

## U.S. Global Engagement and the Military

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Since the end of WWII in 1945, the U.S. has positioned itself as the leader of the international order, the country responsible for the safety and security of the global economic and security “rules of the road.” Today, a fundamental “rebalancing” of the global order is underway. In the face of major shifts in the distribution of power and clear challenges to its supremacy, the U.S.’s global leadership is in doubt. Economic shifts, the erosion of the democratic/free market model, and the “rebalancing” of power - including military power- among nations pose major dilemmas for U.S. policymakers and the public. How should the U.S. redefine its global engagement, its national security needs, and the role and missions of its military in this changing order?

For decades, policymakers in Washington have characterized the U.S. as the inevitable leader of the global system and guarantor of stability and security. The U.S. has been seen, to quote former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, as an “exceptional” and “indispensable” nation. Today, U.S. leadership is in doubt and many nations are concerned what an “America First” national security strategy will mean for the international order. As the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) put it in 2012: “[W]ith the rapid rise of other countries, the ‘unipolar moment’ is over and Pax Americana – the era of American ascendancy in international politics that began in 1945 – is fast winding down.”

The size, health and capabilities of the U.S. economy have been seen as the source of its diplomatic and military strength since 1945. Yet, today, no one nation can claim to dominate the global economy, which is becoming larger and more interconnected as different players rise. The U.S. is a debtor nation today and corporations that were one identifiably American are increasingly independent global actors. China’s economy is as large as that of the U.S., in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) and will surpass the U.S. in absolute size within the next decade.

The core U.S. values of democracy and free markets (soft power) are no longer on the march. The tidal wave of democracy, which was expected to spread around the world with the end of the Cold War, has receded with a turn toward authoritarian government in Russia, Hungary, Turkey, Thailand and Philippines. The democratic uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring are but a memory in every Middle Eastern country but Tunisia. The failure of the U.S. efforts to bring about democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan make it clear that regime change carried out by U.S. military intervention does not guarantee democracy.

Military power is the one remaining index of global power where the U.S. appears to retain dominance. It is the only military that has global logistics, basing infrastructure, transportation, communications and intelligence. It has a large credible nuclear deterrent force at sea, on land and in the air. It also has deep, extensive relationships with other militaries, primarily through arms sales and security assistance programs globally. In 2014, the U.S. accounted for over half of all arms sales agreements in the world, or more than \$36 billion dollars and \$25 billion in security assistance programs, such as military training. Yet, U.S. global dominance may be, in part, illusory. Military rebalancing is taking place around the world as many countries are seeking new sources of arms, developing their own military capabilities, or changing their security posture to reflect the changes occurring globally.

There is a debate on the future role of the U.S. military and its global engagement missions. One strategy envisions universal preeminence and American hegemony. Another focuses on multilateralism and fostering alliances, while another emphasizes unilateral restraint. President Trump’s “America First” national security strategy argues for a new assertive nationalism, which may portend a new isolationism, as the U.S. limits its military engagements to only those areas of the world which directly impact U.S. interests.