

The United States in the New World Disorder

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[This is the second of three lectures on the United States' global role in the 21st century. The first deals with the causes and consequences of the crumbling of the Pax American. The third addresses the need for renewed agility in American diplomacy.]

I want to speak with you about the consequences for our country of changes in the world order. The United States now has several great power rivals, not one., and it has worse relations with all of them than they have with each other. This is not a situation with which Americans should be comfortable. It is the opposite of world leadership. It reflects America's internal disabilities as well as the disorder that has succeeded both US-Soviet rivalry and the American global hegemony that briefly succeeded it. And it raises serious questions about how well Americans understand the international environment our country's foreign policies must now navigate.

The Cold War is long over. The winds now blow not from one but from many directions. But the United States has not changed course. Nor have Americans adjusted the alliances or reset the military-dominated approach to foreign policy we developed to cope with Soviet communism. The results of this lapse make it obvious that a rethink is overdue.

From time to time, the world reorders itself. This is such a time. So was the moment in which the United States was born, 240 years ago. Tradition has it that a British army band played "The World Turned Upside Down" as General Cornwallis surrendered to a combined American and French force at Yorktown in 1781.

The French army and navy played a decisive role in that surrender, which would not have occurred without them. And it was in Paris, two years later, that the British grudgingly accepted the independence of the United States. Our country's independence was in many ways a byproduct of the global wars that accompanied the first bipolar international order.

From the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1754 until the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Britain and France contested world dominance – not just who would rule Europe but also North and South America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Had these great powers not balanced each other, either could have snuffed out our republic in its infancy. Had they not been at war, the diplomacy that produced the vast expansion of the Louisiana Purchase could not have taken place. American history began with an illustration that the nature of the world order both creates the context for national security and determines what policies can be successfully pursued within it.

Consider the impact on the United States of the French defeat at Waterloo in 1815. This again upended world affairs. It ushered in a century of British manipulation of the European balance of power and British management of the affairs of much of the rest of the world. The United Kingdom was the world's first global military and industrial superpower. Despite misgivings, Britain first accommodated, then facilitated America's rise. The Pax Britannica provided a peaceful international environment in which the United States rose to wealth and power without effective foreign opposition and without the need for much of a foreign policy. Americans may have chafed at British supremacy but we accepted the benefits of the mostly peaceful world order sustained by British imperialism and the Royal Navy.

Free of entangling alliances and shielded by the Atlantic and Pacific from great power intervention or the need for our own military engagement in Europe or Asia, Americans practiced diplomatic minimalism. We kept our army and navy small and our defense budgets frugal. We invested in our industry, infrastructure, and workforce rather than a military capable of extra-hemispheric adventures. This focus on domestic development enabled us to expand and prosper. By 1875 or so, the American economy was the world's largest.

World War I ended the century-long Pax Britannica even though the British and other empires remained intact. The American economy emerged from the war larger than those of its six next-biggest competitors. But Americans saw no reason that our greater financial clout should make us any more responsible for the maintenance of peace, stability, or prosperity in foreign parts than we had been. We resumed our traditionally aloof stance toward the other side of the Atlantic. Still, some of the ideas we had put forward in our brief wartime appearance on the

world stage marched on.

Woodrow Wilson's idealistic advocacy of self-determination fragmented Europe, producing weak new states that had little prospect of sustaining themselves against larger neighbors. Germany was humiliated by defeat and impoverished by reparations. Russia was reduced to surly diplomatic isolation. After World War I, neither of these great European powers had any role at all in European governance. Their ostracism left Europe inherently unstable. Europeans lacked both a consensus and a diplomatic structure that could contain national rivalries, revanchism, or the rise of totalitarian ideologies and apparatuses. The United States chose to ignore the dangers of this situation and did nothing to prevent nature from taking its course.

Despite America's efforts to keep our distance from the world beyond our oceans, the size of the U.S. economy and the vigor of American society gave us immense financial and cultural influence abroad. We did not use this power intelligently. Our unbending efforts to collect war debt from Europeans ruined by the fighting made their recovery more difficult. When Wall Street crashed in 1929, the United States responded with a series of protectionist measures. Copied by others, these beggar-thy-neighbor policies compounded the global financial and economic damage, threw the world into ever deeper depression, and helped catalyze eruptions of militarism in both Europe and Japan.

