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*The Strategy of Denial*

# The Purposes of American Strategy

A DEFENSE STRATEGY IS A WAY of employing, posturing, and developing military assets, forces, and relationships to attain a set of goals that are derived from and designed to serve broader political aims. My purpose in this book is to consider what America's defense strategy should be.

## The Fundamental Purposes of American Strategy

Charting such a strategy must begin with identifying America's overall national objectives. These are, of course, subject to debate and not susceptible to precise definition; it is in the nature of a free society that these core questions are never fully settled. Yet certain fundamental political goals are very likely to command broad agreement among Americans. These are to maintain the nation's territorial integrity and, within that territory, security from foreign attack; sustain a free, autonomous, and vigorous democratic-republican political order; and enable economic flourishing and growth. In simpler terms, our basic national objectives are to provide Americans with physical security, freedom, and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

Physical security is the cornerstone of all other interests and values; without it, people cannot take advantage of either freedom or prosperity and may lose them entirely. But physical security alone is not sufficient. To fulfill even the most basic understanding of America's political purposes, Americans must be free enough to determine their national life—to choose their own fate. Last,

Americans must be sufficiently prosperous, not only for its own sake but to undergird confidence in their society's fairness. Americans may elect to pursue ends beyond these three, but they may plausibly do so only if they are sufficiently secure, free, and prosperous.

### The Central Role of the Balance of Power

The international arena in which the United States pursues these objectives remains anarchic, in the sense that there is no global sovereign to make and enforce judgments in a dispute.<sup>2</sup> In this context, security, freedom, and prosperity cannot be taken for granted; they are not self-generating. This is for two reasons. First, in an ungoverned situation, actors may rationally seek advantage and profit by using force to take from or undermine others. Second, inherently vulnerable actors may find it prudent to take preventive action against potential threats: the best defense may be a good offense. These factors mean that the prospect of force shadows Americans' pursuit of these goals.

To ensure its security, freedom, and prosperity, any country, including the United States, has a most powerful interest in ensuring *a favorable balance of power* with respect to its key interests. This is simply another way of saying that the most effective way to check another from doing something one does not want to abide is to be more powerful than the other is with respect to that interest. If one fails to maintain a favorable balance, one's enjoyment of these goods will be at the sufferance of the one who enjoys the advantage.

Ensuring America's security, freedom, and prosperity thus requires us to address the foundational role of power. To fulfill its core purposes, the United States should seek sustainably favorable military-economic balances of power with respect to the key regions of the world. In this chapter I will lay out the following key principles:

- Power in this context is composed of military-economic strength.
- The actors that matter most are states.
- Balances of power particularly matter in the key regions of the world, which are those where military-economic strength is clustered.
- The purpose of balancing is to deny another state hegemony over one of the key regions of the world.
- The favorable balance should be sustainable over time.

*What Is the Balance of Power?*

Physical force, especially the ability to kill, is the ultimate form of coercive leverage. While there are other sources of influence, such as wealth, persuasiveness, and charisma, they are all dominated by the power to kill. One with the ability to kill another can, if willing, escalate any dispute to that level and thus prevail. Although hard power is not the only form of power, it is dominant if effectively employed; hard power always has the capacity to dominate soft power. Left unaddressed, might trumps right. Therefore, to protect its interests, the United States must be especially concerned about the use of physical force.

In stable societies, the sovereign monopolizes the legitimate use of violence: this is law and order. But because there is no global sovereign, war—violence at a large and organized scale—is the final court of appeal in the international arena; if a disputant resorts to force, differences will ultimately be resolved in favor of the side that more effectively musters enough military power. To protect their interests in the international sphere, states such as the United States must therefore actively address the threat of violent force.

This is not to say that violence is always the most visible element of power. To the contrary: other elements of power—political, commercial, intellectual, ideological, spiritual—are usually more prominent, and mutually beneficial cooperation is normal and natural. But this is true only when the threat of violence is confined and regulated, and because of its capacity to dominate, this in turn requires the threat of violence itself. In other words, precisely to allow these softer instruments of power to be more influential, the threat of violence needs to be constrained. And because violence is the most important element of power, military power is ultimately necessary to constrain it.

