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# American Strategy in the Global Era

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James Kurth

**A**NATIONAL STRATEGY, TO BE ROBUST and effective, must take into account the economic and social realities of the nation that it is meant to serve. The national strategy of the United States during the Cold War era—a strategy whose core elements consisted of the foreign policy of containment and the military strategy of nuclear deterrence—was based upon the particular economic and social conditions of that time. The economic realities were American industrial power and American leadership in the international economy. The social realities were the ordering of Americans into numerous large and hierarchical organizations—a distinctive feature of what has been termed “modern society”—and the existence of a basic national consensus around a particular set of ideas or ideology, what was often termed “the American Creed.”<sup>1</sup>

But that was then, and this is now. Ten years after the end of the Cold War, there is no longer an American national strategy that consists of a containment policy and a nuclear strategy. Indeed, there now seems to be no American national strategy at all. Neither is

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there any longer an American economic reality that consists of industrial power within an international economy or an American social reality that comprises a modern society adhering to the American Creed. Instead, a series of economic and social trends that are global in their scope have brought about a whole new era—which, for the sake of simplification, can best be called the *global era*. These trends require a new American national strategy. What American strategy in the global era should be is one of the great questions before political and military leaders today.

### Four Global Trends, New International Relations

Four fundamental and interrelated global trends are shaping the new era in international relations, and they now provide the context for any American national strategy. This is all the more so in that these trends are led, promoted, and even driven by the United States. These trends developed during the last two decades of the Cold War, but they really matured only in the 1990s. Indeed, it was the end of the Cold War—and of the Soviet threat and U.S. containment policy—that brought about the dismantling of some of the ideas and institutions (for instance, national unity against the foreign adversary, government intervention in the market economy) that had helped to hold these trends in check. The U.S. containment policy had not only contained the Soviet Union, it had contained forces operating within the part of the world that was led by the United States.

These four global trends are: the development of the postindustrial, and particularly the information economy, replacing what had been the industrial economy; the development of the global economy, replacing what had been merely an international economy; the development of the postmodern society, replacing what had been the modern society; and the decline of the nation-state, to be replaced in some countries (particularly the United States, Canada, and Western Europe) with something that appears to be more a multicultural society and ideology.<sup>2</sup> Two of these trends, therefore, are principally economic, and two are principally social.

The current era in international relations—the post-post-Cold War era—has been given different names. Three of the more common ones—the “information era,” the “era of globalization,” and the

“postmodern era”—testify to the prominence and defining power of the first three of the trends. The debates about multiculturalism in American politics testify to the prominence of the fourth.

These four trends are global in their consequences, but they have developed more in some countries than in others. Among the major powers, they have advanced most within the United States and Britain, less in Germany and Japan, and still less in Russia and China. Indeed, the *uneven* development of these global trends, combined with U.S. leadership in driving them, probably will produce even greater international misunderstandings and conflicts in the future than will the general trends themselves. Within the United States itself, these four trends have ushered in a series of transformations that have made it a very different country than it was during the Cold War, as well as different in new ways from the other major powers. These transformations have had major consequences for American ideas, ideals, ideology, and even identity.

*The Information Economy.* Many social analysts have observed that the development of the information economy and the displacement of the industrial economy have increased individual choice and devalued conventional hierarchies. The information economy has thus reinforced the traditional American idea of liberal democracy. But it also has promoted a newer and broader idea, that of the open society.

*The Global Economy.* Similarly, the development of the global economy has increased the freedom and mobility of business enterprises and weakened the constraints of governments. The global economy has thus reinforced the traditional American idea of free markets—but it too has promoted the newer and broader idea of the open society.

The information economy and the global economy are therefore two powerful forces whose natural ideology is that of the open society. But the ideology of the open society implies, indeed advocates, the limitation of state sovereignty and the weakening of the nation-state. This ideology of the open society, which is now held by most American political, economic, and intellectual elites, represents a fundamental challenge to traditional conceptions of international relations.

*The Postmodern Society.* The development of the postmodern society has meant the erosion of the great pillars of modern society—bureaucracies and organizations—and of the attitudes of deference,

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duty, and loyalty that often went with them. In their place, the postmodern society has promoted the two interrelated ideas of expressive individualism and universal human rights. Together, they form a new ideology in which individual rights are universal, universal rights are individual, and such rights are fundamental, even absolute.