Americans reacted to the return of war to East Asia and Europe with a timidly feckless mixture of denial, righteous indignation, denunciation, and sanctions. Such feel-good diplomacy was largely toothless, but America's size and potential caused it to be seen as life-threatening in Tokyo and menacing in Berlin. The Japanese and Germans acted accordingly. The regional conflicts they had initiated soon expanded to include the United States.

Tokyo's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor aimed to deprive America of the capacity to interfere with its empire-building in China or its takeover of European colonies in Southeast Asia. But, instead of sidelining the United States, Japan's sinking of much of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and seizure of the Philippines galvanized an American drive to destroy Japanese power. The Second World War ended by replacing European and Japanese hegemony in the Pacific with that of the United States, dividing Europe into U.S. and Soviet-dominated zones, and placing China under strong central government aligned with the USSR. The British, French and other European

empires in Asia and Africa began to disintegrate.

As European colonists came home, natives of their colonies followed them. The colonizers began themselves to be colonized. The tension inherent in the struggle of colonial peoples to achieve self-determination took root in former imperial powers (where it has now flowered into terrorism)..

War had once again rearranged the global geopolitical geometry. This time the United States could not ignore the challenges the new world order posed. It rose to meet them.

World War II devastated Japan, Europe, the Soviet Union, and China, but it left the American homeland unscathed and lifted the United States out of economic depression. The United States alone possessed (and had used) nuclear weapons. American international supremacy – not just military, economic, and financial, but political, cultural, and moral – was undeniable. The more than six thousand ships in the U.S. Navy gave America an effective global monopoly on naval power. By the time the war ended, the American economy accounted for half or more of global output. Americans seemed to have all the money and most of the answers. The United States enshrined the dollar at the center of a new global monetary system that exempted America from most of the financial discipline to which other countries were subject. The United Nations embodied American ideas for great-power collaboration that could manage world affairs.

The almost immediate emergence of a U.S.-Soviet contest for supremacy in Europe erased any hope that the vanquishers of fascism and militarism could jointly manage world affairs through the UN. The Cold War divided the planet and established a bipolar world order, the likes of which had not been seen since the Anglo-French contest for global dominance in which our nation was born. As had been the case in the Napoleonic wars, America's rivalry with the USSR mixed ideology and geopolitics, pitting capitalism and constitutional democracy against economic statism and totalitarian dictatorship. The United States responded to the new world order by transforming itself, its approach to foreign policy, and the way its government was organized..

Americans abandoned our 160-year-old aversion to entangling alliances. The United States extended formal defense commitments to over two dozen countries on three continents. It

adopted a grand strategy of “containment” of the “communist bloc.” The purpose of containment was to wall off the Soviet system and give it time to die of its own deformities.

The first alliances in American history established the perimeters of a new U.S. sphere of influence from which we sought to exclude the USSR and its subordinate states, denying them access to trade and investment as well as human and natural resources. U.S. allies furnished bases and served as military auxiliaries at the margins of this American-defended sphere (which we called “the free world”). To secure it against Soviet inroads, the United States jump-started European recovery, helped reindustrialize Japan, and launched the visionary reform and opening of world trade and investment that culminated decades later in globalization.

Washington needed a new national security structure to coordinate the policies and programs of this unprecedented American activism in foreign affairs. The United States created an all-service Department of Defense as well as foreign intelligence, propaganda, and aid agencies. As the Cold War proceeded and Americans became accustomed to life under threat and a permanently declared state of emergency, the role of the military and intelligence services in American foreign policy steadily expanded. The size and political influence of what President Eisenhower named “the military-industrial-congressional complex” grew apace.

The United States abandoned the concept of a citizen army and built an impressively professional military establishment. It nurtured the growth of huge corporations dependent on federal outlays for their research, development, and production of armaments. It funded the development of new foreign policy-related academic disciplines, and established university departments and think tanks to research how to apply them. U.S. defense budgets and the American military-industrial complex came to dwarf military spending and armaments production by all of America’s allies and enemies combined. The budgets of U.S. intelligence agencies grew to many times that of the Department of State. Diplomats gave way to employees of other agencies as the largest component of America’s civilian presence overseas.

