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# **Sustainable Security: Rethinking American National Security Strategy**

*Jeremi Suri and Benjamin Valentino*

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In recent years, observers of US defense and foreign policies have increasingly warned that America's national security strategy has become obsolete or unsustainable. Although it is widely recognized that the domestic and international conditions facing the United States have changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, our defense and foreign policies—and the underlying ideas and institutions that support them—have changed surprisingly little. Is it simply good fortune that the same basic policies, allies, and budgets that protected us from the Soviet Union in 1988 have turned out to be the optimal ones for defending American interests against terrorist groups like ISIS or a rising China in 2013 and beyond? Or have we clung to familiar policies, friends, and institutions simply because change is difficult? Even supporters of America's current policies need to be more explicit in explaining why and how these inherited policies will remain effective and affordable in the long term.

A decade of foreign wars, a devastating global financial crisis, mounting public debt, and profound realignments in international political and economic power have inspired calls for fundamental change from the competing extremes of the American political landscape. A new generation of political actors in the United States does not share the assumptions of the Cold War generation that shaped current US foreign policy. To some, these developments call for a neo-isolationist strategy that would attempt to wall America off from international threats and unpredictable global economic forces. To others, new threats from terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and a rising China justify an even more interventionist approach, in which the United States would expand its commitments to friendly nations and use its current military advantages to act forcefully, sometimes preventively, to protect American interests around the world.

If we wish to avoid either of these extremes, the United States needs a new set of ideas and principles to justify its worthwhile international commitments, and curtail ineffective

obligations, where necessary. Strategy is at least as much about choosing what *not* to do as it is about choosing what to do. Americans must be cautious about pursuing radical strategic changes, but they also must recognize that thoughtless adherence to the status quo is potentially self-defeating. America's national security strategy must be sustainable politically, as well as financially and militarily. Without a clear set of strategic ideas and principles to guide their decisions, American leaders will be unable to explain convincingly why some interests are worth fighting for and some are not.

In this volume we use the term “sustainable security” to describe a foreign policy that matches America's means to its ends, not just today, but in a way that can be maintained over the coming decades. Virtually all observers of the changing international environment acknowledge that the US is in the midst of a transition from unquestioned hegemon in a unipolar post- Cold War regime to one player, still powerful, in a materially different world. The United States must craft its security strategy in a manner that does not assume American economic primacy as a fore-drawn conclusion, but rather, that figures the long-term economic costs and benefits of different decisions into what will keep America strong. Policies that mortgage America's economic prosperity to maximize security will leave the United States neither prosperous nor secure in the future. Balancing our means and ends requires a deep reevaluation of US strategy, as the choices made today will shape the direction of US security policy for decades to come.

A new wave of rigorous, policy-relevant scholarship on how the US can sustainably pursue its national security interests is necessary for the development of coherent strategic principles. Given the range of issues that might affect American security in the twenty-first century, developing such a strategy is beyond the abilities of any individual scholar, policymaker or academic discipline. This volume, therefore, represents an effort to bring together leading historians and political scientists to rethink the foundations of American national security for a new era. The research presented in these chapters was conducted between 2011 and 2014 as part of the Tobin Project's national security initiative.

The research in this volume focuses on two related facets of national security. The first part of the book explores the material foundations of American national security and the opportunities for significant shifts in foreign policy strategy. The chapters in this part begin by focusing on the economic and financial foundations of policy, examining how US power is affected by recent trends in national and international political economy. The chapters address the relationships between topics such as defense budgets, public debt, the status of the US dollar as an international reserve currency, and the economics of America's global military posture, seeking to identify the factors that cultivate or undermine American power in the long term.

This first part of the book also includes a set of historical chapters that build on the analysis of political economy in earlier chapters to analyze similar moments in the past: How have other great powers attempted to shift their strategies under similar constraints? How has the United States managed strategic change in other periods? The chapters in this section pay particularly close attention to the domestic institutions, both military and civilian, that underpin national security policy. They probe the historical record for insights about how powerful countries have succeeded and failed in adjusting to broad shifts in political economy.

A chapter on climate change, and the geopolitics surrounding that topic, is also included in the first part of the book. This chapter examines a rapidly emerging challenge to stability, economy, and security among the most powerful international actors. Building on the political economic analysis of prior chapters, this one focuses on domestic effects that reverberate internationally, and the necessity for expanded cooperation among dominant states, especially China and the United States.

