the Alliance helped the Ottoman Turks undermine a rebellion in Greece.<sup>47</sup> Fearing similar ambitions by the Spanish to re-colonize Latin America, and Russia claiming territories in modern-day Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, U.S. leadership was critically aware of the dangers of European encroachment.

The Monroe Doctrine affirmed three essential points. First, the United States was committed to a policy of non-colonization.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the policy endorsed a “hands off” approach regarding the Europeans, such that “any attempt” by the Europeans to “extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere” would be critically dangerous to the safety and security of the United States.<sup>49</sup> The third point affirmed the U.S. commitment towards Washington’s Farewell address of refraining from European political affairs. Monroe exclaimed, “In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves have never taken part, nor does it comport powers with our policy to do so...”<sup>50</sup> The Monroe Doctrine was an outright rejection of potential European encroachment.

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<sup>45</sup>Mark T. Gilderus, “The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2006, 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552742>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

European involvement in the Western Hemisphere, specifically in Latin America, had occurred consistently in the past. The British, French, and Spanish had dominated the “New World” for decades and even shortly after the American colonies broke from Great Britain. As a unilateral policy, the Monroe Doctrine was the United States’ first step toward regional hegemony, and decades later, global hegemony. The shell of neutrality and focus on the geographical foothold of North America expanded to the entirety of the Western Hemisphere. Monroe and his successors felt that the United States had an obligation and responsibility to the surrounding regions, not European powers. In addition, the Monroe Doctrine signified a break from the domineering motives of the European powers.

Not only did the Monroe Doctrine have serious implications upon its declaration, but it shifted the trajectory for the future of American foreign policy. In practice, the Monroe Doctrine played a pivotal role in grand strategy for future presidents and policies. President Polk invoked the Monroe Doctrine to warn against British and French meddling in California and Texas, and at the end of the Civil War, Secretary of State William Henry Seward threatened the French over their intervention in Mexico.<sup>51</sup> While the Monroe Doctrine was defensive and reactive, it soon put the nation on a path of more aggressive engagement with its neighbors.

1898 was a defining year for the United States. Since the founding of the nation, the United States had built economic stability, expanded its geography, and limited itself to avoid outside alliances and devastating wars. While the country would still be years away from global hegemony, 1898 offered a glimpse of what the future might be.

Not without dissent, the anti-expansionist and anti-imperialist faction feared an American Empire would be too costly and out of step with American tradition. The leading “anti-

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

imperialists” included author Mark Twain, former presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, and Republicans like Andrew Carnegie and Benjamin Harris.<sup>52</sup> Anti-imperialists did not necessarily come from similar parties or backgrounds; many of them were from varying political factions, ideological backgrounds, and occupations. The debate between imperialism and anti-imperialism would soon become the most contentious topic of the day.

As one of the last few colonies Spain had, Cuba was at a breaking point. The Cuban war for independence broke out in 1895. President William McKinley sought a pragmatic end and approach to the Spanish-Cuban issue. Throughout the first year of his presidency, McKinley pressured the Spanish to make concessions and seek a meaningful end to the conflict. Unfortunately, McKinley all but exhausted his diplomatic solutions to avoid war. After sending the *U.S.S. Maine* along the coast of Cuba, only to be destroyed by an explosion killing more than 250 crew members, Americans became outraged by the untimely death of American servicemen and Spanish treatment of the Cubans, and war became inevitable. In late April of 1898, Congress declared war on Spain

In the end, the Treaty of Paris was signed between the United States and Spain. Under the treaty, the United States obtained Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. America’s place had changed. Now, it possessed colonial holdings, and introduced the nation to a hunger for world leadership. Though McKinley’s presidency ended in a dreadful assassination, the United States had entered a new age of foreign policy and standing in the world.

President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, now at the helm of an emerging American empire, built up the nation’s army and naval forces into a formidable force for the future. His “Great White Fleet” was intended to be a marvel across the world. Before the Roosevelt era, the

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<sup>52</sup>Lewis Gould, “Foreign Affairs,” *Miller Center*, 2024, <https://millercenter.org/president/mckinley/foreign-affairs>.

President and Congress saw the American experiment as an example of representative democracy at work. But for Roosevelt, he believed it was America's moral imperative to export American values and democracy abroad. He wanted to aggressively pursue a foreign policy agenda that was not reserved and passive in nature. Despite Roosevelt's aggressiveness, he became popular as a peacemaker across the globe. Roosevelt guided peace talks to help end the Russo-Japanese War, and even received the Nobel Peace Prize. In addition, the president negotiated Britain and Germany's dispute over Morocco. President Roosevelt's tenure can not only be defined by his imperialist foreign policy, but he was also pragmatic and pursued peace deals. President Taft continued the Roosevelt Corollary and focused much of his foreign policy on expanding international trade.

In the previous section, the foundations of American foreign policy were rooted in the Founders' reflections upon European history. The "Old World" was filled with unfettered competition and war, and early Americans wanted to avoid this. At the turn of the nineteenth century, U.S. policymakers may have understood American sovereignty as threatened. From the War of 1812 to the Quadruple Alliance, European encroachment persisted.

Graham Allison contends allowing spheres of influence leads to peace and lowers the prospect of aggression. While the Monroe Doctrine emphasizes divided spheres of influence in the "New" and "Old" world, the United States rejected European influence by claiming the New World as its own American sphere of influence. The U.S. understood to defend its borders and interest in the region, it had to establish a policy that didn't allow the Europeans to carve up the Western Hemisphere once more. In a sense, Graham Allison's acceptance of spheres of influence proved to be successful for the United States.



Under the Monroe Doctrine, the United States was able to deter European aggression in the region. Though a few European colonies persisted until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the current British Virgin Islands and French Guadeloupe, the United States asserted its dominance in the region through the Monroe Doctrine. Prior to the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine and U.S. hegemonic influence in the region, Great Britain, France, and Spain still exerted influence and power in the Western Hemisphere. More so, the United States had to share the Western Hemisphere with the Europeans, but it did not lead to more peace or concessions from the Europeans. The country was able to exert an enormous amount of influence as a result of the Monroe Doctrine and successive policies after its initial declaration. If the United States had allowed the European powers to potentially re-colonize and exert influence in the Western Hemisphere, the nation may have not been able to experience the peace it obtained under the Monroe Doctrine.

Despite the success of the Monroe Doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the acceptance of spheres of influence may not translate to the modern age. For one, the European powers were still preoccupied with their own issues, such as the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the domestic problems that followed. This limited their ability to challenge the doctrine. Additionally, many of the Latin American countries had recently gained independence from European powers and were committed to resisting any form of re-colonization. While aspects of the Monroe Doctrine still exist, the doctrine could struggle within the current international order. The modern international system is multipolar, with multiple influential powers like China and Russia who have a vested interest and influence in the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, the strong interconnectivity and interdependence among Latin America and countries outside of the Western Hemisphere makes the Monroe Doctrine less feasible.

## **Cold War Policies**

By the end of World War II, the global landscape had shifted dramatically. Europe had been decimated, Japan suffered significant losses due to conventional bombing and the detonation of the U.S. atomic bomb, and only two superpowers remained. The United States and the Soviet Union were the undisputed leaders of the world. Like the early American republic, and the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States experienced a new era of grand strategy.

The country entered World War II not only as a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor, but with the goal of defeating the Axis powers and reestablishing a stable international order. Shortly after the war, the United States was the greatest economic and military power in the world, as well as the sole possessor of nuclear weapons. It instituted several policies and strategies that epitomized its global leadership and resistance against Soviet expansion. To combat the spread of communism, the United States instituted the Truman Doctrine. The Truman Doctrine effectively provided political, economic, and military assistance to nations facing the threat of communism and Soviet influence. Though the Truman Doctrine was established in 1947, the policy endured throughout the Cold War through successive presidential administrations. Under the Truman Doctrine, the “containment” theory and strategy became popularized. Though containment policies evolved over the years during the Cold War, the goals of containment were to limit the spread of communism and Soviet power across the globe. The United States spearheaded the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as one of its first acts of containment. After World War II, the Soviet Union had significant influence over Eastern Europe. The United States and its allies were fearful of a potential Soviet invasion of Western Europe. More so, the United States wanted to combat Soviet influence in the region

and in the world, to prevent allies and vulnerable states from falling victim to communism. As an outgrowth of these fears, and the need for collective security, NATO was born.

The United States implemented a large amount of foreign aid to Western Europe. Under the Marshall Plan, it provided foreign aid to rebuild the economies and infrastructure of its allies after World War II. The Marshall Plan not only helped improve the lives of Europeans and stabilizing their governments, but it also strengthened the allyship and relationship between the United States and Western Europe. The success of the Marshall plan helped pave the way for future foreign aid that helped combat the spread of communism and the encroachment of the Soviet Union.

Outside of Western Europe, President Truman requested \$400 million in military and economic aid for Greece and Turkey.<sup>53</sup> The Soviet meddling in Greek and Turkish affairs, the civil war in Greece, and the withdrawal of British assistance to Greece became the necessary catalyst the Truman Administration needed to provide aid for both nations.<sup>54</sup> Beyond the Marshall Plan and aid to Greece and Turkey, the Truman Doctrine positioned the United States for further policies and actions that would combat the Soviet threat.

In pursuit of further containment, the United States engaged in proxy conflicts with the Soviet Union throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1950s, the United States sent troops to Korea to combat the invading forces of the Soviet-backed North Koreans. A U.S. led coalition spent years in Vietnam trying to limit the expansion of communism in South Vietnam. For decades, the United States spent billions of dollars and lost tens of thousands of lives trying to contain communism and the Soviet threat. Yet, the communist and Soviet threat persisted in

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<sup>53</sup>Dennis Merrill, "The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2024, 27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27552744>.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, 33.

Eastern and Central Europe, Africa, Cuba, and Afghanistan. Though the success of NATO helped hinder Soviet expansion into Western Europe, the record of success with containment strategies remained mixed.

Under the Nixon, Ford, and Carter Administrations, the United States followed the policy of détente. Détente was understood as an easing, or relaxing, of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States pursued détente with the Soviet Union through several arms controls' treaties and diplomatic engagements. These treaties included the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks/Treaty (SALT I), the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and the Helsinki Accords. Despite the initial "successes" of the easing of relations, the United States and Soviet Union would experience a heightened sense of tension in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

In a change of strategy, and in recognition of the potential crumbling of the Soviet Union, the Reagan Administration shifted gears. "We win, they lose" became the mantra of the Reagan Administration.<sup>55</sup> The Reagan Doctrine sought to defy Soviet influence and erode the Soviet Union's international standing through support for anti-Communist resistance groups and actively pushing back against Soviet influence. To rollback Soviet influence, President Reagan invested heavily in supporting freedom fighters in Afghanistan, Central America, and Africa, and supported anti-communist movements in Eastern Europe.

Prior to the Reagan Administration, previous presidents focused on containment strategies throughout the globe. Though Truman and successive presidents had experienced some successes of containment, the Soviet Union still had a grip on global power. Containment strategies pushed back on Soviet influence, but to the delight of those who are in Allison's camp,

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<sup>55</sup>Richard Allen, "The Man Who Won the Cold War," *Hoover Institution*, January 30, 2000, <https://www.hoover.org/research/man-who-won-cold-war>.

policymakers still accepted the spheres of influence approach. In addition, the Nixon Administration's détente policy also affirmed the acceptance of spheres of influence with the Soviet Union. Despite these strategic initiatives, the Soviet Union not only remained, but the communist nation expanded its influence beyond its borders and region. The Soviet Union's influence in Latin America threatened the United States' interests. The invasion of Afghanistan also challenged U.S. influence in the Middle East. Though containment and détente had brief successes, the Soviet Union still expanded.

Moreover, the United States did exactly what Allison advocates for – accepting spheres of influence. But this did not lead to more peace and tranquility; it continued to allow the Soviet Union to expand beyond its own regional space. Leading up to the election of President Reagan, the United States was “losing” the Cold War. According to Will Inboden, at the time of the 1980 election, the United States was in poor shape internationally. The country was reeling from a loss in Vietnam seven years earlier, and the advance of communism was rampant in almost every continent – in Asia: South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; in Africa: Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Angola; in the Middle East: South Yemen; in Latin America: Nicaragua and Grenada.<sup>56</sup> Kremlin-sponsored insurgency groups were able to exert their influence and establish communism in these countries, while the United States grappled with the prospect of increased Soviet spheres of influence. The Hudson Institute reiterated the failures of détente by stating: “As the Soviets themselves believed, the correlation of forces by the end of the 1970s had apparently so moved in Moscow's direction that the end of the US dominant role in the world was soon to be achieved.”<sup>57</sup> The containment and détente policies were failing to achieve the end result of

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<sup>56</sup>“The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink,” *Hoover Institution*, March 15, 2023, <https://www.hoover.org/research/peacemaker-ronald-reagan-cold-war-and-world-brink>.

<sup>57</sup>Peter Huessy, “Should the US Scale Back Its Global Presence,” *Warrior Maven*, 2024, <https://warriormaven.com/global-security/should-the-us-scale-back-its-global-presence>.

limiting the spread of communism, containing the Soviet Union, and leading to broader peace. Allowing spheres of influence did not lead to peace; it empowered the Soviet Union. This philosophical belief ushered in an era of Soviet advancement and the erosion of democratic and U.S. influence.