And then, twenty-five years ago, the USSR first gave up its drive for global dominance and then abolished itself. The threat environment that America’s policy-making apparatus, military force structure, weaponry, alliances, spies, and diplomatic representation abroad had all been designed to address suddenly disappeared. No great enemy or ideological challenge appeared to replace

Soviet communism as an existential threat to the United States.

This was a fundamental change in the world order, comparable to that which had galvanized America's self-transformation as the Cold War began. But the Soviet threat had gone away and there wasn't an obvious new one. Under these circumstances, few Americans thought there was a compelling need to retool to address the more complex realities of a world in which we had no ideological or geopolitical rival. We felt no urgent need to change course. So we didn't.

Instead, Americans sought to cure our enemy deprivation syndrome through a leisurely search for a credible adversary to replace the USSR. We failed to find one. Still, the United States did not trim its alliance structure to reflect the absence of a direct – still less an existential – threat to either our global ascendancy or our homeland. Quite the contrary.

Because there was nothing to stop us from doing so, we expanded our alliances to fill the politico-military space the Soviet default on the Cold War had made available. Over the past quarter century, in the absence of any identifiable military threat to Europe, NATO has grown from sixteen to twenty-eight (soon to be twenty-nine) members. And the United States has now extended America's defense responsibilities right up to the borders of both Russia and China, while claiming the unilateral right to keep order in all the territories and seas beyond these borders.

In the process, the United States has aligned itself with every country that has a border dispute with either Russia or China. Americans are now the self-proclaimed protectors of Georgia and Ukraine from their Russian neighbor. We are in the process of developing a commitment to protect Vietnam from China – this time all of it, not just its southern half. Despite the fact that the United States has not won a war so far this century, Americans seem willing to bet our future on the proposition that no bluff we make will ever be called. Or perhaps we really are prepared to go to war with nuclear-armed adversaries over constitutional arrangements in culturally schizophrenic Ukraine or who can perch where on the uninhabitable rocks and reefs of the East and South China Seas.

The expanded defense commitments we have undertaken do not reflect considered national judgments on the part of the American people. They are not anchored in our constitution. They

are the product of ingrained habit, institutional inertia, hubris, and blindness within the Beltway to the realities of a changed world order. The extent to which the American people will back these commitments is uncertain. The foreign pushback to them is not.

The international environment the United States must cope with is no longer defined by a life-and-death struggle between would-be global hegemony but by tugs of war between shifting combinations of great powers and regional actors. But we Americans invested a lot in Cold War bureaucracies, systems, intellectual superstructures, and alliances designed to manage bipolarity. These institutions have no interest in going out of business. They have become what our military colleagues call “self-licking ice cream cones.” This makes it unthinkable to ask what their purpose now is. And we have a military industrial base to sustain and jobs in the defense sector to protect.

The political path of least resistance has clearly been to keep doing what worked during the Cold War. So that’s what we’ve done. But this is a little like continuing to play checkers when the game has changed to chess. The old rules – those we went by in the Cold War – no longer apply and the old moves no longer work. Our failure to recognize this is having increasingly serious consequences.

The Soviet stand-down from the contest to dominate the world left the United States as the sole superpower. The clash between constitutional democracy and messianic totalitarianism ended; so did the contest between free-market capitalism and statism. The world became safe for political and ideological diversity. Apprehensions about nuclear war virtually disappeared. Superpower proxy wars in the Third World ceased. But, at the same time, the Cold War’s restraints on less powerful nations and peoples also disappeared. The world changed, and its rules of engagement changed with it.

No longer constrained by its Soviet patron, Iraq inaugurated the post-Cold War era by invading and annexing Kuwait. In reprisal for Western and Western-backed Israeli intrusions in the Arab world, Islamist extremists – accountable to no power but themselves – bombed New York and the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. On September 11, 2001, they began a series of spectacular terrorist assaults in New York, Washington, and other Western capitals. They assisted secessionist movements in similar massacres in Russia and China. They made it

clear that they considered these attacks to be retaliation for past wars against Muslims and the ongoing persecution of Muslim minorities in Palestine, Europe, Russia, and elsewhere.