The second part of this book explores several of America's most important regional security commitments in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia. These are close case studies in the difficult strategic choices the United States must make about allocating limited military and economic resources. The authors ask whether and how these commitments continue to advance America's national interests and, if not, how they might be transformed. This part of the book also examines American public opinion regarding overseas commitments.

The two parts of the book are symbiotic. The chapters in part one analyze the material pressures on policy and the historical impediments and opportunities for change. The chapters in part two begin to reassess US security strategy, exploring the dilemmas that policy-makers confront in managing contemporary commitments and resources. Together, the two sections point to possibilities for a more sustainable national security policy by applying the lessons of part one to the difficult cases in part two.

This volume is focused primarily on the material foundations of American national security. We chose to concentrate on international political economy, US national security institutions, and regional security commitments because each of these three topic areas has been under-studied in relation to current US policy options. We also recognized that studying these three fields together would offer an opportunity to re-frame critical policy choices and generate new research insights. Taken together, the chapters in this volume can help to answer the following fundamental questions about US security strategy: How is US national security strategy shaped? How have the US and other great powers shifted their security strategies to adapt to geopolitical and economic change in the past? How do current (inherited) US security commitments serve US interests in a changing world? As in the past, the intersection of international political economy, national security institutions, and regional security commitments will determine many elements of America's future power projection abroad.

Within this framework, the forthcoming chapters devote relatively little attention to the cultural and social foundations of American power. These are important topics, worthy of more extensive investigation. The scholars in this volume made a focused analytical choice, to understand the political, economic and regional security dimensions of contemporary national security policy. We acknowledge the importance of many other factors, including the emerging challenges of climate change and cybersecurity, and we urge future researchers to explore, perhaps on the model of this volume, how other factors re-shape US security in the twenty-first century.

## AN ERA OF CONSTRAINED RESOURCES

Strategic crises are common and they rarely result in enduring shifts of power. The systemic elements of the international system—geography, the allocation of wealth, the mobilization of military capabilities, perceptions of political legitimacy, and routines of behavior—are generally more resilient than the pressures of a particular moment, even a major war. For this reason, American international predominance has continued with remarkable consistency across the last six decades, despite repeated policy miscalculations and misallocations of resources. American strategic leadership has been mediocre, at best, but American strategic predominance has remained largely invulnerable.

Many observers expect this trend to continue with the new energy resources emerging from North America, expansion of global markets for commerce, increased demands for political participation across the globe, and rising political-economic turmoil around East Asia and Europe—the only two regions capable of producing a strategic peer to the United States in the foreseeable future. According to this analysis, American predominance will continue even if America fails to adapt its national security strategy to a changing world. This is a comforting and humbling prediction, echoing German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s contemptuous nineteenth century comment that “God has a special providence for fools, drunks, and the United States of America.”

Perhaps America’s luck is finally running out. There is reason to believe that the mediocrity of American strategic leadership is now imperiling the country’s inherited strategic advantages. The crises facing the United States today are not new, but they appear to be reaching a historical tipping point because of the accumulated costs of past decisions, the density of current challenges, and, above all, the stagnation of American policy-making. Simply stated, the United States is operating in an incredibly difficult international environment with extensive commitments but limited reserves, and even more limited readiness at home to adjust to these circumstances. These pressures are not transitory, but the consequence of long-term trends that are unlikely to reverse themselves in the near future. The accumulated and current pressures on

the United States do not make a strategic tip inevitable, but they make a serious consideration of new policy options and assumptions imperative. That is the motivation for this book.

The United States remains a wealthy and dynamic society that can spend more on its security than any of its peers. The United States also continues to support a more powerful military than most of its competitors combined. American military and communications technologies are, in many cases, at least one and often two generations ahead of others. The United States consistently deploys more advanced weapons in larger numbers and with the better-trained operators than our adversaries. That will not change in coming years. American military expenditures are high in absolute terms, but remain at a historically sustainable level of about five percent of gross national product.