The Reagan Administration rejected the status quo of separate spheres of influence. To “roll back” Soviet influence, President Reagan provided aid to anti-communist groups. Through the Reagan Doctrine, the United States was able to advance liberty and reject Soviet influence. Communism should not just be contained, but it must be defeated, was the strategy of Reagan’s leadership. The Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan, Nicaragua had a democratic election, and more than 40,000 Cuban troops left Angola and held United Nations-monitored elections.<sup>58</sup> While some of these international changes occurred quickly after Reagan’s tenure in the White House, his policies helped rollback the Soviet influence. In addition, the Reagan Doctrine was incredibly cost effective when supporting insurgency groups. It cost the United States less than a billion dollars a year while the Soviet Union spent \$8 billion annually to deflect its impact.<sup>59</sup> The Reagan Doctrine challenged the containment and détente of the past. The doctrine rejected the fact that the Soviet Union and communism had a place in the globe. Taking on Soviet influence resulted in the collapse of the evil empire in 1991 and a new “world order” had been established.

### **America First**

While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment American foreign policy views began to shift, retrenchment and America First came into fruition in the 2016 presidential election. The

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<sup>58</sup>Lee Edwards, “How Ronald Reagan Won the Cold War,” *The Hill*, December 26, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/474669-how-ronald-reagan-won-the-cold-war/>.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

United States had struggled to end two wars that had no end on the horizon. Despite President Obama's decision to pull out of Iraq, the U.S. once again engaged in the region with the rise of ISIS. Thousands of American lives were lost in Iraq and Afghanistan, and billions of taxpayer money was spent in both wars. Donald Trump came onto the political scene in 2015. Americans were frustrated with "establishment" policies, and American workers were angry with perceived "unfair" trade deals.

With sixteen Republicans vying for the Republican nomination in the 2016 election, Trump gave the United States a different view. He fed off the fears and frustrations of everyday Americans. Trump wanted to end the "endless" and "forever" wars the United States had engaged in. He gave hope to Americans who struggled economically and lost their jobs by advocating for protectionist policies. Trump was the perfect storm for a nation that was eager for something different. By the time of his election, President Trump focused his foreign policy on unilateralism and challenging the recent "norms" of U.S. grand strategy. Throughout his presidency, Trump threatened to reconsider U.S. involvement in NATO, pulled out of a variety of cooperative agreements, and enacted tariffs. His administration became the center piece for the future of the Republican Party foreign policy doctrine. While history will be the judge of the Trump Presidency, it is true that that "America First" policies have changed the trajectory of the country for the time being.

### **Conclusion and Analysis**

For much of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. foreign policies adhered closely to Stephen Wertheim's philosophy but did not fit the complete mold of isolationism. After the American victory against the British in the Revolutionary War, the framers and early presidents

refrained from a direct role in international affairs. Whether it was declaring neutrality in the French Revolution, or not seeking to conquer external territory, the United States shielded itself from the affairs of the “Old World.”

As Wertheim writes, modern-day American dominance has supposedly led to “endless wars.” To Wertheim, and those who subscribe to his philosophy, the United States experienced devastating losses with little to no positive strategic outcome in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the time of the founding, and briefly after that, American leadership might have concurred. The Founders were deeply skeptical of the old vanguard; to them, European nations were in a repetitive process of war after war. These wars only led to exacerbated international divisions, expanded upon volatile competition, and ultimately, took the lives of millions of Europeans over a span of multiple decades. The United States was so wary of international conflicts that it continuously declared its neutrality and strayed away from pursuing a more global role. The Founders were fully aware of the dangers of endless wars and how it might negatively impact its populous.

In addition, Wertheim argued the economic cost of war prevented investment in domestic programs and made the American taxpayer foot the bill. Early Americans and colonists were perplexed to find out that their taxes had been raised to help the British pay off its war debts from the French and Indian War. Like Wertheim, early American leaders believed war and global competition could limit an economy and place responsibility on the taxpayer. The experience with Europe and the examples of the Old World forced Americans to retreat from global involvement, not pursue it. Second, Wertheim believes policymakers should refrain from making permanent enemies and permanent friends. In retrospect, this belief is encompassed in Washington’s Farewell Address. As mentioned previously, President Washington warned future



American leadership about the ills of foreign entanglements. According to Washington, the United States should pursue positive and beneficial international relationships, but not at the expense of an alliance or another war. Third, and lastly, Wertheim's arguments directly reflect Early American foreign policy – lead by example. To the Founder's, this new democratic and republican experiment should be mirrored abroad. As Thomas Jefferson exclaims, the United States should be an "Empire of Liberty." Yet, late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century policymakers wanted to lead by example, not by force. Ultimately, the views of the new nation in approaching foreign policy are reflected today in Wertheim's approach.

Proponents of modern-day retrenchment and neutrality might point to America's early history as an example of American foreign policy successes. While it may seem viable in the contemporary world on the surface, U.S isolation and retrenchment was a product of circumstance and only worked because of specific circumstances. First, the United States was in its infancy compared to the rest of the world. The Founders rightfully believed the new nation was fragile and any outside focus on expansion or other conflicts might ruin the fragile country. Focusing on liberty and building up the nation at home, neutrality was the most viable option. Second, even if the U.S. wanted to go beyond its borders, it simply couldn't. The U.S. army consisted of separate militias rather than a standing army. The Navy was nowhere near the strength of the other European powers. Broader expansion, outside of North America, would cripple the young nation and only cause critical losses. Lastly, early policymakers were aware of the European rivalries and the past wars of the Old World. The United States not only shifted its domestic approach to politics from the Europeans, but it also dissented from the foreign policy approaches of Europe.

In the early Republic, many would argue the U.S. global stance reflects Wertheim's views on foreign policy. Yet, based on the Monroe Doctrine, U.S. influence slowly grew in the Western Hemisphere, and in its war with Spain at the end of the century, the United States shifted its global stance from a more restrained and neutral position to a push towards expansion and outside influence. While the United States wasn't the sole dominant power, it wasn't in isolation either. In "The New Spheres of Influence," Graham Allison has a more modern take on global hegemony with the threats of China and Russia, but his arguments even existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century American foreign policy.

As mentioned, the United States was not the domineering force it became known to be, nor was it shielding itself from the outside world. As Allison might recommend, the United States had a willingness to share the global stage with other European nations, but still wanted influence in its own geographic region. The Monroe Doctrine cemented the United States as the power of the Western Hemisphere. The United States became fearful of recolonization efforts by the Europeans and sought to protect its own interests in the region. But U.S. policymakers accepted that not every part of the globe was a sphere of American influence. U.S. leadership raised no issue with other powers' domination of their own neighborhoods.

As Allison argues, the United States historically has not objected to other nations having specific economic and military influence in a particular area of the globe. Simply, the United States "had" the Western Hemisphere, while Europe focused on European and Asian affairs. The U.S. intervention in Cuba, and acquisition of the Philippines from Spain, further cemented the U.S. role in Latin America, and it seemed U.S. leadership was content on this prospect.

The end of World War II resulted in two outsized superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union. U.S. foreign policy was fully immersed in the Cold War, both at home and

abroad. Abroad, the United States combatted the Soviet threat through foreign aid, resistance proxies, and military intervention. As Graham Allison mentioned, the United States accepted spheres of influence throughout most of the Cold War. The Soviet Union had its immediate influence in Eastern Europe, while the United States asserted its dominance in the Western Hemisphere. The two powers would engage in proxy conflicts in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Policymakers realistically understood that the Soviet Union would not go away and had to walk a fine line to avoid a nuclear war. In his article, Allison labeled the balance between the United States and the Soviet Union as an “accommodation.” The fall of the Soviet Union would challenge Allison’s accommodation perspective. The United States became the undisputed superpower. Ushering in a new era of American dominance, the United States experienced unfettered dominance and global influence.

Sharing the world through “spheres of influence” was perceived as a reality in the Cold War. U.S. policy makers chose to “coexist” with the Soviet Union despite the ideological and economic differences. The Soviet Union was an oppressive regime that dominated Eastern Europe, undermined democratic and free-market values, and was a direct threat to the United States and its Western European allies. Sharing the global stage throughout the Cold War was a pragmatic choice for U.S. policymakers and was believed to bring global stability. Yet, as mentioned previously, the Reagan Doctrine challenged this belief by hindering the Soviet Union and ending the Cold War in America’s favor.

Already, China has reached outside of its region and has direct influence in Africa and Latin America. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has become a test on whether the United States and the West will allow the Kremlin to march through Ukraine and occupy a sovereign nation. If the world is to be a safer place, the United States should avoid allowing other powers antithetical to

democratic and western values to share the global stage. While war with the Soviet Union should have been avoided at all costs, the downside of sharing the global stage resulted in a multitude of proxy conflicts, global competition, and a fear of nuclear war. On paper, sharing the global stage and influence with China and Russia would limit confrontation and “satisfy” the powers at hand. But throughout the Cold War, containment and détente ceded influence to the Soviet Union. Communism had a foothold in every continent despite the goal of limiting it through accepting spheres of influence. The Soviet Union’s refusal to limit itself to its own sphere proved the danger of accepting spheres of influence.

The post-Cold War era and the war on terror helped assert American dominance across the globe. From the retrenchment and neutrality of the early republic to accepting spheres of influence in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the Cold War, America’s global stance has shifted dramatically. In Thomas Wright’s, “The Folly of Retrenchment: Why America Can’t Withdraw from the World,” Wright’s perspective is one that defends the idea of American dominance. As previously mentioned, according to Wright, the U.S. approach to the world should be marked by uncontested leadership and an embrace of the American role in international affairs. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the commencement of the war on terror, the United States had remained the dominant power and leader in foreign policy. Prior to Trump’s presidency, the U.S. bolstered its alliances, valued NATO, expanded its influence, and led the world economically and militarily. While the United States has yet to make a complete shift in its foreign policy approach, both the Trump and Biden Administrations have fled from the norms of recent history. Critics of Wright’s position believe the United States has projected far too much power, which pulls the United States into unnecessary conflicts and makes the rest of the world “American-centric.”

## CHAPTER III: THE CURRENT STATE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

It is no secret that the world, specifically the western world, is facing crisis after crisis. The invasion of Ukraine, the war between Israel and Hamas, Chinese threats towards Taiwan's sovereignty, and countless terrorist attacks and threats have significantly raised the stakes for the future of U.S. foreign policy. Discussing the volatile situation in the Middle East, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated, "I would argue that we've not seen a situation as dangerous as the one we're facing now across the region since at least 1973, and arguably even before that."<sup>60</sup> Taiwan's reaffirmed autonomy through its recent presidential election has only intensified China's longing to possess the independent island. This chapter evaluates U.S. relationships and grand strategy, and its current state, with China, Russia, and the Middle East and begins to address the role of the United States in the global security environment.

### China

After the opening of China and the progression of a free market-based economy in the late 1970s, one could have assumed the People's Republic of China (PRC) would become less aggressive, more democratic, and a greater respecter of human rights. It has been quite the opposite – as China has risen, so has the competition with the United States. China's aggressive behavior, its expansionist goals, its extensive conventional and nuclear buildup, and its increased global influence has created a challenge for the Biden Administration and successive administrations in the future. While there are several issues to consider with China, this thesis

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<sup>60</sup>Miranda Nazzaro, "Blinken on Middle East: Israel, Iran," *The Hill*, January 30, 2024, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/4437128-blinken-middle-east-israel-iran/>.

examines four specific issues with the far east nation: the issue of Taiwan, the Russia-Ukraine War, bilateral trade relations, and the Chinese military build-up.

Since 1949, Taiwan has considered itself autonomous from the mainland of China, but the PRC views it differently. As years have gone by, China has maintained its goal of unifying Taiwan under a “One China” rule. The United States has committed itself to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), the Six Assurances, and the U.S.-PRC joint communiques since 1979 and the early 1980s. Regardless of these assurances, the United States has no concrete obligation to defend Taiwan. The United States maintains *unofficial* and partner like relations with Taiwan. One of the provisions in the TRA states that the United States “will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services” as necessary for Taiwan’s self-defense.<sup>61</sup> However, there is no treaty forcing the United States to come to the aid of Taiwan. As for the Six Assurances, the United States has reaffirmed these policies in a bipartisan manner. The Republican Party platform of 2016 affirmed the assurances, President Trump affirmed the same in 2020, and Congresswoman and former Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi displayed her support for the Assurances in her 2022 visit to the island.<sup>62</sup> Since 2017, Congress has affirmed its support of the Six Assurances eight separate times.<sup>63</sup> Those assurances are that the United States:

1. Has not agreed to set a date for ending arms sales to the Republic of China.
2. Has not agreed to hold prior consultations with the PRC regarding arms sales to the Republic of China.
3. Would not play a mediation role between the PRC and the Republic of China.
4. Would not revise the Taiwan Relations Act.
5. Has not altered its position regarding sovereignty over Taiwan; and
6. Would not exert pressure on the Republic of China to enter negotiations with the PRC.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>"Taiwan: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," *CRS Report*, January 4, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10275>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>Michael Green and Bonnie Glaser, "What Is the U.S. One-China Policy and Why Does It Matter?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-us-one-china-policy-and-why-does-it-matter>.

In December of 2023, in a summit in San Francisco, Xi Jinping bluntly told President Biden of Beijing's intentions to unify Taiwan under Chinese rule.<sup>65</sup> Though the United States does not recognize Taiwan's independence, it maintains that China should not take control of Taiwan by force and the Taiwanese exercise self-determination. U.S. diplomatic relations with mainland China rest on the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means, not military. An increase in Chinese threats, military exercises, and overall aggressive rhetoric towards Taiwan is cause for great concern for the United States and the Western world. Taiwan's presidential election resulted in the election of Lai Ching-te; Lai was the most pro sovereignty and status quo candidate in the three-way race.<sup>66</sup> Days before the election, the PRC emphasized Lai's policies were a "route to Taiwan independence."<sup>67</sup> The United States is faced with a true balancing act regarding Taiwan.

