More than a quarter century after the end of the Cold War, the debate continues on the appropriate American grand strategy to succeed containment. Despite widespread consensus on American core interests, there is little progress on what specific policy objectives and tools will maximize those interests. We argue that the lack of progress to date stems from a more basic disagreement about how the world works. Specifically, different groups within the debate rely on differing international relations theories: liberalism and realism. Those theories inform beliefs regarding how far away the United States is from an “optimal strategy,” or, alternatively, how best to reach the Pareto frontier, given American interests. We demonstrate that this framework can best identify competing schools of grand strategy, where and why they disagree, and the degree to which those disagreements can be resolved through empirical tests. In this way, our paper both maps and presents ways to advance the current debate regarding U.S. grand strategy.
What is America’s role in the world? This question is at the heart of scholarly debates on American grand strategy. After multiple inconclusive wars in the past fifteen years and ongoing challenges to the U.S.-led order in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, this question is of central importance. Many argue the election of President Donald Trump signals a radical policy reorientation (e.g., Drezner, 2017; Kahl and Brands, 2017; Saunders, 2016). At this critical juncture it is vital for scholars to critically evaluate the competing grand-strategic positions that seek to enhance America’s national interest.

Numerous scholars have contributed to our understanding of contemporary U.S. grand strategy. Yet, there is little consensus on either the basic contours of the scholarly debate, or what will best serve American interests. Hence, it is difficult for scholars to inform public debate without systematic evaluation of the tradeoffs associated with competing grand strategies.1 The reason for this obscurity is that it is often unclear whether specific policy prescriptions follow different conceptions of what the national interest should be, or disagreements about the evidence supporting competing claims. As a result, debate in which participants frequently talk past one another with little progress in commonplace. That is the major problem this paper seeks to address.

We argue that a more fruitful academic debate focuses on falsifiable claims about how grand strategies would realize a set of outcomes related to U.S. interests, independent of claims of what the national interests should be. Such a debate would in principle have to meet four conditions. First, there must be agreement on the set of interests that American grand strategy seeks to further. Second, the theories that undergird these positions must be clearly identified. Third, scholars must evaluate the internal logic of each side theory and derive testable theoretical

---

1 We recognize that the public and policymakers may choose to disregard scholarship on these issues. Clarifying the academic debate is a necessary, not sufficient, condition to influence the broader public and policy debates. On policymaker views see, for example, Avey and Desch (2014).
predictions. Fourth, these theoretical predictions must be subjected to rigorous empirical tests. Only after these conditions have been met can policy makers effectively evaluate each side’s arguments and update policy based on the weight of the evidence. In its current state, the debate satisfies none of these conditions.

Satisfying these four conditions represents a major undertaking that cannot be addressed in a single paper. The purpose of this paper is more limited in scope: to develop a framework that satisfies the first two conditions. By itself, this is a significant contribution to our understanding because it provides the necessary foundation for future research that can satisfy the final two conditions. Through this approach, we seek to clearly articulate the competing positions, and the conceptual and theoretical foundations on which those positions are based, so that future studies can better evaluate tradeoffs across grand strategies and rigorously test competing claims.

The development of such a framework requires setting aside the normative components of the debate and focusing on how different grand-strategic positions advance a common set of interests. We do so by holding national interests constant to establish a baseline from which to build discrete grand strategy positions. We show that it is possible to identify four major ideal-type grand strategy positions in the academic debate today deductively according to underlying theoretical principles. Conceived this way, it is possible to map the grand strategy debate by examining disagreements about how the world works. Specifically, proponents of various grand strategies draw from different theories of international relations. Two divisions are central. First, we argue that differences in conceptions of power divide the different grand-strategic positions into two overarching camps: those that adopt some variant of balance-of-power realism and those built on hegemonic stability theory (Table 1). This divide has led some scholars to suggest that the grand-strategy debate has collapsed into just two schools (Brands, 2015; Posen, 2014; Rosato and
Schuessler, 2011). However, this dichotomy obscures other important elements of the debate. A focus on only two positions is particularly problematic because much of the debate inside Washington has been over what version of hegemony to adopt, rather than whether to embrace hegemony or not. While there is some variation among those that build upon balance-of-power realism, the larger issue is the conflation of different grand strategies that build on hegemonic stability theory but append additional theories to that base. Thus, the second part of our argument incorporates the role of international and domestic institutions allowing us to explain why the different grand strategy positions that advocate for U.S. hegemony advance diverse policy prescriptions (Table 2). We label these four schools Restraint, Deep Engagement, Liberal Internationalism, and Conservative Internationalism.2

To be sure, others have highlighted how theory shapes thinking on foreign policy and grand strategy. We extend past scholarship, most notably Barry Posen and Andrew Ross’s (1996/97) seminal article, to offer a novel categorization of the contemporary debate that clarifies the sources of disagreement among interests, objectives, and tools in order to improve prospects for moving the debate forward (see also Milevski, 2016:128-9; Snyder, 2004; Walt, 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Power and Grand Strategy Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance of Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

2 Representative examples of each are Posen (2014); Brooks and Wohlforth (2016); Ikenberry (2011a); Nau (2013).
Parsing the contemporary grand-strategy debate according to theoretic priors, while holding national interests the same, is useful for several reasons. First, it provides a general and clear understanding of the grand-strategic landscape at a critical juncture in American history when informed public discussion of foreign policy choices is imperative. Second, our particular deductive approach, by building from theoretic principles, allows the clear identification of four positions in the debate. Previous categorizations of the debate based inductively on policy prescriptions disagreed on the number of distinct camps and the relevant policy differences according to which the categories ought to be drawn. Moreover, our deductive approach puts the emphasis on explaining why a given grand-strategic position favors particular policy prescriptions in a given context, based on how those policies can achieve a set of objectives that advance the national interest. As an example, by categorizing the debate according to a preference for a more or less robust U.S. presence abroad and willingness to use military force, it is difficult to explain why scholars that would be grouped together under that rubric have often been greatly polarized over decisions to intervene abroad, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Likewise, scholars that supported the Iraq invasion often had profound disagreements in other cases. Without focusing the

---

Table 2. Institutions and Grand Strategy Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Institutions Critical to Secure U.S. Interests</th>
<th>International Institutions Critical to Secure U.S. Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Liberal Internationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Deep Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

3 Prominent inductive approaches have resulted in estimates of the number of grand-strategy positions anywhere from two (Posen 2014) to six (Slaughter 2012).
analysis of grand strategy on the theoretical underpinnings of the debate, it is impossible to identify whether the different policy positions stem from underlying intellectual disputes or simply inconsistencies in how theory informs policy preferences.

Third, our framework clarifies the links between theory, interests, objectives, and policy tools. Many studies conflate these concepts. Separating the debate along these conceptual levels adds the precision needed to transform broad visions into falsifiable propositions. Critically, as we noted above, we hold national interests constant and assume that U.S. grand strategy aims to maximize those interests, rather than assuming that each side differs as to what constitutes the national interest. While we acknowledge that there are in fact normative differences over what constitutes national interests, this analytical move allows us to establish a baseline to assess the degree to which grand strategy prescriptions differ according to theoretical disagreements rather than different conceptions of the national interest.

Fourth, this framing will allow future research to focus on identifying the propositions and evidence that can most inform which grand strategic objectives or policy levers can maximize U.S. interests. Scholars can then assess whether alternative policy prescriptions follow from theory and if the causal relationships posited by the theories hold empirically. This will also help clarify when scholars’ policy prescriptions hinge on normative preferences as opposed to theory and evidence. An improved understanding will, at a minimum, help scholars determine where to focus their efforts to avoid debating points that may not be resolvable. Put another way, our approach encourages participants in the grand-strategy debate to consider what (and whether) empirical evidence could change their positions.