The trouble is not that the United States spends too little on the military, but that it may have too many commitments both at home and abroad. There are a dizzying number of latent demands on American force across the globe; and while political realities make it unlikely that American military spending will rise dramatically in the foreseeable future, no conceivably sustainable military budget could ensure that all American commitments are simultaneously protected. American ships patrol all the major waterways of the world, American bases constitute what one scholar calls a global “archipelago” of facilities, and American aircraft fly daily missions (manned and unmanned) above virtually all terrain. Basic American military operations are ubiquitous, they are labor intensive, and they are expensive. Within a political climate that demands an “all-volunteer” force, there is little available capacity in the incredibly large American military for multiplying regional conflicts that demand additional personnel and capacities. For all its extraordinary size and skill, the American military can easily become overstretched.

It might have reached that point already. In conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan—and now a new war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, as well as other terrorist groups—US armed forces quickly find themselves spread too thin to accomplish strategic aims. The civilians who direct American policy—including the president, the secretaries

of state and defense, and the national security advisor—find themselves in perpetual crisis mode, reacting to new demands rather than thinking systematically about strategic priorities.

Another inherited burden on resources is demographic. As Cindy Williams argues, although the United States does not confront population decline (as in Europe and East Asia), the country faces ballooning health and retirement obligations that are crowding out other investments. After a half-century when the United States has fielded the largest peacetime military force in its history, it is now obligated to finance higher economic transfer payments to veterans than ever before. An all-volunteer military compounds these problems because volunteers demand more long-term benefits for retention. These expenses are threatening to break the Pentagon's budget, just as they are producing exorbitant national debt obligations. The American military, like other major civilian institutions, is asked to address a growing number of current commitments and crises while it must devote a higher proportion of its resources than ever before to personnel who are no longer active. We may be at a tipping point where inherited costs undermine current investments.

Defense Secretaries Robert Gates and Leon Panetta both articulated these urgent points, as they called for more restraint in American military commitments and serious reform in health and retirement entitlements. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen made the clearest public statement about these resource challenges. In September 2011, on the eve of another recurring budget battle in Congress, he told a group of business executives that the “biggest threat to our national security is our debt.” Mullen focused on the higher costs for capital equipment and “increases in pay, and especially increases in the cost of health care.” Mullen closed his candid statement with a clear call for greater restraint in American military commitments and more attention to the prudent reallocation of resources: “We must consider the world as it is -- the threats as we see them -- not wishing away the danger nor blowing it out of proportion,” Mullen said. “Pragmatism and practicality must be our watchwords moving forward,” he added, “[and] strategy must become our acumen.”

Despite the enormous influence of Gates, Panetta, and Mullen, these figures failed to make serious headway on reform. American policy-makers in the Bush and Obama administrations were more cautious about intervening in foreign conflicts after long frustrating months of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, but they have not shown any serious willingness to reduce costly inherited commitments around the world. If anything, the “Asian pivot” has created a new obligation to increase the American land, sea, and air presence in Asia, while maintaining military hegemony in the Persian Gulf, Western Europe, and all major waterways around the globe. Civil wars and territorial disputes throughout East and South Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East threaten to suck in further American military forces, based on security guarantees that the United States has inherited, in some cases, from the early years of the Cold War. Resource pressures demand some degree of American retrenchment, but political calculations push policy-makers to avoid all the difficult trade-offs. Without attention to trade-offs, there can be no coherent strategy.

Perversely, the across-the-board sequester budget cuts of 2013 reinforced the resource problem because they exclude reductions to entitlements, they leave inherited obligations in place, and they are accompanied by the increasing demands on American security forces around Syria, North Korea, Libya, Somalia, and other international trouble-spots. The sequester simply asks the American military, and all other government agencies, to do more with less. This is a recipe for even greater overstretch and under-achievement in American foreign policy. This is also a recipe for more strategic blunders like the Iraq War of 2003, where ambitious policy aims were accompanied by clearly insufficient resource commitments.

Observing the widening mismatch between ambitions and resources, numerous commentators have focused on the dysfunctional elements of American domestic politics. Neither partisanship nor politicization of foreign policy are new, but the heightened elements of both phenomena press dangerously on current resource vulnerabilities. It looks, at times (especially during the government shutdown and threatened default of October 2013), like a

perfect storm. The political posturing of American international dominance is blowing hard against the weakened walls of available American capabilities and domestic support.

American military personnel, diplomats, and other officials are now spread so thin that one must question whether they can continue to perform basic functions with the competence citizens expect. High standards of quality usually decline when personnel are asked to do more with less. The natural tendency is to cover-up seemingly small holes in capabilities until they are exposed in disastrous fashion. There is an accompanying urge to silence warnings about potential shortfalls in fulfilling required missions. This has been the experience for other government agencies under similar conditions in the past.