The second most pertinent issue for the United States is Chinese involvement in Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Since the war broke-out, China has become Russia's most important trading partner. China's overall trade with Russia hit an all-time high with a 30 percent increase in 2022.<sup>68</sup> In addition, China has purchased large quantities of oil and gas from the Russian Federation. In July of 2023, a declassified U.S. report said that support from China is "critical" to Russia's ability to continue waging war against Ukraine.<sup>69</sup> Whether it be supporting Russia's oil and gas, or the semiconductor trade, China is fueling the fire in Russia's campaign

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<sup>65</sup>Kristen Welker et al., "Xi warned Biden at summit that Beijing will 'reunify' Taiwan with China," *NBC News*, December 25, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/china/xi-warned-biden-summit-beijing-will-reunify-taiwan-china-rcna130087>.

<sup>66</sup>"Taiwan: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief," *CRS Report*, January 4, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10275>.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>Karen Gilchrist, "How surging trade with China is boosting Russia's war," *CNBC*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/09/28/how-surging-trade-with-china-is-boosting-russias-war.html#:~:text=Total%20bilateral%20trade%20between%20Russia,%2C%20up%2030%25%20from%202021>.

<sup>69</sup>Rob Garver, "US Report: Chinese Support Is Critical to Russia's War Effort," *Voice of America*, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-report-chinese-support-is-critical-to-russia-s-war-effort-/7202759.html>.

against Ukraine. As the war rages on, the United States will not only have to deal with Russia, but also China's support of the war.

Third, a great source of division between the two nations has been trade relations and economic strains. Historically, the United States and China enjoyed a prosperous trade relationship. Specifically, from the U.S. perspective, Americans have relied heavily on the inexpensive products created in China. The trade war between the two countries began under the Trump presidency in 2018. From the Trump Administration's perspective, the United States was in an unfair trade deal and American jobs were being relocated to China. As a result, Trump imposed sweeping tariffs in 2018-2020 that covered most Chinese imports.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, President Biden continued the Trump era tariffs and increased stringent export controls on computer chips. Not only have tariffs affected U.S. consumers by higher prices, but they are also one of the biggest hindrances of U.S. – China relations currently.

Lastly, and what might be the most challenging issue for the United States, is the excessive military build-up by China. China's build-up is not only a threat to Taiwan, but it challenges U.S. military supremacy. China's military build-up challenges potential U.S. deterrence in the Southeast Asian region and signals a potential invasion of Taiwan. China's rapid military modernization has induced considerable fear for Western policymakers. The build-up is a result of soaring defense budgets for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From 2000 to 2016, China's military budget increased annually by almost 10 percent.<sup>71</sup> According to a Department of Defense (DOD) report on China, CCP leadership seeks "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049 – the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party's takeover

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<sup>70</sup>Anshu Siripurapu and Noah Berman, "The Contentious U.S.-China Trade Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)*, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/contentious-us-china-trade-relationship>.

<sup>71</sup>Timothy Heath, "Why Is China Strengthening Its Military? It's Not All About War," *RAND Corporation*, March 24, 2023, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/03/why-is-china-strengthening-its-military-its-not-all.html>.



of the world's largest country.<sup>72</sup> The report also estimates the Chinese have more than 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023.<sup>73</sup> At sea, China boasts the world's largest navy with an impressive battle force of more than 370 ships and submarines.<sup>74</sup> U.S. officials have long warned of the dangers of the Chinese military build and how it might directly threaten U.S. supremacy. During his service, U.S. Air Force Major General Cameron Holt stated that China was acquiring weapons at "five to six times" the rate of the United States.<sup>75</sup> Some assume this is evidence of China preparing for war and an imminent invasion of Taiwan. For instance, Admiral John Aquilino, head of the Indo-Pacific Command, stated he believes China will be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2027.<sup>76</sup> With China's military build-up, an increase in military exercises, and threats to Taiwan and the West, the United States must be poised for any Chinese aggression in the coming years. The "outlandish" threats to Taiwan refer to China's goal to unify Taiwan under its rule.

Why does China matter? Should everyday Americans and policymakers ignore China's relative economic and military rise? Why should Americans care about a war in Ukraine taking place thousands of miles away on a different continent? In Graham Allison's piece, the author argues that China's rise is an inevitable part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Allison does acknowledge that the rise of China is simply not good. China's continued domestic suppression, militarization of the South China Sea, its military build-up, and its threats to Taiwan is more than worrisome. But

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<sup>72</sup>Jim Garamone, "DOD Report Details Chinese Efforts to Build Military Power," *U.S. Department of Defense*, October 19, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3562442/dod-report-details-chinese-efforts-to-build-military-power/>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Timothy Heath, "Why Is China Strengthening Its Military? It's Not All About War," *RAND Corporation*, March 24, 2023, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/03/why-is-china-strengthening-its-military-its-not-all.html>.

<sup>76</sup>Ty Roush, "China Will Be Ready to Invade Taiwan by 2027, U.S. Admiral Says," *Forbes*, May 8, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tyleroush/2024/03/20/china-will-be-ready-to-invade-taiwan-by-2027-us-admiral-says/>.

from Allison's viewpoint, U.S. policymakers "will have to abandon unattainable aspirations for the worlds they dreamed of and accept the fact that spheres of influence will remain a central feature of geopolitics..."<sup>77</sup> Though Allison recommends alternative approaches such as sanctions and other forms of consequences, he still contends the United States should accept new spheres of influence that includes China and Russia.

China has ambitions beyond its own borders – Taiwan and the South China Sea. In addition, China's investment in Africa and Latin America is cause for alarm. Allison's views are admirable and, on the surface, seem realistic, but allowing new spheres of influence doesn't necessarily translate to peace. For centuries, European powers competed and vied for influence not only on the continent, but also in the New World. World War I was a result of regional conflicts that never went away. Competing influences resulted in war and continued conflict. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union not only exported its influence across Eastern Europe, but the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. As mentioned in previous sections, accepting Soviet influence failed.

Allison wants to accept new spheres of influence in exchange for peaceful coexistence. But what Allison refuses to acknowledge is China could push beyond its geographical boundaries. As this thesis discusses later, Chinese influence has made its way into Africa and Latin America through commercial means. In addition, the Chinese have made significant investments in cultural and educational exchanges. Beijing's views are antithetical to Western and democratic views. With the United States having a plethora of allies in the region, and around the world, allowing China to dominate with coercion would put U.S. allies and interests in harm's way. Allison views sharing the globe with adversaries as a form of stability. This

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<sup>77</sup>Graham Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, 2020, 40, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence>.

couldn't be further from the truth. Throughout history, allowing evil regimes to expand and counter U.S. influence has made the world unstable. Throughout the Cold War, and specifically through the 1970s, the Soviet Union exported communism in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia. As Soviet backed insurgency groups came to power, the Soviet Union became further empowered to the point of invading Afghanistan directly to bolster the newly established communist regime. Though China is not promoting guerilla fighters across the world, Beijing is exporting influence through economic means. Whether it be in Africa or Latin America, the Chinese government is influencing nations outside its region. As we see in the last chapter of this thesis, China is wielding great influence in the neighborhood of the United States. Conceding ground to China would not bring peace, but rather, it would empower a regime with ambitions that threaten the current international order.

## **Russia**

United States-Russia relations are at an all-time low since the fall of the Soviet Union and establishment of the Russian Federation. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States ushered in a "new world order." While things looked promising for U.S.-Russia relations, the rise of Vladimir Putin has all but eliminated the prospect of a stable, secure, and non-threatening environment between the two countries. Unfortunately, Vladimir Putin's disdain for the West, his human rights violations, aggression towards Ukraine and other sovereign nations has created a rift in relations between the White House and the Kremlin. Despite these issues, Wertheim's camp doesn't acknowledge the reality of Russian aggression. Though the article written in 2020, Russia invaded Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014, and an invasion of Georgia in 2008. Since the invasion of Ukraine, it is potentially unlikely Russia, and the West will garner trust and

improve diplomatic relations. The specific U.S. foreign policy stance towards Russia is to end the war in Ukraine by protecting Ukrainian borders and sovereignty, preventing a global war, and protecting the interests and security of NATO. U.S. foreign policy “seeks to deter Russian aggression by projecting strength and unity with U.S. allies and partners, building resilience and reducing vulnerability among allies and partners facing Russian pressure and coercion.”<sup>78</sup>

Since the war broke out, Russia has made various threats to the United States, NATO, and non-NATO members. Putin deployed tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus and warned of “serious danger” if the U.S. and NATO are drawn into the war in Ukraine. As recently as February 2024, Russia has been accused of developing a space-based weapon.<sup>79</sup> While this information does not constitute further aggression, the United States should be wary of Russian development of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. Currently, the war in Ukraine is a war of attrition. It seems Russia is neither winning nor losing. More than 315,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded, according to the CIA; others place Russian losses at a higher level.<sup>80</sup> As for weapons and battle operations, Russia has lost 2,600 main battle tanks.<sup>81</sup> Ukraine has turned into a formidable force even amidst the nation being put on the defensive. Yet, Russia has managed to capture small amounts of Ukrainian territory and inflict significant damage on Ukrainian forces. In September 2022, a UN Commission concluded that war crimes have been inflicted by Russia on the Ukrainian civilian population. The UN found documented violations of illegal use of explosive weapons, indiscriminate attacks, executions, torture, and sexual based

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<sup>78</sup>“U.S. Relations With Russia,” *U.S. Department of State*, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-russia/>.

<sup>79</sup>Joey Roulette and Arshad Mohammed, “Russia seen highly unlikely to put nuclear warhead in space,” *Reuters*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/russia-seen-highly-unlikely-put-nuclear-warhead-space-2024-02-15/>.

<sup>80</sup>Steven Pifer, “Does the West’s Ukraine policy need a reality check,” *Brookings*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/does-the-west-s-ukraine-policy-need-a-reality-check-a-brookings-debate/>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

violence.<sup>82</sup> Regardless, two years into the war, Ukraine has fought mightily. According to a White House report, Ukraine has retaken more than half of the sovereign territory that was illegally taken by Russia.<sup>83</sup> The United States has provided more than \$45 billion in security assistance to Ukraine and has helped train more than 123,000 Ukrainians.<sup>84</sup> Depending on support, Ukraine's future is in the hands of potential security assistance from other nations, including the United States.

Besides Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine, Putin continues to rule Russia with an iron fist. Putin and his colleagues crush any dissent that challenges his grip on power. In February 2024, prominent Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny died in a Russian penal colony. According to Russian officials, Navalny collapsed and died after a walk in the prison camp.<sup>85</sup> Many Western officials, including President Biden, expressed outrage at the accused murder of Navalny. Unfortunately, Navalny was one of the few opposition leaders in Russia that posed a threat to Putin and his rule. While Navalny's death is one of many unjust killings under Putin's regime, Russia will continue to be an oppressive regime. Putin's oppression of political enemies, limits to individual freedoms, and a disdain towards democracy is antithetical to the U.S. domestic approach. Future U.S. administrations and policymakers will have to deal with the increasing democratic limitations under Putin's Russia.

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<sup>82</sup>"UN Commission concludes that war crimes have been committed in Ukraine, expresses concern about suffering of civilians," *United Nations Human Rights*, September 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/un-commission-concludes-war-crimes-have-been-committed-ukraine-expresses>.

<sup>83</sup>Todd Lopez, "Two Years in, Russia's War on Ukraine Continues to Pose Threat to Global Security," *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 24, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3686148/two-years-in-russias-war-on-ukraine-continues-to-pose-threat-to-global-security/>.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup>Guy Faulconbridge and Felix Light, "Putin foe Alexei Navalny dies in jail, West holds Russia responsible," *Reuters*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/jailed-russian-opposition-leader-navalny-dead-prison-service-2024-02-16/>.

Ultimately, the United States will continue to focus on the war in Ukraine if the status quo remains, unless isolationists or sphere-of-influence thinkers prevail in U.S. policy. As Congress and the president continue to debate and disagree on the future of Ukrainian aid, Russia looks to expand its offensive. While direct conflict is unlikely, the Biden Administration looks to continue to deter Russia from further aggression.

## **The Middle East**

On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists stormed the across the Israeli border from the Gaza Strip and raped, pillaged, and murdered more than 1,200 Israelis. The world watched in horror as hundreds more - women and children - were kidnapped and brought back to Gaza via the Hamas tunnel system. In response, Israel has responded with air and naval assaults in the Gaza Strip against Hamas. Thousands of women and children in Gaza have lost their lives due to the fighting between Israel and Hamas. Unlike previous skirmishes of the 21st century, the war between Israel and Hamas is large-scale and will be drawn out for months to come.

For decades, U.S. foreign policy has focused on the Middle East region. War after war has plagued the region, and “stable” countries such as Saudi Arabia are ruled by authoritarian regimes. With the debilitating withdrawal in Afghanistan, the war in Gaza, and Iran’s proxies threatening the stability of the region, U.S. attention in the Middle East has been reinvigorated. The Biden Administration has four distinct issues it is facing in the Middle East: The Israel-Hamas War, Iran, Confronting Human Rights Issues, and Balancing Allied Relationships.