We do not seek to demonstrate the superiority of one grand strategy and cannot claim to capture every position on grand strategy. Nor are we able to engage critical efforts to deconstruct
the concept of grand strategy and its place in international relations or security studies, broadly defined. Finally, we cannot engage debates on whether state grand strategies influence actual policy, though a number of recent studies find grand strategy does have real world influence (for example, Mitzen, 2015; Brands, 2014). Our objective is modest: we seek to map the debate and demonstrate how the diverse worldviews influence objectives and specific policy tools that inform a large amount of current grand strategy scholarship. There is variation within each intellectual tradition, but we necessarily gloss over minor disagreements in the interest of outlining grand strategy ideal-types (Posen and Ross, 1996:97).

The rest of this article proceeds in three parts. First, we develop our argument by unpacking the terms we use to characterize the dimensions of the debate. Next, we use this framework to briefly outline four grand strategy positions. We conclude by summarizing major areas of disagreement and ways to advance the debate.

The Framework

In this section, we separate and define the concepts of interests, objectives, and policy tools. Interests are the highest purposes of the state that grand strategy seeks to attain. To achieve their interests, states set objectives, such as preventing a Eurasian hegemon, and utilize specific policy tools, such as alliance commitments or foreign aid, to attain their objectives.

There is considerable disagreement over how to define grand strategy (Milevski, 2016). Contemporary formulations tend to focus on a means-end chain, such as Barry Posen’s (2014, 1984:13) oft-cited definition of grand strategy as a state’s theory of how to create security for itself. Brands (2014:4) reviews multiple definitions, concluding that grand strategy is “the conceptual logic that ensures that [foreign policy] instruments are employed in ways that maximize the
benefits for a nation’s core interests.” We adapt Brands’ definition to the United States, defining grand strategy as the U.S. theory of how it can maximize security, domestic prosperity, and domestic liberty. This definition allows for interests other than security but truncates interests to a set of ‘core’ concerns.

The decision to assume U.S. interests to be constant is controversial, so we unpack the logic in some detail. First, this assumption establishes a baseline for competing grand strategy prescriptions. Without this assumption, it is impossible to isolate the impact of each side’s theoretical assumptions on their prescribed policy prescriptions (Glaser, 2010). Social science tools are ill-suited to assess whether a national interest is normatively appropriate or not. We therefore focus on the theoretical links between specific tools and objectives that advance a clearly specified policy interest (e.g., security). In other words, how variation in worldviews inform disagreements over what objectives and policy levers will best maximize U.S. interests, rather than what those interests should be.

The second virtue in limiting U.S. core interests to security, domestic prosperity, and domestic liberty is that there is general agreement that the United States has historically tended to focus on those interests (Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlfarth, 2012/3:11; Beckley, 2015:24-5; Itzkowitz-Shifrinson and Lalwani, 2014:189). To be sure, there is disagreement on the precise content of these concepts. For instance, domestic liberty has various meanings and the groups of Americans that can claim ‘liberty’ has expanded over time. Yet, as Nau (2013:13-4) notes, “the core classical liberal belief in individual liberty and equality … binds all Americans, conservatives and liberals alike.”

Most current participants to the U.S. grand strategy debate adopt these interests explicitly or implicitly. Generally, those advocating for expansive grand strategies claim prosperity and
liberty alongside security as national interests (e.g., Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016:1; Slaughter, 2012:47-8). Even those favoring a reduced U.S. role assert interests beyond security or argue that their prescriptions will advance U.S. prosperity and liberty. For example, Walt (2015) writes that the “central purpose of U.S. foreign policy is to make Americans safer and richer, and to preserve our political values here at home.” Similarly, Preble (2009) argues that a less activist grand strategy would enhance American security, prosperity, and liberty. Posen (2014:3) defines security to include a state’s power position, which is in turn the “sum total of a state’s capabilities … [including] population size, health, and skill [and] economic capacity of all kinds.” Domestic prosperity thus, finds its way into security.

We assume that the core U.S. interests are the security, prosperity, and liberty of the American people, not the globe. This distinction is often misunderstood or poorly specified. As Posen notes, advancing “the economic welfare or liberty of people abroad” may enhance U.S. interests, but that need not be the case. As we show below, much of the grand strategy debate centers on the presence or absence of links between advancing stability, welfare, and freedom abroad with the wellbeing of the United States at home.

We define grand-strategy objectives as the real-world outcomes a state seeks to achieve in order to advance its interests. Objectives are instrumental to interests: officials’ choice of objectives depends on their theory of what objectives will best maximize U.S. interests given internal and external constraints. For example, some argue that maintaining stability in Eurasia is both affordable and necessary for attaining U.S. interests, while others argue that it is too costly or unnecessary.

---

Finally, policy levers or tools are the instruments states employ to realize objectives. A state’s choice to invest in its diplomatic corps or military forces, or its decisions on where to deploy military assets, are levers that can influence the probability of realizing some objective and thus furthering an interest. Moreover, just as objectives are instrumental to interests, the specific policy levers a state adopts are a means to realizing objectives.

We restrict our analysis to four specific policy levers: military force structure, security commitments, military deployments, and the use of force. We recognize that states can rely upon additional grand strategy tools. We nevertheless focus on military tools for several reasons. While much of the contemporary (and historical) grand strategy debate focuses on the role of military power; there is often less disagreement about other policy tools. Numerous scholars across different grand strategy positions support foreign aid, open trade, and diplomatic engagement with the world. The most intense schisms involve the deployment of military forces and extension of alliance commitments. This is not surprising; extending alliance commitments, deploying troops, fighting, and acquiring the military capabilities to allow such actions involve significant political, economic, moral, and human costs. There is also a practical concern: no article can focus on every U.S. policy tool. Limiting the focus allows us to more specifically describe and define the difference between grand strategies.

**Four Grand Strategies**

We outline each grand strategy ideal-type in this section. We focus on the underlying theory and its relation to objectives and policy levers. Table 3 summarizes the arguments along each dimension.
Table 3. Grand Strategy Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Anchor</th>
<th>Restraint</th>
<th>Deep Engagement</th>
<th>Liberal Internationalism</th>
<th>Conservative Internationalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance-of-power realism</td>
<td>Hegemonic Stability Theory</td>
<td>HST + Neoliberalism</td>
<td>HST + Classical Liberalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objectives

- Regional Priorities
  - Balance in core
  - Stability in core
  - Global stability
  - Global stability

- Peer competitor
  - Prevent
  - Prevent
  - Incorporate into institutions
  - Prevent

- Globalization
  - Allow
  - Promote
  - Promote
  - Promote

- Institutions
  - Indifferent
  - Promote
  - Promote
  - Wary

- Counterterrorism
  - Minimal
  - Moderate
  - Expansive
  - Expansive

- Counter proliferation
  - Minimal
  - Expansive
  - Expansive
  - Expansive

- Human rights promotion
  - Minimal
  - Expansive
  - Expansive
  - Moderate

- Democracy Promotion
  - Minimal
  - Expansive
  - Expansive
  - Expansive

Policy Levers

- Commitments
  - Reduce
  - Maintain
  - Expand
  - Expand (~4% GDP)

- Force Structure
  - Reduce (~2.5% GDP)
  - Maintain (~3% GDP)
  - Expand (~3-4% GDP)
  - Expand (~4% GDP)

- Troop Deployments
  - Offshore
  - Forward in core
  - Global
  - Global

- Use of Force
  - If balancing fails
  - When core threatened
  - Multilateral when objectives threatened
  - Unilateral when objectives threatened

Restraint

THEORETICAL ANCHOR. Balance-of-power realism provides the intellectual foundation for the Restraint, or what some label “offshore balancing,” grand strategy. It makes several core assumptions: the international system is anarchic, states cannot fully know the intentions of others, and states want to survive. “Because there is no government to protect them and they cannot know the intentions of others,” write Rosato and Schuessler (2011:85), “great powers must ultimately provide for their security.” The efforts of one state to make itself more secure can create insecurity for others, the basis of the security dilemma that plays an important role in most Restraint formulations (Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, 1997). Systemic constraints and the distribution of power are thus the key causal factors, while international and domestic institutions play a marginal

role in shaping international outcomes. Alongside, but distinct from, the focus on the international system, Restraint argues that nationalism remains a powerful motivating force (Posen 2014).

