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Understanding the Emerging Era of International Competition

Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

KEY FINDINGS

- The emerging competition is not generalized but likely to be most intense between a handful of specific states.
- The hinge point of the competition will be the relationship between the architect of the rules-based order (the United States) and the leading revisionist peer competitor that is involved in the most specific disputes (China).
- Global patterns of competition are likely to be complex and diverse, with distinct types of competition prevailing in different issue areas.
- Managing the escalation of regional rivalries and conflicts is likely to be a major focus of U.S. statecraft.
- Currently, the competition seems largely focused on status grievances or ambitions, economic prosperity, technological advantage, and regional influence.
- The competition is likely to be most intense and persistent in nonmilitary areas of national advantage.
- The postwar multilateral order provides the framework in which the emerging competition will unfold.
- Two obvious flashpoints for the emerging competition lie in regional territorial and influence claims.
- The emerging era is likely to involve a drawn-out combination of contestation, competition, and cooperation.

The most recent U.S. National Security Strategy is built around the expectation of a new era of intensifying international competition, characterized by “growing political, economic, and military competitions” confronting the United States.¹ The new U.S. National Defense Strategy is even more blunt about the nature of the emerging competition. “We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order,” it argues.² “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”³ The document points to the “reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers.”⁴ It identifies two countries as potential rivals: China and Russia. “It is increasingly clear” that both countries “want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.”⁵

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has been widely accepted,⁶ there is no consensus about what this shift means. Commentators use such terms as “competition,” “rivalry,” and “great-power competition” to mean different things. In short, while there is a general expectation of a new era of strategic competition, there is not yet clear understanding what that means, what forms it could take, and what it might imply for U.S. national security or U.S. defense policy—or the demands likely to be placed on U.S. military services, including the U.S. Air Force.

No country should embark on such a broad-based global competition without a clear sense of the path ahead. The theorist of war Carl von Clausewitz argued that “[t]he first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”⁷ The same basic injunction applies to an era of global competition. We should not embark on one without first becoming clear in our minds just what sort of competition we are facing.

To assess these questions and to provide a more-detailed evaluation of the emerging era of competition, RAND Project AIR FORCE has undertaken a study with four main components. The first is a survey, reflected in this report, of the ways in which theory and history can help understand the coming era. This report defines the concept of international competition and offers an initial assessment, based on a first round of survey research grounded primarily in existing RAND analysis, of what this framework suggests about the nature of the emerging era. This report concludes with several tentative findings, offered as hypotheses, about the emerging competition based on this initial survey.

Subsequent components of the study are designed to flesh out these initial assessments and test the hypotheses of the first-phase analysis. The second component will examine the ways in which key countries view the emerging competition. The third component will divide the emerging era of competition into economic, military, geopolitical, and informational aspects and identify indicators of competitive advantage in each of those realms. Finally, based on those three analytical elements, the fourth phase of the study will offer summary analysis on the nature of the emerging competition and define and evaluate several alternative national security strategies to address it.⁸

The study is also designed to highlight what might be described as the great or major powers of the era. Such nations have a disproportionate effect on the status of any international period and often generate its leading security threats. In scoping the study, therefore, we had to identify a set of countries—both in general and for the specific report on country perspectives—to which we would give particular attention. We used a number of criteria to identify a list of key players in the emerging environment.⁹ These criteria led us to an initial set of focus countries, listed in Box 1. Of these, the United States and China are identified as the two dominant actors in the emerging era, but many states will have leading roles on specific issues. While there could be some dispute around the edges of this list, broadly speaking, this list of countries stands out from other contenders.

This initial report relies on three sources of data and insight: First, we conducted a literature review of the international relations field for such terms as *competition*, *strategic competition*, *great power*

Box 1
Countries of Focus in Study

Australia	Brazil	China
France	Germany	India
Indonesia	Iran	Japan
Mexico	Russia	

competition, and *rivalry*. Second, we reviewed several historical periods for key lessons—three periods characterized by a generalized shift from moments of greater coherence and cooperation to increasing levels of rivalry and chaos. Third, we conducted a survey of data from multiple sources to get a snapshot of the emerging competition according to the indicators or criteria that we outline in the next sections.

Defining Competition

Surprisingly, we discovered that, for a term used so routinely in international relations, there is no clear, consensus understanding of what *competition* means. The distinctions among related but very different global dynamics—such as competition, conflict, rivalry, and contestation—are not well defined. In this section, we survey existing treatments of the concept of competition and offer a revised definition of our own.

General Definitions

In defining *competition*, dictionaries point to such concepts as “the act of competing; rivalry”; “a contest for some honor, prize, advantage”¹⁰; and “the rivalry offered by a competitor.” One business dictionary defines the term as “an activity done by a number of people or organizations, each of which is trying to do better than all the others.”¹¹ It also refers to “a situation in which various organisms living in the same area try to compete for a limited amount of food, water, space, etc.”¹² A source on negotiations defines competition as an approach “that emphasizes assertiveness over empathy. Competitive negotiators have winning as a goal.”¹³

These general definitions make clear that competition is not the same as *conflict*, although some versions of the terms do overlap.¹⁴ Many descriptions of conflict are quite broad, referring to “a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals.”¹⁵ Narrower definitions tend to describe a state of outright warfare. We will use the narrower definition, which describes conflict or war as an especially intense form of competition; most varieties of competition imply an effort to outperform rivals short of outright conflict. The notion of competition also implies some degree of agreement to context and boundaries: Whether in sports, the business world, or creative fields, competition usually involves the pursuit of relative success in a framework that has some degree of rules or norms.

These general definitions suggest several things about a situation of competition. First, *there must be some degree of perceived or measurable contention involved*. Two parties who are mutual partners and who share common goals and interests cannot be said to be competing. In this sense, competition always involves some degree of antagonism, but the specific degree—the intensity of antagonism and hostility in competition—can vary significantly. Second, competition is generally viewed as *a contest in which each party (or one of the two parties) aims to enhance its power and influence, typically relative to one another*. Third, while not all competitive

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situations are zero-sum or focused on relative gains, generally the term refers to a *situation in which there is either (1) scarcity in the object of the competition or (2) significance to getting more of that object than someone else*. If three or more countries are interested in something that is widely available—and possessing it conveys no special advantage—the resulting pursuit of gains might not rise to the level of a competition.

Contrasting the word *competition* with a related term—*contestation*—offers an additional perspective. Many nations *contest* specific U.S. claims, objectives, or even interests. Some, for example, contest specific U.S. objectives in trade negotiations; U.S. friends such as Brazil and India have at times bitterly contested the U.S. approach to internet governance. But such issue-specific contestation need not imply a situation of overarching competition. This comparison makes clear that a situation of competition does involve some degree of antagonism, if only in a single-issue area, that goes beyond a friendly debate over means or ends.

International Relations Theory and Competition

There is no clear consensus in either the scholarly or more policy-focused literature about the definition of competition or its component parts. In fact, the literature offers few definitions of “strategic competition” or “competition” at all, despite the importance of the concept to the major international relations paradigms.¹⁶ One of the few available definitions describes the concept as being “goal-seeking behavior that strives to reduce the gains available to others.”¹⁷ Another labels it as a situation in which “two actors in the international system have

incompatible high-priority interests and one or both actors engage in behavior that will be detrimental to the other’s interests.”¹⁸

In the international relations context, competition can be understood as a state of antagonistic relations short of direct armed conflict between actors, which reflects the three basic distinguishing factors noted earlier: perceived contention, an effort to gain mutual advantage, and pursuit of some outcome or good that is not generally available. This implies a common pursuit of power, influence, prosperity, and status at the same time when others are also seeking those things and when supply is limited.

