



Executive Summary



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SHARING POWER? PROSPECTS FOR A U.S. CONCERT-BALANCE STRATEGY

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The subject of U.S. grand strategy has been getting increasing attention from the policy and academic communities. But too often, the debate suffers from being too reductionist, limiting America's choices to worldwide hegemony or narrow isolation. There is a wide spectrum of choices before Washington that lie somewhere in the middle. Too often not enough thought is given to how such alternative strategies should be designed and implemented.

This monograph argues that a shift away from the pursuit of liberal hegemony is prudent. We cannot know the future, and earlier predictions of American decline have proven to be premature. But since there is a realistic chance that we are seeing a shift in wealth and power to the extent that America may not be able to hold on to its position as an unrivaled unipolar superpower, it is worth thinking about how the United States could shape and adjust to the changing landscape around it. What is more, there are a number of interlocking factors that mean such a shift would make sense: transnational problems needing collaborative efforts, the military advantages of defenders, the reluctance of states to engage in unbridled competition, and "hegemony fatigue" among the American people.

Alternative strategies that are smaller than global hegemony, but bigger than narrow isolationism, would be defined by the logic of "concerts" and "balancing," in other words, some mixture of collaboration and competition. This monograph suggests that "watchfully sharing

power" could be the guiding logic. However, in turn, this watchful power-sharing would also face serious dilemmas, including the difficulty of reconciling competitive balancing with cooperative concerts; the limits of balancing without a forward-reaching onshore military capability; the possibility of unanticipated consequences such as a rise in regional power competition or the emergence of blocs (such as a Chinese East Asia or an Iranian Gulf); and the challenge of sustaining domestic political support for a strategy that voluntarily abdicates world leadership. Could the United States adjust to a Concert-Balance grand strategy that makes space for other rising powers without sacrificing too much of its forward military presence, without unleashing too much regional instability, and without losing the domestic political will?

Part of the answer lies in negotiating spheres of influence with other rising powers — striking a balance between accommodating the rise of states like China and India and retaining the capability to deter and thwart any military adventurism. But part of the answer also lies beyond drawing lines on a map. Instead of characterizing America's choices in exclusively territorial terms, the United States could also make space strategically for other powers and move toward a durable power-sharing world order through practical measures such as space arms control, an end to alliance expansion, joint cooperation on the nuclear fusion project ITER (originally known as International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor), coupled

with the joint pursuit of a common nonpolluting, renewable energy source, and the enhancement of military-to-military communications. It is not certain that a cumulative shift to a new grand strategy would necessarily succeed, as other powers might turn down the chance to cooperate. However, with soaring budget deficits and national debt, increasing burdens on social security, and possible agonizing choices in the future between guns and butter, it is surely worth a try.

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