*Who Matters for the Balance of Power?*

This reality means that US strategy for the world must first and foremost reckon with those with the power to wield large-scale violence, which means those that can muster military power. Less powerful actors, particularly those with some means of wreaking catastrophic violence (such as weapons of mass destruction), can pose a serious threat, but their weakness, by definition, means that more powerful parties have ways to deal with them. Specifically how the United States can do so is addressed later in this book.

In the modern world, military power derives from the ability to raise and command capable armed forces. Modern militaries, especially the more advanced and effective ones, are highly sophisticated, complex, and often large. They are therefore expensive and must be supported by advanced, robust economic and technological bases. Further, they are administratively and logistically demanding and need highly capable administrative structures to enforce the cohesion and command the obedience needed for effective war making.

In the contemporary era and for the foreseeable future, the only entities able to generate such modern militaries are *states*. The ultimate form of power in the international system, then, results from a state or group of states leveraging violence. And the states that have the most of this fundamental coercive leverage are those with the most wealth and internal cohesion. Thus, in practice, the states with the most military power are those with the greatest economic resources.

If the United States were more powerful in this sense than any combination of other states, it would enjoy a favorable power advantage under any conceivable circumstances. In such a situation, no state could meaningfully coerce it. To maintain such a favorable distribution, it would need only to tend to its own power base to at least stay abreast of other states' growth.

The United States does not, however, enjoy such a preponderance of power—nor will it. Rather, although it is very powerful, its power is substantially outweighed by that of the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> If enough of the rest of the world's power were aggregated against it, the United States could be coerced with respect to its security, freedom, and prosperity; others could compel it to accept things Americans really do not want to tolerate. Accordingly, the United States should not allow such an unfavorable balance of power to form against it.

#### *Where Does the Balance of Power Matter?*

The states that matter most—the ones whose economies can support the generation of significant military power—are not randomly distributed but are clustered in particular regions. These key regions boast the vast majority of the active or latent military power that constitutes the most coercive form of leverage. In addition to North America, there are two regions—Asia and Europe—that have as much or more economic capacity that could be translated into military power as the United States and one subregion—the Persian Gulf—of notable significance.

The key regions of the world, ranked in order of geopolitical importance, are:

- *Asia*. Asia comprises approximately 40 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP), and given that it is the locus of about two-thirds of global growth, its share of global economic activity is rising.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, the Asian economies are already far larger than that of the United States and are increasingly advanced economically and technologically. From a geopolitical perspective, Asia is therefore the world's most important region.
- *Europe*. Europe comprises nearly one-quarter of global GDP, and its economies are on the whole considerably more advanced than most of Asia's.<sup>5</sup> For the United States, it is therefore the critical secondary external region after Asia.
- *North America*. North America is geopolitically important because of the United States. According to widely used estimates, the United States accounts for just under one-fifth of global GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. Largely because of this, most assessments rank the United States first in global power, though some indicate that China has surpassed it.<sup>6</sup> The rest of North America is modest in power and share of global economic activity, making the region unique in that it is overwhelmingly dominated by a single state.
- *The Persian Gulf*. The Persian Gulf is a far smaller and less important region than the others, comprising less than 5 percent of global GDP.<sup>7</sup> The Persian Gulf is home, however, to roughly 40 percent of the world's oil and natural gas reserves.<sup>8</sup> Control over these resources would provide a large source of power that could be readily leveraged, given their centrality in the carbon-based world economy. This strategic concern does not, however, extend to the remainder of the Middle East and North Africa; the power of this area would not make a material difference to American security, freedom, or prosperity.<sup>9</sup> The United States has a direct interest in preventing transnational terrorism against itself or its allies, but this is a more limited concern that can be addressed more narrowly.

The rest of the world is considerably less important in terms of military-economic power. If all of Latin America were to be agglomerated, it would represent approximately one-half of the total power of the United States.<sup>10</sup> This is significant, but by itself it would be manageable. The United States could not

be meaningfully coerced by a grouping representing just half its power. Africa, the world's remaining major inhabited continent, is the least developed part of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa represents roughly 3 percent of global GDP, so gathering its power together would not result in a major threat to the United States.<sup>11</sup> Central Asia has some wealth and natural resources, but not nearly enough to plausibly contest core US purposes.<sup>12</sup> The rest of the world offers little power. Oceania is exceptionally small in population and economic power, and the poles are unoccupied. The fates of these regions are essentially completely determined elsewhere. The same is true of outer space for the foreseeable future.