*The Multicultural Society.* The development of a multiracial or multicultural society has promoted the idea of cultural diversity. Like the postmodern society, the development of a multicultural society has also promoted the idea of human rights. Although it might seem that a multiplicity of cultural groups would lead logically to an emphasis on the rights of the community, in practice it seems to have led instead to an emphasis on the rights of the individual. Also, like the ideology of the open society, the ideology of human rights advocates the limitation of state sovereignty and the decline of the nation-state.

### Liberal Globalism and Humanitarian Intervention

The traditional American ideology advocated liberal democracy and free markets. In foreign affairs, this ideology is known as “liberal internationalism,” and its most prominent proponents were Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>3</sup> In the 1990s, this familiar ideology has been revived and revised into a new American ideology that promotes human rights and the open society. This too is a version of liberal internationalism, one that is more accurately termed “liberal globalism”; its most prominent proponents are President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The new American ideology of human rights and the open society—liberal globalism—in turn provides the justification, even the compulsion, for a new kind of U.S. military operation. This is humanitarian intervention, as in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia; the culmination of this development was the U.S.-led Nato war against Serbia over Kosovo.

The idea that there should be a new purpose for U.S. military operations and that it should be humanitarian intervention, or more broadly, intervention in support of human rights, is not subscribed to equally by all parts of the American public. It is a view held

primarily by political and intellectual elites, especially in the media and in academia— such as liberal professionals and professional liberals.

Humanitarian intervention is the natural consequence of liberal internationalism and particularly liberal globalism, when carried to its logical conclusion in the unconstraining conditions of the post-Cold War era, in which the United States faces no superpower adversary or even a peer competitor. Humanitarian intervention thus represents a rejection of Realist internationalism, whose ideas were so prominent in U.S. foreign policy in the constraining conditions of the Cold War era, during which the United States confronted a formidable nuclear superpower that had many military and ideological allies. Humanitarian intervention subordinates the criterion of vital national interests to that of universal human rights; however, since in the current conditions there are no obvious threats to the vital interests of the United States, American political and intellectual elites now think that they can get away with this clear violation of Realist tenets.

Humanitarian intervention also represents a rejection of the “Weinberger-Powell doctrine” for U.S. military operations, which, for the U.S. military, summed up the “lessons learned” from the failures of the Vietnam War and which seemed to be confirmed by the successes of the Persian Gulf War. In practice, the Weinberger-Powell doctrine totally contradicts the humanitarian intervention ideology, and that is why the political and intellectual elites have had to reject it.

In truth, most of the American people, and virtually all of those in the U.S. military, do not want to expend American military casualties for human rights alone. This political reality has important consequences for military operations. First, it drives the liberal elite to avoid seeking approval for military operations from the more conservative Congress, and to justify this avoidance by saying that Congress is isolationist and irrational. Since this avoidance of Congress, which is composed of the elected representatives of the American people, is an evasion of a principal element of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine (the necessity for public support of military operations), the liberal elite is driven to denigrate the doctrine itself. Second, this political reality drives that elite to avoid the use of ground forces in combat operations and therefore to avoid the use of

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overwhelming force, because unacceptable casualties would likely result. Since this avoidance of overwhelming force is an evasion of another principal element of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, the liberal elite is again driven to denigrate it.

The military consequences are not without irony. The liberal ideology of humanitarian intervention necessitates military operations, but the political reality negates ground operations. This leaves only air operations, in particular punitive bombing, as in Bosnia in 1995; in Iraq since the Gulf War and especially in 1999; and in Serbia in 1999. But the Serbian campaign suggests that by themselves, these air operations might only achieve their political objectives when they expand to the point of hurting civilians, either by killing them “collaterally” or by deliberately targeting their economic necessities, such as electric-power grids and water-supply systems. These kinds of actions against civilians hardly seem to fit the normal definition of “humanitarian.”

### Losers and Winners

The great transformation in international relations in the past decade—brought about by American promotion of the four global trends and by American leadership in humanitarian interventions—has begun to generate opposition from a significant number of countries. The major sources of opposition are found in four large countries or areas. First and most obviously, there is the opposition from the losers in the global economy of the 1990s.