Why should we expect US military, security, and diplomatic agencies to be immune to this dynamic? How can we hope to maintain the high standards we demand for international and domestic security when ambitions and resources are misaligned? The rising levels of suicide, depression, and violence within the military services are already a sign of serious internal troubles. The on-the-ground difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan were another powerful warning. We have entered an era when rigid domestic political demands, coupled with multiplying foreign challenges, constrain the strongest military in the world.

These changes render the current crisis in American foreign policy more serious and difficult to ignore than those America has faced since the end of the Cold War. If the United States benefitted from enormous strategic fortune in the past, as Bismarck observed, it appears to confront an unfortunate dynamic in the early twenty-first century: expanding international activities with an ever-more constrained and polarized domestic base. This situation cannot continue for very long in a democratic system without a major strategic reevaluation. American political leaders need to be able to maintain a security strategy that both serves American interests and values, and is acceptable to the democracy. Our book hopes to contribute to this process in a reasoned and measured way. We can expect less reason and measure if change is required after a public catastrophe, perhaps something larger than the 11 September 2001 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, or the frustrating war in Iraq. Strategic change is most effective when

it begins *before* a catastrophe, giving policymakers the chance to anticipate and mitigate future threats. Otherwise, rapid catastrophe-driven reform is likely to prove counter-productive, and maybe too little, too late.

## **SUSTAINABLE SECURITY**

A sustainable national security strategy must effectively unite America's means with its ends—its limited resources with its global interests. The constraints on American political and economic resources must be matched with the threats the United States faces from beyond its shores. American policy-makers cannot stretch resources continuously without diminishing returns abroad and at home. Sustainability in foreign policy implies focus, cost-effectiveness, and a careful management of resources. It discourages the tendencies toward full spectrum dominance, endless warfare, and multiplying foreign commitments in recent American policy. The chapters in this volume use the concept of sustainability to analyze a few important dimensions for American strategic reevaluation.

Unfortunately for American strategists, the international security environment has changed at least as radically in the last twenty years as have the constraints on national resources. Some of these changes, like the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, have undoubtedly made America safer. Many others have presented new threats and challenges to the United States. There is a natural tendency toward threat inflation, and domestic politics often make it difficult to control popular calls for shows of military strength against terrorist groups and other violent but distant trouble-makers. A sustainable security strategy requires the hard work of educating citizens about the limits of various threats, and the high costs incurred by reacting to every challenge. Difficult American experiences in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq show that overreaction to limited threats can be more damaging than the threats themselves.

The United States exists in a world almost without precedent for a leading international power. American military capabilities dwarf those of any other country. Yet the United States remains an explicit ally or close friend of almost every country on the World Bank's list of the

twenty largest economies. The only exceptions are China and Russia, and few see a realistic threat of full-scale war with them any time soon, despite continued tensions around various East Asian islands and Ukraine. Never before has the leading international state had so many powerful friends and so few state adversaries aligned against it. The most pressing threats to the United States come from terrorists, rogue states, and other small actors who can harm large numbers of citizens (usually abroad). Their capacity for undermining overall American security, however, is quite limited. Terrorism is a danger to civilians; it is not a strategic challenge to US international supremacy.

Traditional security is not the problem for the United States. The most significant challenge for American policy-makers, and a missing piece for a sustainable security strategy, is adjustment to international economic change. Long-term trends in economic growth are narrowing America's relative position, and limiting the resources that the United States can effectively allocate for traditional security commitments, especially if Americans want to continue investing in innovation and productivity at home. In 1994, when the last Russian troops left Germany, China's GDP stood at \$560 billion (using market exchange rates), compared to America's \$8.4 trillion. Today, China's GDP has reached \$8.4 trillion, an increase of almost fifteen fold, while the United States' economy has more than doubled to \$15.7 trillion. At this rate, China's economy is likely to surpass the United States' before the end of the decade.

Even if the Chinese economy does not grow larger than the American economy, however, the emerging parity of the two markets and the financial interdependence between them means that the United States will have less freedom to act unilaterally to protect its interests around the globe. The Chinese, and coalitions of other states, will have the power to inflict high costs on undesirable American actions by re-directing their financial resources, including their purchases of US government debt. Leaders in Washington will find it necessary to elicit significant military and financial assistance, not just acquiescence, from regional allies in order to share costs.