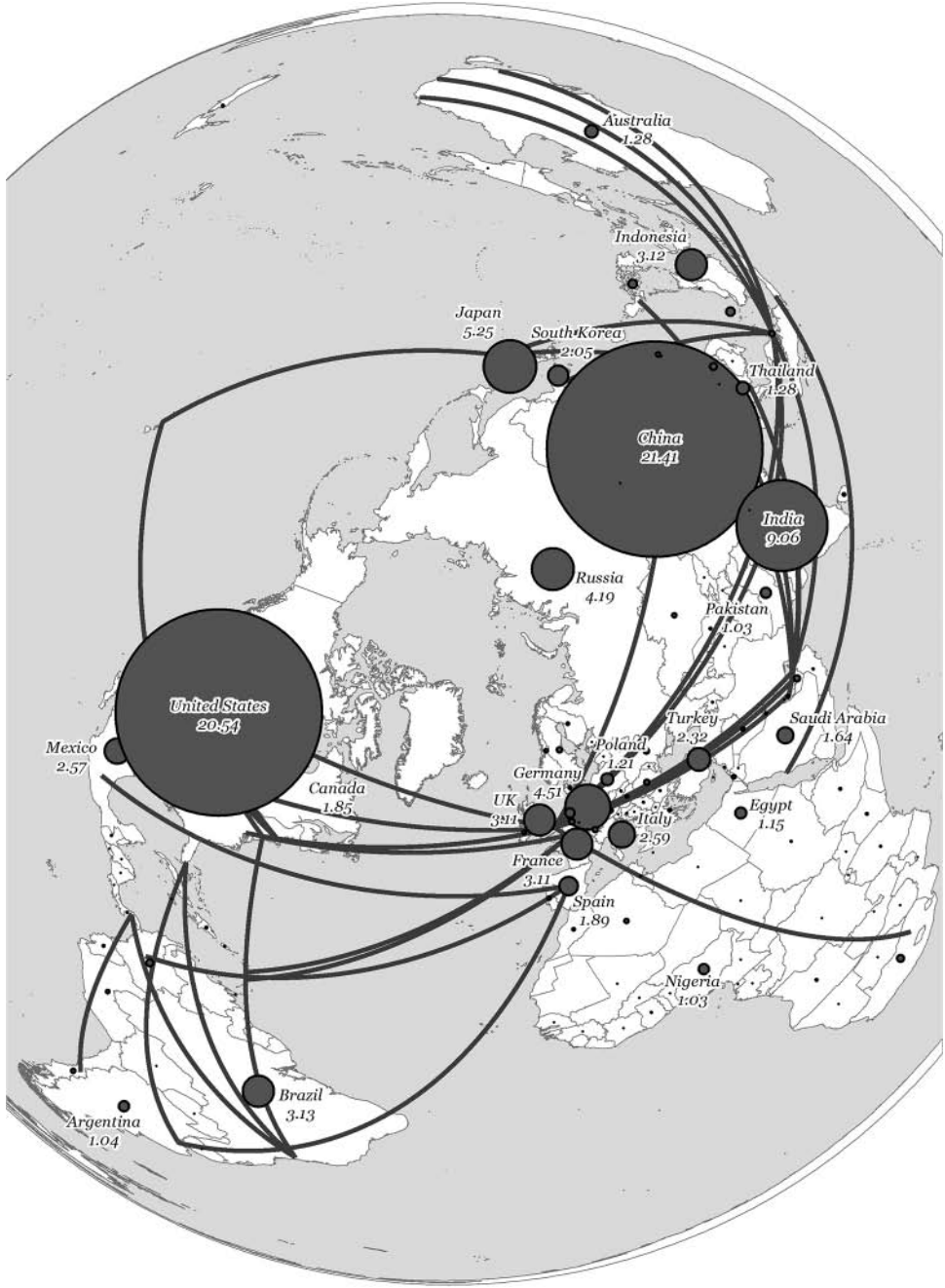
Asia in particular and then Europe and North America are thus the decisive theaters for global politics; Asia alone is a larger economy than Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, and Oceania combined.<sup>13</sup> If a state could leverage the wealth of one of those decisive theaters, it could dominate a state ascendant in one of the other regions. It was this recognition that led Winston Churchill to remark, "If we win the big battle in the decisive theater, we can put everything straight afterwards."<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the United States has long been focused on what George Kennan famously identified in the early Cold War as the key "centers of military and industrial power."<sup>15</sup>

### *What Is Balancing Supposed to Do?*

The mere existence of power in key regions is not what the United States should fear. Instead, it should care about the use of the power of these regions to materially impair America's security, freedom, and prosperity.