Such a pursuit of scarce goods does not automatically imply competition. Countries have another broad avenue to achieve their objectives: *cooperation*.¹⁹ An important strain of international relations theory—including classical accounts of alliances and mutual gains, game theoretic examinations of the origins of cooperation, liberal institutionalism, and defensive realism—emphasizes the fact that states usually have cooperative or semicooperative routes to achieving their objectives if they choose them, and that such routes often have a better cost-benefit calculus than competitive ones.²⁰ This contrast sharpens our portrait of competition: It involves situations in which actors seek objectives in ways that elevate their unilateral interests and perspectives above those of other actors rather than moderating their actions for mutual benefit. Competitive behavior is not necessarily characterized by seeking relative advantage by *injuring* other parties—but it is self-directed behavior unconstrained by any sense of others’ interests.

In sum, thinking about competition from the standpoint of international relations theory and practice suggests the following broad definition:

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This definition presumes that states (or groups of states) are competing for narrow goals, such as the essential security of their nations, but they often also compete for broader objectives: leadership of the global agenda; status relative to others; and the ability to influence or dictate outcomes, especially in issues or in regions of importance to their interests.²¹ China, for example, is clearly competing to fulfill objectives well beyond the security of the Chinese Communist Party and the territorial integrity of its country: It desires dominant regional influence, a coequal global status to the United States, and more. But the broad definition can also include competition with friends or allies who are viewed as a challenge in only one sphere—for example, when the United States and countries of the European Union (EU) seek advantage in key industries.

This definition also assumes competitive behavior is only one of several possible tactics or strategies to achieve national goals. The basic national posture of Germany and Japan today is not competitive; they seek national security and prosperity in cooperative and institutional terms. The definition is thus distinct from *cooperation* (seeking those same goals through mutual coordination of activities for common benefit) and does not encompass strategies that promote national interests in a unilateral but noncompetitive manner. (A strictly neutralist foreign policy, seeking no relative

advantage over others, would fall into that category.) The definition also suggests that the concept of competition necessarily involves the pursuit of some degree of relative success to others, rather than merely an effort at self-improvement for its own sake.

The spirit of the definition proposed here is close to the classic theory of international relations known as *realism*—the idea that the international system is a forum for rivalry in which states seek to outperform one another in the pursuit of often-scarce objectives such as power and status. But nearly all varieties of realism have as their kernel a single predominant objective of that competition—either power or security.²² Realist approaches typically draw a sharp distinction between political-military realms of competition and all others and between material forms of power and nonmaterial goals such as status and prestige.

The proposed definition opens the aperture of the potential objectives of nations engaged in competition. Nations can compete over many goals, some of them intangible (such as status) and some strictly economic. There is not necessarily an automatic priority on military competition or material goals. There is also wide room for state *interpretation of ways and means*: Nations can draw from a wide array of strategies for gaining absolute or relative advantage. Some will be cooperative, some neutral, and some competitive. Even among the latter, some of the strategies will conform to realist expectations, while others may not. A state forsaking military power to compete in strictly economic terms, for example, is not behaving as a realist would expect, even if that economic competition is intense and zero-sum.

The final lesson of this review of definitions and concepts is that competition can come in many varieties. Different states will compete in diverse ways, and the emphasis they place on the hierarchy of objectives in the competition can change over time. One critical task for the United States is to evaluate what specific form it will face in the coming decade.

Historical Perspectives on the Rise of Competition

In addition to reviewing theory and definitions, we also examined the lessons of history to understand the current competition. The general historical literature on international competition and national rivalry is immense. To focus the analysis, we focused on the rise and nature of generalized periods of competition—identifying three periods when more rule-bound and cooperative eras gave way to rising competition—and the reasons for this evolution.

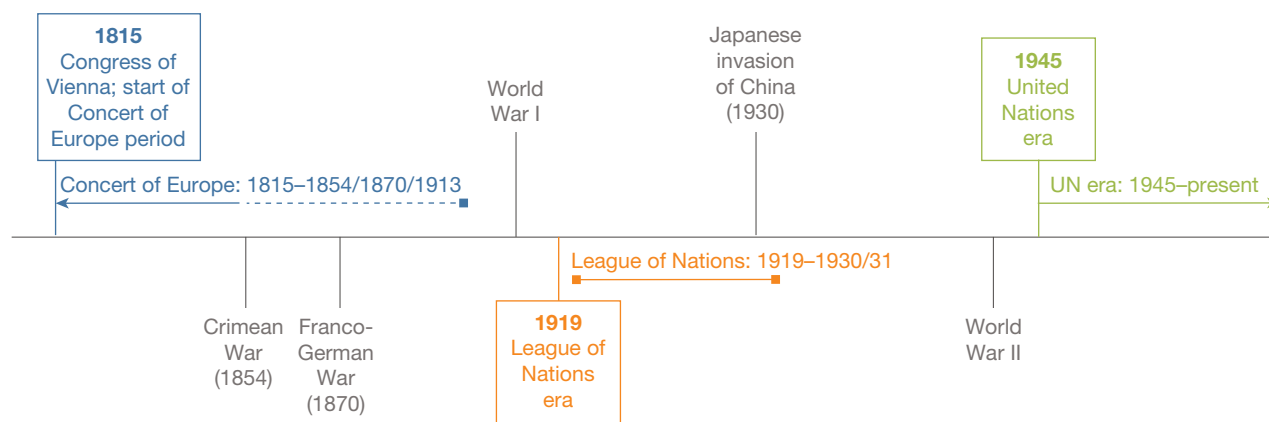
At various times in history, strategic competition seemed to be briefly muted; these were times when states chose to rein in their ambitions and cooperate to achieve some degree of collective security. A model for such historical moments is the so-called Concert of Europe borne out of the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna,²³ but our analysis identified two other modern periods: The interwar years of 1919–1939, from the Versailles Treaty concluding the First World War to the outbreak of the Second World War; and the early postwar years after 1945, when the United

States sought a multilateral order grounded in the United Nations. For each of these eras, we analyzed first how states attempted to regulate, formally or informally, their relations before examining how competition returned to the fore. Figure 1 offers a simplified historical timeline of these three eras with associated events.

A First Effort to Mitigate Competition: The Concert of Europe, 1815

Following the defeat of Napoleon at Leipzig in October 1813, France started negotiating for peace with the winning coalition of Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The powers present at the Congress of Vienna, however, had aims beyond achieving just a peace settlement. Britain in particular sought to establish some processes that would make it easier for great powers to consult one another on issues of strategic importance.²⁴ The result was a Concert of Nations, based on the final act of the Vienna Congress and the territorial borders it defined, which saw European great powers agree to handle crises through ad hoc consultations in European congresses or, for less pressing issues, ambassadors' conferences.²⁵ These consultations increased the amount of information that states had on their respective capabilities and intentions—an effort that, in turn, built trust and made it easier for states to manage crises together.²⁶ It was, to be sure, a great power-centric system in which the leading

FIGURE 1
Timeline of Competitive Eras



states managed the system with their own interests primarily in mind and did not consider other actors to have an equal voice.