During the Cold War, the possibility of nuclear Armageddon gave the United States and the Soviet Union a common interest in restraining our respective allies or client states. Neither of us wanted a state within our sphere to provoke the other by attacking its homeland. When wars occurred, we sought to keep them limited so as to avoid their widening or escalating into direct combat between the U.S. and Soviet armed forces. Intervention in the nations of the Third World therefore entailed little apparent risk to either the American or Soviet homeland.

In the bipolar order of the past, neither the Soviet Union nor China would allow north Korea or Vietnam to retaliate against the United States by attacking targets in America. The United States might fight thinly disguised Chinese forces in Korea and Vietnam but the Chinese could be confident that America would not take its war to the Chinese mainland. The U.S. knew China would not attack America. The Soviets could be sure that the Afghan mujahedeen's CIA and Chinese handlers would discourage them from going after targets in the USSR. The United States could bomb Tripoli while relying on the Soviets to deter Libyan reprisal against the American homeland. And so forth. All this has changed.

Now, when a great power bombs a foreign people, there is no other great power to deter that people from finding a way to bomb back. Hence 9/11. In the globalized world in which we now live, Americans must expect military interventions in other lands to generate opposite, if not immediate or symmetrical reactions against us. We are both more powerful and more vulnerable to reprisal – if only pinprick – than at any previous period in our history. We need to take this into account when we use force overseas.

In the new circumstances, the argument that Americans must fight “terrorists” “over there” to avoid having to fight them “here” is dangerously wrong. We are learning the hard way that the more we poke hornets’ nests abroad, the more likely hornets are to sting us here in our homeland. Drone warfare is proving counterproductive. Killing Muslims overseas while projecting an image of an America that hates and represses Islam at home is just what is required to inspire anti-American extremists with global reach and self-starting American copycats.

The greater likelihood of retaliation against us by non-state actors, including deranged individuals with guns or improvised explosive devices, is, of course, far from the only important change in the international environment to which the United States has yet to craft an effective response. Global dynamics increasingly reflect the emergence of non-western forms of modernity and the diffusion of power to the world's regions. Major realignments and shifts in regional balances of power are also taking place. Americans are not coping at all well with a world in which we no longer call the shots.

As the 21st century began, misguided U.S. attempts at regime change in West Asia and North Africa overthrew the state system imposed by European colonialism, destabilized previously tranquil societies, and ignited sectarian conflict, ethnic cleansing, and civil wars. The region is now being reshaped by sectarianism, widening proxy wars between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf Arabs, eruptions of Jewish and Muslim extremism, and violent disagreements among Muslims about how to restore their civilization to greatness. None of these countries or causes can now be restrained by great powers outside the region. The United States and other outside powers whose interventions helped kindle this strife have been powerless to inhibit, let alone halt it.

U.S. relations with all the major actors in the region – Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey – are ever more distrustful and strained. Rebuilding these relationships is the prerequisite for implementing a strategy – if Americans can devise one – to defend and advance U.S. interests in the region. But even then, progress will depend on the region's major powers agreeing a peace among themselves. The United States may or may not be part of such a process.

The spreading violence is an existential threat only to the states and peoples in the region where it originates, but it is having painful worldwide spillover effects. Neither Russia nor Europe has been able to insulate itself. The mayhem is now touching the United States and countries in East and South Asia. There is no coherent international plan for containing the threat of Islamist terrorism. In many respects, American, Russian, European, and Chinese policies and actions seem to be exacerbating it. Instead of making common cause with mainstream Muslims to combat Islamist extremists, the United States is alienating itself from the Islamic world. Obvious opportunities for diplomatic cooperation remain unexplored and unexploited.

Uncontrollable flows of refugees escaping war and poverty in West Asia, North Africa, and the Sahel now threaten the unity of the European Union (EU), which was already under stress from economic stagnation and persistently high unemployment. The EU's economic problems have exacerbated racial and religious tensions between Europeans and immigrants from their former colonies. The result is belated blowback from imperialism in the form of Islamist extremism and terrorism. This has given some of the EU's newer member states excuses to pursue autocratic and nationalist agendas that further threaten the continent's hard-won political and cultural cohesion.

Divisions between Europe's prosperous north and its indebted south, its liberal west and autocratic east, and its German-dominated euro land and areas with national currencies are more acute than ever. The EU has proved unable to coordinate the fiscal policies of its members. It has had to rely on monetary policy instead. But few now believe that monetary policy alone can end economic malaise in Europe – or, for that matter, in America. Europeans are increasingly despondent.

