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# Recalibrating America's Global Security Role

Today's global security environment is fraught with an array of dangers including Islamist extremism, irregular warfare, nuclear proliferation, and fragile states. Military power may, in concert with other instruments of statecraft, be indispensable for grappling with these complex international challenges. But which actors and institutions have the political will and military capacity to address these risks?

Patrick M. Cronin, Katrin Heuel\*

As noted German journalist Josef Joffe and other commentators have written, only the United States – loathed as it may be in some quarters today – is in a category of one when it comes to global military capabilities. British historian Sir Michael Howard reached the same conclusion, when he wrote “The rest of us still need to accept that the United States is the only nation that has both the capacity and the will to project military power when it is needed to maintain order in what is still a very turbulent world.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the United States has had difficulty in translating its power into influence, in part because in recent years it has often been perceived as contributing to instability more than resolving it.

## The Cost of Preponderance

Although some may see America's military preponderance more as a liability than an asset, the inescapable fact is that in 2006 the United States spent 50 percent more on defense than China, Japan, India, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK combined. The total Department of Defense budget for fiscal year 2007 amounts to more than \$600 billion to date, when one adds supplemental funding related mostly to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Nor is this discrepancy in levels of defense expenditure likely to change in the foreseeable future. Indeed, U.S. defense spending next year should easily surpass this year's total, given the \$483 billion budget for regular operations and a \$142 billion supplemental request for current operations.<sup>3</sup>

The United States is not merely the world's pre-eminent military spender; it is also the leading contributor when it comes to deploying “boots on the ground” in conflict and peacekeeping zones. In addition to the more than 165,000 troops deployed to Iraq, the United States also had more than 23,400 troops deployed in Afghanistan

and other hotspots in 2006 – even before the recent surge in Iraq. The next highest contributors – European countries such as the UK (with more than 14,300 troops), France (nearly 10,000), and Germany (more than 8,500) – provide troops in greater numbers to peacekeeping missions but, with the exception of the UK, far fewer to the most contested conflict zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, many of these forces, such as those in Afghanistan, are confined to more permissive environments

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rather than the centre of the fighting. Other countries, especially from South Asia, contribute large numbers of troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions (e.g., India provided more than 8,900 troops to UN missions in 2006), but few deploy the kind of front-line combat forces that seem to be in such short supply today.<sup>4</sup>

These numbers provide some empirical evidence to support the claims that the United States continues to be the dominant military power on the international stage. But dominance is not what it used to be; the ability of military power to address

modern security challenges is open to debate, and America has had a difficult time translating its preponderance into influence. There is a correlation between the recent diminution of U.S. influence and its declining levels of support, as indicated in numerous polling data. For instance, according to a survey released by the Ger-

**The ability of military power to address modern security challenges is open to debate.**

man Marshall Fund of the United States in September 2007, support for U.S. leadership in world affairs has, since 2002, decreased by 30 percent from 68 per cent down to 38 per cent in Germany, 26 percent in Italy and 22 percent in Britain.<sup>5</sup> Factors attributed to causing this decline include a series of issues associated with America deviating from broadly accepted liberal Western values, including allegations of secret CIA prisons, the war in Iraq, and

<sup>1</sup> Michael Howard, “Keeping Order in a Global Society,” in *Liberation or Catastrophe: Reflections on the History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 197. See also Josef Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: Norton, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Pat Towell, Stephen Daggett, and Amy Belasco, “Defense: FY2008 Authorization and Appropriations,” CRS Report for Congress, updated September 17, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> “Defense: FY2008 Authorization and Appropriations,” *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers taken from “The Military Balance 2007” (London: Routledge 2007).

<sup>5</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, “Transatlantic Trends,” at [www.transatlantic-trends.org](http://www.transatlantic-trends.org), accessed on September 21, 2007.