A correlate to these consultations on strategic issues was great powers' acceptance to restrain their action and, in particular, to not act unilaterally in response to a crisis.²⁷ This willingness to limit one's power was not merely based on rational calculation—forgoing a potential gain today to secure a more important one later—but rather on an understanding that European great powers represented a community of interests with shared values.²⁸ States limited their ambitions so as to not be excluded from this community.²⁹ Great powers also refrained from attacking one another's vital interests and from carrying out actions that might humiliate another country or damage its prestige.³⁰ In a sign of the inclusiveness of the order, France, the defeated power, was incorporated into the Concert as early as 1818.³¹ Other powers recognized that a somewhat more-lenient policy on their part might increase the new regime's chances of survival—an outcome that they all saw as being in their interest.³²

The Concert was made possible by several factors. First, the recent memory of Napoleon's attempts to dominate Europe made all states present in Vienna eager to prevent another such occurrence in the future: The Napoleonic Wars had been horribly destructive, and the great powers hoped to avoid a recurrence. By accepting to bind their own ambitions, they obtained in exchange that all other participants would bind theirs. Great powers also had an incentive to preserve the European system (to include territorial borders) that they had just designed. In this sense, the Concert of Europe was an inherently conservative enterprise aimed at preserving the system born out of the Vienna settlement. Finally, cooperation between nations—and, equally if not more importantly, the expectation that they would cooperate in the future—was likely facilitated by the fact that the great powers present had fought together against Napoleon. This offered a memory of solidarity that, along with the memory of the war itself,³³ would soon fade.

Despite its limitations, the Concert represented what the historian Paul Schroeder calls “a profound change in the accepted rules of European

statecraft.”³⁴ The great powers effectively worked together to defuse several European and non-European crises.³⁵ Consultations provided some degree of transparency; they worked to prevent misunderstandings and accidental escalation of minor disputes. This is not to say that power competition disappeared from Europe. There were still rivalries,³⁶ but their scope was contained to allow great powers to continue consulting and making concerted decisions when the need arose.³⁷

There is no consensus, among historians, on when the Concert of Europe came to an end and a pattern of more intense, zero-sum competition reappeared. The date of 1854 is often mentioned, since the Crimean War was the first conflict after 1815 to oppose European great powers.³⁸ Yet some historians see the Concert as fading as early as the 1820s, while others contend that its effects lasted until the end of the 19th century or even until 1914—the First World War being, in that view, the only conflict whose scope the Concert of Europe did not manage to contain in some way.

Cooperation within the Concert was rocked by ideological changes across Europe, as the revolutions of 1848 dramatized and accentuated the ideological gap between conservative and liberal powers. The concept of the Concert was also challenged by the rise of notions such as pan-Germanism, which put the emphasis on solidarities between nations of a similar culture rather than between like-minded (but culturally and ethnically different) great powers.³⁹ The 1848 revolutions also put new leaders in power, whose commitment to the Concert was lesser than those who had taken part in the Vienna Congress.⁴⁰ A more-uncompromising foreign policy became a way for these leaders—particularly in France and Britain—to maintain popularity and order at home, a factor that played an important role in starting the Crimean War.⁴¹

Partly because of such factors, tensions within the Concert worsened.⁴² The Crimean War showed a return to balance-of-power dynamics, with France and Britain going to war against an ambitious Russia intent on gaining territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.⁴³ After Crimea, more wars between great powers followed;⁴⁴ by the turn of the century, competition for regional preeminence had replaced

cooperation, and European powers experienced a fresh series of crises, such as the 1898 Fashoda incident that pitted Britain against France and the 1912 and 1913 Balkan Wars. Most fundamentally, the consultative mechanisms of the Concert proved unable to deal with the most fundamental geopolitical challenge of the time—the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, which created a vacuum of power into which other great powers rushed.

The League of Nations: 1919

A second period of order-building designed to restrain competition took place in the interwar years. The First World War resulted in extensive human and material losses for all parties involved, except for the United States that found itself, after proportionately smaller losses than European powers, in a position of world leadership. The entire European system was in tatters, with two empires (Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire) dismembered. President Woodrow Wilson sought to establish institutions that would prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy, which he blamed on balance-of-power politics. Like 1815 Britain helping to establish an order that would restrain its power, the United States was ready to enter a system that would bind all great powers, including itself.⁴⁵ This section examines the various efforts undertaken in the aftermath of the First World War to collectively manage international crises—mainly through the League of Nations—and promote international cooperation between former war adversaries—mainly France and Germany—as well as the factors that contributed to their ultimate failure.

President Wilson started articulating his views about the postwar order—notably, the notion of an “international concert which must thereafter hold the world at peace”⁴⁶—in January 1917, even before the United States entered the war. In his Fourteen Points speech delivered to the U.S. Congress in January 1918, he announced the creation of a League of Nations “for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike” (Point XIV).⁴⁷ France would have preferred a military alliance to a League in order to guarantee a collective

response to (and therefore hopefully deter) a hypothetical future aggression on the part of Germany, but President Wilson was aware that an alliance binding the United States to intervene militarily in Europe would not pass Senate ratification. He pushed instead for a more informal guarantee.⁴⁸

The League was based on a covenant that codified such principles as the respect for the territorial integrity of all League members and the solidarity of the rest of the League with a member suffering aggression.⁴⁹ Like the earlier Concert of Europe, it placed a strong emphasis on consultations between its members, who met regularly in Geneva.⁵⁰

Yet the 1919 settlement also rested largely on a balance of power logic, as several of its provisions—such as the prohibition of a merge between Germany and Austria (Anschluss)—were specifically aimed at containing a resurgence of Germany’s military power.⁵¹ The most conspicuous absence in the League was the United States, following a negative vote by the U.S. Senate, which refused to endorse the international system conceived in many ways by the American president. While the Soviet Union was a member, moreover, its status as a pariah meant that it played only a minimal role; as a result, Britain and France, although diminished by the war, became the key players in the new institutions.⁵²

Under the influence of the League, the 1920s were marked by significant degrees of cooperation in Europe.⁵³ France and Germany made progress in relation to the reparations issue, which had briefly led the French to occupy the Ruhr in 1923. Through the 1925 Locarno treaties, Germany recognized its new western borders and pledged to not attack France or Belgium. In 1928, the Kellogg-Briand Pact signed by most League members committing signatories to renounce war and settle peacefully their disputes represented the last successful effort to create a stable European order.⁵⁴ During its short life, the League managed to resolve a number of territorial disputes ranging from the Baltics to Albania to Iraq.

But this hopeful post-1918 international order was soon undermined by the aggressive policies of revisionist powers, the most prominent of whom were Germany and Italy in Europe and Japan in East Asia. These three countries saw the rise to power of

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leaders with revisionist and militarist agendas and whose explicit objective was to upset the existing order. The first serious encroachment was Japan's aggression in Manchuria in 1931. The League of Nations showed on that occasion that it could not do much to prevent aggression and was equally powerless at punishing it.⁵⁵ Japan responded to the League of Nations' protests and its setup of an investigative body (the Lytton Commission) by pulling out of the organization, with little if any negative consequences. In 1936, Italy's invasion of Abyssinia represented another blatant violation of the League's principles. This marked, according to J. P. Dunbabin, the moment when "the League's prestige was finally destroyed . . . and politics reverted to an earlier model."⁵⁶

The League further fell into disarray as violations of the post-1918 treaties and established boundaries took place at an accelerated pace. Germany occupied the demilitarized Rhineland in March 1936 and united with Austria in a treaty-prohibited Anschluss two years later. The League played almost no role in addressing these crises or the Spanish Civil War or Japan's attack against China in 1937. In a context of rising tensions, all powers started rearming, but the French and British efforts quickly fell behind Germany's.⁵⁷

Historians have assigned a variety of causes to the failure of the League. The institution was lacking in many ways, particularly in its absence of an enforcement mechanism.⁵⁸ The League—and the post-First World War order more generally—were closely associated with the Versailles settlement. As a result, "it lacked a concert of interests, as Germany, Japan, and Italy opposed the postwar status quo."⁵⁹ Additionally, the rise of authoritarian regimes challenged the liberal and democratic values at the League's core.⁶⁰