The desire to survive alongside nationalist impulses imbues societies with a strong incentive to resist outside influence. This leads to the key proposition that, over time, states will tend to balance rather than bandwagon. States with sufficient means will work to block or undermine the opponent by building up their own military capabilities, allying with states to oppose rivals, or militarily challenging the opponents’ interests. Efforts to project power and counterbalancing will occasionally lead to spirals of hostility resulting in arms races and conflict. There is disagreement about which behaviors will provoke balancing, but there is consensus that the more geographically proximate and active a state is, the more likely its actions will provoke reactions by capable states (Walt 1987, 2006; Mearsheimer 2001; Posen 2014; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016). The emphasis on ability to balance is critical. Weak states not directly targeted by a great power may be able to do little and simply bandwagon until they find themselves directly in a great power’s crosshairs (Mearsheimer, 2001:162-5). The basic balancing logic can extend to non-state actors as well, which will use asymmetric strategies (e.g., terrorism) to challenge the great power policies they oppose (Pape, 2006).

Many (e.g., Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlfforth, 2012/3) link Restraint to defensive realism. Yet the U.S. position allows offensive realists, most notably Mearsheimer, to advocate a policy of restraint. The offensive/defensive realist divide is therefore narrowly applied to U.S. grand strategy. Offensive realism predicts that states will seek to expand when the benefits outweigh the costs. The United States’ position as the only major power in the Western Hemisphere provides a high level of security and prosperity. The costs associated with U.S. activism therefore outweigh the minimal benefits in the absence of a potential hegemon abroad.
OBJECTIVES. The focus on balancing and nationalism directly informs Restraint’s contention that a short list of objectives best advances American interests. First, Restraint focuses on preventing any major threats to the American homeland. Second, the United States must prevent the emergence of a hegemon in Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Persian Gulf. Preventing a hegemon in Europe or Asia is necessary because such a rival could utilize that region’s power potential to endanger U.S. territory or block U.S. commerce. A hegemon in the Persian Gulf could endanger energy flows, harming the U.S. economy by raising the global price of key commodities (Rosato and Schuessler, 2011:805-7, Posen, 2014; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016). Finally, the United States must deny another state from commanding the global commons of the “sea, space, and air” (Posen, 2003:7-8). If others command the commons, then the United States might find its homeland vulnerable to attack. In the long run, this could also undermine the U.S. economy.

Restraint looks at the world today and sees few states capable of threatening these objectives. “Unipolarity and U.S. hegemony will likely be around for some time,” writes Posen (2003:6; Walt, 2006:31; though see Layne, 2012). Distance and the American nuclear arsenal deter any major assaults. There is no state that can unite European or Asian power-potential in the near-term, though China may be able to do so in the medium- to long-term. Preventing the emergence of a hegemon in the Middle East requires minimal U.S. investment because very weak powers populate the region. The United States can maintain a technological lead to ensure its naval, air, and space capabilities can prevent loss of access to the global commons (Gholz and Press, 2006; Posen, 2014; Friedman and Logan, 2012; Shifrinson and Lalwani, 2014). Global markets are robust and not easily disrupted (Gholz and Press 2001, 2010).

Restraint does not identify regional stability as a grand strategy objective. The United States “should not commit U.S. military forces for that purpose” of “promoting peace” write
Mearsheimer and Walt (2016:73; also Posen, 2014; Rosato and Schuessler, 2011; Betts 2012). First, instability abroad will not directly affect American security. Second, the tendency to balance a nationalist impulse means that others will contest U.S. efforts to impose regional stability, potentially generating instability by creating security dilemmas with fearful regional powers. Third, regional actors will tend to balance other regional actors. This may lead to conventional arming, the formation of new alliances, and possibly even nuclear proliferation. This type of instability does not directly threaten American interests, though, making U.S. management unnecessary.

The reason U.S. allies do not behave this way today is because the United States supplies security. In Posen’s (2014:35-50) words, these states are “cheap-riding” while the US foots the bill. Worse, the United States may be creating a moral hazard. Reducing objectives would minimize the likelihood the United States ends up fighting others battles. As other states provide for their own security, the United States can save tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars that will increase U.S. prosperity and liberty without sacrificing security (Parent and MacDonald, 2011). There may be indirect benefits as well. As other states have to invest more in ‘guns’ relative to ‘butter,’ they will no longer be able to grow as quickly relative to the United States. If other regions became slightly less stable, the United States might even appear more attractive to foreign investment.

Restraint does not consider eradicating terrorism a grand strategy objective. Restraint takes “seriously the threat from international terrorism,” notes Desch (2007/8:40), but it “also put[s] it into perspective.” (See also Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016:77). An activist policy can actually provoke backlash. As Pape (2010) argues, “U.S. ground forces often inadvertently produce more anti-American terrorists than they kill.” Most of the time, terrorist groups have local objectives; It
is best to let local actors handle them and pay the associated costs. Terrorist acquisition of a nuclear weapon would be, in Mearsheimer’s (2014:12) words, “a game changer … [but] the chances of that happening are virtually nil.” States are unlikely to allow nuclear weapons or fissile material to fall into the hands of a terrorist organization and risk retaliation (Walt, 2006:224-40; Mueller, 2010). The United States can secure stockpiles and prevent accidents by sharing safeguard technology and best practices, rather than relying on military tools.

Although few Restraint proponents advocate for nuclear proliferation, most do not consider nonproliferation a grand strategy objective at all. They do so by adopting the nuclear optimist position that proliferation is a form of balancing behavior that may reduce conflict (Sagan and Waltz, 2013). So long as the United States maintains its nuclear arsenal, deterrence will prevent nuclear attacks. Moreover, Restraint argues that “U.S. military hegemony is as likely to encourage nuclear proliferation, as states balance against us, as to prevent it” (Sapolsky et al., 2009:91; also Posen, 2014:31, 61; Walt, 2006:239-40; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016:79). Some proliferation may even enhance stability; proliferation to wealthy allies capable of managing their arsenal will “enhance their security and dampen their desire for American guarantees” Saposky et al., 2009:91; Sapolsky and Leah, 2014). Thus, Posen (2014:167) can accept that under Restraint “some proliferation would be tolerated.” This may cause the U.S. to lose some power projection ability, which is not a problem because the Restraint position prefers that the United States do less in the current international environment.

Restraint does not count democracy promotion or humanitarian intervention among its objectives. Democracy promotion is difficult and unnecessary for U.S. interests. This is not to say that Restraint opposes democracy or foreign aid. Rather, proponents believe that it is inappropriate for grand strategy. Humanitarian interventions can create failed states, generate havens for
terrorists, and invite diplomatic backlash. The United States can utilize a number of alternative diplomatic and foreign aid initiatives that may save more lives (Valentino, 2011).

POLICY LEVERS.

Restraint seeks to reduce existing U.S. defense commitments, minimize the forward-deployment of troops and frequency of using force, and shrink the U.S. military. However, despite a common theoretical base and set of objectives, individual scholars differ on the scope of the reduction. The broadest divide is between those advocating modest versus major reductions. This reflects diversity in assessing the balance of power, most notably China’s status, preferences for hedging against geopolitical uncertainties, and estimates of domestic political feasibility. While these differences are important, they are outside the shared theoretical framework. For instance, two scholars may disagree on the speed of Chinese growth and therefore offer different policy prescriptions. That gap in prescriptions would narrow as views come into line. We do not, therefore, treat these differences as discrete grand strategies.