In contrast to the militaristic unilateralism that has dominated American foreign policy from the Global War on Terror to recent attacks on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a sustainable security policy for the United States will require extensive multilateralism—compromise on interests, consultation on actions, and serious burden-sharing. In a more competitive international economic environment, current American foreign policies will only be sustainable if the United States is not acting largely alone, and not paying most of the costs. Otherwise, American unilateral actions will inspire more local resistance and incur painful burdens on the national economy. A sustainable security policy must be attentive to the opportunity costs of military and other foreign policy expenditures. This is a central theme for each chapter in this book.

In addition to increased economic competition and the spread of terrorism, the United States faces a host of unconventional developments with the potential to affect America's security. As American business and military organizations have become more dependent on the Internet, they are now vulnerable to cyberattacks. Major climactic shifts are creating new geopolitical realities. These include the opening of Arctic sea lanes and increased competition between nations over newly accessible mineral, oil, and gas deposits in the Arctic and Antarctic. Climate change also threatens to alter patterns of human habitation and economic activity on a global scale, with unknowable consequences. Although the United States may be more secure than ever before, current policy confronts new and emerging threats that require strategic responses. This is an additional reason to manage security commitments wisely, allocating precious resources and attention for nascent challenges, beyond those of the present moment.

Unfortunately, recent American foreign policy has focused almost exclusively on current threats and past commitments, not future needs. This is most evident in the startling observation that the broad contours of America's national security strategy have changed very little since the end of the Cold War. The number of active duty military personnel has declined by less than ten percent. America's defense budget has remained relatively constant at about 4.5 percent of GDP.

In 1994, the US operated twelve aircraft carriers. Today we have ten with another one under construction.

Perhaps the easiest way to appreciate the stagnation in America's national security strategy over the last two decades is to review America's network of alliances. America's main formal or informal defense commitments with Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia all pre-date the end of the Cold War. The only significant change to our alliance structure since then has been the expansion of NATO, which, despite the collapse of NATO's primary adversary, has committed the United States to the defense of twelve additional nations in Eastern Europe—a decision many have begun to question in light of Russia's increasing willingness to test the strength of those commitments. The US has reduced the number of troops deployed in South Korea and Japan, but nowhere has Washington chosen to terminate its commitments to defend other nations. (The Philippines did ask the United States to close its major bases there in 1991, but the US retains an almost 60 year-old mutual defense treaty with the Philippines). It is difficult to believe that the same alliance portfolio the United States needed in 1950 just happens to be the one we need today. Adherence to inherited commitments and routines, rather than adjustment to emerging needs, threatens to make current policy unsustainable.

A key premise of this book is that the time has come for a comprehensive reassessment of America's overseas commitments in light of America's changed strategic and economic environment. Significant cuts to our defense budget are likely whether we reexamine our commitments or not. It would be wise to use this opportunity to ask whether we can bring our commitments back in line with our national interests and sustainable costs, rather than struggle to overstretch our budget to meet ever-growing commitments. It makes little sense, for example, to continue to debate the utility of the F-22 aircraft or how many carrier battle groups we need without examining the value to the United States of the overseas commitments these weapons were designed to defend.

The costs of America's commitments, of course, are not merely economic. Although our alliances were initially formed to deter conflict, many of America's overseas commitments also have the potential to draw the United States into wars it would prefer to avoid. The recent crisis in Ukraine reinforces this point. If Ukraine were indeed part of NATO, as some have advocated, the United States would have an obligation to join a potential war between Ukraine and Russia, even if leaders in Washington questioned American interests in that conflict. A similar dynamic exists in Asia, where Japan's actions in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands threaten to draw the United States into a war against China. Extended security commitments quickly become unsustainable when regional conflicts call in American guarantees.

Although alliances are essential for effective multilateralism, they can be dangerous and even self-defeating if they become permanent and axiomatic. When the United States promises to ensure the security and welfare of countries, it also encourages free riding, and sometimes even reckless behavior. This has been evident throughout the Middle East, East Asia, and South Asia during the last decade. Permanent alliances also complicate relations with major powers like Russia and China, who perceive themselves as permanent adversaries for these alliances. That perception makes cooperation with the United States on critical issues like trade, arms control, humanitarian intervention, and regional conflict more difficult. These costs are perhaps worth paying, but only if they are outweighed by benefits afforded by existing alliances. Weighing costs and benefits, and contemplating shifts in alliance commitments, is an exercise we have ignored for much too long.