The 1929 financial crisis played a major role in fostering heightened competition. The failure of the international economic conference in London in June 1933, whose purpose was to get states to come up with a common response to their economic woes, marked the end of such efforts. Subsequently, states engaged in protectionist policies that reinforced competition.⁶¹ Economic competition fed international tensions, and the economic crisis also contributed to the defeat of traditional political parties in favor of populist, anti-liberal and militaristic leaders in countries such as Germany and Japan.⁶² These leaders' response to the crisis involved stimulating national industry through rearmament and expanding the national territory to make economic autarky viable, two elements that put them on a collision course with other powers.⁶³

Meanwhile, the United States pursued its isolationist policy, and neither Britain nor France were willing to run the risks that would have been necessary to stand decisively in the path of revisionist powers. As a result, there were effectively no great powers left to maintain the international system born out of the First World War. European powers resorted to unilateral moves in the face of crises—for example, Britain signing a naval agreement with Germany in June 1935 without consulting the French, or France getting closer to Russia against Britain's will⁶⁴—or to taking decisions that reflected an acceptance of *faits accomplis*, violations of territorial integrity, and disregard for nations' sovereignty, culminating in the Munich conference that endorsed the effective dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

The United Nations System: 1945

Although the failure of the 1815 Concert and the 1919 settlement to prevent two world wars raised some doubts as to whether collective security systems were worth attempting again,⁶⁵ the post-World War II settlement presents some similarities with these previous efforts. The conferences of Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July–August 1945) made clear that the new international order would be largely designed by the United States, Soviet Union, China, and Great Britain, which Roosevelt envisioned as the "Four Policemen" who would be responsible for

preserving peace.⁶⁶ While Roosevelt's notion of the Four Policemen did not prevail in the end, the notion of a small number of powers meeting regularly to settle crises is at the core of the United Nations' Security Council, which was established in October 1945.⁶⁷ Under the pressure of Winston Churchill, France was added as a fifth power in 1945 and took part in the quadripartite division of Germany. The period starting after World War II also saw the creation of numerous multilateral institutions. In the economic and financial realm, in particular, new efforts at binding industrial nations together were a direct result of the perception that protectionism and autarky in the 1930s had played a major role in leading European powers to war.⁶⁸

This period of order-building unfolded in two distinct phases: The initial period of designing the United Nations and associated institutions, which began as early as 1941 and ran through the end of the war; and the second phase of order-building within a largely Western community, which emerged once it became clear that the Soviet Union would not be a reliable partner in a global system. As the world increasingly became divided into two "blocs"⁶⁹ aligned with either the United States or the Soviet Union, some elements of the Western order still evoked earlier Concerts. Members generally shared liberal democracy as a common value. Founded in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was based on the idea that members would respond to an attack against any of them, regardless of the victim's size, power, or military contribution to the organization (Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty), and that the decision to provide such a response would also be taken collectively—a reminder of the principles of equality and collective decisionmaking from the 19th-century Concert.⁷⁰ Another key element of that Western order evoking

the earlier Concert was the willingness, on the part of the United States, to show restraint and act to the largest possible extent within multilateral institutions—an informal covenant between the United States and the states that chose to align with it summarized as follows by John Ikenberry: "At the heart of the American postwar order was an ongoing trade-off: the United States would agree to operate within an institutionalized political process and, in return, its partners [would] agree [to] be willing participants."⁷¹

According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, the effort to set up a new, peaceful international order after the Second World War was based on a fundamental misunderstanding between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States believed that collective security and a freer world trade—both elements that had been sorely missing in the 1930s—would bring security. In contrast, "For Stalin, the key to peace was simple: keep Russia strong and Germany weak."⁷² These two tenets led to fundamentally different conceptions of how Eastern Europe—Russia's buffer zone—and postwar Germany should be treated. U.S. fears of Soviet influence over Eastern Europe and Germany were compounded by their lack of trust in a leader whose ideology was based on an explicit intention to overthrow capitalism. As early as 1946, the United States—with support from the Congress and the public—engaged in a more confrontational policy toward the Soviet Union and initiated rearmament efforts.⁷³ Similar lack of trust on the part of the Soviet Union, largely based on ideological reasons but also compounded by Stalin's paranoia, further widened the gap with the United States and made cooperating to manage the new international system virtually impossible.⁷⁴

The bipolar divide of the world that started in 1946–1947 was further solidified by the division of

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Germany in two separate states in 1949. The function of the United Nations was impeded by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, which routinely used their veto power within the Security Council to block the initiatives of the other.⁷⁵ Charles A. and Clifford A. Kupchan argue that a true Concert was attempted after the Second World War but never realized, as the United States and the Soviet Union fundamentally disagreed on what the nature of the international order should be.⁷⁶

International competition was not limited to the U.S.-Soviet confrontation, as some states chose to opt out from this binary choice. Leaders who rejected both the U.S. and the Soviet blocs—such as Tito in Yugoslavia, Nasser in Egypt, and Nehru in India—formed a nonaligned movement, while the Sino-Soviet rift made clear that communism was not a monolith. In Europe, De Gaulle’s insistence at distancing France from the United States and conducting an independent foreign policy represents, albeit to a lesser extent, another fault line in the geopolitical blocs.⁷⁷

Yet while the United States and the Soviet Union were clearly engaged in intense strategic competition to define the ideological, political, and economic features of the international order, they could also, at times, cooperate. They would do so on

such issues as strategic arms control or the creation of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, whose Final Act, as Georges-Henri Soutou notes, “amounted to a legal framework for a European order (equality among states, inviolability of borders, human rights, basic freedoms, self-determination)” and might be seen as a belated attempt to return to the quadripartite European order initiated in 1945.⁷⁸ This suggests that, even during the Cold War, there was a possibility, however slim, of a European order between great powers that were also ideological adversaries.⁷⁹

Within the western block, however, competition was successfully contained. Rynning argues that the “western concert”—made up of NATO and EU nations—that was born in the postwar era still holds today.⁸⁰ His position echoes G. John Ikenberry’s, who contends that a “liberal hegemonic order” was established during the Cold War and survived the end of that era, even as a number of new competitors—such as Brazil, India, and China—increasingly challenged U.S. authority and asked for a larger role in multilateral institutions.⁸¹ In Western Europe, economic competition was contained through the progressive integration of states into what eventually became the EU. Competition was pushed to a supranational level, with the entire EU bloc becoming a single economic competitor for other states.

The Emergence of Competition: Lessons from History

This brief review points to several lessons that can help assess the emerging era of international competition. First, *periods of cooperation tended to occur after major wars*, when the urgent requirement for order-building seemed more obvious to governments and populaces of participating nations. It was in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, and World War II that the most-intense efforts arose to bring more rule-based order to world politics. A concern for the future, however, is that this commitment to ordering mechanisms typically does not last forever: Postwar order-building projects tend to give way to periods of intensified competition

and, in some cases, conflict, as occurred with the collapse of the post-1815 Vienna system and the post-1919 League of Nations.

Second, *competition appears more likely to lead to conflict if it involves states that seek to change the norms and principles upon which the international system is based* rather than states that merely wish to improve their position within the international system. States that contest established norms of, for instance, territorial integrity—such as the expansionist Germany and Japan of the 1930s—likely present a higher risk that competition will degenerate into armed confrontation. Systemic versus issue-specific revisionism is the greater threat, although in some cases, the dividing line between the two can be blurry.

Third, *states sharing “a minimum sense of political community”⁸² seem more likely to be able to avoid or manage competition.* This factor counts as one of the conditions that appear to have made the 1815 Concert, as well as—at least initially—the 1919 and 1945 settlements, possible. While states engaging in some degree of collective security do not need to share the same governing systems or values, some basic principles of action upon which they can agree might help contain or restrain competition.