Europe demands attention from the United States. It is not just that Europe and America are part of a single geostrategic zone and previously dominant global civilization. The European economy remains the world's largest. Sustaining the worldwide influence of Western values in the face of competition from non-Western traditions requires preserving transatlantic consensus. Americans share Europeans' frustration with dysfunctional government. We can and should learn from each other as we work to mend our broken politics.

Europe's political, economic, and ideological fault lines were for long the major source of global conflict. On at least four occasions, these divisions have convulsed the world in planetwide warfare. This is an important reason that European unity has long been as much an American as a European project. If Europe disintegrates, so will transatlantic ties.

But European enthusiasm for the EU has flagged. The EU has been unable to develop coherent responses to any of the political and economic crises it now faces. Popular dissatisfaction with

both the shortcomings of EU governance and its bureaucratism has grown. As the British referendum on whether to leave the EU illustrates, there is now a serious risk that Europe will come apart.

Meanwhile, in a classic instance of moral hazard, the willingness of the United States to supply military muscle for Europe through NATO continues to relieve Europeans of the need to pay and provide for their own defense. Europe's failure to come together as an effective political and military partner for the United States has in turn reduced American interest in "the European project." At the same time, Europeans see the United States as too prone to pursue military solutions to essentially political problems. Europeans and Americans are slowly falling out on matters of great concern to both.

The Ukraine imbroglio is a case in point. To be stable, independent, and prosperous, Ukraine requires cooperative relations with both the EU and Russia. Western Europeans, led by Germany, seek to restore a relationship between the EU and Russia within which Ukraine can find such balance while healing its internal divisions and evolving a coherent national identity, much like the neutralization of Austria at the height of the Cold War. Americans and some Eastern Europeans see containing Russian influence in Ukraine and fortifying the EU's borders with Russia as the main tasks before us.

EU efforts to renew diplomatic dialogue and rebuild trust with Russia contradict the U.S. preference for military capacity-building in Ukraine and escalating pressure to punish Russian adventurism. These differing approaches test transatlantic unity. They leave Ukraine's identity crisis uncured and Russia's long-term relationship with Europe unaddressed. The result is a protracted crisis that calls into question both Ukraine's viability as a nation and its potential as both a buffer state and bridge between Russia and the rest of Europe.

In this stalemate, all sides lose. The impasse in Ukraine inhibits desirable cooperation between Europe, Russia, and the United States on other issues. It contributes to the current drift toward more distant US-European relations. Like Germany after World War I, Russia is left with no stake in the European order. And Americans and Russians are once again engaged in

contingency planning for a possible war between us.

U.S.-led efforts to isolate Russia have also strengthened its impulse to make common cause with China. Both Beijing and Moscow seek to counter what they see as U.S. policies that disrespect their interests or those of other independent states. Ironically, in view of the historic disdain of both for the rule of law, this has driven them to emphasize support for international law, the procedures of the United Nations, and the principles of the Westphalian order. They base their opposition to U.S.-backed military interventions like those in Libya, Syria, or Yemen on the principles of the UN Charter. Meanwhile, Russia cites NATO's forceful separation of Kosovo from Serbia without UN authorization as an exculpatory precedent for its own less violent but equally unauthorized separation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Russia is a great regional power that borders Europe, the Middle East, China, and Japan and has intercontinental nuclear reach. It plays a major role in global energy and arms markets. The U.S. attempt to punish Russian adventurism in Ukraine by ostracizing Moscow has inadvertently revealed how important the Russians are as players on issues of importance to the United States. Without Russian cooperation or acquiescence, it is hard to imagine any success in the management of affairs in Europe, the Middle East, post-NATO Afghanistan, or the Arctic. Demonizing and dissing Russia's leader is puerile posturing, not a policy. In the new world disorder, adversaries on some issues are indispensable allies on others. The notion that "you are either with us or against us" is an unsophisticated delusion of bush-league minds.