**Table 1: Defence spending by the US, China, India, Russia and the EU 4 (France, Germany, Italy, and UK), 1997–2007** (In US Billions)

	1997	2001	2006	2007*	Total 2001–2007
United States	272	304	535	611	3157
EU 4 (France, Germany, Italy, and UK)	115.9	98.6	153.6	165.1	918
Japan	40.9	40.3	41.1	40.7	294
China (official budget)	9.7	17	35.3	44.9	194
India	12.8	15.5	22.3	21.7	133
Russia	64	7.5	24.9	32	116

**Source: “Military Balance,” 1998–2007. Numbers are rounded.**

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\*The 2007 numbers represent estimates. Except for the following countries, the numbers for 2007 are taken from “Military Balance 2007.” **USA:** Gordon Adams, Iraq's Sticker Shock, *Foreign Policy*, Mar/Apr 2007, Issue No.159, p. 34; **China:** Associated Press, “China says defence budget authentic, hotline with US military likely,” June 2, 2007, at <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/june-2007/china-says-budget-authentic-hotline-likely>, accessed on July 7, 2007; **India:** Associated Press, “US, India, China to dominate Asia-Pacific defense meet in Singapore,” May 31, 2007, at <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/may-2007/us-india-china-to-dominate-defense-meet>, accessed on July 7, 2007.



Aircraft carriers are important assets in the United States's global security role. This F/A-18 C of Strike Fighter Squadron 37 belongs to the carrier USS Harry S. Truman currently conducting maritime security operations in the Persian Gulf.

Photo: Jürg Kürsener

concerns about human rights at the U.S. detention camp at Guantanamo Bay. Today, only slightly more a third (36 percent) of all Europeans thinks U.S. leadership in world affairs is desirable; a majority (58 percent) of Europeans regards it as undesirable.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Pew Research Center polling found that, out of 47 countries surveyed, 26 have a less favorable image of the United States today than several years ago.<sup>7</sup> A third poll suggests that increasing numbers of Europeans see the United States as part of the problem of international security rather than identifying the United States as the solution to today's challenges. The June 2007 Harris Research survey for the *Financial Times* found that 32 percent of the respondents in five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK) regard the United States as a bigger threat than any other state.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, only 17 percent identified Iran as the biggest threat.<sup>9</sup>

In short, the United States is incapable on its own of achieving its desired security results, not least because of the recent rupture to its moral legitimacy amongst some of its closest allies, especially in Europe. These developments have left America

### The United States is incapable on its own of achieving its desired security results.

behind the curve when it comes to building effective military coalitions, forging an international political consensus, and deterring or confronting complex adversaries. As Michael Howard observes, "American power is indispensable for the preservation of global order, and as such it must be recognised, accommodated, and where possible supported. But if it is to be

Table 2: Contributions to Peacekeeping Missions

# Country	Total Ground Forces (Active)	TOTAL Ground Forces deployed	Total Non-UN	TOTAL UN	Percentage of troops deployed relative to country's total ground forces (rounded)
1 United States	782,607	192,920	192,870	50	25%
2 United Kingdom	104,980	14,159	13,870	289	13%
3 France	133,500	10,349	8,475	1,874	6%
4 India	1,100,000	8,921	0	8,921	8%
5 Germany	160,794	8,785	7,791	994	5%
6 Italy	112,000	7,682	6,070	1,612	7%
7 China, PR	1,600,000	1,483	0	1,483	14%
8 Russia	395,000	3,580	3,365	215	0.9%
9 Japan	148,300	0	0	0	0.8%

Source: "Military Balance 2007"

Numbers for UN and UN-deployments for 2006 as listed in Military Balance 2007.

effective, it needs to be seen and legitimized as such by the international community."<sup>10</sup> Clearly the United States cannot be influential when so many of its allies see it as the world's principal threat to global peace.

### Questions About U.S. Sustainability

Of course, even when a new U.S. administration achieves power in 2009, it will require more than repairing the damage to America's tarnished international image to create effective military and security responses to future challenges. There is, after all, good reason to ponder the sustainability of American expenditures on defense and security. The degree to which the United States has taken a kinetic or military approach to post-9/11 security has been expensive. The so-called "war on terror" cost the United States more than 600 billion dollars between 2001 and 2007.<sup>11</sup> Others have labelled Iraq a "billion dollar war" so far. Budget analyst Gordon Adams calculates that the United States will have spent \$3,204 billion on defence since 2001.<sup>12</sup> Although some analysts may be satisfied to argue that historically, the United States can easily afford to spend more than 3 or 4 percent of its gross domestic product on defense, they seldom factor in the onset of a retiring baby boom generation that will create a large increase in fixed pension and health budgets.

Another issue that casts doubt on the sustainability of America's current defense posture is that U.S. forces, especially its ac-

### U.S. forces, especially its active and reserve ground forces, are stretched to the limit.

tive and reserve ground forces, are stretched to the limit. Even though few believe the United States has sufficient numbers of ground forces, as well as sufficient numbers

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The Pew Global Project Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 4 – Nation Survey. Global Unease with Major World Powers," June 27, 2007, at [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org), p. 1. The survey covers 47 countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East and was conducted in April and May of the year 2007.