Restraint proponents argue that U.S. security commitments and troop deployments can embolden allies and provoke rivals. This can create instability and entrap the United States in issues outside the set of objectives necessary to advance the national interest. Moreover, Restraint acknowledges that U.S. involvement may deter some conflict. Reduced involvement is acceptable because maintaining this stability is not a grand strategy objective. At the extreme, scholars in this group advocate ending nearly all commitments and bringing the troops home (Gholz et al., 1997:17-29; Layne, 2006). More moderate positions (Posen, 2014:90-1, 100-13, 159; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016; Parent and MacDonald 2011; Betts, 2012:37-9) agree on reducing the U.S. role in NATO and Europe where Russian weakness and West European wealth negate the need for U.S. involvement. Air and naval power may remain in the Middle East but commitments
that keep regimes in power would end and “the United States would put boots on the ground in the Middle East only if the local balance of power seriously broke down and one country threatened to dominate the others.” (Mearsheimer, 2008). Only in Asia would sizeable U.S. forces, primarily air and sea, and defense commitments potentially remain in order to hedge against the rise of China.

Restraint’s objectives suggest the United States will rarely use force. It will do so only if a state stands poised to attain hegemony in Europe, Asia, or the Middle East or a state makes a bid to command the commons. The United States will honor those security commitments that remained, but only if its ally was the clear victim of aggression (Walt, 2006:243). Finally, the United States will use minimal force to degrade and contain terrorist organizations with the desire and ability to strike the United States. As Posen (2015:86) argues, “Failing local cooperation, the United States should operate from a distance, with the least amount of force consistent with some success. Small special operations units or air and drone strikes would be the preferred option.” Nor would the United States use force for humanitarian intervention or to promote democracy (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016). The limited U.S. global role allows significant reductions in the current force structure. In particular, force structure would shift to one that privileges the navy and air forces with light, highly mobile ground forces. Rather than withdrawing troops, this is where the largest savings of the Restraint grand strategy are found.

Deep Engagement

THEORETICAL ANCHOR. Hegemonic stability theory provides the underlying principles for Deep Engagement (Gilpin, 1981; Wohlfforth, 1999). This position shares much with what others have labeled “selective engagement” (Art, 2003). By drawing on a separate branch of realism than Restraint, Deep Engagement argues that balancing is not feasible when one state’s material
capabilities far exceed those of its potential competitors. Indeed, states are more likely to bandwagon with rather than balance against the hegemon. Not only is balancing unlikely, but the world is more peaceful and prosperous when there is a preponderance of power (Wohlforth, 2012; Nye, 2012). The hegemon can utilize its superior military and economic tools to provide global public goods, such as regional security, that underwrite a stable international order. The provision of security alleviates regional security dilemmas and deters aspiring powers from seeking to challenge the hegemon’s authority (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016, 89-102). Absent the hegemon, regional balances of power will not form, costly arms races will occur, and the hegemon will find itself embroiled in the conflict and its interests harmed. The clear preponderance of power makes conflicts over prestige unlikely, removing another source of war. Thus, spirals of hostility are unlikely at both the global and regional levels.

The costs of maintaining order are outweighed by the benefits. The costs are low because other states are unlikely to balance. In addition, military spending is unlikely to be a major drain on resources (Norrlof and Wohlforth, 2017). Peripheral wars are a choice rather than a necessity (Brook and Wohlforth, 2016:122-33). The benefits of increased security are augmented by the rise in global prosperity that can enrich the hegemon. Indeed, the hegemon is able to extract enormous privileges from the system (Norrlof, 2010; Beckley, 1997; Mastanduno, 1997). Deep Engagement argues that shaping international institutions facilitates the hegemon’s ability to set the basic rules of the game and lower transaction costs for managing the international system. For instance, the hegemon can use economic institutions to shape the global economic system to its comparative advantage (Mastanduno, 2009). International security institutions allow the hegemon to coordinate with allies to maintain regional stability (Art, 2003:163-5, 247). However, in contrast to Liberal Internationalism, institutions are unlikely to be effective in the absence of a preponderance of
power. Unlike Restraint, Deep Engagement views managing the system as a tool for domestic economic growth (Gilpin, 1981:21).

OBJECTIVES. Deep Engagement shares with Restraint objectives to deter threats to the homeland and global commons. Where it parts company is in seeking to maintain stability and prosperity, rather than simply checking a potential hegemon, in the world’s three key regions: Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Those regions are home to the world’s largest markets and critical energy resources. Thus, Brooks and Wohlforth (2016:1-2) advocate economic globalization, promoting the institutional order, and defending allies and preventing conflict that would threaten the U.S.-led international order.

The underlying theory explains why the United States can and should continue to lead the international order. It can because the United States remains the only superpower even if there are other great powers and, that American position is durable (Wohlforth, 1999:23-5; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008; Beckley, 2015). The United States should because economic and security relations between states will be more stable, which serves U.S. interests. Additionally, without the United States’ hegemony, regional actors will fail to balance a potential peer competitor or maintain stable economic and security relations with one another. This will harm U.S. security and prosperity. Finally, any alternations to the system will necessarily be negative for the United States because it has largely written the rules of the game to reflect its interests and benefits disproportionately from the status quo.

Maintaining a stable, open, and U.S.-led order in the core regions requires that the United States pursue several objectives. First, the United States must oppose the emergence of a regional hegemon that might undermine the U.S.-led order in these regions. Regional actors will not balance effectively against regional challengers without U.S. leadership. Rather, balancing will be ad hoc
and create security competitions that will negatively affect stability. That in turn will harm commerce and pose challenges to U.S. security directly. The best strategy for managing the rise of a peer competitor is to lead and control such balancing efforts. U.S. guarantees help prevent states from bandwagoning with a potential peer competitor and ensure their cooperation in balancing if a rival makes a bid for regional hegemony. Thus, Deep Engagement argues that paying the costs associated with protecting American allies helps to deter and contain potential peer competitors while giving the U.S. leverage over its allies. That leverage minimizes the risk of entrapment (Beckley, 2015).

Second, Deep Engagement seeks to deter and dampen regional security competition in any of the three core regions. Security competition generates negative externalities, such as conventional arms racing, nuclear proliferation, and trade disruption. These then increase the risk of conflict and regional and eventually global instability. Nuclear proliferation that might result from regional security competition is a pernicious threat to both the stability of the international order and U.S. security directly. Deep Engagement adopts nuclear pessimism, which highlights the dangers of nuclear accidents, inadvertent escalation, and loose nuclear weapons, and holds that nuclear weapons inhibit the ability of the United States to manage allies and deter adversaries (Sagan and Waltz, 2013). These dangers outweigh any potentially stabilizing effects of nuclear deterrence.

Third, Deep Engagement aims to protect the United States and its allies from the threat of terrorism and violent domestic instability. However, Deep Engagement does not view terrorist attacks or threats of domestic instability outside of the core regions to be a major threat. For example, the risk of a terrorist attack or civil conflict in sub-Saharan Africa is a smaller concern than in Saudi Arabia or Spain. Deep Engagement might support efforts to prevent failed states,
civil war, ethnic conflict, and humanitarian disasters, but only if such outcomes have the potential to threaten the stability of the international order. Thus, Deep Engagement considers efforts—such as arms sales, training security forces, and perhaps direct intervention—to prevent civil conflict in Saudi Arabia a grand strategy objective not because of the humanitarian costs, but because the internal collapse of Saudi Arabia could cause instability in a core region and undermine the global economy through a dramatic increase in energy prices.