As mentioned, the war in Gaza is a true test for American foreign policy commitments. For decades, support for Israel has been a bipartisan effort. Outside of the biblical perspectives from Evangelical Christians in Congress, the United States has long believed Israel to be a key

strategic partner in the Middle East as well as a democratic beacon for a region that desperately needs reform. But the Biden Administration faces a balancing act in this war. Though the Biden Administration has affirmed its commitment to Israel and its support of the nation's self-defense, the administration has also called for Israel to tread lightly in the wake of thousands of civilian deaths—alleged by Hamas. As Israel moves to eradicate Hamas and try to end its final stronghold in Rafah, President Biden urged Israel to have a plan for the displaced Palestinians before commencing an attack. According to the Gaza Health Ministry, a Hamas-run organization, more than 28,000 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting. As a result of the alleged civilian death toll, the United States is experiencing the power of public opinion, much like during the Vietnam War. As President Biden is up for reelection, U.S. foreign policy is being challenged by Americans at home. Accusing Israel of “genocide” and committing war crimes, some Americans have called for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. According to an *AP News* poll, half of U.S. adults believe Israel has gone too far.<sup>86</sup> Nearly three quarters of Americans ranging from age 18 to 29 disapprove of the Biden Administration's handling of the conflict in Gaza.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the Biden Administration has struggled to work with Congress on aid to Israel, which has been tied to aid for Ukraine and Taiwan. American foreign policy norms have been rocked by not only the conflict itself, but the public opinions that surround it.

The United States has dealt with Iranian proxies across the Middle East since the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet, since the war in Gaza began, Iranian proxies are seemingly working “overtime” against U.S. soldiers and interests. Iranian proxies such as

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<sup>86</sup>Ellen Knickmeyer and Linley Sanders, "Half of US adults say Israel has gone too far in war in Gaza, AP-NORC poll shows," *Associated Press*, February 2, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-poll-biden-war-gaza-4159b28d313c6c37abdb7f14162bcdd1>.

<sup>87</sup>Anthony Salvanto, Jennifer De Pinto, and Fred Backus, "Most Americans disapprove of Biden handling Israel-Hamas war: poll," *CBS News*, December 10, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/most-americans-disapprove-biden-handling-israel-hamas-war-poll-2023-12-10/>.

Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi rebels in Yemen have launched attacks against the United States and its allies. Specifically, the Houthi rebels have played a significant role as a destabilizing force in the Middle East. Beginning in November 2023, Houthi rebels launched attacks in the Red Sea. Not only have American vessels been harmed, but it has disrupted global trade - 12 percent passes through the Red Sea.<sup>88</sup> In response, the United States launched direct attacks against the Houthis. In addition to Iranian proxies, Iran's nuclear program is seen as a grave threat to regional and global security. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, otherwise known as the JCPOA, is an agreement that tried to place restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Though the Trump Administration pulled out of the JCPOA in 2018, the Biden Administration has tried to revive the talks. Iran has already made substantial progress on its nuclear program. According to U.S. intelligence assessments, Tehran has the capacity to produce nuclear weapons at any point. Yet, the regime reportedly still has not mastered all the necessary technologies to build the weapons. Iran, arguably the greatest threat to American interests in the Middle East, has been and will continue to be a key focal point of American foreign policy.

Third, the Biden Administration has made human rights a key cornerstone in its current foreign policy. While issues with Israel and Iran have bumped issues like human rights lower on the priority list, it remains a top issue for the current administration's foreign policy. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated: "President Biden is committed to a foreign policy that unites our democratic values with our diplomatic leadership, and one that is centered on the defense of democracy and the protection of human rights."<sup>89</sup> But the administration is already at a

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<sup>88</sup>Chris Baraniuk, "Red Sea crisis: How global shipping is being rerouted out of danger," *BBC Future*, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240119-red-sea-crisis-how-global-shipping-is-being-rerouted-out-of-danger>.

<sup>89</sup>Anthony Blinken, "Putting Human Rights at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy." *U.S. Department of State*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/putting-human-rights-at-the-center-of-u-s-foreign-policy/>.



crossroads. While the United States has enjoyed a cozy friendship with Saudi Arabia, President Biden promised to make the authoritarian regime into an international “pariah” after revelations that it ordered the killing of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi.<sup>90</sup> In addition, Saudi Arabia, like many other Middle Eastern countries, has imposed strict laws and restrictions on its population.

Lastly, the Biden Administration and policymakers have a precarious struggle when dealing with allies in the Middle East. Currently, the United States still has an influential position in the region. With the war in Gaza raging, it has challenged U.S. relationships in the Middle East. The United States is supporting Israel in its fight against Hamas, but also must remember it has several Arab “friends” in the region. Since Israel’s establishment in 1948, the Israel-Palestine issue has been a wedge between the United States and other Arab nations. Recently, the signing of the Abraham Accords has led to an unprecedented coexistence and relationship between Israel and some of its Arab neighbors. In addition, the United States must still counter Iranian influence in the region.

As Wertheim and Allison contend for retrenchment and an acceptance of new spheres of influence, one must understand the dangers this poses to the Middle East. As a hotbed of terrorism, and a threat to U.S. interests, the United States should be wary of retrenchment from the region. The retreat from Afghanistan is the most recent example of the dangers of American retrenchment. Not only did this lead to the takeover of the Taliban, key enablers of the 9/11 conspirators, but it also resulted in the deaths of thirteen American service members. President Obama’s withdrawal in Iraq led to the unintended rise of ISIS – the world’s most egregious and

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<sup>90</sup>Jarrett Renshaw and Nandita Rose, “Biden to Meet with Saudi Crown Prince despite ‘pariah’ Pledge,” *Reuters*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-meet-with-saudi-crown-prince-during-middle-east-trip-2022-06-14/>.

heinous terrorist organizations. Additionally, Russian and Iranian adversaries remain invested in the Middle East. Russia has supported Bashar al-Assad's regime throughout the duration of the Syrian Civil War that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians. Iran continues to export state-sanctioned terrorism through Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. As for Beijing, in March of 2023 the Chinese helped broker discussions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>91</sup> China has arrived on the regional diplomatic scene in the Middle East. Aside from these concerns, America's allies are under duress. Particularly, Israel is still under immediate threats from not only Iranian proxies, but directly from the Iranian government. The Biden Administration, and successive administrations, must continue U.S. presence in the region, bolster continued relationships, and combat Iranian, Russian, and Chinese influence. A retreat from the Middle East and allowing another nation to exert influence in the region would sow chaos in the region.

### **Looking Forward**

China's military build-up, threats toward Taiwan, and an overtly aggressive stance have put policymakers on high alert. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, threats to NATO, cyber-attacks on American infrastructure, efforts to steal American technology, and human rights violations have culminated in all-time low relations with the United States and its allies. In the Middle East, Iran is on the cusp of developing a weapon of mass destruction and continues to empower its proxies across the region. In addition, the war in Gaza has forced the Biden Administration to turn its

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<sup>91</sup>Maria Fantappie and Vali Nasr, "A New Order in the Middle East?" *Foreign Affairs*, March 22, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/iran-saudi-arabia-middle-east-relations#:~:text=On%20March%206%2C%202023%2C%20representatives, had%20decided%20to%20normalize%20relations.>

attention closer to the Middle East. The world is watching, and the United States must evaluate every decision to ensure American interests, allied interests, and the greater good for humanity.

With the pervasive issues facing the West, the United States has ideally seen itself as a beacon of democracy. The value of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles are cornerstones for the United States not only at home, but abroad as well. As discussed in this chapter, the dilemmas with China, Russia, and the Middle East coincide with the debate on where the United States should be in the world. As Stephen Wertheim asserts in his piece, the United States should place greater emphasis on human rights and democracy abroad. Though these principles have always existed in American foreign policy, Wertheim's camp believes the United States should place a stronger emphasis on it. In addition, one might assume Wertheim and individuals who share his thinking would seek to pull the U.S. military from certain locations around the globe. This could potentially mean leaving the Middle East, no longer remaining in Southeast Asia, and allowing Western Europe to defend itself from Russian threats. Specifically in the Middle East, Wertheim was critical of U.S. involvement in the region. Retrenchment beliefs seemed to be bolstered after U.S. ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the Gaza-Israel conflict persists, expect the camp of global retrenchment to find one more reason to leave U.S. partners in the region.

The emergence of China and Russia's invasion of Ukraine could challenge Graham Allison's views on sharing the globe with other powers. Allison assumes there are times of peace, and accepting new spheres of influence will only increase the prospect of peace. Yet, this is simply not a reality. There will always be adversaries in the world and global competition. China, Russia, and regimes in the Middle East have been persistent thorns in the side of the West for decades. According to Allison, sharing spheres of influence with adversaries like Russia,

China, and Iran is realistic. Specifically with China, the CCP not only has influence in Southeast Asia, but across the world. In addition, China is a nuclear power with high-level conventional military capabilities. To Allison and others like him, the best course of action is to coexist with China and allow the CCP to have influence in the world.

The current situation does reinforce Thomas Wright's assertions the most. As indicated in the recommendations in the next chapter, Wright's views are the perfect combination between idealism, realism, and ultimately, practicality. Wright's camp understands the consequences of retrenchment or allowing China and Russia to have the same outsized influence that the United States currently has. Though Wright agrees the United States should refrain from intervention as often as possible, he understands the need for the United States to be the global leader militarily and economically.

## **CHAPTER IV: GLOBAL RETRENCHMENT AND ACCEPTING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE: A DANGEROUS GAMBIT**

Since both Republicans and Democrats have criticized and sought to minimize U.S. global stance, this section identifies America First policies and global retrenchment as synonymous with each other. Though America First policies are nothing new in American history, they have made a resurgence in the political classes of America. On the surface, America First policies and global retrenchment look attractive - No “endless wars,” more investment towards domestic priorities, and a “protection” of U.S. sovereignty. Yet, the devastating effects of the United States retreating from the world stage are far reaching.

The second portion of this chapter is focused on the false premise of accepting spheres of influence. Pundits and policymakers like Graham Allison believe accepting new spheres of influence is the best course of action for U.S. foreign policy. This section focuses on the fallacies and issues regarding accepting spheres of influence in the modern age.

### **Dangers of Global Retrenchment**

Global retrenchment risks abandoning allies and vital American interests that protect the world from tyranny. At times, policymakers, and foreign policy hawks struggle to make the case to everyday Americans why alliances are integral to American interests abroad. To the retrenchment advocate, the United States shouldn't be the “world police,” nor should the nation entangle itself with further alliances and military commitments. Alliances and commitments abroad are perceived as incredibly costly. Aside from the billions of dollars spent on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past twenty-five years, a Quincy Institute study found that American

military bases and installations cost the United States close to \$55 billion annually.<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, the same study found that the United States has nearly three times as many bases compared to embassies and consulates, and has three times as many installations compared to all other countries combined.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, it is argued, defending other nations is not our responsibility, and it puts U.S. sons and daughters in harm's way. In essence, the costs are high, and the benefits are limited. While the sentiments of the retrenchment advocate and isolationist are warranted, they fail to understand that these policy proposals have detrimental effects and long-term consequences for the United States.

For one, global retrenchment fails to acknowledge that the United States' presence abroad allows the U.S. to have leverage to restrain partners and allies from making detrimental policy decisions. For example, the U.S. extension of its nuclear umbrella not only provides U.S. allies with protection and deterrence of adversaries, but it prevents other nations from seeking nuclear weapons of their own. In the 2022 National Defense Strategy, the U.S. reiterated its commitment to nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and the multi-faceted value U.S.-led nuclear deterrence brings to the table.<sup>94</sup> Aside from the primary goal of deterrence, a motivator for the U.S. nuclear umbrella is to prevent allies from pursuing their own nuclear ambitions. If allies no longer feel protected, or if the U.S. rescinded its nuclear umbrella, nations under the American security blanket could possibly seek out nuclear weapons of their own. Already, South Korea has flirted with the idea of developing its own nuclear weapons. In 2023, President Yoon Suk Yeol

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<sup>92</sup>David Vine, Patterson Deppen, and Leah Bolger, "Drawdown: Improving U.S. and Global Security through Military Base Closures Abroad," *Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*, January 12, 2021, <https://quincyinst.org/research/drawdown-improving-u-s-and-global-security-through-military-base-closures-abroad/#>.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Jennifer Bradley, "Preventing the Nuclear Jungle: Extended Deterrence, Assurance, and Nonproliferation," *National Defense University Press*, February 15, 2024, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3679143/preventing-the-nuclear-jungle-extended-deterrence-assurance-and-nonproliferation/>.

stated that South Korea may have to consider acquiring nuclear weapons if the regional situation in Asia worsened.<sup>95</sup> Allies such as Japan and Australia have navigated the prospect of developing nuclear weapons of their own.<sup>96</sup> On the surface, the U.S. nuclear umbrella can be perceived as an over extension of U.S. influence. Despite this perception, the nuclear umbrella not only prevents war, but it prevents allies from proliferating nuclear weapons and making the world a more volatile place. A failure of the nuclear umbrella could dramatically change the international landscape by risking a nuclear arms race, putting allies in harm's way, or worse, nuclear war.

Moreover, retrenchment advocates refuse to understand the deep-rooted economic benefits of security agreements and alliances. The current state of alliances prevents arms races, minimizes regional conflicts, and instability that otherwise occurred before the Cold War. The reduction in threats has opened economic doors for the United States. Regardless of one's political or foreign policy leanings, a healthy global economy is incredibly important for American and international stability. According to an analysis produced by the RAND Corporation, alliance partners have higher rates of trade and investment compared to non-allies.<sup>97</sup> Higher trade and investment constitutes more jobs, expanded industries, and an overall healthy economy. In addition, a separate RAND Corporation report found that "U.S. security commitments have significantly positive effects on U.S. bilateral trade."<sup>98</sup> The study suggested that trade would fall to \$450 billion if security commitments were cut by 50%.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, NATO expansion not only benefitted the economies of current and new members, but it also had a direct impact on the United States' economy. U.S. exports to new NATO members rose from

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan Rooney et al., "Does the U.S. Economy Benefit from U.S. Alliances and Forward Military Presence?" *RAND Corporation*, September 1, 2022, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA739-5.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA739-5.html).