*Russia* (and, more generally, most countries of the Eastern Orthodox religious tradition). For a variety of reasons, Orthodox countries—Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia—have been unsuccessful in making the transition from communist regimes to liberal democratic and market-economy structures that can adapt well to an open society and a global economy. In contrast, most countries with a Roman Catholic tradition have been able to make this transition (Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and even Croatia). Largely Protestant countries (Estonia and Latvia) also have been successful. This dichotomy among ex-communist countries, between the more Western and the more Eastern, between the Roman Catholic or Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox, means that the political and

economic developments of the 1990s have revived and reinforced a historic divide, one that corresponds to the great schism between Western and Eastern Christianity, even to the ancient division between the Latin and Greek halves of the Roman Empire.

In their current condition of political and economic weakness, the governments of Russia and the other Orthodox countries cannot mount an effective and sustained opposition to the United States and its various projects of global economics, open society, and humanitarian intervention. But among the populations of these countries, there is now substantial resentment of and resistance toward the United States.

*The Islamic World.* Most Islamic countries have also been unable to establish viable and resilient liberal democracies and market economies. Their sense of failure and their alienation from globalization have been deepened (especially for those that experienced the heady years from 1973 to 1985, when the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries seemed to be a world power) by the decline in oil prices. Here too, governments are neither willing nor able to mount opposition that is effective and sustained. But again, within their populations is widespread resentment and resistance, whose most obvious manifestations are militant organizations based upon Islamic revivalism.

Significantly, there is growing opposition to global trends even from some of the winners in the global economy of the 1990s.

*China* (and most countries with a Confucian tradition). Most Chinese, both in China itself and overseas, see their economic success as resulting from their own culture—from “Asian values,” from engaging in the global economy in their own way. This conception has been reinforced by their interpretation of the recent Asian economic crisis. The countries with the most open currency markets (South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia) suffered the greatest disruptions and declines; those whose currency markets were most regulated (China and, ironically, Taiwan) experienced little disruption and continued their economic growth.

*India.* The entry of India into the global economy has been recent, and its benefits for that country have been unevenly distributed. It has occurred, however, at the same time as the growth of Hindu nationalism, the development of Indian nuclear weapons, and an increased confidence in rejecting certain Western ways.



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Thus the sources of opposition to the United States and its globalization project are disparate. Some are politically and economically weak and divided (the Orthodox and Islamic countries). Some are economically strong but still divided among themselves (the Confucian countries). But together, these sources of opposition constitute a vast region, really all of Eurasia and more; it stretches from Russia and Eastern Europe, through the Middle East, through South Asia, to China and East Asia. In this vast region are found the four great civilizations that Samuel Huntington has identified as most likely to confront the West in “the clash of civilizations.”<sup>4</sup> These are, in his terms, “Slavic-Orthodox,” Islamic, Hindu, and “Sinic-Confucian” civilizations. In this region too are four nuclear powers—Russia, Pakistan, India, and China—each seeing itself as the center of its civilization.

### Uneven Developments and Opposite Directions

Thus, the trends that we have discussed have been global in their consequences, but they have been very uneven in their development. As a result of these trends, much of the West (especially the United States but also Western Europe) has become postindustrial, postmodern, and postnational—and therefore less industrial, less modern, and less national. At the same time, however, much of the East (especially China but also much of East and Southeast Asia) has become *more* industrial, more modern, and more national. Indeed, it is these very qualities of contemporary China and other Asian countries that account for their great successes in the U.S.-led global economy.

This diverging, even opposite, movement by the West and East, and especially by the United States and China, in respect to such fundamentals as economy, society, and nationality gives rise to very different perspectives on international affairs and, indeed, on human nature. This difference in perspectives toward the modern era and particularly its culmination in the twentieth century—a difference between those that are eagerly leaving the modern era and the twentieth century behind (the United States) and those eagerly entering them (China)—is generating misunderstandings and conflicts. The clash of civilizations depicted by Huntington is greatly amplified by the clash of centuries.

One such difference in perspective is likely to be over strategic concepts. At the beginning of the twentieth century, two of the major strategic concepts used by Western powers were *balance of power* and *sphere of influence*; at the midpoint of the twentieth century, two of the major strategic concepts were *containment* and *deterrence*. From the perspective of postmodern and postnational American elites, who conceive of international affairs largely in terms of the global economy and the open society, these four strategic concepts are now hopelessly old-fashioned and irrelevant. From the perspective of newly modern and newly national Chinese elites, however, they are the essence of international affairs. In the two decades that lie ahead, we can expect that the Chinese will breathe new life into these old concepts. As with other kinds of self-fulfilling prophecies, if the Chinese think that these concepts are real, they will make them so. It will be a strategic reality that American elites would be wise to take into account, despite their characteristic revulsion against their own strategic past, which they so earnestly wish to leave behind.