Substantial costs might be justified if they are clearly outweighed by the benefits of existing alliances. The character of alliance benefits, however, is seldom made clear by those who advocate maintaining US commitments; they simply assert vague benefits that some of the chapters in this volume question. Indeed, in the post-Cold War world, it is hard to make the case that most of our allies do much to defend directly the security of the United States. To take two examples: Romania does little to protect the United States from Russia, and Taiwan does not protect the US from China. American allies may assist in projecting power around the world,

but in many cases the main reason the United States needs to project power is to protect these same allies. A cycle of alliance dependencies raises American costs with perhaps negative security returns.

Many of the arguments in favor of maintaining American alliances boil down to fears about regional instability that could occur should the US pull back. Would a US withdrawal from Asia spark a conventional build-up or even nuclear weapons programs in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan? Would it embolden China to threaten US freedom of navigation in the Pacific? Would a reduction of US support to Israel encourage Iran to develop nuclear weapons or set off a nuclear arms race in the Persian Gulf? Proponents of these commitments must make the case that the predicted threats are reasonably likely, that a military alliance with the United States is the most effective way of averting them, and that averting them is worth the costs and risks to the United States. Proponents must also address an alternative proposition: that extended American commitments in regions like the Middle East make conflict and instability more likely. Would some regions be better off with a smaller US presence? Would a more limited US posture prove more sustainable for the region and American interests?

This book poses four fundamental questions of America's security commitments, aimed at assessing core interests and long-term sustainability. First, what benefits does the United States obtain from a given alliance? Put differently, what negative consequences might the United States suffer if it ended a particular commitment, and how likely are those consequences to occur? Second, is a US military commitment necessary to defend our interests in the region, or are our allies capable of defending themselves? Third, is it possible that our commitments could be counterproductive—diminishing our allies' incentives to invest in their own defense or encouraging them to behave recklessly? Finally, what are the full costs of a given commitment to the United States, including the economic and political liabilities, and the risks of war?

The chapters in this book explore strategies for American foreign policy that focus on core national interests and recognize the limits on resources. The authors take the criticisms of current strategic overstretch and ineffectiveness seriously. They also affirm that the power of the

United States requires some active measures of foreign defense, open trade, and continued international exchange of labor, capital, and ideas. The authors argue that a fundamental strategic reevaluation for the United States is necessary to reaffirm internationalist principles. In the past, strategic reevaluations—by William McKinley and John Hay after 1896, and Franklin Roosevelt after 1933—played a vital role in repositioning the United States to improve its security abroad, as it forged a new policy consensus at home. We are in similar historical terrain today. Assessing how we have come to our current predicament and examining realistic alternatives, in the light of past experience, is the only way to develop a sustainable strategy for American security into the middle of the present century.

## **OUR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Each of the chapters in this volume addresses three questions: Why does the United States need a more sustainable security strategy? What are the key elements of a more sustainable security strategy? How might the United States construct such a strategy? Although our contributors offer different ideas and recommendations, they all agree that the time has come for a critical reexamination of the foundations of American security.

The first set of chapters focus on the links between money and power. Jonathan Kirshner examines the great recession of 2008 and its lingering effects on America's international economic position. He argues that the interrelated trends of domestic financial deregulation and financialization contributed directly to the crisis, the rise in foreign-held US debt, and the new fundamental weakness of the dollar as a global currency. Kirshner describes Chinese and other efforts to challenge the standing of the dollar, and he predicts more of the same. Kirshner's analysis argues for re-thinking of assumptions about financial deregulation at home to give the United States a sounder basis for the support of its extended international economic, political, and military positions.

Daniel Drezner and Nancy Hite examine the relationship between military spending and foreign direct investment. In a close analysis of the data, they find that high military spending by

developed countries, particularly the United States, does not attract more capital investment to the country. Drezner and Hite point to some correlation for developing countries, establishing basic security for investors, but they show that the high levels of American spending do not pay off. Instead, current American military spending at home and abroad contributes to capital depletion and indebtedness. Drezner and Hite's analysis suggests that a sustainable security strategy must involve less military spending.