American concern should therefore focus on a state or states that could direct or marshal the power of one of these key regions. This is because no single state in the current environment—not even China, the world's other most powerful state—possesses sufficient power on its own to plausibly coerce the United States over its fundamental purposes; only some conglomeration of other states could gather the power to do this. Thus the only way the United States could face a situation in which other states were substantially stronger than America over the issues it really cares about would be if the power of one or more of these key regions were agglomerated.

The most plausible form by which a state could accumulate such power is *hegemony*, meaning that a state exercises authority over other states and extracts benefits from them, but without the responsibilities or risks of direct control. In



Global distribution of economic power. Proportional circles depict national GDP in USD trillions, at 2018 PPP rates. Economies over \$1 trillion are labeled with total GDP value. Lines depict direct flight paths of top global long-haul air routes. Lambert Equal Area Projection. Original map by Andrew Rhodes.



this book I will use the term *predominance* interchangeably with *hegemony*.<sup>16</sup> (Empire, the other way that states exercise control over other states, is much more costly because it requires direct administrative control by the imperial center. Direct imperial control tends to be rarer in the modern world.)

It is almost invariably a unitary state that can aspire to hegemony over a region. In theory, a group or coalition of states could establish regional hegemony, but such a group would face tremendous collective action problems in trying to establish and sustain a joint form of predominance. This is due to the question of who would decide if the group could not agree on some contentious issue. Because of this, it is very difficult to find stable empires or hegemonic systems that involve shared state power. Thus an aspiring hegemon is, generally speaking, a state located or active in the region that is powerful enough to plausibly establish hegemonic control. More particularly, it is likely to be a state that is the most powerful within a region by a considerable margin. A state that is the strongest by only a modest degree will find it much more difficult to impose its predominance over its neighbors, for reasons I will discuss later.

The United States has reason to fear another state pursuing hegemony over one of the world's key regions because regional hegemony is highly alluring; there are potent incentives for a state to seek it, especially if it does not face a sufficient counterforce. Because of these advantages, the strongest states within a region almost always seek predominance at some point. The history of modern Europe is a catalog of attempts by very powerful states to gain regional hegemony: the sixteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy, France under Louis XIV and then Napoleon, Second and Third Reich Germany, and the Soviet Union. China held regional sway in East Asia for much of recorded history, and Japan sought it after it leapt ahead of China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The United States established effective regional hegemony in Central America and the Caribbean in the nineteenth century. We should not expect the contemporary environment to be different.

Because of Asia's size and military-economic potential, ensuring that it is not subjected to such hegemony is of primary importance for the United States. Asia is once again, after a lapse of several centuries, the area of the world with the greatest total wealth and the greatest capacity to translate that wealth into military power. That another state might establish hegemony over significant parts of Asia is therefore the most concerning possible regional scenario for the United States.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Asia also contains the world's most plausible aspirant to hegemony over one of the world's key regions: China. The People's Republic of China is by far the most powerful state, other than the United States, in the international system, and it is much more powerful than other states in Asia. China is a rising giant with a GDP that is nearly one-fifth of the global total; most assessments rank China as the world's second most powerful state, behind the United States, with some judging that it is more powerful than America.<sup>18</sup> China even rivals the total power of the other states within its region. Estimates of its power relative to the other Asian states suggest that it represents roughly half of Asia's power potential, placing it in a prime position to pursue regional predominance.<sup>19</sup> More to the point, there is much evidence that China *is* pursuing regional hegemony.<sup>20</sup>

Europe follows Asia as the other decisive theater for the United States. It has a smaller total economy than Asia but still accounts for about a quarter of global GDP.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Asia, however, no state in Europe is clearly preeminent. The state most commonly thought to be interested in regional predominance is Russia, and during the Cold War hegemony by the Soviet Union was a realistic prospect. Russia's economy, however, is only the second largest in PPP terms within Europe, behind Germany, and only slightly larger than those of the United Kingdom, France, or Italy.<sup>22</sup> No European state is anywhere near as powerful and wealthy relative to its neighbors as China is in Asia.