U.S.-Russian interaction over Syria, where we are adversaries, has illustrated this on several occasions. Russia's now-six-month-old military intervention in Syria has altered more than the correlation of forces on the ground. It has underscored the need for a peace process in Syria and begun to make one possible. It has made Russia a significant actor in the international campaign against Islamist terrorism and an essential part of any effort to staunch the flows of refugees that now threaten the EU. In response, without announcing a policy change, Washington has reengaged with Moscow.

Wisdom is to be welcomed, even when delayed. Dismissing Russia as a has-been power has

been a mistake. The question Americans must now dare to address is how to secure Russian cooperation where we have common interests, even as we oppose each other where our interests conflict.

U.S. policies are currently pushing Russia toward China, whose rise was already rebalancing relationships across the Eurasian landmass, on its periphery, and in the world as a whole. China's GDP has quintupled since 1990. It's on course to surpass that of the United States. China has begun to play an active role in reshaping the postwar international economic order, which it views as skewed in favor of American, European, and Japanese interests. By 2020, the Chinese are expected to have invested \$20 trillion abroad. As the inauguration of institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the so-called "BRICS bank" illustrate, China is now a significant force in global governance. It has become a rule-maker, not just a rule-taker.

The economic order in the Indo-Pacific is now Sino-centric. This reality is not going to be changed by the bravado around which the Obama administration has built its domestic political case for approval of the "Trans-Pacific Partnership" (TPP). China cannot be excluded from writing a major part of the rules in a region where it is everybody's largest trading partner and source of new investment. India and Japan, the Indo-Pacific's other great powers, will also have much to say, as will ASEAN. They are reacting to China's growing military power by beginning to cooperate to offset it. This is causing them to strengthen their relations with the United States and with each other. China is their greatest security concern but China is and is likely also to remain their largest economic partner.

In military terms, China is not yet an irresistible force, but it has become an immovable object. Enhanced access to Russian and European science, technology, and armament is now accelerating its modernization, including its military modernization. But this just adds to China's increasingly formidable capabilities for innovation. By 2025, it is expected to have a larger scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematical workforce than all member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) combined.

This underscores the need to recognize and respond to China's growing role not just in East Asia

but in a much wider arena. China's "one belt, one road" proposal is by far the largest integrated infrastructure project in human history. It aims to connect every part of the Eurasian landmass to every other and to ensure that all roads, railroads, and other links in this vast space lead to Beijing, placing China at its center. This is a plan to erase borders to every kind of human interaction from Portugal to the Pacific. It is an effort to integrate the major part of the planet by commercial confederation rather than military conquest. It requires a non-military response.

As the AIIB debacle demonstrated, on many issues American allies, partners, and friends now see their interests as dictating support for Chinese positions rather than ours. This is a further illustration of the absence of fixity in international relationships and the increasing fluidity of the new world disorder. A country with which we collaborate on one difference with a third country may very well be our opponent on another issue involving that very same country. Americans need to cultivate the emotional detachment and master the diplomatic agility required to cope with these complexities.

In the protracted struggle between two sides that was the Cold War, the primary task of both American diplomacy and military planning was the prevention of changes in the bipolar status quo, not the resolution of its problems or the achievement of favorable adjustments to it. The United States specialized in the military deterrence of change, not problem solving through diplomacy. U.S. diplomacy came to resemble trench warfare. Its purpose was to hold the line, while occasionally probing the other side's defenses – to recognize that breakthroughs by our side were impossible and to ensure that they were equally impossible for the other side. We have left that world behind. The rigid system of alliances we built to forestall change in the borders between now-vanished spheres of influence needs zero-based reexamination.

Policies directed at managing potential conflict through military deterrence rather than attempting to eliminate the causes of such conflict through negotiations also need reexamination. Deterrence does not remove the risk that differences between nations will degenerate into armed conflict so much as delay such conflict. It contains but perpetuates the danger of war.

During the Cold War, almost every issue was a zero-sum game in which one superpower's

advance was seen as the other's retreat. Given the desire of both superpowers to prevent local disputes from spiraling into combat and possible nuclear war between them, it made sense to respond to almost all challenges by freezing them. The most effective way to do that was by issuing threats that showed willingness to risk escalation. But, with the Cold War behind us, such military deterrence to block change rather than diplomacy aimed at reducing or ending the danger of war is proving counterproductive.