Deep Engagement supports the spread of democracy but does not view this as a grand strategy objective. Indeed, overt democracy promotion can be a costly distraction that undermines support for achieving other U.S. objectives (Art, 2003:46, 69-73, 145; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016:74). Efforts to protect human rights through humanitarian intervention or spread democracy may lead policymakers to “do stupid stuff” by pursuing unnecessary or impossible objectives, squandering resources, and producing negative externalities. This distracts leaders from keeping “their eye on the ball” of pursuing U.S. core grand strategy objectives. As Brooks and Wohlforth (2016:74) write, “disengaging from the strategy’s core commitment is not unnecessarily, but also inadvisable.”

POLICY LEVERS. Deep Engagement seeks to maintain existing alliance commitments and troop deployments, construct a military to meet those requirements, and employ force to maintain the status quo. Alliance commitments and forward deployed troops serve as the backbone of U.S. influence. American ability to shape and defend the international order rests there. Alliances and the presence of troops provide leverage over other states by deterring adversaries and reassuring allies. Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth (2012/3:34) make the point clearly: “The United States’ overseas presence gives it the leverage to restrain partners from taking provocative action. Perhaps more importantly, its core alliance commitments also deter states with aspirations to regional
hegemony from contemplating expansion and makes its partners more secure, reducing their incentive to adopt solutions to their security problems that threaten others and thus stoke security dilemmas.” (See also Wohlfarth, 1999; Art, 2003:8-9, 138-45, 231-2; Art, 2012:15-28; Beckley, 2015). Therefore, arms races, nuclear proliferation, and conflict are all made less likely. To this end, the United States has constructed a vast and far-flung set of commitments that include formal defense pacts with sixty-eight countries that, with the United States, represent 75% of world economic output (Beckley, 2015:7). Alliances such as NATO and security structures in the Middle East and Asia should be continued. “Forward-based, alliance-embedded forces,” argues Art (2003:145), “can react more quickly, be reinforced more effectively, and fight better than forces that have to be introduced into the region from scratch” (see also Art, 2012; Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlfarth, 2012/3:33-40). Moreover, forward deployed forces are necessary to maintain command of the commons and surge U.S. presence in an emergency. Thus, contrary to Restraint, Deep Engagement does not believe U.S. forces can disengage and then reengage easily when a threat emerges. In addition, commitments and presence encourages intelligence sharing and support for fighting terrorism as well as reduce the danger of terrorism and domestic instability. In sum, alliances and forward troop deployment have made U.S. reassurances and threats more credible, increasing U.S. influence and allowing it to deter and compel allies and adversaries alike.

Several costs to which critics point are often overblown. Offsetting arrangements with allies defray many of the costs with deploying troops. In terms of terrorism, U.S. troops may contribute to anti-Americanism but it is hardly the decisive factor (Brooks and Wohlfarth, 2016). Were the United States to come home tomorrow it would not eliminate the terrorist threat or save much money. Regarding entrapment, U.S. alliances are designed to allow the United States
significant freedom to maneuver and tend to give the U.S. more influence over its weaker partners (Beckley, 2015).

Deep Engagement supports the use of military force to protect U.S. alliance commitments, defend access to the global commons, and prevent terrorist attacks against the United States. Military force is a tool to maintain the status quo, not to alter it. Deep Engagement does not support using military force to spread democracy or, except in extreme cases, remove human-rights violators from power. As Brooks and Wohlforth (2016:74) write: “those who advocate ambitious projects to assertively spread democratic liberal principles and foster dramatic improvement in human rights, by the sword if necessary, make the same mistakes as proponents of pulling back; they fail to appreciate the major benefit America derives by sustaining its long-standing grand strategy.”

Deep Engagement seeks to maintain the current U.S. force structure projections made during the end of the Obama administration but is not opposed to modest increases. This level of military structure is necessary to maintain existing commitments and deployments. At the same time, a drastically larger force structure is not necessary because Deep Engagement does not seek to undertake new military missions or commitments beyond the core. This force requires an amount of military spending that is affordable and will likely decrease over time (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; Norrlof and Wohlforth, 2017).

Liberal Internationalism

THEORETICAL ANCHOR. Liberal Internationalism rests on hegemonic stability theory and neoliberal institutionalism. It therefore shares many of the positions with Deep Engagement regarding hegemony, but differs in some key respects. In particular, it depends on what Duncan
Snidal (1985:588-9) terms the “decentralized model” of hegemonic stability, in which it is the hegemon’s “benevolent leadership” more than its coercion of states that ultimately maintains the international order. In other words, the hegemon wins the support of other states for the international order by providing shared benefits rather than enforcing common rules.

Liberal Internationalism’s central characteristic is the creation and maintenance, by the hegemon, of a “rule-based order” built on “rules and institutions that advance collective security and cooperation among democracies,” (Ikenberry, 2009:2). It holds that a stable international order can arise when a hegemon is able and willing to use its power to overcome collective action problems and provide international stability as a public good. However, Liberal Internationalism does not accept that the hegemon's power is sufficient, instead arguing that hegemonic leadership must command legitimacy. That legitimacy rests on the establishment of an order that depends on upholding the interests of the other states in the system, rather than coercing states to adhere to the hegemon’s rules. To accomplish this, the hegemon must tie its own hands by adhering to the same international rules as other states and allowing a role for non-state actors (Ikenberry, 2000, 2011b; Slaughter, 2016:84-6). By constructing effective, relatively flat (as opposed to hierarchical), international institutions, the hegemon restrains its ability to act coercively and enhances the legitimacy and stability of the order. Institutions can facilitate cooperation by reducing transaction costs, monitoring and enforcing agreements, and overcoming collective action problems. Ultimately, a thick web of institutions can “lock-in” the order and allow it to outlive the hegemon’s inevitable decline. Rising great powers can be successfully co-opted into supporting and perpetuating the international order (Keohane, 1984; Ikenberry, 2000, 2011b). This helps overcome the nefarious consequences of anarchy touted by realists (Jackson and Nexon 2009:923-4).
Liberal IR theories of economic and domestic-political underpinnings of international cooperation strongly inform the international order Liberal Internationalism advocates (Jackson and Moravcsik, 1997). In particular, Liberal Internationalism argues that the promotion of open and free trade (economic liberalism) and the global spread of democracy (republican liberalism) are critical pillars of a stable and peaceful international order. Thus, as Slaughter (2009:105), former director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, argues the “origins of international conflict and cooperation lie in the political and economic micro-foundations of individual societies.” Democratic states are unlikely to go to war with one another and can cooperate to form security communities (Lipson, 2003). Market democracies will engage in the globalization project that pushes for the free flow of goods, services, and ideas across borders. This type of economic interdependence not only promotes peace by raising the costs of conflict, enhancing security, it also enriches societies enhancing prosperity.

OBJECTIVES. The core objective of Liberal Internationalism is the maintenance and expansion of a U.S.-led international order based on liberal characteristics and embedded within a dense network of international institutions (Ikenberry and Slaughter, 2005:14-6; Slaughter, 2012:46-7). As Slaughter (2016:77) puts it, the “next U.S. president should adopt a grand strategy of building and maintaining an open international order based on three pillars: open societies, open governments, and an open international system.” Liberal Internationalism holds that U.S. economic and military supremacy and American global engagement, at least over the near- and medium-term, can effectively maintain stability, reduce security risks to the United States, and create a favorable international order. However, unlike Deep Engagement, Liberal Internationalism maintains that the United States must constrain itself in order to uphold the international legitimacy it requires to wield its power without challenge from other states,
especially fellow democracies. Critically, Liberal Internationalism parts company with Deep Engagement by considering the incorporation of liberal elements into the international order not just desirable, but the very bedrock of U.S. grand strategy. Liberal Internationalism shares with Conservative Internationalism the belief that a strong and globally-engaged military is a core tool in advancing human rights, democracy, and free markets, and that doing so should be core grand strategy objectives.