Russia is another country of strategic importance to the United States that has experienced uneven or even divergent development. Russia represents a failed industry, a failed modernity, perhaps even a failed nationality. But it also has been incapable of moving into a postindustrial, postmodern, and postnational condition. A country perennially torn between Eurasian and European identities, Russia is now experiencing a new version of its old quandary. What path will this torn and tormented people seek out of their new "time of troubles"? Most likely, they will eventually try to succeed at last where they have failed so terribly—that is, at becoming industrial, modern, and national in some sense that brings social order and self-respect. If so, Russia, like China but with a darker self-conception, will be moving in a direction, and with a perspective, opposite to those of the United States.

The Islamic Middle East is another such area. The Middle East also represents a failed industry, a failed modernity, and a failed nationality, and it also obviously has been incapable of moving to the postindustrial, postmodern, and postnational level. In contrast to the ideological confusion of Russia (to which Orthodoxy is only a partial exception), however, Islam represents a highly coherent rationale for rejecting both the modern and the postmodern worlds. Indeed, Islam provides the most coherent reconstruction of the

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premodern world that exists today. Thus the Islamic Middle East is also moving in the opposite direction, and with the opposite perspective, from the United States. At the same time, however, it is also moving in a *different* opposite direction, and with a *different* opposite perspective, from those of China and Russia.

The contemporary international arena thus presents a quite extraordinary scene. The dynamics of uneven development have reached the point of simultaneous movements into three different eras. The United States is leading the West into the postmodern era; China is leading the East (and perhaps eventually Russia) into the modern era; and Islam is leading the Middle East into the premodern era.

### Spheres of Influence versus Liberal Globalism

Russia and China, respectively the main Cold War adversary of the United States and its main potential adversary, are the most important powers to consider in any sound and realistic American national strategy. We will focus upon a traditional strategic concept, the sphere of influence, which remains important to Russia and China but is alien to the new American ideology of liberal globalism.

It has always been a central reality of international politics that a great power will seek spheres of influence over neighboring small states, those in its "own backyard" or "near abroad." This has been especially true of emerging great powers with newly industrializing economies and newly modernizing societies. This was the case with the United States, Germany, Russia, and Japan a century ago, and it is the case with China today. But declining great powers may also be defensive about the influence that remains to them. This is true of Russia today.

There is a contradiction, however, between the contemporary American conception of the global economy, which has become so central to U.S. foreign policy, and the Chinese and Russian conceptions of regional spheres of influence. In the past, spheres of influence usually have served the economic interests of their dominant powers, often excluding or restricting those of other powers. This notion is now rejected by the globally minded United States.

It was not rejected by the United States when it too was only a rising regional power. The United States created a sphere of influence

in the Caribbean and Central America at the beginning of the twentieth century. It did this so readily and with so little opposition from other great powers that Americans came to take their sphere almost for granted. However, U.S. policy makers worked hard at maintaining it, as evidenced by the occasional military interventions in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Panama; by the U.S. purchase of the Danish West Indies in 1917, as insurance against their becoming a base for Germany; and by the momentous conflict that resulted, and risks run, when Castro's Cuba escaped from the American sphere into a Soviet alliance.

In the twentieth century, Britain established a sphere in parts of the Middle East from the 1920s to the 1950s; Germany sought to create one in southeast Europe in the 1930s; Japan similarly sought to do so in East and Southeast Asia in the late 1930s and early 1940s; and the Soviet Union established a huge sphere in Eastern Europe after the Second World War. For them, however, the circumstances were less favorable than in the case of the United States, and their spheres were less secure.

A great power defines its sphere according to its shifting perception of the diplomatic, economic, and military interests at stake. This might seem to result in inconsistency, confusion, and misunderstandings. In practice, however, the definition is usually rather obvious: most experienced diplomats, area specialists, and scholarly experts have a quite clear and consistent sense of what a particular great power might consider its necessary and legitimate sphere of influence. It is grounded in historical and cultural traditions, which persist throughout the ups and downs of power and the zigs and zags of interest.