<sup>98</sup> Keith Rockwell, "Criticism of NATO Ignores Its Economic Benefit to the US," *Wilson Center*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/criticism-nato-ignores-its-economic-benefit-us>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

\$900 million in 1989 to more than \$9 billion in 2016.<sup>100</sup> To espouse retrenchment views is to put U.S. economic standing at risk. The alliances and security agreements between nations have a direct impact on the positive trajectory of the U.S. economy. To simply say, “come home, America” could result in severe economic damage.

Additionally, the retrenchment and America First apologist value protectionist policies that harm the American economy. Per previous chapters, both former President Trump and President Biden have implemented tariffs on several products traded with the Chinese. In a potential second term, former President Trump has proposed a 10% tariff on all imported goods. A 2019 study by Moody Analytics found the U.S. – China trade war cost the U.S. economy 300,000 jobs.<sup>101</sup> Bloomberg reported the trade war cost the U.S. economy \$316 billion by the end of 2020. The Biden Administration has maintained tariffs and protectionist policies that was implemented by the Trump Administration. According to the Tax Foundation, “Historical evidence shows tariffs raise prices and reduce available quantities of goods and services for U.S. businesses and consumers, which results in lower income, reduced employment, and lower economic output. Tariffs could reduce U.S. output through a few channels.”<sup>102</sup> Outside of the presidency, the Senate’s two most prominent members – Republican Senator Josh Hawley and Independent (caucuses with the Democrats) Bernie Sanders – introduced legislation that would apply high tariffs to imports from China.<sup>103</sup> The Sanders-Hawley tariffs would be between 11.1 percent to 40.9 percent and would place a high tax on a combination of items such as shoes,

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ryan Hass and Abraham Denmark, "More pain than gain: How the US-China trade war hurt America," *Brookings Institution*, August 7, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/more-pain-than-gain-how-the-us-china-trade-war-hurt-america/>.

<sup>102</sup>Erica York, "Impact of Tariffs and Free Trade," *Tax Foundation*, June 27, 2018, <https://taxfoundation.org/research/all/federal/impact-of-tariffs-free-trade/>.

<sup>103</sup>Bryan Riley, “Sanders-Hawley Tariff Would Be Biggest Tariff Hike Since Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930,” *National Taxpayers Union*, 2024, <https://www.ntu.org/publications/detail/sanders-hawley-tariff-would-be-biggest-tariff-hike-since-smoot-hawley-tariff-act-of-1930>.



clothing, toys, and computers.<sup>104</sup> In return, the U.S. consumer would potentially have to pay \$86 more for smartphones and \$111 more for laptop computers.<sup>105</sup> Protectionism not only harms the overall economy for the United States, but it also impacts the American consumer.

Despite the dangers of retrenchment and America First policies, policymakers and thought leaders still contend the U.S. should pursue a change of course. In Keith Kellogg and Fred Fleitz’s article, *In Defense of the America First Approach to National Security*, the author’s contest the assumption that America First policies are conflated with isolationism and retrenchment. According to Kellogg and Fleitz, the America First approach to national security is to put the interests of the people of the United States through “decisive leadership, negotiating from strength, working with allies, and trying peaceful tools to resolve global conflicts before turning to military force.”<sup>106</sup> The article points to the successes of President Trump engaging with North Korea in 2018 and avoiding broader international conflicts as a means to justify America First policies.

In addition to the foreign policy successes mentioned by Kellogg and Fleitz, President Trump did accomplish several foreign policy victories – the Abraham Accords, curtailing illegal immigration, pulling out of the JCPOA, and the killing of Iranian General Qassam Soleimani. Yet, a few foreign policy “wins” does not constitute the success of a broader foreign policy strategy, nor does it mean America First policies will result in long-term success. President Jimmy Carter signed the Camp David Accords but failed in bringing home American hostages from Iran. The Nixon Administration negotiated the end of the Vietnam War and was thought to

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Keith Kellogg and Fred Fleitz, “In Defense of the America First Approach to National Security,” *National Review*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/02/in-defense-of-the-america-first-approach-to-national-security/>.

be a “success,” only for the communists to take over the entirety of Vietnam. Policymakers must understand that few successes do not create long-term stability. Though the U.S. never fully embraced retrenchment, America First policies flirted with the idea of the United States not leading in the international space.

Under President Trump’s foreign policy, the U.S. threatened to desert allies and long-term bipartisan commitments. President Trump threatened to leave NATO and labeled the organization “obsolete,” ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Syria and leaving Kurdish allies to fend for themselves and started the process of withdrawal from Afghanistan that ended in a disaster under the Biden Administration. The Trump Administration also announced troop reductions in Germany, but the withdrawals were frozen by the Biden Administration, and the administration made threats to reduce troop numbers in both South Korea and Japan putting our Asian allies in harm’s way of China and North Korea. Again, the Trump Administration never embraced isolationism or full retrenchment. Yet, the Trump Administrations withdrawals and further threats to pull the U.S. from commitments and assurances constitutes a transactional foreign policy that dangers traditional American leadership. Former Trump Administration officials and prominent voices in foreign policy have expressed their dismay with the former President’s foreign policy. In a 2023 speech at the Hudson Institute, former Vice President Mike Pence warns against “appeasement Republicans” and stated that some Republicans, including former President Trump, are “abandoning the traditional conservative position of American leadership on the world stage and embracing a new and dangerous form of isolationism.”<sup>107</sup>

Former National Security Advisor John Bolton offered a scathing analysis of both the Trump

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<sup>107</sup>Mike Pence, “Mike Pence Warns Donald Trump Is Embracing Isolationism over American Leadership,” *C-SPAN*, 2023, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5084549%2Fmike-pence-warns-donald-trump-embracing-isolationism-american-leadership>.

Administration's foreign policy, and the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, in the article *Containing Isolationism*. In this piece, Bolton identifies the "isolationist virus" and the dangers that follow with retrenchment and isolation policies.<sup>108</sup>

America First advocates believe in "negotiating from strength," as Kellogg and Fleitz state. In reality, America First apologists have negotiated from a state of weakness. Former President Trump has stated Ukraine may have to give up some territory for the war with Russia to win.<sup>109</sup> Not to mention, President Trump encouraged Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" if NATO allies didn't meet defense spending targets.<sup>110</sup> Ceding territory would only empower Putin on his quest for Russian superiority. His goal is not only regional stability, but to return Russia to Cold War eminence. America First policies focus on "cutting deals" but it is cutting corners and placing allies in a vulnerable state. The administration even had a willingness to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. Aside from the Taliban's brutality and its history of providing safe harbor to terrorists, negotiating and cutting deals with the enemy is problematic. Under the agreement with the Taliban, the Trump administration laid the groundwork for the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan. As the Trump Administration emboldened the Taliban, the Biden Administration executed a dismal evacuation that led to the deaths of thirteen U.S. servicemen and utter chaos in Kabul. Part of the U.S.-Taliban agreement was that the Taliban would not provide safe harbor for terrorists. But it seems the Taliban have broken this promise. Aside from the Taliban's terrorist enemies – ISIS-K – Al Qaeda, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and a number of Central Asian jihadis operate in

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<sup>108</sup>John R. Bolton, "Containing Isolationism," *National Review*, January 5, 2023, <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2023/01/23/containing-isolationism/>.

<sup>109</sup>Dalibor Rohac and Mathieu Drain, "Trump's Proposed Ukraine 'Deal' Threatens European Security," *AEI*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/trumps-proposed-ukraine-deal-threatens-european-security/>.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Afghanistan.<sup>111</sup> Al Qaeda leader Aimen al-Zawahiri, an architect of 9/11, was identified in Kabul and was killed by a U.S. drone strike in 2023.<sup>112</sup> Despite repeated assurances and a signed agreement from the Taliban, Afghanistan is still harboring terrorists within its borders. America First policies not only leave out allies vulnerable, but also the United States vulnerable.

Despite the fallacies of America First policies, the Trump Administration still had its own rationale for its foreign policy approach. As mentioned, the Trump Administration viewed the world transactionally. In the case of NATO, President Trump believed alliance members were not paying their “fair share.” Similarly, in a 2014 EU-U.S. Summit in Brussels, President Obama shared similar concerns and said, “if we’ve got collective defense, it means that everybody has got to chip in.”<sup>113</sup> Though the Obama Administration failed in getting European nations to pay their “fair share,” the Trump Administration succeeded by enticing NATO members to increase their defense spending. The rationale from the Trump Administration was understandable, but the threat to leave NATO and labeling the alliance as obsolete sends the wrong message to allies. Despite the “imperfections” or lack of fair share from fellow NATO members, the alliance’s advantages far exceed the few disadvantages. A world without NATO would not only end the collective defense between the United States and Europe, but it could spur a newfound arm’s race, an increase in Russian power and aggression, and a threat to European regional security. The dissolution of NATO, or the United States leaving NATO, would translate into minimal cost savings and limited advantages for the country. The U.S. would lose allies, U.S. presence abroad,

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<sup>111</sup>Mir Asfandya, “Two Years under the Taliban: Is Afghanistan a Terrorist Safe Haven Once Again?,” *United States Institute of Peace*, August 15, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/two-years-under-taliban-afghanistan-terrorist-safe-haven-once-again>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>“Press Conference by President Obama, European Council President Van Rompuy, and European Commission President Barroso,” *National Archives and Records Administration*, March 16, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/press-conference-president-obama-european-council-president-van-rompuy-a>.

and leadership prestige. Again, the Trump Administration and America First policies made several accomplishments. But for the longevity of the country, the United States should still pursue alliances, military strength, and military presence abroad.

### **The False Premise of Spheres of Influence**

Why should American policymakers reject a new age of spheres of influence? Why does it matter for the United States to pushback against Chinese and Russian expansion? To the casual observer, accepting spheres of influence seems like a pragmatic choice. Allowing U.S. adversaries to have significant economic and geographic influence in their respective regions (and beyond) could promote stability and peace, right? Allison's arguments seem alluring, but they are incredibly misguided. As China and Russia look to carve out the world to their advantage, U.S. policymakers must understand accepting new spheres of influence threatens U.S. security and economic interests. A competitive, dangerous, and unforgiving world is inevitable. But the world becomes much more treacherous and menacing with the welcoming of newly minted superpowers.

Allowing new spheres of influence threatens the sovereignty and stability of democratic nations and U.S. allies. For example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has given Russia a foothold outside of its own borders. Yet, others still argue that Ukraine is not in strategic interest for the United States. This, among other things, is a false premise and assumption. If Russia goes unchallenged when invading Ukraine, one may assume Russia could expand its ambitions. In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Russia's border "has no end."<sup>114</sup> In February of 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pronounced that democratic

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<sup>114</sup>William Courtney, "Russia's Appetite May Extend beyond Ukraine" *RAND Corporation*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/02/russias-appetite-may-extend-beyond-ukraine.html>.

Moldova could become the “next Ukraine.”<sup>115</sup> If the U.S. were to accept, or cede any ground to the Russians, this will only embolden the Kremlin to look further west. Allowing new spheres of influence hinders democracy and places an immediate pressure on U.S. allies. U.S. markets, businesses, and citizens would be in the crosshairs of a dictatorial regime if Russia is victorious in Ukraine. Throughout history, we have seen the dangers of allowing aggressive regimes to establish a new sphere of influence. In the late 1930s, Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany were able to make significant gains because of Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement policy. Appeasement is a negotiation policy that gives material or territorial concessions to an aggressive power to avoid a broader conflict. In the case of Nazi Germany, Hitler’s regime annexed Austria in 1938 and in the Munich Agreement, annexed the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. In essence, appeasing Nazi Germany not only emboldened the regime, but it also allowed Hitler to have a sphere of influence in Central Europe. Though the U.S. and its allies would go on to fight a war to reject Nazi Germany’s claim to Europe, the West failed to deny Nazi Germany its initial sphere of influence. In similar fashion, the U.S. must not allow Russia to go unchallenged and have a sphere of influence beyond its borders. Other U.S. allies might follow a similar fate if Russia is not defeated in Ukraine. A danger of accepting new spheres of influence is the false premise of peace and stability.

Furthermore, embracing new spheres of influence would mean ceding ground to human rights abuses. If U.S. leadership and everyday Americans truly cared about human rights abroad, then one should acknowledge that allowing Russia and China to carve up rest of the world threatens the very people the U.S. intends to protect. China and Russia are authoritarian regimes which limit speech, the press, religion, and repress political dissidents. Assuming Russia or

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

China would change in nature based on achieving the influence they desire is a farce. In a more recent display of such abuses outside of their own borders, China's authoritarian decisions in Hong Kong are cause for concern. After the British "handoff" to Beijing in 1997, and the promise of 50 years of self-government and freedoms not allowed on the Chinese mainland, the Chinese government has slowly chipped away the rights and freedoms in Hong Kong.<sup>116</sup> In 2020, Beijing implemented a sweeping national security law in Hong Kong that curtailed the rights and freedoms of inhabitants. Authorities have arrested pro-democracy activists, curbed voting rights, and limited freedoms of the press and speech.<sup>117</sup> In a 2022 speech, Chinese President Xi Jinping confirmed that China has achieved comprehensive control over Hong Kong.<sup>118</sup> The case of Hong Kong is a warning to those content of spheres of influence. Though the Hong Kong handover was agreed between the British and Chinese, it has only empowered China to take further steps at dismantling human rights and eroding democratic values. The U.S. has a moral obligation to uphold human rights as a focal point of American foreign policy and allowing spheres of influence threatens the integrity of human rights abroad. Taiwan's robust and capitalist democracy would be decimated under Chinese rule. Again, accepting new spheres of influence doesn't translate to a more peaceful world.

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<sup>116</sup>Lindsay Maizland and Clara Fong, "Hong Kong's Freedoms: What China Promised and How It's Cracking Down," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hong-kong->.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>"China's XI Says Full Control over Hong Kong Achieved, Determined on Taiwan" *Reuters*, October 15, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-full-control-over-hong-kong-achieved-determined-taiwan-2022-10-16/>.

## CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

As the world faces reoccurring conflicts and international crises, U.S. policymakers are struggling to convey a clear and concise message on foreign policy. Even fellow Americans are asking what we stand for, what do we represent, and what is the role of the United States in the geopolitical and economic environment. As a new generation comes into the realm of foreign policy, and a new class of lawmakers enter the policymaking space, so do potential new policies. A 2023 Gallup poll confirmed that most Americans want the U.S. to take a leading role in international affairs, but more than ever, there are an increasing number of Americans who want the United States to have a more limited role.<sup>119</sup> While there are positive elements to the different foreign policy practices, there is ample evidence to suggest that Thomas Wright’s view expressed in the “Folly of Retrenchment” offers the most sustainable approach going forward. The United States should not only remain the world’s greatest superpower, but it should continue the leadership the world desperately needs. This final chapter explores the key recommendations for the current global climate as noted in the Thomas Wright analysis. While Graham Allison and Stephen Wertheim provide solid evidence for their perspectives and arguments, they fail to acknowledge the realities and historical ramifications of global retrenchment or allowing Russia and China to share expanded influence in the world. For policymakers, the U.S. must lead through enduring alliances and commitments, free trade and global connectivity, emphasizing the importance of nuclear deterrence, and expanding global security in Latin America in addition to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

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<sup>119</sup>Jeffrey Jones, “Fewer Americans Want U.S. Taking Major Role in World Affairs,” *Gallup*, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/471350/fewer-americans-taking-major-role-world-affairs.aspx>.



Going forward, the president, policymakers, and the general populace should understand the implications of a U.S. withdrawal from the world. While the United States is unlikely to fully embrace isolationism fully if certain progressives and America First Republicans get their way, one should assume the United States would withdraw from alliances, retire from its commitments, enact harmful protectionist policies, and ultimately, shrink the American global stance. Additionally, U.S. policymakers should reject new spheres of influence. These spheres of influence not only erode American influence, but also harm American allies.

Not only should the United States honor its commitments and its role in the world, but the United States should reassert its leadership in the world through several pragmatic steps. This section offers several different considerations for policymakers and practical policy solutions for the U.S. to reassert its dominance across the world and lead the globe against foreign adversaries.

### **Affirming and Honoring U.S. Commitments and Alliances**

For decades, bipartisan efforts have reinforced U.S. commitments and alliances abroad. Yet, calls for ending aid to Israel on the left, failing to help Ukraine on the right, and an overall disdain for American supremacy abroad harm the United States and its allies. In the House of Representatives, seventy Republicans voted in favor of Congressman Matt Gaetz's amendment on a defense bill that would have prohibited security assistance going to Ukraine. In the Senate, fifteen Republicans and two Democrats voted against an essential \$95 billion emergency foreign aid bill that included defense allocations to Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine.

The "Nays" had their own rationale for voting against the various security assistance measures. In one faction, several Republicans demanded an overhaul of domestic border policies at the southern border before sending further security assistance abroad. Senator Tommy

Tuberville (R-AL) encapsulated this conviction by stating: “We should not send a dime to Ukraine until our borders are fully secure.”<sup>120</sup> Senator Eric Schmitt (R-MO) exclaimed: “Missourians sent me to Washington to fight for them, not to just go along with the failed Washington way of doing things, like spending billions we don’t have to defend the Ukrainian border while nothing is done to secure our own border.”<sup>121</sup> Other policymakers viewed aid to Ukraine equivalent to putting “America last,” and have maintained a hardline approach against sending any foreign aid to the war-torn Eastern European nation. Believing the sovereignty of Ukraine is not a vital interest for the United States, a minority, yet vocal, group of Republicans have denounced any foreign aid package to Ukraine. Representatives such as Matt Gaetz, Jim Jordan, and Marjorie Taylor Greene stated that by supporting Ukraine meant “we’re ignoring our own people’s problems.”<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Republican voters may have influenced the opinion and views of various lawmakers. In a December 2023 Pew Research poll, roughly 50% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believe the U.S. is giving too much aid to Ukraine.<sup>123</sup>

While these views are understandable, they are not substantiated. Aside from the principles of supporting democracies abroad and pushing back against tyranny, the United States is not making a fiscally irresponsible decision of supporting Ukraine. According to a House Foreign Affairs Committee report, twenty-nine European countries have provided more aid to

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<sup>120</sup>Tuberville: Not One Dime for Ukraine Until the Border Is Secure, 2024, <https://www.tuberville.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tuberville-not-one-dime-for-ukraine-until-the-border-is-secure/>.

<sup>121</sup>Senator Schmitt Statement on Foreign Aid Supplemental Vote, 2024, <https://www.schmitt.senate.gov/media/press-releases/senator-schmitt-statement-on-foreign-aid-supplemental-vote/>.

<sup>122</sup>Bernd Debusmann, “Why Are Some Republicans Opposing More Aid for Ukraine?,” *BBC News*, December 7, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-67649497>.

<sup>123</sup>Richard Wike et al., “Growing Partisan Divisions over NATO and Ukraine,” *Pew Research Center*, May 8, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/08/growing-partisan-divisions-over-nato-and-ukraine/>.

Ukraine than the U.S.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, NATO allies, who are sharing the burden of supporting Ukraine, have boosted their defense spending by 8.3% - the largest yearly increase in the past decade.<sup>125</sup> Despite Congressional members' reservations with spending too much taxpayer money, the United States has only spent 1.5 percent of the federal budget on support to Ukraine.<sup>126</sup> Foreign aid to Ukraine, and other U.S. interests abroad, are miniscule compared to the broader federal budget. If lawmakers want to reign in federal spending, it should focus on reforming entitlement spending. Regarding polling data, lawmakers must fall into the trap of relying on the populist whims of the electorate. Policymakers must be driven by the principle of protecting American allies and interests.

Though the House amendment was overwhelmingly voted down and the Senate legislation was passed, many policymakers are turning to an American retreat. Despite the calls for retrenchment, the United States is stronger and safer when commitments are strengthened and honored. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. couldn't simply rely on the Atlantic and Pacific to protect itself. It was only a matter of time until the world pulled the United States into conflict. The world needed the United States to guide the Western world to victory in both World War I and World War II. U.S. policymakers must understand that alliances and strategic commitments make the world a safer place.

The United States should remain committed to the integrity of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. As the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO approaches, it is paramount for U.S. policymakers to emphasize its support for the security agreement – vocally and in practice.

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<sup>124</sup>Michael McCaul, Mike Rogers, and Mike Turner, "Proposed Plan for Victory in Ukraine," *House Foreign Affairs Committee*, 2024, 13, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Proposed-Plan-for-Victory-in-Ukraine.pdf>.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid, 14.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

NATO has historically offered stability for its members. With the additions of Finland and Sweden, the collective security agreement must remain. Despite the questions of the integrity of NATO, there are several reasons why the United States should not only remain in NATO but remain the leader of the security alliance.

NATO has been the world's greatest deterrent to Soviet and Russian aggression. Centuries of warfare, two world wars, and a Cold War prove that Europe and the rest of the world are unstable. NATO has offered unprecedented stability for its members. Throughout the Cold War, Western Europe was protected from Soviet encroachment because of NATO. Currently, Western Europe is faced with a volatile Russia. Labeling the fall of the Soviet Union as the greatest catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vladimir Putin is determined to recreate a Russian empire that challenges the United States.<sup>127</sup> Putin's determination for regional hegemony is more reason to protect the sanctity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Moreover, alliances and commitments give the United States immense influence over its allies and strategic partners. While the United States should honor the individual sovereignty and self-determination of fellow nation-states, it is advantageous for the United States to have the utmost influence throughout Europe and Asia. As the moral authority of the world, and the beacon of democracy, alliances give the United States significant influence and power across the globe. The United States should affirm and improve its alliances, like NATO, and lead the charge through continued collective security agreements.

There are several ways the United States can bolster its support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. First, Congress can affirm its commitment through legislative means. Already, Congress has bolstered its support for NATO through the National Defense

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<sup>127</sup>“Putin: Soviet Collapse a ‘Genuine Tragedy,’” *NBC News*, April 25, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057>.

Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024. Senators Tim Kaine and Marco Rubio spearheaded a provision in the NDAA that would prevent any president from withdrawing the United States from NATO without the approval of the Senate or an Act of Congress.<sup>128</sup> Similar to this legislation, Congress should pass a Joint Resolution that affirms the U.S. commitment to NATO and our allies within the organization. In 2019, Congressman Jimmy Panetta introduced the NATO Support Act which reiterates U.S. commitment toward the security organization. Though the bill did not pass, the United States Congress should move swiftly in affirming its support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Congressional action is the utmost reaffirmation for U.S. allies abroad. Congressional support not only provides concrete steps towards bolstering U.S. investment into NATO, but it signals support to our allies. At the conclusion of the Soviet regime, former Soviet client states flocked to NATO for protection, cooperation, and peace. The invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, and the threats to Moldova, have only increased the need for NATO.

Not only should Washington continue to bolster and affirm its relationships with Japan and South Korea, but the United States must also provide strategic clarity toward Taiwan. For decades, Washington has maintained “strategic ambiguity” – a practice of not stating whether the United States will come to Taiwan’s defense in the face of a Chinese invasion. Despite the ambiguity, President Biden stated the United States would defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion.<sup>129</sup> The White House and the U.S. State Department walked back the president’s

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<sup>128</sup>“Kaine & Rubio Applaud Senate Passage of Their Bipartisan Bill to Prevent Any U.S. President from Leaving NATO,” *Tim Kaine, United States Senator from Virginia*, December 13, 2023, [https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-and-rubio-applaud-senate-passage-of-their-bipartisan-bill-to-prevent-any-us-president-from-leaving-nato#:~:text=WASHINGTON%2C%20D.C.%20-%20Today%2C%20U.S.,Treaty%20Organization%20\(NATO\)%20without%20Senate](https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-and-rubio-applaud-senate-passage-of-their-bipartisan-bill-to-prevent-any-us-president-from-leaving-nato#:~:text=WASHINGTON%2C%20D.C.%20-%20Today%2C%20U.S.,Treaty%20Organization%20(NATO)%20without%20Senate).

<sup>129</sup>Josh Chin, Andrew Restuccia, and Ken Thomas, “Biden Says U.S. Would Intervene Militarily If China Invaded Taiwan - WSJ,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-says-u-s-would-intervene-militarily-if-china-invaded-taiwan-11653286228>.

defense claim by stating: “Our One China Policy and our commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait of course remains.”<sup>130</sup> Understood as a “gaffe,” President’s Biden’s statements regarding Taiwan are a smart strategy to deter China; regardless of if the comment was unintended.

For far too long, the United States’ policy of “strategic ambiguity” has been a relic and foreign-policy artifact of the past. China’s nuclear modernization, military build-up, expansion into Latin America, and ultimately, threats to Taiwan, has exposed the need for strategic clarity. Richard Haas, President of the Council of Foreign Relations, advocating dropping the ambiguous policy: “The policy known as strategic ambiguity has, however, run its course. Ambiguity is unlikely to deter an increasingly assertive China with growing military capabilities. The time has come for the United States to introduce a policy of strategic clarity: one that makes explicit that the United States would respond to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan.”<sup>131</sup> If the United States truly wants to deter China, protect its Asian allies, and affirm the autonomy of Taiwan, policymakers and the president should adopt a policy of strategic clarity. The failures of Afghanistan, the lack of “iron clad” support for Israel, and inconsistent messaging regarding Taiwan has made the situation in Asia more dire. Despite the supposed deterrence of strategic ambiguity, it has only empowered China to grow its military power and push beyond its bounds.

Aside from the perils of strategic ambiguity, there are a few advantages toward the policy. First, it does not require the United States, or any country, to come to the direct aid of Taiwan. Unlike other strategic guarantees and treaties, ambiguity allows for the United States to

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<sup>130</sup>Ralph Jennings, “US State Department Walks Back Biden’s Unusually Strong Comments on Taiwan,” *Voice of America*, May 29, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-state-department-walks-back-biden-s-unusually-strong-comments-on-taiwan-/6588234.html>.

<sup>131</sup>Doug Bandow, “It’s Time to End ‘Strategic Ambiguity’,” *CATO*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/its-time-end-strategic-ambiguity>.

be “flexible” in their commitments towards Taiwan. For instance, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 gave Ukraine assurances but no guarantees, which do not carry any legal weight. Second, strategic ambiguity can potentially restrict unilateral decisions from both China and Taiwan. Particularly from Taiwan’s perspective, it prevents the island territory from declaring formal independence from China. Such a declaration could provoke an aggressive China.

Yet, even with minimal advantages, the U.S. should shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity. For one, China has already committed itself to “reunification” with Taiwan. President Xi Jinping stated in his New Year’s address in 2023 that “reunification of the motherland [China] is inevitable.”<sup>132</sup> In a recent government report delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening of the National People’s Congress (NPC), China dropped the mention of “peaceful unification” with Taiwan.<sup>133</sup> Despite the past success of strategic ambiguity and the “threat” of American retaliation, China has committed to taking control of Taiwan. Though China has yet to act on its promises, it has undermined the policy of strategic ambiguity and still seeks reunification. The United States, and its western allies, would be better suited by affirming its commitment of the defense of Taiwan to better deter China. Strategic ambiguity sends mixed signals and can be perceived as an absence of policy; a commitment to strategic clarity gives China a definite “red line.” In Glenn H. Snyder’s “Deterrence and power,” a strong deterrent is a function of certainty, its celerity, and its severity.<sup>134</sup> Specifically, meaningful deterrence would mean ditching strategic ambiguity and guaranteeing a protection of Taiwan and further economic and political consequences for the CCP. The prospect of getting into a war with the United States

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<sup>132</sup>“China’s XI Says ‘reunification’ with Taiwan Is Inevitable,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-calls-taiwan-president-fronrunner-destroyer-peace-2023-12-31/>.