Liberal Internationalism’s support for U.S. military power is time-limited. It considers the end of unipolarity and the rise of one or more rival great powers as inevitable and opposes efforts to contain a rising peer (Ikenberry, 2008, 2011b). Instead, it argues that by building a thick web of international institutions, the United States can co-opt potential rivals into the existing order and provide them a stake in maintaining it. Put another way, Liberal Internationalism argues that the emergence of the United States as the unipole after the end of the Cold War has created a unique historical moment and an unparalleled opportunity for the United States to “lock-in” an international order amenable to its interests (Ikenberry, 2000:55-6). However, whereas Deep Engagement envisions the opportunity in terms of the continued dominance of the United States, Liberal Internationalism sees it as a window of opportunity. During this window, the United States should use its power for institution-building, advancing democratic institutions and norms, promoting free markets, and pulling down barriers to international trade—albeit while acting within the rules of the order it constructs. Institutions, they argue, are “sticky.” Once states become enmeshed within a sufficiently thick rule-based, liberal international order, the benefits this order provides and the costs of dismantling it to establish a new order will create powerful incentives for future great powers to maintain rather than overthrow it (Ikenberry 2000:65). That order can
outlive U.S. primacy and allow the United States to continue to reap the benefits after its relative decline.

Liberal Internationalism holds that institutions can provide other states with benefits in the form of global public goods like security and stability. Institutions also reassure other states that U.S. leadership is benign by constraining U.S. behavior. Although the United States may possess the military and economic power to violate the institutional rules, doing so carries the cost of undermining its international legitimacy. Thus, other states buy into the order because they receive benefits and the costs, in the form of an unconstrained hegemon, are low (Ikenberry, 2011).

Liberal Internationalism also promotes the advance of other liberal characteristics. In particular, it considers the global spread of democracy as a keystone to global stability and central grand strategy objective. Liberal Internationalism therefore advocates protecting established and nascent democracies, even to the point of providing military support to domestic democratic opponents of existing autocratic regimes. This democratizing impulse was the basic rationale behind the Clinton Administration’s “democratic enlargement” policy which expanded NATO eastward in the 1990s (Brinkley, 1997; Ikenberry, 2009:20-2). More recently, Slaughter (2009:97, 109) argued the United States must continue its policy of “supporting liberal democratic parties and institutions in countries determining their own political future. …The twenty-first century, like the twentieth century, must be made safe for democracy.”

Liberal Internationalism also considers promoting open markets and globalization to be critical grand strategy objectives. Democratic regimes are more likely to support globalization, and globalization can foster the development of a middle class, a core constituency for democratization in developing countries.
Liberal Internationalism agrees with Deep Engagement on the importance of maintaining stability in Western Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East. Regional arms races and conventional conflict undermine the rule-based international order and inevitably end up sucking the United States into conflict. The experiences of the past have shown that “aggressors in faraway lands, if left unchecked, would someday threaten the United States (Ikenberry and Slaughter, 2006:16). For Liberal Internationalism, the September 11 attacks demonstrated how internal and external stability can create conditions that can lead to direct harm to the United States. It is better to manage these threats sooner rather than later.

Liberal Internationalism considers international terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and gross human rights violations to be significant threats to the global order and first-level security concerns for the U.S. These concerns are compounded by general suspicions of authoritarian and illiberal groups and a skepticism they can be reliably deterred. This is particularly so with terrorists who would be difficult if not impossible to deter if they were ever to acquire a nuclear weapon. Thus, Ikenberry and Slaughter (2006:14) assert the “threat of nuclear terrorism looms greater than any other nuclear threat because of the limits of traditional concepts of deterrence against adversaries who would willingly martyr themselves.” Liberal Internationalism adopts the general nuclear pessimist position that proliferation may not produce stability. Moreover, proliferation would impose limits on America’s ability to act forcefully in other regions against potential aggressors and challengers to the liberal international order. Human rights violations undermine nascent liberal movements and breed regional instability. As Slaughter (2016:89) notes, today “R2P [Responsibility to Protect] has gone deeply out of fashion, but that is surely temporary.” In order to push a liberal, rule-based order systemic violations of individual rights must be opposed.
POLICY LEVERS. Liberal Internationalism holds that U.S. military dominance currently underwrites a liberal international order. By establishing institutions that work in favor of a liberal order, the system can become self-sustaining after inevitable U.S. decline. In the near- and medium-term, then, the United States must maintain the military capabilities and alliances necessary to deter and defend against revisionist, anti-liberal challengers (Ikenberry, 2011a:301-6; Ikenberry, 2000:ch.3). Preserving the troop deployments, security commitments, and ability to use force for these purposes requires a large force structure and one capable of both power projection and large-scale ground interventions. As Ikenberry and Slaughter (2006:29-30) note, their objectives “require a continued high level of U.S. defense spending.”

The United States should maintain and expand its commitments and, where necessary, its troop presence as well. This is particularly true for nascent democracies outside Western Europe. “The United States,” argues Ikenberry (2011a:354-5) “should recommit to and rebuild its security alliances. …The updating of these alliance bargains would involve widening the regional or global missions in which the alliance operates and making new compromises over the distribution of formal rights and responsibilities.” Similar to Deep Engagement, Liberal Internationalism sees U.S. troop presence as an important tool to influence both friend and foe. Though the relatively regional emphasis may differ by scholar, Liberal Internationalism supports an expansion of troops in several regions as a hedge against potential illiberal challenges. For instance, in East Asia the “United States should accompany creating institution-building with the maintenance of a strong military capability that is not directed overtly at China but is designed to dissuade it from regional hegemonic ambitions and deter it from acts of aggression” (Ikenberry and Slaughter, 2006). Former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy and former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans Janine Davidson (2012:56) note, “The cornerstone of
forward engagement [is] positioning U.S. troops in vital regions to help deter major conflicts and promote stability, particularly in Asia and the Middle East.”

Liberal Internationalism recognizes that there will at times be the need to use force to attain its objectives, including democracy promotion, humanitarian intervention, and counterterrorism. To be sure, Liberal Internationalism does not advocate using force constantly to build democracies worldwide. It emphasizes multilateralism as a way to build legitimacy for the use of force, however this coalition need not be universal. As Slaughter (2009:114) writes “if the need for international action is great, the international community must turn to broadly representative regional institutions to authorize and implement intervention.” Some advocates of Liberal Internationalism have suggested relying on democratic communities that could legitimize U.S. action when broader forums were not supportive (Slaughter, 2009:98-100; Ikenberry and Slaughter, 2006:7). Concerns over human rights violations remain central leading to support for the Iraq War in 2003 and the intervention in Libya in 2011 (Slaughter, 2009:109). Liberal Internationalists recognize the initial stages of humanitarian intervention may require the kind of forces that only the United States is in a position to supply (Western and Goldstein, 2011).

Conservative Internationalism

THEORETICAL ANCHOR. Conservative Internationalism is a broad family of grand-strategic positions that includes, but is not limited to, neoconservatives and shares much with what Dueck (2015) labels “conservative nationalism.” It combines classical liberal assumptions and hegemonic stability theory to arrive at more muscular and assertive grand-strategic prescriptions.5 It rests on a variant of hegemonic stability theory that combines both “benevolent” and “coercive” elements.