The Persian Gulf is a distant third in priority. While its natural resource wealth is highly leverageable for coercive purposes, it is the smallest economy of the key regions, and no state in the region is overwhelmingly stronger than its neighbors. Iran may aspire to regional hegemony, but it does not enjoy a commanding power advantage even within the region.<sup>23</sup>

The United States is effectively a hegemon in North and Central America, and it will not have any difficulty sustaining this position. For reasons I will discuss later, US hegemony over this region is compatible with and indeed beneficial for many other countries' interests.

There are two essential, related reasons for the United States to be very concerned about another state's establishing hegemony over Asia, Europe, or the Persian Gulf. These reasons are not self-evident because these regions are far from the United States, across great oceans.

The most straightforward reason is that, once it had secured such hegemonic power, a state could consolidate and leverage it to project violent force elsewhere, including into North America, and perhaps even occupy or subordinate the United

States. This of course would directly violate the most fundamental goods and purposes of American life. If Germany had won the Second World War in Europe or the Soviet Union had prevailed in the Cold War, either might very well have sooner or later sought to project military force against the United States.

This concern, though serious in principle, is rather remote. The United States lies behind two great oceans and is enormously rich and powerful. It can defend itself and its strategic sphere with the military afforded by the world's most sophisticated large economy, ultimately backed by a survivable nuclear arsenal that can impose the most punishing costs on an invader. Thus the United States has enormous resources for defense of its immediate sphere.

Moreover, the benefits of actually invading or aggressively projecting power into North America may not appear compelling to an established hegemon in Asia or Europe, considering the risks and costs it would entail. Given the influence and eminence afforded by ascendancy over one or both of these key regions, venturing to assault the North American continent might not add enough benefit to outweigh the costs. Hegemonic powers, especially more commercially oriented ones, often recognize the value of bounding their conquests. Even the Romans drew a limit to their power at the Danube and Rhine.

The more plausible and thus compelling reason why the United States should be so concerned about regional hegemons is less direct but nonetheless implicates the fundamental purpose of ensuring a free and uncoerced national life and prosperity. If a state such as China could establish hegemony over a key region such as Asia, it would have substantial incentives to use its power to disfavor and exclude the United States from reasonably free trade and access to these wealthy regions in ways that would undermine America's core purposes, shift the balance of power against the United States, and ultimately open the country to direct coercion in ways that would compromise Americans' freedom, prosperity, and even physical security.<sup>24</sup>

This is because, if China could establish hegemony over Asia, it could then set up a commercial and trading bloc anchored in the world's largest market that would privilege its own and subordinates' economies while disfavoring America's.<sup>25</sup> The resulting drain on American businesses, large and small, would be most keenly felt by the workers, families, and communities who rely on those businesses for jobs, goods, services, and the other benefits that come with a vibrant economy. The steady erosion of America's economic power would ultimately weaken the nation's social vitality and stability.

This kind of disfavoring is hardly a theoretical concern; China today appears to be seeking to shape the economic map in just this way.<sup>26</sup> Nor is it especially unusual; this sort of policy has a powerful appeal and internal logic and is a regular feature of how aspiring and established hegemony behave.<sup>27</sup> Essentially every aspiring hegemon in history has sought or planned to establish an economic system favoring itself, in order to enrich itself, sustain its predominance, and exclude or disfavor potential competitors. Examples range from Napoleon's Continental System to imperial Germany's Customs Union to Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.<sup>28</sup> The United States itself has historically sought to create an economic sphere in North and Central America, including, most recently, through such arrangements as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

An aspiring hegemon like China would have at least three reasons to pursue an economic bloc approach privileging its own economy and prejudicing the American one: economics, geopolitics, and status.

First, China's leaders might—and indeed appear to—think that such a bloc is the most prudent way to advance their state's economic strength.<sup>29</sup> They might judge a trading or regulatory bloc anchored in Asia that they can control or substantially influence preferable to exposure in a competitive global market that they do not control.<sup>30</sup> Dominating an economic bloc with large internal flows of trade, capital, and labor would help insulate Beijing from global economic shocks and the attendant risk of slowing growth. Disfavoring the United States might seem necessary in order to form and sustain a cohesive bloc of China's own and resist what Beijing might regard as disruption by the United States and others.