Fourth, *the ultimate objective of the competition matters.* Are states merely competing or trying to reach regional (or even global) hegemony? The historian Paul Schroeder argues that one reason why the Concert era was mostly peaceful was the fact that great powers were still competing, but “without degenerating into a struggle for mastery.”⁸³

Fifth, *domestic factors play a key role in constraining or promoting competition, as well as in determining the type of competition that is pursued.* A critical question is whether competition—and, in its most extreme form, war—bolsters or harms political leadership’s chances of survival. The 1815 Concert

was born out of a willingness on the part of Europe’s great powers to prevent a future war by resolving together small crises before they could escalate. In contrast, the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s used a militaristic policy to sustain the economy and keep themselves in power—in other words, they had a vested interest in war.

Sixth, *competition can be aggravated by unexpected events outside the geopolitical relations of the competition itself,* as when the 1929 financial crisis triggered intense economic competition and contributed to the rise to power of leaders intent on pursuing a most drastic form of military competition. Alternatively, some surprise events can assuage competition—this is the case, as noted earlier, of recent wars, which tend to bring states to search for collective security to avoid a repetition of the past.

Finally, *the degree to which states can trust one another remains an essential element of any attempt to set up an international system aimed at defusing crises.* According to John Mearsheimer, states’ inability to trust others’ intention is a major reason why the search for greater power is a constant in world politics.⁸⁴ Yet such mistrust could be overcome at various times in history: the 1815 Concert, but also the 1918 and 1945 peace settlements aimed at offering participants a longer time horizon whereby they might forgo immediate gains based on the expectation that the Concert would hold long enough for them to benefit, at a future time, from other members behaving in the same way.⁸⁵

One lesson stands out as especially concerning from the sum total of these lessons: the difficulty of avoiding conflict between great powers engaged in across-the-board competitions, especially when their systems reflect starkly different values. Graham Allison has suggested a “Thucydides Trap” that points toward U.S.-China war—a classic dynamic in which an established power fears a rising challenger,

[D]omestic factors play a key role in constraining or promoting competition, as well as in determining the type of competition that is pursued.

producing dynamics that lead to war.⁸⁶ This specific mechanism is controversial—but the overriding message of history supports the conclusions of their analysis of 16 historical cases of “power transition,” which is that the risk of accelerating mutual threat perceptions and miscalculations becomes intense in such powerful competitions. These mutual perceptual dynamics are well under way. History suggests that avoiding conflict will require a nuanced combination of military preparedness and credibility and denying Chinese gains in such areas as economic and informational strategies, but also ongoing diplomacy and efforts to find areas of overlapping interests.

A Framework for Assessing the International Competitive Environment

Having considered basic definitional issues—understanding how to conceive of competition as a phenomenon—we sought to identify key factors that can help define the character of a specific competitive environment. As suggested in the previous section, each competition can take on very different characteristics and, even within the same competition, countries can compete in divergent ways. The most important task for the United States in an era that will be characterized by intensifying competition is to understand its essential nature. Our review of theory and history suggests five specific factors that can help in making such a determination. We pose them as five questions:

1. What is the essential character or nature of the competing nations?
2. What do the participants compete for (what are their goals)?
3. How do they compete (what strategies or capabilities do they employ)?
4. What specific international systemic patterns or structures come to characterize the competition?
5. To what degree does the competition reflect factors that theory and history suggest determine its intensity?

To understand the character of a specific competition, a nation must consider the character of other competitors—what they want, the nature of their strategies for getting it, and how the dynamics of those interacting strategies can play out. The next sections consider one of these major variables, describe more-specific metrics to assess it, and offer an initial evaluation of what the current competition looks like in that regard.

What Is the Character of the Competing Nations?

To understand the emerging era of competition, the United States must first assess the character of the great powers that will shape it—both persistent features (such as national ambitions and strategic culture) and evolving ones (such as the structure of its government and domestic interests and leader’s perspectives). Our review of the literature on international relations, informed by our assessment of historical periods of rising competition, points to a few critical factors that can help evaluate the character of such actors. We asked these questions to identify the characteristics of possible powers:

- Is the regime a democracy or not?
- How does it conceive of its identity—and what sort of ambitions and grievances does that conception generate?
- Is it mostly satisfied with its position in the international system or not?
- What sort of domestic interest groups and ideologies dominate its foreign policy debate?
- How do its current leaders see the competition?

In this section, we describe each of these variables and then apply them to the emerging competition.

The first of these factors is regime type. One of the most reliable findings in the political science literature has been the *democratic peace theory*—the idea that democracies tend not to go to war, either in general (in some variants of the theory) or specifically with other democracies (in other versions).⁸⁷ These theories suggest many reasons for such patterns, from the checks and balances built into democratic

systems to the habits of peaceful resolution of disputes that emerge in such societies. This finding for conflict should have significant implications for more generalized competition, especially for behavior among democracies.

A second major factor to assess the character of competitors is actor identity and the resulting perceptions of interests. A state's identity—its basic sense of itself, essentially its values, rights, historic role, and ambitions—plays a major and sometimes dominant role in shaping the perception of interests and objectives, and thus behavior.⁸⁸ Identity is the most fundamental filter through which states interpret the character of a competition, their goals in that competition, and the resulting implications for their competitive positioning. As just one example, China has certain socially constructed ideas about itself as a player on the international stage that differ in kind and character from those of many other states: It views itself as the natural hegemon of the region, with both a potential but also an ideologically grounded right to exercise predominant influence over others. Its national identity will influence its behavior in a competitive landscape—similar to what the United States has done. This is an especially important potential variable in the competition today; Box 2 describes the concept in more detail.

The third aspect of the character of competitors is their degree of dissatisfaction and revisionist intent. International relations theory has sought to identify types of states that are uniquely disruptive of any order and that engage in constant and destabilizing forms of competition out of an urgently felt need to overturn or significantly modify the existing system. Termed “revisionist,” “dissatisfied,” or “predator” states, this type of actor will both

energize and exacerbate the nature and level of competition. (This factor is also relevant to the emerging competition; Box 3 discusses this character of competitor.) Revisionist states are typically contrasted with status quo powers that are broadly satisfied with the system or order that exists. States can theoretically be revisionist in one issue area (e.g., economics) while retaining status quo inclinations in another (e.g., geopolitics).

The constellations of domestic interests within a state provide a fourth factor to assess the character of the competitors. Some leading traditions in international relations, as well as the lessons of history, emphasize the role of domestic actors and interests—of a wide range of types and relative influence—in shaping the ultimate character of a state in international relations.⁸⁹ These can include business lobbies, ideological groupings, political parties, and bureaucratic coalitions. Bureaucratic politics can be an especially noteworthy influence on the ultimate choices of national governments, both constraining those choices and sometimes determining their outcome. In some nondemocratic countries, the role of clashing domestic interests—such as the party apparatus, the military, and sometimes nongovernmental actors such as religious or tribal interests—can have a similarly important influence. Various constellations of such interests have played important roles in encouraging conflict (as in the famous case of German domestic interests before World War I) or forestalling a nation's international ambitions (as in the dominant interest groups opposed to U.S. interventionism through the 1930s).

Finally, an important variable governing the behavior of actors in a competitive environment

One of the most reliable findings in the political science literature has been the democratic peace theory—the idea that democracies tend not to go to war, either in general . . . or specifically with other democracies . . .

Box 2

National Identity and Competition

Strategic competition between states is the result of not only economic and military resources, but of cultural forces as well. These softer factors are crucial because they shape the ways in which the harder factors are understood, approached, desired, and feared by states, societies, and leaders. Interests are mediated by the identities of the actors, their self-understandings, and their understandings of their relationships with other actors.