---

5 We borrow the term “Conservative Internationalism” from Henry Nau (2013), but do not strictly define the term as Nau does. See also Dueck, 2015:168-76
(Snidal, 1985). The hegemon’s rule must be benevolent in that the international order it establishes must command legitimacy among other states in the system. This legitimacy arises naturally when core liberal values are shared. Because liberal, democratic states have a shared set of interests, a liberal and democratic hegemon’s efforts to establish an international order based on liberal principles will command legitimacy among these states, even when its efforts to do so involve the unilateral exercise of military force. Indeed, the legitimacy of the hegemon rises among its fellow liberal democracies whenever it exercises its power to defend the international order against illiberal and nondemocratic challengers. Therefore, there is a critical coercive element to Conservative Internationalism’s conception of hegemonic stability: the hegemon’s legitimacy among its fellow democracies depends on its willingness to forcefully guard the international order against illiberal threats. For this reason, the hegemon has a strong interest in advancing the global spread of democracy. As Cohen, Edelman, and Hook (2015:6) state, a “strong United States is essential to the maintenance of the open global order under which this country and the rest of the world have prospered since 1945 …[t]he alternative is not a self-regulating machine of balancing states, but a landscape marked by eruptions of chaos and destruction.” (See also Brands and Feaver, 2016:168; Dueck, 2015:207-8).

Conservative Internationalism shares with Liberal Internationalism a focus on domestic institutions but parts company on international institutions. For Conservative Internationalism, state behavior is largely driven by regime type rather than the distribution of power. “Democracies,” writes Charles Krauthammer (quoted in Vaisse, 2011:244-5, see also 233), “are inherently more friendly to the United States, less belligerent to their neighbors, and generally more inclined to peace [than illiberal regimes].” International institutions are suspect, though. Particularly concerning are those that grant equal status to both democracies and autocracies that
are fundamentally illiberal in character because they empower and legitimize tyrannical regimes. Because democratic regimes are more likely than autocratic ones to be bound by international rules, international institutions restrain the states that require a free hand to uphold the international order while permitting the challenges of the liberal order greater freedom of action. Thus, according to Conservative Internationalism, international institutions can have an important effect on state preferences (contra Restraint), but uniquely among democratic states (contra Liberal Internationalism).\textsuperscript{6}

Some may object to linking conservative nationalism with internationalism. In Dueck’s (2015) important treatment of conservative nationalism, he seeks to distinguish the two. Despite a number of real distinctions, on the key points the divide is narrow. For instance, like many post-Iraq authors, he counsels prudence in regime-change operations (e.g., Nau, 2013). More importantly, on the key underlying theoretical positions conservative nationalism is firmly within the conservative international camp. Dueck’s (2015:ch.5) discussion makes clear that conservative nationalism sees regime type as critical, with liberal states sharing interests with, and powerful autocracies as a key challenge for a liberal hegemon. There is also a pronounced skepticism of multilateral institutions and attention to muscular U.S. hegemony, which leads to many of the same objectives and specific policy prescriptions.

OBJECTIVES. Conservative Internationalism, like its liberal counterpart, favors the promotion of an international order based on liberal characteristics, in particular the spread of democracy, capitalism, and free trade. As Condoleezza Rice (2008:26) put it, “An international order that

\textsuperscript{6} Nau (2013:52) argues that “legitimacy in foreign affairs derives from the free countries making decisions independently or working together through decentralized institutions,” whereas Liberal Internationalism see legitimacy as stemming from “participating and voting in universal organizations” that include authoritarian regimes on an equal footing.
reflects our values is the best guarantee of our enduring national interest.” Conservative Internationalism does not consider such an “international order” to be a rule-based one built on international institutions; in fact, it warns that faith in institutions could lead the United States to abrogate its leadership role while failing to constrain illiberal regimes. The United States remains the sole superpower, albeit sharing the stage with several great powers. Even with a variety of challenges that hegemonic status is durable (Dueck, 2015:203-12).

Conservative Internationalism prioritizes the spread of democracy and, conversely, opposition to authoritarian regimes. Unlike Liberal Internationalism, which argues that democracies can better resolve conflicts of interest through peaceful negotiation, Conservative Internationalism holds that maintaining a U.S.-led international order is a globally-shared interest and that democratic governments best channel popular international support for U.S. hegemony. Authoritarian and “rogue” regimes, on the other hand, are unrepresentative of the populations they govern and therefore do not share the citizenship’s interest in maintaining the international politico-economic order established by the United States. Thus, both see the spread of democracy as being strongly connected to U.S. security but for quite different reasons. Conservative Internationalism also does not rule out spreading democracy by the sword though it cautions against ill-conceived or constant efforts to do so. “U.S. democracy promotion programs,” Brands and Feaver (2016:168), citing past research, argue, “including economic aid, diplomatic pressure, covert action, and even the occasional military intervention—have helped foster a world that is more liberal and congenial to U.S. values and interests.” Because non-democratic regimes are both illegitimate and naturally inimical to the established and popularly supported international order, their very existence is by definition a security threat to the United States and its democratic allies.
Conservative Internationalism posits that the stability of the international order rests on U.S. power. They therefore consider U.S. primacy and preventing the rise of a great power rival, particularly an illiberal great power, to be a core objective. The focus on regime type and the importance placed on the preeminent U.S. position in the international system suggests a strategy toward China that combines elements of engagement and regime transformation (similar to Liberal Internationalism) and a balancing approach (similar to Deep Engagement and, increasingly, Restraint). The result is a strategy similar to Aaron Friedberg’s (2015:107) “better balancing” approach, which “combines continued attempts at engagement with expanded and intensified balancing.” The strategy differs from other grand-strategic positions by assuming engagement can best move China toward democracy when coupled with assertive balancing, and that U.S. balancing efforts do not require risk escalation or reassurance.

An important objective remains aggressively countering terrorism (Nau, 2013:59). “Jihadist terrorists” must be preempted, Dueck (2015:236-7) writes. “The nature of this particular enemy leaves no superior alternative other than an assertive and determined strategy of rollback.” Conservative Internationalism sees an essential link between terrorism and “rogue” states that sponsor terrorist organizations, and therefore favors strategies that focus on that link. This approach was at the heart of various Bush Administration policies. For example, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz and Vice President Cheney quickly shifted their focus to Iraq in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the belief that the most effective way to stem terrorism was for the United States to militarily challenge the states on whom international terrorists depended. Iraq would serve as the first example despite its lack of connection to the 9/11 attackers. As Mann (2004:302), describes Wolfowitz’s thinking, the “forces behind terrorism in the Middle East were all
interconnected…If the United States could defeat [Hussein], it would weaken terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. The issue was broader than Al Qaeda.”

Nonproliferation is also an important objective. Conservative Internationalism questions the possibility of stable deterrence with authoritarian and rogue states that may also have ties to terrorist groups. As a result, proponents of Conservative Internationalism are unwilling to rely on a nuclear deterrence as a guarantee of U.S. security and are generally supportive of preventive military action to stem nuclear proliferation. This also feeds into support for ballistic missile defenses and nuclear counterforce capabilities. Concerns about nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons proliferation were at the center of the Bush administration’s case to invade Iraq. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, it was advocates of the neoconservative strain of Conservative Internationalism within the administration who expressed particular concern about “rogue” states like Iran, Iraq, and North Korea acquiring nuclear weapons. This interacted with the terrorist threat to raise additional worry. The combination played a central role in the development of the Bush Doctrine against Iraq and informs critiques of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action involving Iran’s nuclear program more than a decade later (Gause, 2010:186-238; Jervis, 2003; Cohen, Edelman, Takeyh, 2016:64-75).