Such a bloc could enable China to more effectively shape its own social and political future. State economic policies are not merely technical matters of maximizing growth and standards of living; they have deep implications for how societies evolve and are structured. Some societies may prefer political stability over uneven growth, or equality over wealth generation.<sup>31</sup> To achieve their goals, however, states must have the economic power to shape their societies in the face of enormously potent international economic forces. In light of this, China would be in a much stronger position to shape its own social-political destiny if it could dominate a large economic bloc; this would allow it to compete from a position of strength and more effectively regulate flows of trade, capital, and labor to promote its own preferred goals.

There are also more strictly economic reasons for China to pursue such a bloc. High-end economic activity is not randomly distributed; rather, it is clustered in North America, Europe, and East Asia. China might wish to channel this kind of economic activity to its own companies and workers in order to place itself at the forefront of the global economy, with all the benefits that would bring.<sup>32</sup> It might do this by nurturing industries it regards as important and by generating a large enough domestic market to enable its firms to grow and eventually gain the commanding heights of the global economy. An economic bloc that China controlled would offer a favorable basis for developing such industries.<sup>33</sup>

This, too, is hardly theoretical; in key respects it simply describes China's behavior over the last generation. The economy of the People's Republic of China, though in some respects a free market, involves a level of state involvement that the United States judges to be unfair and inimical to its interests.<sup>34</sup> In China's efforts to ascend the ladder of economic activity, shifting from a low-wage, labor-intensive economy to more capital-intensive forms of production, it has acted in ways the United States regards as discriminatory or worse. It appears clearly to be pursuing policies designed to shape its regional environment to insulate and promote its own preferred model.

Nor does Beijing seem to be changing this approach. China's pattern over the past decade has been to resist fundamental changes to this model in the face of both blandishments and pressure.<sup>35</sup> If extensive global economic engagement and growing wealth have not already persuaded China to change its behavior, it is unclear why it would be more likely to do so as it grows stronger and thus less susceptible to outside pressure. A state like China, with a deeply entrenched economic model that is fundamentally different from—and in key respects antithetical to—that of the United States, seems more likely to continue the course that has brought it wealth and power.

A second reason why a state like China might seek to develop an economic bloc that disfavored the United States is geopolitical: precisely to weaken the primary threat to its predominance.<sup>36</sup> One of the cardinal challenges of politics, and certainly of ascendancy over other states and peoples, is how to maintain one's power and the preferences it secures. China is no exception.

China would therefore have a most potent interest in reducing the power of any state that could challenge its predominance—and no state is stronger in the international system than the United States. Beijing could weaken the United States by wholly or partially excluding it from or disfavoring its engagements

within important markets over which China exercised control or influence.<sup>37</sup> An arrangement that burdened America's ability to trade with Asia, which is the world's largest market and includes many of the world's most advanced economies, would depress the relative wealth of the United States. This in turn would weaken American power and consequently its ability to influence events.<sup>38</sup> A diminished United States would be less able to disrupt or challenge China's influence, and Beijing would be increasingly able to influence Washington's policies more through its growing power advantage and consequent leverage.<sup>39</sup>

A third and final key reason why a hegemon like China might pursue a discriminatory regional economic system is for status. Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II yearned for a place in the sun, and twentieth-century China wished to stand up and once again be a great power in the world. China might thus see preeminence as a crucial benefit in its own right, and knocking the mighty United States down a peg would be a natural part of attaining it. In establishing its economic policy, a hegemon like China might favor a discriminatory market system precisely in order to reduce America's relative standing vis-à-vis China.

The consequences for the United States of being disfavored or excluded from Asia's vast markets would over time be very significant. Such a situation would result in the decline of Americans' prosperity and progressively weaken the United States' ability to resist being further disadvantaged, telling on the core purposes of American life. By undermining Americans' prosperity and expectations of future growth, China would make American society worse off and more susceptible to internal disputes over a stagnant economic pie.