Strategic competition, therefore, cannot be explained outside the context of the identities and social relationships of the actors.⁹⁰ Competition, in this view, is not the automatic result of the distribution of material capabilities but is a product of the social process of states coming to see their relationship as competitive. And such perceptions are often grounded in the self-determined identities of the states involved. Many identities can coexist within one country, and it is wrong to treat states as completely unitary actors. Yet, countries do have collective histories, traditions, and narratives that tend to endow them with some degree of shared national identity. Indeed, the reaffirmation of these identities is a major priority of many governments today, partly because so many people see their national or community identity as under assault from globalizing and homogenizing forces.

Russia's historic identity, for example, tends to place it in a competitive relationship with Europe; Russia sees itself as an outlier from the European project. China's self-conception creates ambitions for regional pre-dominance that other Asian states do not currently share. Identities can affect specific policy issues: States' understanding of themselves as "civilized" led them to see chemical and nuclear weapons as illegitimate and to abstain from their use.⁹¹ Of course, the United States, too, has a global posture strongly influenced (if not determined) by its sense of national identity as a nation called forth to promote liberal values.

The role of identity also affects the ways in which decisions are made. Rather than encouraging classic cost-benefit analysis (a so-called logic of consequences), concepts of identity tend to operate according to a "logic of appropriateness." People operating with a logic of appropriateness ask "three elementary questions: What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this?" Action following this logic is an exercise in "matching . . . identities, situations, and behavioral rules."⁹² Germany and Japan's postwar foreign policies are excellent examples. Despite being subject to the same security threats as other states, the two countries have pursued avowedly antimilitaristic policies.⁹³ Their national security strategies and policies result, in part, from their postwar self-conceptions.

National identities matter in strategic competition. Identities—which are socially constructed, contested, and malleable and are not natural or fixed⁹⁴—are the fundamental filter through which countries contextualize their competitive positioning. National identity can influence state behavior directly and indirectly in any number of ways. Its importance stems in part from its role in the collective memory—emotion-laden understandings of history shared by members of a group.⁹⁵ For example, collective memories of events—such as the Holocaust and the Vietnam War—shape perspectives and decisions of Americans born long after the events happened.⁹⁶ Shared memories provide the foundation for group identity. In a more palpable way, national identity can also constrain state actions: The role of Germany and Japan in the emerging competitive environment, for example, is limited by the ingrained attitudes (and, in some cases, constitutional restraints) of the postwar identities of these two countries.

Such collective memories can have a powerful effect on international threat perceptions and resulting competition. This is especially true in Asia today,⁹⁷ where historical memory of World War II continues to have a powerful effect on the relations among China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as other countries in the region. Historical memory, more than objective material considerations, powerfully shapes the regional reaction to a more-assertive Japanese security policy, for example. In sum, the way states approach an emerging competition cannot be fully understood without taking seriously the role of identity and related issues such as collective memory.

Box 3

Assessing Degrees of Revisionism

A revisionist state—defined in contrast to status quo states, which are happy with the existing system and its implied balances of power and influence⁹⁸—is a useful concept to understanding the degree of competitive intensity that China and Russia are likely to inject into world politics. Revisionists seek change, although the details of it and how militant they may be in seeking it are subject to wide variation.⁹⁹ As a rule, revisionist states aspire to

- alter the distribution of goods in international politics, especially among leading powers (this can include sovereign or territorial claims but does not necessarily)
- increase their relative power, status, and voice in the system
- boost the global relevance and influence of their values and/or ideology
- either change specific rules governing the system or enhance their own relative influence in shaping and enforcing rule setting as a process.

These aspirations could be embraced by many states that are seeking to grow power without necessarily posing a threat to others. Any rising power determined to change the distribution of goods (such as global wealth patterns) is revisionist—a category that would at present include such order-producing and responsible members of the international community as Brazil, South Africa, India, and Mexico. China would be a limited threat were it to constrain its revisionism to demands for different rule sets in the World Trade Organization or enhanced global equity.

A second set of criteria distinguishes between revisionists seeking to differentiate moderated or constrained cases from militaristic revisionist states—actors sometimes referred to as “rogue regimes.”¹⁰⁰ Such actors

- have specific territorial or regional sphere-of-influence demands and ambitions that require coercion and possibly military aggression against neighboring states
- view the existing order as inherently biased against them and fundamentally illegitimate, requiring wholesale change or even annihilation rather than mere reform
- repeatedly violate core norms of the international system in service of unilateral interests.

One of the questions that will determine the nature of the emerging competitive era, then, is which of these two broad categories—more-moderated or constrained revisionism versus more-militaristic and aggressive—will Russia and especially China end up falling into. The concept of revisionism offers several indicators that inform the question over time, including (1) the number of military aggressive acts taken, (2) the number of new or renewed territorial claims, (3) state narratives and propaganda that depict the existing order as bankrupt, and (4) clear violations of rules and norms.

These criteria remain subjective. Some might contend that the United States is revisionist based on many of these indices. Nonetheless, the markers provide a baseline to work from. Recent RAND analysis suggests that, at least so far, China remains firmly in the category of a moderated revisionist, whereas Russia’s stance is more complex but not fully militaristic. Notwithstanding events (such as a Taiwanese declaration of independence) that could call forth more-aggressive revisionist actions, it appears that Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are all capable of pursuing the moderated degree of revisionism they seek below the threshold of armed conflict.

is the beliefs and perspectives of their leaders or leadership groups. This is a more changeable variable than many of the others, but it is often the decisive one. In many ways, leader perspectives function as the filter for all other unit-level variables: Aggressive leaders will tend toward more intense and even violent forms of competition, whereas more status quo-oriented or risk-averse leaders will not.

A specific belief, and one that can be especially critical to shaping a state's competitive posture, is the leader or leadership group's perspective on the need for and nature of competition itself. This may be a function of leaders' theories of international relations, personal experiences, or attitudes toward specific nations. Some countries and national security establishments (such as in present-day Germany) become focused on transcending the requirement for competition, whereas others (to a degree in Russia and in elements of the U.S. national security community) see competition as persistent, unavoidable, and demanding vigorous and at times confrontational postures. These fundamental beliefs about competition constitute a critical variable in determining competitive behavior.

Lessons for the Emerging Competition

This brief analysis of the character of agents in the competitive landscape holds several implications. First, it simply emphasizes a general rule: The character of a competition will flow in large measure from the essential character of its participants. This fact presents a reason for concern, given the current trend in deepening authoritarian impulses in Russia and China. Even if pure national interests can be significantly reconciled, the nature of the states involved may make it difficult to moderate competition.

Second, our initial assessment of the major states in the emerging international environment suggests that the severity of the competition is mainly a question of the relationship of several possibly revisionist actors toward a larger group of mostly stable, status quo states whose preference is to compete in moderate ways.¹⁰¹ Most major powers today, including the United States, Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil, are democracies that compete

Even if pure national interests can be significantly reconciled, the nature of the states involved may make it difficult to moderate competition.

economically but otherwise do not perceive an intense geopolitical competition among the group. They do not have urgent territorial ambitions and want to preserve some sort of rules-based order. Any differences that exist mostly concern relative influence in setting and enforcing rules; the major powers mostly agree that nonaggression, free trade, nonproliferation, and other principles of the postwar order are mutually beneficial. Russia's and China's ambitions and potential aggressiveness are the issue—and of those, it is China's ambitious regional and global ambitions that are the overriding factor in shaping the competition. Two smaller outliers, Iran and North Korea, may become catalysts of regional competition but are not global actors and remain isolated from much of the world community. No such assessment will hold true for all time, of course: These assigned characteristics can change, and our assessments apply to the character of these states at the time of writing.