<sup>8</sup> "Europeans See US as Threat to Peace," *Financial Times*, July 1, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Howard, *ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," CRS Research Service, September 22, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Adams, "Iraq's Sticker Shock," *Foreign Policy*, Mar/Apr 2007, Issue No.159, p. 34.

of ground forces properly trained for complex irregular warfare, the United States cannot seem to sustain even its current numbers of troops. U.S. Army policy is to deploy troops into an operational theatre for no more than one year at a time and to allow time between deployments of at least two years for active-duty soldiers. But presently Army units are being deployed in Iraq for longer tours of duty and are being sent back after shorter periods at home than the service's policy calls for.<sup>13</sup> However, to sustain the number of personnel currently deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and related theatres, the Army has had to deploy units for 15 months at a time and units are being returned to the combat areas so quickly that some units' time back home is no longer than their previous deployment.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff identifies fixing the ground forces as priority number one. Admiral Mike Mullen's initial guidance calls for investigating "the true health of our

### New asymmetrical threats call for different kinds of warfighters, mission systems and strategies.

ground forces." He highlights the need for resetting, reconstituting and revitalizing the ground forces: "We must rapidly mitigate the toll our current pace of operations is taking on them, our equipment, and our ability to respond to other crises and contingencies. We must recognize that new



Strategic bombers such as this B-2 from 509th Bomb Wing are important instruments for the political-military leadership of the United States of America. This stealth aircraft is refuelling at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, on its way to Guam.

Photo: US DoD

asymmetrical threats call for different kinds of warfighters, mission systems and strategies."<sup>15</sup> Because both U.S. interests and international order hinge on an effective American global security role, U.S. Armed Forces must be prepared to operate across a range of different missions, both conventional and unconventional, and ongoing conflicts are taking a toll on a finite fighting force.

America has undeniably lost influence in the past five years. Support for the United States leadership on security issues has plummeted in Europe, the Middle East and other parts of the world. Even American

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power, while still unsurpassed, is heavily leveraged, with its armed forces stretched to meet commitments to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and wondering how to sustain the heightened tempo of operations for a "long war." But if America were not able to provide a leading role in redressing future major challenges to world order, which country or set of countries or institutions would be able to take decisive action in a crisis? Unfortunately, the alternatives range from nonexistent to problematic.

### Alternative Centers of Power

Europe is the most obvious alternative power center, and the current heads of

government in Berlin, Paris and London have hinted at a reinvigorated Europe with some fresh ideas and in some cases bold expressions about the role that European

### Europe is the most obvious alternative power center.

nations, both individually and as part of the European Union, can play in addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. With his mandate for change and proto-American tendencies, Nicolas Sarkozy appears to have French power on the Continent working in alignment with rather than in competition to American power, perhaps for the first time since the creation of the Fifth Republic.

### France appears as serious as the United States in averting Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, France appears as serious as the United States in averting Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons. French President Nicolas Sarkozy has pointed out the catastrophic choice between "an Iranian bomb or bombing Iran," and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner suggested that the international community should prepare for the worst – the possibility of war with Iran. At the same time, Britain remains focused on the long-haul in Afghanistan (although not necessarily in Iraq) and Germany has steadily enhanced its role

### Germany has steadily enhanced its role in international security.

in international security under Chancellor Merkel to include support for peacekeeping in Africa. While a common security and defense policy, spearheaded by a rapid reaction force, remains problematic

<sup>13</sup> Jim Garamone, "Change in Deployment Policy Aims to Provide Predictability," American Forces Press Service, April 11, 2007, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?n=32774>, accessed on October 2, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> "Defense: FY2008 Authorization and Appropriations," *ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>15</sup> Admiral M.G. Mullen, *CJCS Guidance for 2007–2008* (Washington, D.C.: The Pentagon, 1 October 2007), p. 3.



**A short time after 9/11 the United States sent military forces into Afghanistan to fight at one source of terrorism. Here members of C Company, 1st/32 Battalion, 10th Mountain Division are crossing the Pech River during a mission in Afghanistan.**

Photo: US DoD

for the EU, President Sarkozy has expressed a refreshing attitude to the effect that the transatlantic alliance requires overcoming past competition about a strong European pillar and instead concentrate on making the EU more compatible with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); white papers to be completed in spring of this year may be early indicators of how far this spirit can be translated into future capability and action.