Cindy Williams digs into the effects of smaller budgets for the US military services. In a very fine-grained analysis, she argues that cuts can, in fact, strengthen American capabilities. To address the demographic challenges the military faces, Williams proposes reforms to pay structures, benefits, and overall numbers that will eliminate waste and discourage mission creep. Williams lays out what a smaller, more efficient, and more focused US military might look like. She anticipates a more sustainable defense establishment in future years.

The next three chapters add a historical dimension to the analysis of economy, strategy, and power. Jeremi Suri interrogates the sources of power growth and decline in eighteenth century Great Britain, nineteenth century China, and twentieth century America. He analyzes the crucial roles played by domestic taxation and foreign borrowing for necessary economic and military investments. Suri argues that these financial instruments are crucial for a sustainable security strategy. Successful governments nurture institutional capabilities for effective taxation and inexpensive borrowing. He argues that the United States must strengthen these capabilities if it wishes to sustain its international power.

William Inboden focuses his attention on American security institutions, the National Security Council (NSC) in particular. He describes how important the coordination of different policy-makers through the NSC is for the formulation and implementation of strategy, especially during periods of domestic retrenchment and foreign threat. Comparing the experiences of President Harry Truman with those of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, Inboden distills a series of valuable guidelines for reforming American national security in a new era.

Inboden's analysis shows that a sustainable foreign policy begins, in many ways, with effective national security institutions, re-made for the challenges of their time.

John Hall's chapter, which compares the experiences of European and American armies between the two world wars, offers a number of lessons for contemporary policy that build on the economic and institutional insights of the prior chapters. He shows that higher budgets do not necessarily improve military preparation, and he also observes that strategic rigidity hinders necessary learning. For Hall, the key elements of military success include adaptability, innovation, and tolerance of dissent. He observes that these qualities are limited in the current US military by the pressures derived from "global constabulary obligations and the constraint of being perpetually ready for a major war." Hall's chapter argues that stricter scrutiny of budgets and security commitments might, in fact, help the US army to develop a more sustainable strategy.

Joshua Busby's chapter neatly closes out this section with a concise description of the emerging political and economic implications of climate change. Busby addresses some of the clearest connections to security, and the likely consequences. He points to necessary areas for cooperation, and outlines some possible paths for US policy that link security and climate in sustainable ways.

The second section of the book applies the insights from the chapters in the first section to current geopolitical realities, focusing on America's extensive system of alliances and security commitments. This section begins with a chapter by Benjamin Valentino which explores the nature of American public opinion regarding our existing overseas alliances. Since the public ultimately bears the costs of these alliances, continued public support is necessary for sustaining them. Recently, however, many scholars and policy makers have expressed concern that widespread disillusionment among the public could lead to increased support for isolationism. Drawing on an original poll conducted especially for this volume, however, Valentino shows that fears of a new wave of isolationism have been greatly exaggerated and public support for American alliances remains strong. Thus, the greater challenge in the coming years may be for

those political elites and scholars who favor retrenchment to convince the public that ending or significantly reconfiguring our overseas commitments is a necessary part of a sustainable security strategy.

The remaining chapters in this section explore America's commitments to specific regions. William Wohlforth begins with a hard look at America's oldest and largest alliance, NATO. Although Wohlforth acknowledges that the "case for an agonizing reappraisal of the US security commitment to Europe has never seemed stronger," he ultimately concludes that the European alliance structure we have inherited through more than half a century of political, military, financial, and bureaucratic wrangling is about the best we can do. Wohlforth argues that because both the costs and the risks of the alliance are relatively low, "muddling through" is better than the alternatives of dramatically reducing or further expanding our commitments.

Daniel Byman and Sara Bjerg Moller provide a detailed inventory and appraisal of America's commitments to the Middle East, the region that has occupied more of the resources and attention of United States than any other since the end of the Cold War. Byman and Moller argue that permanent US military deployments in the region are not only unnecessary, but often counterproductive. They recommend a lower profile strategy that focuses on maintaining bases and prepositioned equipment, and negotiating access agreements should the United States need to intervene more directly. Ultimately, Byman and Moller acknowledge that the power of the United States to shape events in this critical region remains limited. Sometimes the best we can do is "prepare for the aftermath."