The issue, in other words, is not a generalized great power competition as much as it is a struggle to constrain two potential major power revisionists. The emerging competition continues to reflect an informal coalition of mostly value-sharing democracies committed to some versions of the rules and norms that have characterized the postwar international order. This fact potentially offers the United States a tremendous competitive advantage: If it retains its position as leader of this coalition,

the United States will persist in having significant leverage.

Third, notwithstanding the constraints on their revisionism, Russia and China (and, to a lesser degree, Iran) all share an important characteristic that defines the nature of the challenge they pose: Their governance models do not take seriously the sort of public-private distinctions, or elaborate principles of rule of law, that are so central to most liberal democracies.

The challenge that the two countries pose to the United States, other democracies, and the broader international order stems in significant measure from this essential mismatch. Value-sharing democracies are confronting competitors who combine economic competition, intelligence operations, cyber meddling, political manipulation, information campaigns, and many other tools in ways that democracies are institutionally (and sometimes constitutionally) incapable of matching. The challenge, from China at least, is unique among current challengers: This is the single case in which the United States is confronted with a highly competent, economically dynamic country that, at least in theory, can employ every actor in the society as part of a coordinated strategy.

Fourth, notwithstanding some of the similarities we discussed, it is critical to differentiate between China and Russia. Often, treatments of the emerging competitive era lump the two countries as “revisionists.” But the degree of their global ambitions, the balance between economic and military challenges, and the tools they have at their disposal differ greatly. Indeed, we argue next that—among multiple competitions in the emerging international environment—the dominant reality is an overarching competition with China, with secondary, largely regional contestations with other actors, including Russia.

Fifth, because of the character of most major powers, it may remain possible to assemble a critical mass of states—one reflecting more than three-quarters of global gross domestic product and military expenditure—dedicated to stability.¹⁰² Absent further fracturing of the international order, the context does not appear to reflect a truly multipolar order with many relatively equal, and equally

What are the participants competing for? What are their goals and objectives?

revisionist, great powers. Instead it is likely to represent a future with threats and opportunities that diverge from the classic model of great power competition. If the relatively positive relationships among value-sharing democracies can persist, and if the international trade and financial system remains largely intact, there will continue to be a disproportionate component of global power favoring peaceful resolution of disputes and economic integration.

Yet in approaching the global systemic dynamics of the emerging competition, the United States must take more seriously than ever a simple fact. Although the United States has been the predominant status quo power since 1945—maintaining the postwar order, including for its economic components, against challengers—it has also, especially since 1989, arguably been the world’s most ardent revisionist. This has been true in areas of norms and values rather than territory: American revisionism has sought to spread democracy (including to the Soviet Union during the Cold War but also through military interventions in Iraq and elsewhere), neoliberal economic models (including through stringent conditions applied by international economic institutions), and more. Many other countries see the United States, with its advocacy of liberal values through example and sometimes coercive force, as the most disruptive force in the international system. This is becoming even more true given recent policies that have called into question the future of U.S. participation in the very institutions and processes it helped create after 1945. The United States will not be able to fully comprehend others’ reactions to its policies in the emerging competition without taking more seriously than before its own role as global disruptor.

What Do States Compete Over?

The second question to help understand the nature of the emerging competition is: What are the participants competing *for*? What are their goals and objectives? Again, theory and history provide an initial framework, offering several goals that states typically seek in international relations. Achieving individual state objectives in each of these areas need not be a zero-sum situation or even one in which states are obsessed with relative gains. But states typically compare themselves with others along several major indices.

The goals outlined in the next subsections reflect different measurement indexes. Some, such as economic measurements, are generally measured on absolute scales and often have a nonzero-sum character: Gains for one party need not mean losses for another—indeed, in a situation of interdependence, for one country to gain may require another to grow. Others, such as power and status, are typically defined in relative terms. A gain in global status for one major power would generally be viewed as coming at the expense of the status of another, although this is not always the case. The intensity and zero-sum aspects of the emerging competition, then, will depend in part on which areas end up being the dominant focus of the competition.

Power and Security

The most fundamental objective of competition in international relations theory, rooted in classic realist accounts of world politics, is that states seek some combination of power and security. Perhaps the most well-established claim in all of international relations theory, stretching back to Thucydides and even earlier, is that nations compete for power. (Power is typically defined in terms of aggregate resources,

which include population size, economic assets, and military capacity.¹⁰³) Different traditions, however, disagree about why nations do so, how much power they want, and what power distributions are most stable.¹⁰⁴ One more modern approach, for example, argues that states' most fundamental goal is *security*, not power: Security is the ultimate goal of all states in an anarchic system (a system in which there is no overall authority to enforce rules). Power is simply the means to obtain it.¹⁰⁵

Several modern approaches emphasize the importance of perceptions of *relative* power and relative gains in shaping nations' competitive behavior. When all states are competing in an anarchic system for security and survival, what matters is gaining more of something relative to other actors, even if that means all actors gain less in absolute terms. In this approach, for example, the United States should have been less concerned that its own gross domestic product was growing during the 1990s and 2000s than it was about the fact that China's was growing much faster, and thus relative U.S. power was eroding.¹⁰⁶

One debate in international relations offers useful insight for assessing the potential of any competition to intensify and eventually end in war. Two differing approaches, which have become known as *offensive* and *defensive* realism, diverge on just how much power states want and which power distributions are most stable.¹⁰⁷ Offensive realists contend that the structure of the international system drives nations to seek the most power they possibly can—a drive that will inevitably include the pursuit of regional hegemony, if such an objective is within a nation's capacity.¹⁰⁸ Competition and conflict are therefore caused by multiple actors seeking to maximize their share of power relative to others—not because of greed, but because of the need to ensure

Two differing approaches, which have become known as *offensive* and *defensive* realism, diverge on just how much power states want and which power distributions are most stable.

survival. In the process, however, their mutual ambitions lead to war. The scholar John Mearsheimer famously deems this the “tragedy of great power politics.”¹⁰⁹

In contrast, a group of scholars known as defensive realists argues that “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system.”¹¹⁰ Both too little and too much power is dangerous: Too little power invites aggression from stronger countries, but states also recognize that too *much* power can provoke balancing behavior from others.¹¹¹ This approach allows more room for compromise and even cooperation to constrain competitive dynamics; nations in a defensive realist world fully appreciate that even selfish interests can be advanced through collaborative mechanisms. The leading defensive realist thinker Charles Glaser argues that the approach “demonstrates that international anarchy does not create a general tendency for security-seeking states to pursue competitive strategies.”¹¹²

The distinction between offensive and defensive interpretations of power and security is therefore critical to understanding the dynamics likely to unfold in the current conception of competition. A China behaving as an offensive realist would be expected, for example, to seek very elaborate versions of regional hegemony and be willing to undertake aggressive military action to obtain that goal. A China in a defensive realist mindset would be much more aware of the dangers of such a course and be content with less absolute, more-collaborative resolutions of regional territorial disputes.

Realists also worry that even when states are trying to be relatively restrained, the steps they take to ensure their own security can inadvertently threaten other states—a situation known as the *security dilemma*.¹¹³ Cooperation is riskier, and security dilemmas are more likely, when defensive capacity is indistinguishable from offensive capacity; when the same weaponry and equipment can be used equally efficiently for aggression as for defense, the potential costs of cooperating are much higher. In contrast, the security dilemma is mitigated when it is possible to differentiate defensive and offensive weapons and when defensive strategies have the advantage.

In sum, the literature on power and security seeking offers several potential lessons for the current competition. Broadly speaking, states compete for hard power but, in most cases, as a means to security, which is less zero-sum than power itself. In competitive rivalries, states will pay close attention to the relative gains of rivals. The pursuit of power leads to security dilemmas, as measures taken by some states to enhance their reputation are viewed by others as a threat—sometimes prompting escalatory responses.