For all of the concern that Europe lacks a serious military intervention capability, Europe manages to deploy almost half of the number of forces abroad as the United States with less than half of the defense spending. Looking at the European budgets in 2006, the four European countries

## Europe lacks a serious military intervention capability.

France, Germany, Italy, and the UK – who would be the most likely candidates to have the capacity to step in to share the burdens of providing international security – boast a total defence budget of \$153.6 billion. In comparison, China's official defence budget for 2006 was just \$44.9 billion, although allowing for purchasing power parity would more than double that official number. The next highest was that of Japan with \$40.7 billion.<sup>16</sup>

So, although the European powers would be well in position to assume some

Taliban in Afghanistan – is overwhelmingly unpopular. The German Marshall Fund poll showed that, in fact, some 65 percent opposed combat operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan, where NATO leads a 40,000-strong force. Only 31 percent expressed approval.

Russia under Vladimir Putin saw the revival of Moscow's major-power ambition by wielding an energy weapon – including tacit threats to neighboring European

## Russia is partly responding to historical pressures.

countries dependent on Russian gas and oil – as well as shoring up a sagging military and resorting to more short-term realpolitik. Russia is partly responding to historical pressures and also still lashing out in response to a sense of marginalization since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Even so, Russia's willingness to resolve major international security challenges outside of its immediate sphere of influence is called into question by its ambivalence to join Europe, the United States and, to some extent, even China in cooperating on major issues, such as approving a third round of sanctions in response to Iran's disputed nuclear program.

In the long run, many see China's re-emergence as a global power as offering an alternative to diminishing American clout. Even if such a linear transition between great powers were to take place, and assum-



**A M1-A1 Abrams tank of the 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiment moves through the streets of Mosul, Iraq. As part of their global commitment, the United States invaded the country in 2003 to free its population from Saddam Hussein's regime.**

Photo: US DoD

<sup>16</sup> "The Military Balance 2007," *ibid.*



The US armed forces often suffer heavy casualties from mine blasts in Iraq. To reduce the risks during life threatening patrols, the Army is now deploying the new vehicle MRAP which offers much better protection to the crew. Photo: US DoD

ing that China increasingly comes to share Western values embodied in the Enlightenment, certainly for the foreseeable future China is not close to seeking, accepting or receiving the mantle of global leadership on security matters. Its pretensions to global military power remain mostly external interpretations of where China may be heading in the future rather than any declared aspiration on the part of the Chinese Communist Party. China's meteoric rise since Deng Xiaoping opened up China in 1978 has produced impressive economic growth, but progress has also exposed a host of domestic threats from environmental, social, and political causes.

### Many see China's reemergence as a global power.

China's increasing interest in playing a global role far surpasses its political will and even its military capacity to play such a role outside of East Asia. At the same time, China's and Asia's continuing dynamism poses a challenge for how to positively integrate Eastern power into a still predominantly Western security framework.

Other emerging power centers such as India, Brazil, South Africa, Japan, Indonesia and even Iran all are flexing their muscle, but none of these states is able to secure peace in its region on its own and, in the case of Iran, peace may be the furthest objective from the minds of some of its clerical leaders.

As all of this underscores that the United States remains unique in its military prowess. Although the world is more multipolar, or perhaps nonpolar, than it is unipolar, there is still no alternative to the U.S. as the world's leading enforcer or policeman. But

it is dangerous to assume that the United States will undertake international security missions simply because others will not or

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### There is still no alternative to the U.S. as the world's leading enforcer or policeman.

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can not do so. The next U.S. administration may seek greater strategic restraint for a variety of reasons, among others to revitalize the U.S. armed forces; to reduce defense spending at a time of rising social

costs; to encourage other powers to shoulder more burdens; to avoid "another Iraq"; or to avoid providing a counterproductive rallying point for terrorists.

The bottom line is that U.S. defense expenditures and military deployments have not effectively secured U.S., regional or international security. Without more burden-sharing and renewed U.S. influence, it is difficult to see how effective approaches to grappling with the major international security challenges of the day will be possible. And yet future security challenges make it easy to develop dire scenarios, especially when one contemplates the "black swans" of low-probability, high-impact events or developments – such as nuclear terrorism or bioterrorism.