Today, both Russia and China are intent upon restoring some version of their traditional regional spheres of influence. Although Russia is now far weaker than China, both will likely pursue this intent in the future. This is a regionalist reality that the globalist United States will have to take into account.

***The Russian Sphere of Influence.*** Since the time of the czars, Russia has relied upon either a cultural or a geopolitical basis for its traditional sphere of influence. The cultural basis has been Eastern Orthodoxy, or what Huntington has termed "Slavic-Orthodox" civilization. Among modern countries, this includes most clearly

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Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Less clearly, the Russian sphere includes most non-Slavic Orthodox countries—Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Romania. (The exception is Greece.)

Historically, Russia has permitted and even encouraged Orthodox nations to be nominally independent. But (apart from Greece) during the Cold War and since, there has been no case of Russia's accepting an Orthodox nation's becoming an ally of a great-power adversary. There is nothing in the cultural or intellectual tradition of Russia that can interpret such a development as stable or legitimate.

This, of course, is a large part of the explanation for Russia's behavior during the Kosovo war in 1999. The U.S.-led Nato campaign against Serbia was a direct challenge to the Russian conception of its traditional, cultural sphere. The surprise occupation of the Pristina airport by 250 Russian troops—an action that was seen in the West as reckless, annoying, or just silly—was a desperate attempt by Russia to retain a symbol of presence in its historical sphere, while the substance was being extinguished by Nato's occupation of Kosovo.

In the absence of cultural affinity, a pronounced geopolitical interest can provide a basis for a traditional sphere of influence (as the U.S. sphere in the Caribbean and Central America illustrates). Russia has long had a geopolitical interest in its near abroad, or "soft underbelly," to the south—the countries of Transcaucasia (among which Armenia and Georgia also provide the cultural connection of Orthodoxy) and Central Asia. This has persisted even in the face of its military debacle in Chechnya in 1994–96 and its difficulties in Dagestan in 1999. Russia systematically annexed territories of Transcaucasia and Central Asia in the nineteenth century; this would seem to suggest that it will strive to annex them again, at some favorable time. It is just as likely, however, that Russia will continue to permit these countries to remain independent states, as long as they abide by the norms of a Russian sphere of influence.

Similarly, and more ominously for its relations with the West, Russia has long had a geopolitical interest in its near abroad to the west—that is, the Baltic countries of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Russia systematically annexed these territories in the eighteenth century, and the Soviet Union annexed the latter three again in 1940. How these countries can retain their characters as Western societies and independent states while being objects of a

pronounced geopolitical interest of Russia is one of the major dilemmas of international politics in contemporary Europe.<sup>5</sup>

What should be the American national strategy toward the traditional Russian sphere of influence? A related question is, what should be the future role of Nato (which is, in some ways, an American sphere of influence) in relation to the Russian sphere? Should there be a "second round of Nato enlargement," and if so, should it include some of the countries in the traditional Russian sphere? (American foreign-policy officials have proposed Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as likely Nato members.)

The first round of Nato enlargement added Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, but there seems to have been almost no attention given to a military strategy to defend these new members. Perhaps this was because Russia is now so weak that no military strategy has seemed necessary, and because, for all practical purposes, the new members do not directly border on Russia itself. (An exception is Poland's border with that odd geographical anomaly, the Kaliningrad district.)

A second round of Nato enlargement could be a different matter, however. If it included the Baltic countries, which do directly border on Russia (Estonia is only 150 kilometers from St. Petersburg), what would be the Nato and U.S. military strategy to defend them? Would a strategy of conventional defense be practical? Would nuclear deterrence be credible? Similar puzzles would be posed for any U.S. military strategy for the other, and less Western, parts of the Russian sphere.

If it is difficult to envision the efficacious use of U.S. military forces generally in the Russian sphere of influence, it is even more difficult to envision the use of specifically naval forces there. The U.S. Navy has never considered the seas adjoining the Russian sphere (principally the Baltic and Black Seas) to be suitable theaters for operations; the closest usable waters would be, respectively, the North Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Overall, then, the traditional Russian sphere of influence cannot be included, realistically and practically, as an object of American military strategy. Although it can use a variety of incentives and threats, principally nonmilitary ones, to encourage Russia to engage in liberal and enlightened policies toward its sphere, the United States should not seek to convert the Russian spheres into its own.