<sup>133</sup>Yew Tian and Laurie Chen, “China Drops ‘peaceful Reunification’ Reference to Taiwan,” *Reuters*, March 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-drops-peaceful-reunification-reference-taiwan-raises-defence-spending-by-2024-03-05/>.

<sup>134</sup>Glenn Snyder, “Deterrence and power,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1960, 167, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200276000400201>.

should terrify Chinese leadership. Further, strategic clarity not only gives assurance to Taiwan, but it gives assurance to communist China. Currently, the Chinese can only speculate how the United States might respond. NATO, the perfect form of strategic clarity, has deterred the Soviet Union and the Russian regime since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. China must weigh the costs and benefits of invading Taiwan. The United States, and the rest of Taiwan's allies, need to be transparent and forthright about the costs of aggressive re-unification. These commitments have not only bolstered the relationship between allies, but it has thwarted any Soviet/Russian advancement. If the United States truly wants to deter China, it will need to clarify its stance on the issue of Taiwan. By clarifying the defense of Taiwan, China may step away from its hopes of reunifying with the island territory.

A coherent and unified policy statement reflecting the defense of Taiwan is needed more than ever. The origins of strategic ambiguity for the United States were initially appropriate at the time. The United States had hoped China would become a positive trade partner and a more democratic-leaning nation. Additionally, policymakers believed China could never rival the United States; they were wrong. Since then, China leadership has clung to authoritarian rule and aims to undermine U.S. leadership. A statement of strategic clarity is a step toward the defense of Taiwan and the hindrance of Chinese aggression. The United States should pledge to defend Taiwan and clearly define what Beijing's actions would constitute a response from the United States and its allies.

Aside from clear defense of Taiwan statement, U.S. policymakers should bolster its investment in Taiwan. The U.S. should allocate billions of dollars in defense aid to the island nation. Already, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act included \$10 billion in aid to



Taiwan.<sup>135</sup> With China potentially invading Taiwan in 2027, the United States must deliver timely and sufficient aid for the security of Taiwan. Additionally, the United States should partner with its regional allies – such as Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines – to aid Taiwan before a potential Chinese invasion. South Asia allies must understand that a threat to the stability of Taiwan is a threat to their stability. A Chinese dominated region could amount to increase threats, broader coercion, and an empowered Beijing if it is allowed to acquire Taiwan aggressively. The United States should request its Asian allies to redefine their own Taiwan policies that include the defense of Taipei. If the United States expects to lead, it must lead the world by reinforcing its commitment to its allies, NATO, and the defense of Taiwan.

### **The Value of Free Trade**

Since the nation’s inception, the United States has promoted commerce, but also had been wary of free trade. Motivated by protectionist policies and bolstering American industry, the United States implemented a wide range of tariffs. This economic policy not only harms the consumer, but it diminishes the U.S. economy and international cooperation. Promoting free trade and an international free market makes the world a safer, more cooperative, and economically viable environment. As mentioned in previous chapters, several studies have found that increased trade leads to fewer armed conflicts among nation-states. In a piece by Mathew Jackson and Stephen Nei, the authors stated the following: “The number of wars per pair of countries per year from 1950 to 2000 was roughly a 10th as high as it was from 1820 to 1949... Increased trade decreases countries’ incentives to attack each other and increases their incentives

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<sup>135</sup>Bryant Harris and Joe Gould, “Senate to Add \$10 Billion in Taiwan Aid, Scale Back Arms Sale Reform,” *Defense News*, October 17, 2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/budget/2022/10/17/senate-to-add-10-billion-in-taiwan-aid-scale-back-arms-sale-reform/>.

to defend each other, leading to a stable and peaceful network of military and trade alliances that is consistent with observed data.”<sup>136</sup> In “Trade, Peace, and Democracy: An Analysis of Dyadic Dispute,” authors Solomon W. Polachek and Carlos Seiglie found that a doubling of trade leads to a 20 percent reduction of conflict.<sup>137</sup> Yet, there are no guarantees. Many at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century argued increase trade would lead to peace, but World War I quickly “debunked” these views. Despite this early case study, free trade and broader globalization still has positive effects on the American consumer and American national security. A threat to free trade is a threat to national security.

Not all international agreements, whether it be economic or security, are in the interest for the United States. The JCPOA and the Paris Climate Accords are examples of international agreements that were not in the interest of the United States. Among other things, the JCPOA gave Iran a pathway to nuclear weapons through the sunset clause, it allowed Iran to receive permanent benefits up-front, and ultimately, it still allowed the regime to finance terrorism and destabilizing activities across the Middle East.<sup>138</sup> As for the Paris Climate Accords, the agreement would have costed hundreds and thousands of jobs and destroyed \$2.5 trillion in gross domestic product by the year 2035.<sup>139</sup> Additionally, the agreement costed billions of dollars in taxpayer funds and hindered American energy competitiveness.<sup>140</sup> Particularly from an economic

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<sup>136</sup>Matthew Jackson and Stephen Nei, “Networks of military alliances, wars, and International Trade,” December 14, 2015, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1520970112>.

<sup>137</sup>Solomon W. Polachek and Carlos Seiglie, “Trade, Peace and Democracy: An Analysis of Dyadic Dispute,” *SSRN*, July 25, 2006, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=915360](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=915360).

<sup>138</sup>“The Iran Nuclear Deal: What’s Wrong with It and What Can We Do Now?” *United Against Nuclear Iran*, 2024, <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/iran-nuclear-deal>.

<sup>139</sup>Nicolas Loris and Katie Tubb, “4 Reasons Trump Was Right to Pull out of the Paris Agreement,” *The Heritage Foundation*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/environment/commentary/4-reasons-trump-was-right-pull-out-the-paris-agreement>.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

standpoint, there are economic international agreements that have benefitted the United States both economically and geopolitically.

In 2017, President Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the TPP was set to become the world's largest trade deal, covering more than 40 percent of the global economy.<sup>141</sup> The TPP not only would have increased cooperation, but it would also have given the United States influence with Southeast Asia countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore who opted into the trade agreement. The TPP eliminated and reduced tariffs on a variety of goods, the trade service was liberalized, intellectual property protections were enacted.<sup>142</sup> The TPP was never ratified due to the United States' withdrawal.

According to the Trump Administration, the TPP eliminated American jobs while benefiting large corporations. Many Americans felt disenfranchised and angered because jobs were being outsourced overseas. On the other side of the political aisle, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) celebrated the demise of the TPP. According to the Sanders' Office, trade deals similar to the TPP have "cost us millions of decent-paying jobs and caused a 'race to the bottom' which has lowered wages for American workers."<sup>143</sup>

More than an economic partnership, the TPP demonstrated the United States' commitment to its allies in the Pacific region and its pursuit of global influence. The TPP aimed to further the United States' strategic interests in at least three ways. First, an opportunity for the United States and Asian leadership to strengthen military and diplomatic power. Second,

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<sup>141</sup>James McBride, Andrew Chatzky, and Anshu Siripurapu, "What Is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)?," *Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)*, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>*Sanders Statement on Trans-Pacific Partnership*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/press-releases/sanders-statement-on-trans-pacific-partnership/#:~:text=For%20the%20last%2030%20years,lowered%20wages%20for%20American%20workers>.

focusing on a broader effort to improve the international order through market economies and liberal values. Third, aiming to strengthen key partners; particularly in Japan and Vietnam.<sup>144</sup>

According to Timothy Heath, the TPP “served as an important component of the rebalance to Asia initiative.”<sup>145</sup> The lack of U.S. presence has allowed China into the fold. A *Wall Street Journal* article points out that failed trade liberalization gave China an opportunity:

Beijing’s pro-trade steps have fueled concerns among American businesses and close allies. They worry that the U.S.’s absence in regional trade agreements gives Beijing an opening to establish its leadership in setting rules and standards for trade and economy, particularly in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital trade.<sup>146</sup>

After the early months of the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte sought warmer relations with China.<sup>147</sup> Hanoi began taking steps to stabilize ties with Beijing as well.<sup>148</sup> From the ashes of the TPP, came the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Already, China has applied to the partnership (though China has a process to go through). In addition, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a trade agreement led by China, includes fifteen Asia-Pacific countries but not the United States.<sup>149</sup>

With China’s Belt and Road Initiative, countries are moving on with or without the United States. The United States will lose influence if it continues to retreat from free trade and worldwide economic cooperation. Outside of the geopolitical ramifications of free trade, U.S.

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<sup>144</sup>Timothy Heath, “Strategic Consequences of U.S. Withdrawal from TPP,” *RAND Corporation*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2017/03/strategic-consequences-of-us-withdrawal-from-tpp.html>.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Yuka Hayashi, “U.S. Readies New Asia-Pacific Economic Strategy to Counter China,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-readies-new-asia-pacific-economic-strategy-to-counter-china-11644148801>.

<sup>147</sup>Timothy Heath, “Strategic Consequences of U.S. Withdrawal from TPP,” *RAND Corporation*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2017/03/strategic-consequences-of-us-withdrawal-from-tpp.html>.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

policymakers should understand that free trade is economically advantageous for everyday Americans. Free trade provides economic stability for Americans, while enhancing U.S. national security goals. The United States should pursue deals that not only benefit American interests but pursue agreements that benefits allies and alleviates reliance on adversaries.

### **Reinforce Nuclear Modernization and Deterrence**

One of the critiques Wertheim has of U.S. foreign policy is that the United States has a history of overextending itself abroad. Though Wertheim does not call on the United States to pull back its nuclear umbrella, he assumes American actions warrant near-peer aggression. According to Wertheim, “clinging to the dream of never-ending primacy will ensure trouble, mandating the containment of rivals and provoking insecurity and aggression in return.”<sup>150</sup> China, Russia, and Iran’s aggression is not a result of American primacy; these regimes are self-motivated aggressors. If the United States provokes such aggression and conflict, then one must question if the nuclear umbrella is enabling instability. This assessment would be quite the opposite. To limit further aggression and further stabilize certain parts of the world, the United States must continue to lead through its nuclear modernization efforts, the nuclear umbrella, and ultimately, deterrence.

To strengthen U.S. security abroad, protect U.S. allies, and prevent nuclear proliferation, the U.S. should not only continue to place a strong emphasis on nuclear deterrent leadership, but it should also modernize the nuclear arsenal to meet the threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Russia still maintains the world’s largest nuclear arsenal, China’s nuclear stockpile is growing, North Korea continues to make threats to our allies, and Iran is on the cusp of developing nuclear weapons of

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<sup>150</sup>Stephen Wertheim, “The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn’t Dominate the World,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2020, 21, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2020-02-10/price-primacy>.

its own. As mentioned previously, countries like South Korea and Japan have questioned if the U.S. nuclear arsenal is “enough” for their protection. With Russia and China vying for influence and control in their respective regions, the United States needs to maintain its nuclear umbrella. Aside from preventing nuclear proliferation, the nuclear umbrella prevents nations coming under the aggressive sphere of influence of adversarial regimes. Specifically, the nuclear umbrella protects South Korea and Japan from further aggression from the CCP.

More so, the U.S. nuclear weapon stockpile depends on facilities that are, on average, 50 years old.<sup>151</sup> These aging facilities pose a significant threat to safety and further nuclear operations. If the U.S. wants to maintain international superiority, advance peace, and assure allies, modernizing the U.S. nuclear deterrent should be a top national priority. There is a dire need for modernization. Congress has already raised alarm bells for the need for nuclear modernization. U.S. Senators Deb Fischer, Angus King, and Roger Wicker have introduced the “Restoring American Deterrence Act” in order improve the nuclear preparedness needs of the modern age.<sup>152</sup> If the U.S. is to deter its enemies, and reassure allies, policymakers must overhaul its nuclear arsenal.

An increasing unstable international environment has led to reevaluations of U.S. nuclear arsenal and deterrence. The U.S. has focused much of its attention on “life extension” programs rather than developing new and improved nuclear weapons. The “newest” nuclear warhead in the

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<sup>151</sup>“Over Budget and Delayed-What’s next for U.S. Nuclear Weapons Research and Production Projects?,” *U.S. GAO*, August 17, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/over-budget-and-delayed-whats-next-u.s.-nuclear-weapons-research-and-production-projects>.

<sup>152</sup>“Fischer, King, Wicker Introduce Bill to Overhaul Nuclear Preparedness, Address Future Threats from China and Russia,” *The Office of Senator Deb Fischer*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.fischer.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2024/4/fischer-king-wicker-introduce-bill-to-overhaul-american-nuclear-preparedness-address-future-threats-from-china-and-russia#:~:text=The%20Restoring%20American%20Deterrence%20Act%20contains%20multiple%20provisions%20aimed%20at,Posture%20of%20the%20United%20States>.