It is important, though, not to overstate the degree of Conservative Internationalism’s focus on terrorism and nonproliferation. The more important objectives involve states like Russia and China—illiberal powers that can more directly threaten the U.S. national interest. Thus Nau (2013:9) argues, “the United States should think twice before it fights rogue states and terrorism in remote regions such as the Middle East and southwest Asia while it ignores or placates efforts by Russia and China to extend their influence along the central borders of free Europe and Asia.”
POLICY LEVERS. Conservative Internationalism highlights the value of U.S. military power for achieving American objectives. Proponents therefore counsel strengthening U.S. security commitments, expanding U.S. alliances globally, and expanding U.S. troop presence. This will reassure skittish allies, deter and compel potential adversaries, and establish the means to defeat them should coercion fail (Dueck, 2015:chap. 5). The tendency to bandwagon with U.S. power will dominate incentives to balance, and so there are increasing returns to U.S. global activism with little risk of blowback. As Robert Kagan (2014) notes, the “American presence enforced a general peace and stability in two regions [Europe and Northeast Asia] that for at least a century had known almost constant great-power conflict. …When the United States appears to retrench, allies necessarily become anxious, while others look for opportunities.” In the Middle East, Feaver (2016) argues that Obama’s troop drawdown “proved disastrous for American interests and paved the way for the rise of the Islamic State, forcing Obama to shift back once again to an onshore balancing in the region.”

In general, proponents of Conservative Internationalism emphasize alliances with democracies rather than autocracies. They are willing to compromise on this issue to further higher priorities, such as the competition with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Thus Mann (2004:352) explains how conservatives shifted during the Cold War from a position largely consistent with the one set forth in Jeane Kirkpatrick’s (1979) landmark Commentary article, to more assertively supporting democracy even when it meant challenging the domestic security of anti-communist regimes supportive of the United States. Similarly, Nau (2013:55) argues that although “critics often attack such cooperation [with authoritarian regimes] as hypocrisy” it is necessary to set priorities and be sensitive to “the limitations of both resources and public will to support the end of tyranny everywhere at once.” Thus, support for U.S. commitments to non-
democratic allies in the Middle East and elsewhere is not inconsistent with the overall tenets of Conservative Internationalism. Nonetheless, such guarantees should be viewed as expedient and even temporary compared to the bedrock security commitments to and military presence in fellow democracies like Japan and NATO.

The greater emphasis on military power leads to both a larger force structure and greater willingness to use threats of and actual military force to advance U.S. objectives. The United States should, Dueck (2015:218) argues, “conceive, develop, and implement strategies of pressure … reviving the art of deterrence and coercive diplomacy.” Conservative Internationalism thus emphasizes what Nau (2013:6) terms “armed diplomacy.” The ability and resolve to use force “during negotiations and before an attack when it is a choice, not just after negotiations and in retaliation to an attack when it is a necessity” is essential to “succeed in negotiations that move freedom forward.” Keeping military options available is an essential policy lever, particularly with autocratic regimes that “use force congenitally.” This does not mean Conservative Internationalism favors greater use of force overall. Rather, as Nau (2013:7, emphasis in original) argues, “the earlier and perhaps more frequent use of smaller force to deter, preempt, and prevent [will] prevent the later use of much greater force.” Put differently, Conservative Internationalism focuses on the risk of acting too late; other grand strategies put greater weight on the risk of acting too soon. A large military is essential, allowing the United States to act and bargain from a position of strength (Vaisse 2011:235). Thus, Nau (2013:179) lauds Ronald Reagan’s policy of “peace through strength” which improved U.S. “bargaining leverage” with the Soviet Union. Current spending on defense is low by historical standards and can be increased without undermining the domestic economy (Lieber, 2005; Dueck, 237-9).

Discussion
We argue that grand-strategy disagreements hinge on theoretical disagreements about the role power and international and domestic institutions play in international politics. Regarding power, the core disagreement is between Restraint, which relies on balance-of-power realism, and the other three grand strategy positions, which adopt variations of hegemonic stability theory. A focus on power alone, however, would lead to an inaccurate portrayal of the debate, lumping together discrete scholarship and conflating important differences. The crux of this debate is the role that international and domestic institutions, broadly defined, play in international politics. These differences have enormous implications for the specific objectives the United States should pursue to maximize its interests, as well as the means to realize those objectives. Liberal Internationalism focuses on spreading liberal economic, domestic, and international institutions, relying on all three pillars of the Kantian tripod (Oneal and Russett, 1999). Conservative Internationalism draws on classical liberalism and agrees on the importance of spreading liberal economic and domestic institutions. In Contrast to Liberal Internationalism, though, proponents argue that international institutions dangerously constrain U.S. action while allowing illiberal states to pursue dangerous agendas inimical to U.S. interest. Deep Engagement is the mirror position of Conservative Internationalism. For its proponents, spreading liberal domestic institutions is often a costly distraction from core objectives. At the same time, Deep Engagement borrows some insights from institutionalism, though it is skeptical of the strength of institutions absent U.S. power. Restraint argues that it is unnecessary and perhaps even counterproductive to use military tools to spread liberal international or domestic institutions to secure U.S. interests.

Our framework makes three important contributions to the scholarship of grand strategy. First, by holding interests constant, it allows for a deductive typology of the grand-strategy debate
based on theoretic first principles. This establishes how much each side's preferred grand strategy would diverge independent of normative conceptions of national interest.

Second, and relatedly, the deductive approach helps scholars more clearly separate social-scientific from normative claims and maintain that distinction when communicating their findings to policy makers. Decision makers rightly tend to consider the determination of U.S. interests to be beyond the purview of social science. At a minimum, it will improve understanding if scholars can draw a finer distinction between claims that are based on objective causal relationships and normative preferences about American interests. We recognize that in reality the lines between interests and theory are not so hard and fast, and that social-science theory can usefully inform the setting of interests. This does not, however, suggest we should ignore distinctions between the two.

Third and finally, our approach allows social-science research to more directly speak to the debate. This framework aids in identifying gaps where compelling evidence is lacking, where more research needs to be undertaken, and where widespread agreement among the positions means that research will not necessarily alter grand-strategy positions. A complete survey of all potential avenues is impractical due to space considerations. We therefore illustrate this point with attention to one potential objective: nuclear proliferation. A large amount of recent research can be usefully mustered to inform the debate. For example, if a U.S. presence abroad provoked rival proliferation more than it restrained allied proliferation this would support Restraint while undermining the alternative positions. The converse is not necessarily the case. If reduced U.S. involvement did lead to more proliferation among allies, the Restraint position may find that acceptable, arguing that it increases regional stability through mutual deterrence. It would then be necessary to bring research from the enduring debate on the consequences of nuclear proliferation for regional
(in)stability. Scholars could further inform the debate by identifying links between regional (in)stability and U.S. interests. Beyond the general U.S. influence on proliferation, greater attention to the mechanisms of U.S. influence is useful. For instance, research that disentangles whether the U.S. commitment is sufficient to provide it leverage (closest to Deep Engagement), or must be coupled with a global/regional institutional order (Liberal Internationalism), and/or a strong commitment to use force against potential proliferators (Conservative Internationalism) would be informative.

In sum, the focus in this article on why each side adopts a preferred set of grand strategic objectives and corresponding levers will allow future research to better assess the relative effectiveness of these objectives and levers for attaining U.S. interests. Existing research on the relationship varies in policy levers such as troop deployments, alliance commitments, international and domestic institutions, and important outcomes of interests such as nuclear proliferation, conflict and instability, global trade and economic growth can be more directly brought to bear. Clearly demarcating the various positions also highlights the importance of bringing these diverse strands together to inform the broader grand strategic positions. That is, it is necessary to not just test individual relationships but to assess how those relationships interact with one another to highlight the various tradeoffs inherent in any grand strategy that attempts to prioritize, balance competing demands, and bring together a diverse set of policies into an overarching agenda. This is more demanding than narrow hypothesis-testing, but has the potential to fill a critical gap between scholarship and policy and move us closer to the ideal of evidence-based policy.
References