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*The Chinese Sphere of Influence.* Since the time of the emperors, China has relied upon either a cultural basis or a geopolitical basis for its traditional sphere of influence. The cultural basis has been “the Chinese world order” or Confucian tributary system, what Huntington has termed “Sinic-Confucian” civilization.<sup>6</sup> For imperial China this meant Korea, Taiwan, northern Vietnam, and more vaguely the East China and South China Seas; today, Chinese nationalism envisions something like this realm as well. These areas are obviously also ones in which China has a pronounced geopolitical interest.

Also of geopolitical interest, but with much less cultural affinity, are Tibet and Sinkiang. They are the equivalent for China of what Central Asia was for the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Imperial China ruled these territories more or less as a sphere of influence. Under communist China, as is well known, they have been ruled, directly and severely, as annexed provinces.

What should be the American national strategy toward the traditional Chinese sphere of influence? Of the countries in that sphere, two were focuses of military confrontations between China and the United States in the 1950s, and they are particularly likely to be at the centers of serious conflicts in the future: these are Taiwan and Korea. (Tibet has recently been an object of dispute, but hardly any U.S. foreign policy maker believes that the United States can do very much about Chinese rule there.)

The Chinese believe that Taiwan is in principle a part of China and that, in the fullness of time, this principle will become an actuality.<sup>7</sup> The change in the status of Hong Kong in 1997 is seen as a prototype for such a transition of Taiwan in the future. In the Chinese perspective, Taiwan should in the meantime not put formal obstacles in the way of this “natural development.” The most obvious obstacle would be for Taiwan to gain international recognition as an independent state; Taiwan’s initiatives in this direction in 1996 and 1999 consequently produced angry responses, even threats, from China. The Chinese have been willing to accept a Taiwan that formally is a part of China but is really an independent economy. This Chinese conception has been congruent with the interests of many Taiwanese businessmen, who have found their most promising ventures on the mainland; they have invested \$40 billion there. It has also been congruent with the interests of the United States, whose long-term

hopes for China will most likely be achieved if Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Shanghai together form a powerful Chinese commercial trinity, one that would work to transform the nation's traditional bureaucratic authority.

Consequently, the United States has been right to use the U.S. Navy to prevent China from resorting to military force to threaten Taiwan (as in March 1996), but it has also been right to discourage Taiwan from further moves toward formal independence (as in July 1999, when the Clinton administration rejected the statement by President Lee Tung-hui that there are two Chinas). However, the commitment of Americans to their ideology—to liberal democracy, free markets, and human rights—makes such prudence unlikely or at least episodic and inconsistent.

Korea represents another major potential dispute between the United States and China. There is the possibility that the two Koreas will be reunited in the next decade or two, with North Korea dissolving into South Korea as East Germany dissolved into West Germany. China probably could accept this, but only if American troops were not stationed in northern Korea, as Nato troops are not based in eastern Germany. (Indeed, China might be pleased to see U.S. troops remain in *southern* Korea, to preempt a rationale for Japan to acquire nuclear weapons.) A mutual understanding between the United States and China is more likely in regard to Korea than to Taiwan.

In sharp contrast to the situation in the Russian sphere of influence, U.S. military forces, including naval ones, could be very efficacious in the Chinese sphere of influence. The East China and South China Seas, the island of Taiwan, and the peninsula of Korea have long been theaters of naval operations. The very efficacy of U.S. naval forces in these areas and their familiarity with them could tempt U.S. policy makers into believing that it is not necessary to work out mutually beneficial understandings with China in regard to its traditional sphere.

We have already indicated that such understandings could be feasible in regard to Taiwan and Korea. More generally, the United States and China have compatible interests in an open trading system in East and Southeast Asia and, as part of this, open access to the sea lanes in the East and South China Seas.<sup>8</sup> Although China has no interest, as the United States does, in a balance of power in the region (China wants an *imbalance* of power, in its favor), it does wish to



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avoid a Sino-Japanese arms race. Continued U.S. military power in the region could make Japanese military rearmament unnecessary and unlikely.

### **The Rising Power and the Leading Power**

During the second half of the twentieth century the Soviet Union posed a strong military threat to the United States, but it only briefly (in the 1950s) appeared to represent an economic one. Conversely, more recently Japan posed a strong economic threat but not a military one. During this era, the United States did not really have to confront a great power that was simultaneously a military and an economic threat.