Jennifer Lind's chapter explores America's alliances in East Asia. Lind argues that although our alliances with Korea, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan do support some key American interests in the region, they also come with substantial risks. Our commitments risk entangling the United States in a costly and dangerous security spiral with China, or entrapping the US in wars that are not in American interests to fight. Our alliances have also encouraged buck-passing and expense passing by our allies who are capable of contributing much more to their own defense. Lind argues that the United States is unlikely to withdraw from these

alliances, but that it could reform them by transforming them from “terminals” that serve only to help defend single allies, into “hubs” that allow the United States project power in the region.

Sumit Ganguly focuses on one of America’s most important, but also most troubled, overseas commitments—the relationship with Pakistan. As Ganguly shows, an array of critical US interests overlap in Pakistan, including the future of Afghanistan, the fight against Islamic extremism, and efforts to limit nuclear proliferation. Ganguly makes the strong case that if the United States wishes to do more than react to increasingly grave crises emanating from Pakistan, Washington has a long term interest in helping to resolve the rivalry between India and Pakistan. He argues that the US may have a key role to play in deescalating the rivalry, if it is willing to use the leverage available to it.

Finally, Audrey Kurth Cronin focuses on the future of America’s relationship with Afghanistan, the location of America’s longest war. Cronin argues that if the United States does not wish to be drawn back into Afghanistan, as it has been in Iraq, it must help Afghanistan establish and maintain a strict policy of neutrality and nonalignment. As Cronin writes: “Afghanistan has been most dangerous to itself and others when it has drawn too close to any one power or group, and most stable when it has acted as a political buffer and economic crossroads between two or more.” A sustainable security strategy involves a disciplined acknowledgement of limits, as well as continued ambitions, by American policy-makers in Afghanistan and other regions.

## **CONCLUSION: A SUSTAINABLE FOREIGN POLICY**

American national interests are best served when short-term foreign policy decisions are woven into a strategic fabric that endures. Effective national strategies assign priorities to guide behavior in crises, they allocate resources for worthwhile investments, they affirm valuable relationships, and they caution against temptations and traps. Effective national strategies also educate the public, they create clear expectations, and they provide criteria for assessing success and failure. Strategies tell us clearly what is worth fighting for and what is not.

All together, these qualities contribute to what we call a sustainable national strategy. We are concerned with the formulation and implementation of a new American national strategy that can serve the nation's interests at reasonable cost, with consistent support, and continuing benefits to Americans and non-Americans alike. A more sustainable strategy, like the Open Door in the late nineteenth century and containment in the Cold War, must be simple, resilient, and compatible with American institutions and values.

In the chapters that follow, the authors assess sustainability by focusing on political economy, institutions, policy routines, and threat assessments. The chapters are attentive to the *material* sources and measures of power. The chapters also analyze the *choices* that leaders and publics have made about strategy, and the ways those choices influence on-going behavior. Of course, multiple sets of actors—domestic and international—express preferences at the same time. The chapters assess the intersections of different preferences, and their consequences for policy choices. A sustainable strategy must frame, organize, and prioritize diverse policy preferences, converting them into a coherent system of choices that serve national interests over time.

Strategies are ultimately composed of compromises among different preferences. They are necessarily imperfect and dependent on their time and context. They must reflect domestic political realities as well as material ones. The fairest way to assess the sustainability of a national strategy is to ask how it compares to viable alternatives. Is there a better way to protect national interests at reasonable cost? Is there a national strategy that can offer more benefits with fewer risks? These are the historical, economic, and political questions that ground rigorous analysis of what composes a sustainable national strategy for a large and powerful country in a world with seemingly endless policy demands. A sustainable strategy helps to provide necessary resources and limit excessive commitments.

America's national security strategy has seen more continuity than change over the last sixty years. Making major changes to any policy as enduring and complex as this brings significant challenges. Our current policy is the devil we know. Anything else is the devil we

don't know. Countless political, economic and even emotional interests have accreted over the decades to sustain the national security strategy we have today. Many of those who stand to lose from changes to the present policy, including current allies who will have to spend more on their own defense, know who they are and are therefore motivated to defend the status quo. Many of those who might gain from a new strategy, such as Americans men and women who will not be asked to fight in future foreign wars, do not yet know it, and so cannot be counted upon to advocate for change. Nevertheless, the first steps to making such changes are carefully assessing why things are as they are, and imagining how things could be different. These are the goals of the scholars who have contributed to this volume. A sustainable national security strategy must ask tough questions and it must imagine better alternatives.