There is no "free world" with borders whose ramparts we Americans must man. There is no longer a global zero-sum game between competing ideological camps or spheres of influence. We can afford to try to solve problems rather than storing up trouble by letting them fester. We have no need to preserve our credibility as the defenders of the status quo against a now non-existent adversary. In the new circumstances, adjustments in the past state of affairs need not signal a loss of American control so much as a demonstration of American power. Instead of reflexively deterring such adjustments, we should be thinking about how to turn them to global and regional advantage.

For example, it would clearly serve U.S. interests to end the south-north confrontation on the Korean Peninsula and, with it, the U.S. troop presence along the 38th Parallel that serves as a tripwire against north Korean attack. What happens between south and north Korea is no longer connected to any global contest. And it does not make sense to preserve the status quo until -- perhaps a decade or more from now -- a hostile north Korea acquires the ability to conduct a nuclear strike against our homeland, which it will, unless things change.

South Korea now has an economy thirty-five times that of the north. A peace treaty between south and north, joined by the United States and China, could end the danger of war in Korea. So, of course, would an implosion of the despicable north Korean regime. Either outcome should be acceptable to Americans. But a negotiated end to the military standoff on the Peninsula would surely be preferable to the violent uncertainties of turmoil in the north. Americans and south Koreans should focus on what sort of relationship the United States might have with a Korea that is at peace with itself, how to achieve such a Korea, and what kinds of relationships Korea should have with China and Japan.

Similarly, a negotiated resolution of the question of Taiwan's relationship to the rest of China would remove a threat to the peace of the Western Pacific and a potential casus belli between China and the United States. The status quo risks an eventual armed clash between competing nationalisms that would devastate Taiwan and adjacent areas of the China mainland, while dragging the United States into war with a nuclear-armed China. It impairs Taiwan's prosperity by inhibiting its participation in regional trade and investment regimes. The emotions it generates constrain cooperation between China and the United States.

U.S. policies posited on sustaining military balance in the Taiwan Strait are unrealistic, infeasible, and counterproductive. Since 1950, the major objective of the United States in the Taiwan area has been to preclude the use of force there. While it's up to Taipei and Beijing to strike a deal both can live with, it's time for the United States to adopt policies that have the effect of encouraging rather than inhibiting or discouraging them from doing so.

For analogous reasons, as I have argued elsewhere, rather than deploying the U.S. armed forces to freeze the situation in the East and South China Seas through military deterrence, the United States should be encouraging the parties to settle their disputes through negotiations.

As a final example, in the Middle East, Israel's continued viability as an internationally supported, democratic, Jewish homeland is in mounting jeopardy as Palestinians are transformed into a desperate people without land. The consequences of the Israel-Palestine conflict for both regional stability and U.S. interests have already been enormous. The potential for catastrophe is growing.

Enabling the continuation of current trends will end in disaster for the United States as well as Israel, the Palestinians, and the region. Americans must now use our leverage to impose incentives for Israel to prefer peaceful coexistence with its Arab neighbors and disincentives for it to continue oppressing and displacing Palestinians. The alternative is tragedy.

The Pax Americana is no more. America's alliances have lost their original purposes as have

most of its client-state relationships. With few exceptions, U.S. allies and protected states are no longer threatened by countries that are also enemies of the United States. Their issues are not those of Americans and American issues are not theirs.

The policies we have inherited on issues like those I have just cited all lead at best to dead ends and at worst to tragedy. All place short-term considerations ahead of likely long-term consequences. None is clearly succeeding. Some are visibly failing. The issues they present are no longer imbedded in zero-sum rivalry at the global level. Their peaceful resolution by the parties would harm no one else and benefit many. Despite the political difficulties of changing long-established policies, all merit rethinking. It is time to take the risk to consider how to discourage the parties to such disputes from carrying on as they have and to incentivize them to take their own actions to mitigate, settle, or shelve their differences.

To sum up: in the new world disorder, America needs national security policies that begin and end by asking what's in these policies for Americans, not what foreign nations long dependent on our protection might think about them. There is no reason for us to continue to shoulder burdens others can now bear. We should build our strength while holding it in reserve. We should act only when it's in our interest to act. If the United States makes itself and the world safer, Americans will be better off. Our credibility – with which we have become so obsessed – will take care of itself.