### Recalibrating America's Global Security Role

To preserve an international capability for responding to security threats, the United States will need to recalibrate its power to repair its legitimacy problem, strengthen relations with allies and coalition members, and develop comprehensive solutions to problems beyond the use of force. The war in Iraq has shown the limits

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To resume global leadership it will no doubt require an astute mix of policy instruments.

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Four former strategic ballistic missile submarines of the Ohio-class were recently converted to cruise-missile and Special Operation Forces carriers. They each have 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles aboard and thus offer a unique strike power to the operational U.S. commanders worldwide. Photo: US DoD



Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England (right) and Marine General James E. Cartwright, Vice-Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, watch the successful kill of a satellite from the Command Center at the Pentagon in February 2008. The Standard sea-to-air missile SM-3 was fired from the cruiser USS Lake Erie. Photo: US DoD

**Maritime forces from the United States Navy and Coast Guard (such as these vessels in Bahrain), together with forces from the UK, Australia, France, Pakistan, Germany and others, control the Persian Gulf in order to protect Iraqi oil terminals from terrorist attacks.**

Photo: Jürg Kürsener

of the United States' dominating military strength. Therefore, to resume global leadership it will no doubt require an astute mix of policy instruments, perhaps what Joseph Nye and Richard Armitage refer to as "smart power" – the more effective blending of military and non-military or hard and soft power.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the solution may also be found, not in isolationism and disengagement, but strategic restraint, of managing disorder rather than striving to solve so many of the world's ills – especially quickly and at the same time. Preserving deterrence and bolstering containment certainly allowed the United States to preserve over decades during the Cold War, and analogous approaches may be applicable to the conflict, terrorism and proliferation challenges marring this century's security environment. Pre-emption and regime change will be more, rather than less costly if they are attempted as anything but policies of last resort and, even then, in concert with others.

Another path toward rebuilding U.S. influence is by concentrating on common interests without assuming they provide as much cohesion as the Cold War Soviet threat. As Anne Applebaum of the *Washington Post* has noted: Although the "Transatlantic Survey" of the German Marshall Fund has shown that the faith in the United States by Europeans has weakened, "their perceptions of potential threats are growing ever more similar to ours ... we all worry about ... international terrorism, a nuclear Iran, global epidemics – in almost equal measure."<sup>18</sup> Hence the task for the

<sup>17</sup>Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye, CSIS Commission on Smart Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies, at <http://www.csis.org/smart-power>, accessed on October 2, 2007.

<sup>18</sup>Anne Applebaum, "Why they don't like us," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2007.





**Strategic mobility for U.S. armed forces is an integral part of the national military strategy, including naval and air assets. The C-17 Globemaster II strategic transport aircraft is such an asset. Here a number of C-17s are de-iced at McChord Air Force Base.**

Photo: US DoD



**As part of its deterrence strategy, the United States still keeps a number of nuclear ballistic missile submarines in its inventory. Here crew members of the ballistic missile submarine USS Louisiana (SSBN 743) screen the surface through their binoculars.**

Photo: US DoD

United States lies in the challenge to reconstitute the faith in its leadership it has so dramatically lost over the last four years.

Third, the U.S. should work to restore good will on a variety of issues and through adroit statecraft and diplomacy. This is not to say it will be easy to replenish the good-will deficit. However, the next U.S. administration will receive credit for not having attacked Iraq, and just as President Sarkozy was able to change the French tone towards relations with the United States in very short order, so, too, the next U.S. president should be able to usher in a new spirit of cooperation with Europe and other international partners. The next administration

**The U.S. should work to restore good will on a variety of issues and through adroit statecraft and diplomacy.**

should be able to regenerate trust in the United States by demonstrating more sensitivity to liberal Western values, supporting established institutions and the rule of law, and actively addressing non-traditional security challenges such as global climate change, resource scarcity and global poverty.

However difficult it may be for the United States to recalibrate its global security role, the alternatives are far more costly. Perhaps the only certainty is that it will be difficult to preserve and enforce the peace in the decade ahead: whether over a new crisis in the Balkans related to Kosovo's independence; whether in the Persian Gulf related to Iran's nuclear program; whether in the Middle East over Israeli-Palestinian security; whether in South Asia related to a rejuvenated Al Qaeda sanctuary in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas; whether it is over any or all of these issues, the need for the United States to retain influence through engagement, restraint and cooperation is vital. It is equally vital not just for the United States to work with capable partners in the international community, but to be able to count on them to share responsibilities for them, too. ●