Even more, a weakened United States riven by internal disputes would be more vulnerable to external pressure and even coercion, especially by an increasingly powerful China. Such a China would have far greater leverage to exercise influence in US internal affairs, whether through economic incentives and penalties, support or opposition to political groups, or propaganda and support—or outright ownership—of opinion-shaping outlets. China has already demonstrated a clear willingness to intervene in the United States' internal political affairs; there is every reason to think it will intensify that treatment if it gains the power to do so.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, once established, such Chinese hegemony and its baleful influence would be difficult and costly for the United States to reverse. By definition, an established hegemon, able to direct the relevant policies of subordinate states, is harder to eject from its position than a state still grasping for hegemony.

This means that the United States must be concerned with even the possibility that a regional hegemon might pursue such disfavoring policies. Although a state like China, once so established, *might* pursue a more open-handed approach toward the United States, it also very well might not. Whether it did would be Beijing's choice, and there are more than enough reasons to think that it would not be respectful of US interests.

Especially because of this last point, US strategy must primarily be concerned with a potential hegemon, not only a declared or overtly aspiring hegemon, let alone an established one. This counsel is rooted in several reasons. First, intentions can change. Even a state that genuinely does not seek regional hegemony could later decide to. This might be because of new leadership: France under Louis XVI, for instance, was relatively content to maintain the status quo, but France under Napoleon a few years later was not. Or a state's perception of its strategic environment might alter: Mao's China in 1950 was rabidly hostile to the United States and aligned with the Soviet Union; just two decades later, Beijing had reversed itself.

Second, a state may want regional hegemony but conceal its aspirations behind lies, deceit, and distractions, as the Crowe Memorandum famously pointed out in the context of imperial Germany. Given the allure of regional hegemony, the United States should be skeptical of protestations of innocence regarding its pursuit. Contemporary China, governed by a Communist Party with a long record of dissimulation, is certainly no exception to this counsel.<sup>41</sup>

Third, preventing a capable state such as contemporary China from attaining regional hegemony is likely to be difficult and time-consuming; it is therefore necessary to act while the threat is still aborning. Even more, the United States is far less likely to be able to muster the power to reverse Chinese regional hegemony once established if Beijing does decide to pursue a more discriminatory course. Therefore the United States should err on the side of caution by seeking to prevent such a state from establishing predominance rather than waiting to be sure.

This is important because, even though it seems increasingly clear that China is pursuing regional hegemony, this assessment remains subject to debate. Given how powerful China is and will be, however, even if Beijing were not seeking regional hegemony, or if some future leadership decided not to do so, the United States would still need to ensure that China could not achieve regional hegemony at some later point.

This approach, of course, risks exacerbating a security dilemma with China. But so long as US efforts are clearly directed at denying Beijing hegemony rather than dismembering China, occupying it, or forcibly changing its government, the security dilemma should be manageable. The United States has no interest in dictating to China, only in blocking it from attaining regional hegemony. If a state genuinely does not seek hegemony, it should not fear efforts clearly limited to preventing it from doing so.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the costs and risks of blocking a state from attaining regional hegemony that is genuinely uninterested in it should be low. Thus the risk of overpreparing is modest compared to the risks of failing to act in time.

It is important to emphasize that America's issue with a potential regional hegemon is primarily structural. The United States is fundamentally concerned about the condition of hegemonic domination of a key region because the incentives to exclude the United States exist for states of all kinds. It should be considerably less concerned about precisely which or what kind of state does establish such predominance. The United States should of course be *more* concerned if a state such as Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia were to gain regional hegemony because of such governments' violence and aggressiveness and their hostility to American preferences and values. But hegemony by any state, of whatever political complexion, would be a grave concern. China's achievement of hegemony would pose a serious challenge to US interests under any circumstances; that it would do so while governed by the Chinese Communist Party exacerbates the threat.

#### *Over What Time Period?*

The issue of state behavior changing over time casts into relief a crucial element of US interest: its fundamental strategic purpose is to sustainably avoid another state's hegemony over one of the world's key regions. Avoiding regional dominance today would not be very useful if it is going to happen in the future.

To summarize, then, the fundamental and primary objective of US strategy must be sustainably avoiding another state's hegemony over one of the key regions of the world. Because Asia has the largest economy of the key regions and China by far the largest other economy in the world, ensuring that China does not establish hegemony over Asia must be the United States' cardinal strategic aim.<sup>43</sup>