U.S. inventory, the W-88, was developed almost 35 years ago.<sup>153</sup> Other warheads, such as the B-61 gravity bomb, is more than 60 years old. The United States has not produced a new war reserve plutonium pit since 1989, and the current developments are well behind schedule. While modernization efforts began early in the Obama presidency, the U.S. has failed to meet its modernization goals. In the bipartisan 2023 Strategic Posture Commission report, the report articulated that there is a growing “deterrence gap.”<sup>154</sup> The report also reinforced that the United States is on the cusp of having two nuclear peer adversaries – China and Russia.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the commissioners wrote: “It is an existential challenge for which the United States is ill-prepared, unless its leaders make decisions now to adjust the U.S. strategic posture.” In addition, the Heritage Foundation’s 2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength found the nuclear platform reliability, warhead modernization, nuclear weapons complex, and national labs talent to be “marginal.”<sup>156</sup>

Policymakers should make warhead production a top national priority for the coming years. An aging nuclear arsenal coupled with Russia and China increasing their own nuclear capabilities, the U.S. must transform its warhead production. Currently, the production rate for plutonium pits is far too low to meet the need to replace the aging pits.<sup>157</sup> In 2022, the U.S. only manufactured 10 pits, but statutory law requires the United States to produce no fewer than 80 pits per year.<sup>158</sup> Pit production is a complex process, so U.S. Congress should prioritize and increase funding for a number of aspects that include developing skilled labor and industrial

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<sup>153</sup>Madelyn R. Creedon, “America’s Strategic Posture,” October 2023, 89, <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Michaela Dodge, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons,” *The Heritage Foundation*, 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessment-us-military-power/us-nuclear-weapons>.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

infrastructure. After spending decades of not developing plutonium pits, current engineers and skill workers are scarce. As for industrial infrastructure, facilities such Savannah River Site in South Carolina were either repurposed or closed. New facilities that are under construction have faced significant delays.

In addition, Congress and the President should work in conjunction to enact the Restoring American Deterrence Act introduced above. Many of the provisions within the bill are based on the Commission's recommendations. Among other provisions, the legislation would enact a national workforce strategy. This provision would require the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with fellow Cabinet members, to develop a strategy to promote the skilled manufacturing and vocational workforce to expand the U.S. nuclear enterprise.<sup>159</sup> As mentioned, one of the issues of nuclear modernization is a need for a skilled workforce. The American Deterrence Act would help guide the country into developing the next nuclear workforce. Furthermore, the legislation would require the Secretary of Energy to evaluate locations best suited to host facilities to enrich uranium, including highly enriched uranium.<sup>160</sup> By evaluating the potential sites for enrichment of uranium, the United States would be poised to implement a safe, secure, and stable environment for uranium enrichment. While this legislation doesn't solve the immediate problems facing America's nuclear deterrent, it is a step in the proper direction.

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<sup>159</sup>“Fischer, King, Wicker Introduce Bill to Overhaul Nuclear Preparedness, Address Future Threats from China and Russia,” *The Office of Senator Deb Fischer*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.fischer.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2024/4/fischer-king-wicker-introduce-bill-to-overhaul-american-nuclear-preparedness-address-future-threats-from-china-and-russia#:~:text=The%20Restoring%20American%20Deterrence%20Act%20contains%20multiple%20provisions%20aimed%20at,Posture%20of%20the%20United%20States>.

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*



## **Enhance Global Security in Latin America**

It is worth mentioning once more, Graham Allison's calls for the United States to accept new spheres of influence are unwarranted. Allowing authoritarian regimes to dictate their surrounding regions is dangerous. Russia has already begun to expand upon its sphere of influence by invading Ukraine. China may follow suit by invading Taiwan in the coming years and may look further in the South China Sea soon after. History reminds us of that authoritarian and aggressive regimes do not stop with one piece of territory; they expand. Unfortunately, America's enemies have already expanded into its neighborhood – Latin America. Before the United States can fully pushback against China, Russia, and Iran in their own regions, the nation must enhance global security in the Western Hemisphere.

Though it might seemingly be harmless to lawmakers and everyday Americans, reasserting American influence in the region is vital to American interests – economy, security, and democracy. Though Venezuela and Cuba are authoritarian, and several countries in the region have corruption, it is still vital for the United States to uphold and promote democratic values in the region. Allowing adversaries to exert influence in the region threatens the democratic stability in the region. Moreover, Latin America plays a growing role in the global economy. The Panama Canal is a vital access point for U.S. and global trade. The growing economic investment by China threatens U.S. economic stability. By losing influence in the region, the United States runs a risk of losing trade partners, access to Latin American markets, and key resources. Another danger of Chinese and Russian influence is a threat to national security. As we will see later in this section, China and Russia have supplied anti-American regimes in Latin America with military advisors, soldiers, weapons, and equipment.

Currently, U.S. adversaries maintain a geographic foothold in the Western Hemisphere. In early 2023, U.S. Southern Command Army General Lara Richardson confirmed that 21 of the 31 nations in the command's area of responsibility had signed on with China's Belt and Road initiative.<sup>161</sup> In addition, according to the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, China's influence in the region is vast and deeply interconnected. Between 2000-2020, Chinese trade with Latin America grew 26-fold – increasing from \$12 billion to \$315 billion; and is expected to double by 2035.<sup>162</sup> Aside from continued investment in the region, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina have purchased Chinese equipment. In the realm of education, China has slowly established “Confucius Institutes” with 44 in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>163</sup> Further educational partnerships such as scholarship programs and research support in Latin America have been expanded greatly. The Chinese have used these educational ventures to not only teach the Chinese language and culture, but it has also acted as a “segue” for diplomatic relations.

China has also sought to engage with the region through the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), a region-wide partnership that excludes the U.S. and Canada. Through CELAC, the parties adopted a China-CELAC Joint Action plan to guide cooperation in areas of security, infrastructure, and economy.<sup>164</sup> One of the main priorities of the partnership is for China to isolate Taiwan by pushing for partnered states to end formal

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<sup>161</sup>John Grady, “Chinese Investment in Western Hemisphere Raising Concerns for U.S., Says SouthComm Commander,” *USNI News*, January 22, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/22/chinese-investment-in-western-hemisphere-raising-concerns-for-u-s-says-southcom-commander>.

<sup>162</sup>“China Regional Snapshot: South America,” *Committee on Foreign Affairs*, October 25, 2022, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-south-america/>.

<sup>163</sup>Margaret Myers, “China's Education Diplomacy in Latin America,” *Wilson Center*, March 15, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/chinas-education-diplomacy-latin-america>.

<sup>164</sup>“China's Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean,” *CRS*, June 23, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10982>.

diplomatic ties with the democratic nation.<sup>165</sup> Currently, seven out of the thirteen governments maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>166</sup> Since 2017, give of the partnered governments have established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), ending formal recognition of Taiwan. Honduras was the most recent country to end their formal recognition of Taiwan.

As for Russia, the Kremlin has made it a priority to entrench itself in the Western Hemisphere. In a 2022 Congressional testimony, Evan Ellis emphasized Russia’s relationships with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba as a vehicle to undermine the United States in its region. In February 2022, Russia and Venezuela signaled stronger military ties and cooperation.<sup>167</sup> Russia has provided Venezuela with military equipment, troops, and technical assistance to the regime. Specifically, Russia has deployed the S-300 Air Defense Systems, at least 100 military trainers, and Wagner group mercenaries in Venezuela.<sup>168</sup> Though Russia has support Venezuela since the mid-2000s, the military and technical assistance and the increasing aggressive nature of Russia has caused for concern. In Nicaragua, the nation authorized limited numbers of Russian troops and equipment into the country for training opportunities and other forms of support.<sup>169</sup> More than 200 troops are stationed in Nicaragua with several pieces of military equipment.<sup>170</sup>

While it seems Russia and China’s presence in the Western Hemisphere is used to intimidate the United States and pursue aggression towards the United States and its allies, U.S. policymakers should not underestimate the danger of Russian projected power in the region. Unfortunately, there is currently no real strategy to push back on the growing Chinese and

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>“Russia in the Whem: Assessing Putin’s Malign Influence in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 2022.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

Russian influence in the region. If the U.S. doesn't reevaluate its approach to the western hemisphere, expect China and Russia's growing economic and military ties to the region to exacerbate.

To enhance global security in the region, the United States must implement a multiprong approach. While the U.S. can't "expel" Chinese and Russian influence in the region, this focus on Latin America must alleviate adversarial influence as much as possible. U.S. policymakers must emphasize this is not a return to the Monroe Doctrine and would not be a pretext for U.S. intervention of the past. The U.S. should emphasize economic, democratic, and security partnerships to curtail Chinese and Russian influence. In the past decade, Chinese President Xi Jinping has toured the region ten times while U.S. presidents have only visited the region five times in the past decade.<sup>171</sup> Currently, the U.S. has seven vacant ambassadorships in Latin America.<sup>172</sup> While much of the heavy lift is on Congress, the vacant ambassadorships pose a significant void in diplomatic relations in the region. The lack of diplomatic engagement in the region helps the Chinese and Russians fill the void the U.S. has left. As Chinese and Russian trade and investment in the region increases, specifically through the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the closer Latin America gets to U.S. adversaries. Policymakers must understand investment in Latin America is vital to having influence in the region and push for market-oriented alternatives compared to what China offers. The U.S. should encourage private-sector American investments in the Latin American region, as well as pursuing free trade agreements.

Furthermore, enhancing security in Latin America should prioritize a secure southern border with Mexico. While every nation must emphasize its need for strong border security, the

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<sup>171</sup>Julio Guzman, "How the U.S. Should Counter China in Latin America," *Time*, April 27, 2023, <https://time.com/6272322/us-plan-latin-america-china/>.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

United States must understand there are significant national security threats at the Southern border. By the end of 2023, migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border hit a record high.<sup>173</sup> More 24,000 Chinese nationals had been encountered at the border, with one breaching a military base in California.<sup>174</sup> More so, multiple Iranians and Russians have tried to enter the U.S. illegally. In 2023 alone, 151 individuals on the terrorism watch list were apprehended at the border.<sup>175</sup> In addition, the Mexican Cartel has exacerbated the fentanyl crisis that is the leading killer of Americans aged 18-45.<sup>176</sup> Much of the fentanyl has been manufactured on Chinese soil.<sup>177</sup> Aside from the political rancor, the U.S. southern border faces unprecedented national security threats. U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens called the situation at the southern border a “national security threat.”<sup>178</sup> In March of 2024, a self-identified Hezbollah terrorist who wanted to ‘make a bomb’ was arrested by border patrol in Texas.<sup>179</sup> With the current state of the southern border, and the national security threat, current and future policymakers must place an immediate focus on the nation’s border.

Policymakers should not just rely on more funding or border patrol agents, but there should be genuine reforms that secures the southern border and preserves U.S. national security. With a divided Congress, it is difficult to accomplish any type of meaningful immigration

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<sup>173</sup>John Gramlich, “Migrant Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border Hit a Record High at the End of 2023,” *Pew Research Center*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/15/migrant-encounters-at-the-us-mexico-border-hit-a-record-high-at-the-end-of-2023/>.

<sup>174</sup>“Startling Stats Factsheet: Encounters of Chinese Nationals Surpass all Fiscal Year 2023 at the Southwest Border,” *Homeland Security Republicans*, April 18, 2024, <https://homeland.house.gov/2024/04/18/startling-stats-factsheet-encounters-of-chinese-nationals-surpass-all-fiscal-year-2023-at-the-southwest-border/>.

<sup>175</sup>Rudy Koski, “Iranian Encounters Confirmed on Texas Border, Says DPS Director,” *FOX 7 Austin*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.fox7austin.com/news/iranian-encounters-confirmed-texas-border-dps-director>.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup>Camilo Montoya, “U.S. Border Patrol Chief Calls Southern Border a ‘National Security Threat,’ Citing 140,000 Migrants Who Evaded Capture,” *CBS News*, March 24, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jason-owens-border-patrol-southern-border-national-security-threat/>.

<sup>179</sup>Haley Strack, “Self-Identified Hezbollah Terrorist Who Wanted to ‘make a Bomb’ Caught by Border Patrol in Texas,” *National Review*, March 17, 2024, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/self-identified-hezbollah-terrorist-who-wanted-to-make-a-bomb-caught-by-border-patrol-in-texas/>.

reform. Successive administrations and policymakers should focus on the U.S. southern border as a key tenant of global security. Congress can very well enact policies to curtail illegal immigration and prevent a national security crisis, but the executive could prevent such actions. Under current statute, the U.S. president can restrict the entry of aliens according to “such reasonable rules, regulations, and orders, and subject to such limitations and exemptions as the President may prescribe.”<sup>180</sup> In 1979, President Carter invoked the statute to deny visas to all Iranian nationals.<sup>181</sup> While the U.S. should make a clear distinction between legal and illegal nationals, the President should use their executive authority to prevent the infiltration of illegal Chinese, Iranian, and Russian nationals. Additionally, the President and Congress should implement policies that hold the Chinese, Iranian, and Russian governments accountable for exacerbating the situation at the southern border. In addition to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the United States must also expand upon its leadership and presence in Latin America to combat adversarial influence.

## **Conclusion**

More than ever, the U.S. is in dire need of strong leadership and a robust foreign policy. The policymakers face difficult decisions regarding the challenges in the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific, and Eastern Europe. As the country is in an election year, it is important for U.S. voters to realize the gravity of the international situation. This thesis tries to look back on the successes and failures in American history, the current state of American foreign policy, and offer several courses of action. The United States remains at a crossroads, and it is vital for the nation to lead

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<sup>180</sup>“Can the President ‘Close the Border’? Relevant Laws and Consideration,” *CRS*, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10283>.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*.

the world through alliances, free trade, nuclear deterrence, and an enhancement of global security in Latin America. Yet, leadership comes at a cost for policymakers. Everyday Americans are focused on the issues at home – inflation, crime, and the economy. With the general populace and policymakers growing displeased with the issues at home; it will only trickle into the opinions of U.S. grand strategy. Whether it be U.S. support for Israel, or sending aid to Ukraine, policymakers are struggling to get the message across – America must lead. Despite Americans’ reservations for global involvement, the temporary consequences outweigh the detrimental effects if the U.S. chooses not to lead. Though these concerns are warranted, as we have seen, U.S. global leadership has led to more peace and prosperity, not less. U.S. allies expect and rely on the United States to lead and undermining that leadership might make the world a more dangerous place.

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