During the first half of the twentieth century, however, Germany did pose such a dual threat to the United States, and to the international security and economic order generally. The rapid rise after 1871 of German military and economic power first disrupted and eventually destroyed both the balance of power and the balance of trade in Europe.

Similarly, during the first decades of the twenty-first century, China will likely pose both a strong military and economic threat to the United States and to the global security and economic order in general. The rapid rise after 1976 of Chinese economic power and the recent modernization of Chinese military power together promise to disrupt both the Asian balance of trade and the Asian balance of power, just as Germany's rise disrupted the European balance after 1871.

The great challenge to American national strategy in the next two decades will not be to recognize China as the central threat to the United States. Given the natural analogies between the Soviet Union of the past and the China of the future, this would be all too easy for American foreign-policy makers to do. Instead, the great challenge will be to guide the rising Chinese power into the path of supporting international order and stability. This is what Britain failed to do with Germany in the first decades of this century, and two world wars were the result.

Only the United States can be a credible leader of the global order. This is true not only because of such traditional measures as the superiority of its military forces and the size of its economy but also

because the United States is the leader in the global trends and great transformations of our time—the development of the information economy, the global economy, the postmodern society, and the multicultural society.

However, other great powers, particularly China and Russia, can be credible leaders of their respective regional spheres of influence, and they will seek to be so. Not only have industrializing and modernizing powers like China normally sought such spheres, but regional leadership will be a way for China and Russia to compensate for the global leadership and superiority of the United States. They will also see a regional sphere of influence as helping them buffer the disruptive impacts that the U.S.-led information, global, postmodern, and multicultural trends are having upon themselves.

There will be a temptation for the United States to presume that as a global leader pursuing a global economy, it must prevent regional spheres of influence (except its own). Pursuing this overstretched notion against China or Russia in the future could lead to very grave conflicts.

Rather, the task for the United States is to encourage China and Russia to define their spheres of influence as the United States did its own, first in Latin America and later in Western Europe and the western Pacific. The American spheres were closed to the military presence of other great powers but open to commercial transactions of the international economy. The economies of the spheres were open to the process of competition and change (albeit with an American advantage). This should be the U.S. objective in regard to the Chinese and the Russian spheres. Indeed, in the case of the Chinese sphere, the periphery (particularly Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the overseas Chinese) has the economic potential to transform eventually the politics of the core.

In short, the grand strategic tasks of the United States in the first decades of the twenty-first century are to be the motor and monitor for the global order, and to be the model and mentor for regional spheres of influence—the global hegemon of the regional hegemons, the boss of all bosses.

This conception of an American national strategy for the global era contradicts, however, the traditional American ideology of liberal democracy, free markets, and liberal internationalism. It contradicts even more the new American ideology of open society, global

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economy, and liberal globalism. It is a conception, nevertheless, that is consistent with those sometime American foreign policies of balance of power, spheres of influence, and Realist internationalism. It is consistent also with the Realist conceptions that have long provided the foundations of American military strategies, and with the realistic lessons that have been learned from the history of American military operations.

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### Notes

1. These features are discussed in my "Global Trends and American Strategic Traditions," in Pelham G. Boyer and Robert S. Wood, eds., *Strategic Transformation and Naval Power in the Twenty-first Century* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1998), pp. 9–16.

2. *Ibid.*

3. An excellent account of liberal internationalism and also Realist internationalism is in Edward Rhodes, "'... From the Sea' and Back Again: Naval Power in the Second American Century," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1999, pp. 13–54. These ideologies are also discussed in my "Inside the Cave: The Banality of I.R. Studies," *The National Interest*, Fall 1998, pp. 29–40.

4. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

5. I have discussed the dilemma posed by the Baltic states in my "To Sing a Different Song: The Choices for the Baltic States," *The National Interest*, Summer 1999, pp. 81–7; and "The Baltics: Between Russia and the West," *Current History*, October 1999, pp. 334–9.

For an overview of Russia's policies toward its neighbors, see Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *The New Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998).

6. John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968).

7. See Douglas Porch, "The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996: Strategic Implications for the United States Navy," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1999, pp. 15–48.

8. For a thorough discussion of the issues involved with the South China Sea, see Michael Studeman, "Calculating China's Advances in the South China Sea: Identifying the Triggers of 'Expansionism,'" *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1998, pp. 68–90.