Status, Standing, and Prestige

A second leading objective of state competition is status.¹¹⁴ Status is often critical for states whose identity depends to some degree on their relative standing in world politics. Status objectives generally translate into goals in other areas, whether economic or geopolitical. China’s search for leading status, for example, arguably demands both measurably equal influence to the United States and the realization of some vision of regional geopolitical predominance. Russia’s status goals are integrally linked to its demand for a sphere of influence on its periphery among former Soviet states.

One of the leading trends in world politics today is the growing number of countries with some degree of *status* dissatisfaction even if they are not revisionist in terms of the overall system—nations that believe their identity, power, and history entitle them to a greater role in international affairs than they now have. Several major countries, notably Russia and China, but also including restive states such as Turkey, Brazil, Venezuela, and others, resent the existing order: dominated by the United States, inequitable, and without countries’ sufficient voice. These countries feel that the current order does not sufficiently respect their dignity. Their desire for enhanced status is reflected in their national security doctrines and in the sentiments of officials and scholars alike, as revealed by RAND researchers’ conversations in several of these countries. In a more personal and economic and less geopolitical way, significant minorities in dozens of countries, including the United States, see the current order as elite dominated, unequal, stagnant, and run to the benefit of special interests and minority groups.¹¹⁵

As much as they desire such geopolitical outcomes as power, security, and status, major powers also seek economic goals such as prosperity and economic influence.

Material Economic Prosperity and Power

As much as they desire such geopolitical outcomes as power, security, and status, major powers also seek economic goals such as prosperity and economic influence. To a certain degree, this is a subset of the larger search for power and security expressed in economic terms. Historically, the pursuit of economic goals has manifested in a series of discrete economic strategies, including empire, mercantilism, state-led development and industrial policy, state-funded research and development, and favorable tax or fiscal policies to attract investment and business activity. A prominent example of a bitter economic competition emerged in the U.S.-Japan relationship in the 1980s: Although the two countries were joined in a military alliance and cooperated routinely on geopolitical issues, some U.S. scholars and officials saw in Japan a predatory trading state determined to dominate many key industries.¹¹⁶

Like competition over geopolitical goals, economic competition can have both absolute and relative components. Nations typically seek certain absolute economic goals with important domestic implications—a given rate of growth, unemployment, or new business activity. But countries also will frequently assess these goals in relative terms, comparing themselves with the concomitant levels of achievement in other countries. Indeed, much economic competition remains relatively friendly, with significant degrees of cooperation on rules and norms. The postwar international economic order is the most institutionalized and rule-governed component of the postwar order, and this, combined with the gradual coalescing of most leading powers

onto a similar economic model, has tended to moderate economic competition.

International competition can, at certain moments, have a dominantly economic cast and become much more aggressive. The term *economic warfare* has been used to refer to intense economic competition, although this has usually been posed as a complement to traditional military operations in wartime.¹¹⁷ Today, some analysts have pointed to the rising use of a range of economic tools—from targeted sanctions to industrial espionage to state-supported industries—in concerted campaigns designed to gain competitive advantage.¹¹⁸ China's goal in the emerging competition, for example, appears to be first and foremost economic—both achieving a given level of development and gaining a relative advantage over the United States in many areas of advanced technology.

Resources

States also seek control over and access to resources. Traditionally, when raw materials constituted a leading element of state power, this was a leading source of conflict among states. This is less true today, and an integrated global economy in which resources can be obtained through trade—and in which the leading sources of competition derive from the application of knowledge rather than raw materials—has made competition over resources a less-central aspect of international relations.

There are many exceptions to this general rule, however. One is in the developing world, where some less-developed nations continue to rely on the export of raw materials for significant components of their gross domestic product and interstate competition

over resources remains an ongoing issue.¹¹⁹ Fossil fuels is a second area of continuing resource competition, especially oil and gas deposits in various regions of the world.

Territorial and Sovereign Claims

Nations have traditionally also competed over territory and territorial claims based on their view of their rightful scope of sovereignty. In many ways, territory is the most fundamental form of competition because it defines a state: It is made up of boundaries over which a country can claim sovereignty and extend its political mandate. For example, empirical research has chronicled the fact that unsettled borders are among the leading causes of war.

Territorial competition has declined somewhat in recent years. A major reason is the rise of what has become known as the *territorial integrity norm*—defined by a connection to larger trends of the stabilization of borders. After a burst of territorial disputes in the postcolonial period, most state borders are now firmly established, and the norm of territorial nonaggression is deeply embedded in postwar institutions such as the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.¹²⁰ At the same time, the economic and strategic value of territory has generally declined; states do not see the competitive value of pure acquisition of territory as they once did.

Some sovereign disputes over specific territories, however, continue to be the focus of competition. The two most significant of these are China's claims about Taiwan and the "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea.¹²¹ Its territorial claims in the South China Sea are somewhat unclear, but China's behavior—repeated coercion of other actors who do not recognize Beijing's predominance—suggest an implicit, and perhaps eventually explicit, ambition of declaring

full sovereign control over the area. China also has contested territorial claims with Japan and India, among others. Competition over at least some of these claims is likely to intensify with China's growing power.

Values and Ideology

Nations sometimes compete to dominate global ideological disputes. Such a competition was obviously central in the Cold War, which, at least in its early stages, was an ideological competition to win over wavering publics and governments. The potential power involved in a competition over values is substantial. The basic neoliberal model advanced by the United States in the postwar period influenced the preferences and behavior of dozens of countries around the world. Even the realist scholar Hans Morgenthau admitted the profound significance of ideological and cultural power: Military conquest is a form of control, he argued, but if one state's national culture and ideology were to conquer another's through "cultural imperialism," it would have "won a more complete victory and would have founded its supremacy on more stable grounds than any military conqueror or economic master."¹²² This reflects some of the concerns that such competitors as Russia and China have today, as they see the United States attempting to achieve victory through soft-power means.

Since 1989, there has been little emphasis on ideological competition, largely because of the predominance of the U.S.- and Western-centric neoliberal model. In recent years, however, it has become apparent that China and Russia are determined to reassert somewhat competing value and cultural systems. At a minimum, Beijing and Moscow believe that the United States (and the West more generally) have been waging a campaign of

In recent years, . . . it has become apparent that China and Russia are determined to reassert somewhat competing value and cultural systems.

ideological subversion aimed at the security of their regimes and are determined to counteract that campaign. More ambitiously, both countries have certain concepts they hope to promote as new international norms. While neither is an ideologically motivated expansionist power like the Soviet Union, both are pushing various political and socioeconomic concepts in a far less intense version of the same sort of contest.

The Rules, Norms, and Institutions of the Larger System

Nations compete to influence the prevailing international order through influence over its rules, norms, and institutions. In such orders as the Concert of Powers, the League of Nations, and the postwar United Nations system (and larger postwar order), nations compete to set the rules and determine who will have the right to interpret their enforcement. A major focus of U.S. foreign policy since 1945 has been shaping the postwar order, an effort that has arguably led to U.S. competitive advantage.¹²³

There are numerous examples of U.S. predominance in rule-making bodies that have given the United States competitive advantage. One example is the historically disproportionate voting shares (along with a handful of leading allies) in such institutions as the International Monetary Fund, which has offered unique leverage over the institution's operations. The United States has been influential through its domination of the logistical infrastructure of the internet and its rule-setting bodies. U.S. leadership of various trade bodies has given American negotiators a predominant role in the setting of rules and standards.

Over time, other major powers have increasingly chafed at this degree of U.S. institutional predominance. Increasingly, therefore, the competition regarding leadership of the prevailing order may become focused on establishing and promoting alternatives to the U.S.-led and Western-dominated rules, norms, and institutions of the postwar world. China and Russia are working to establish parallel political and economic institutions

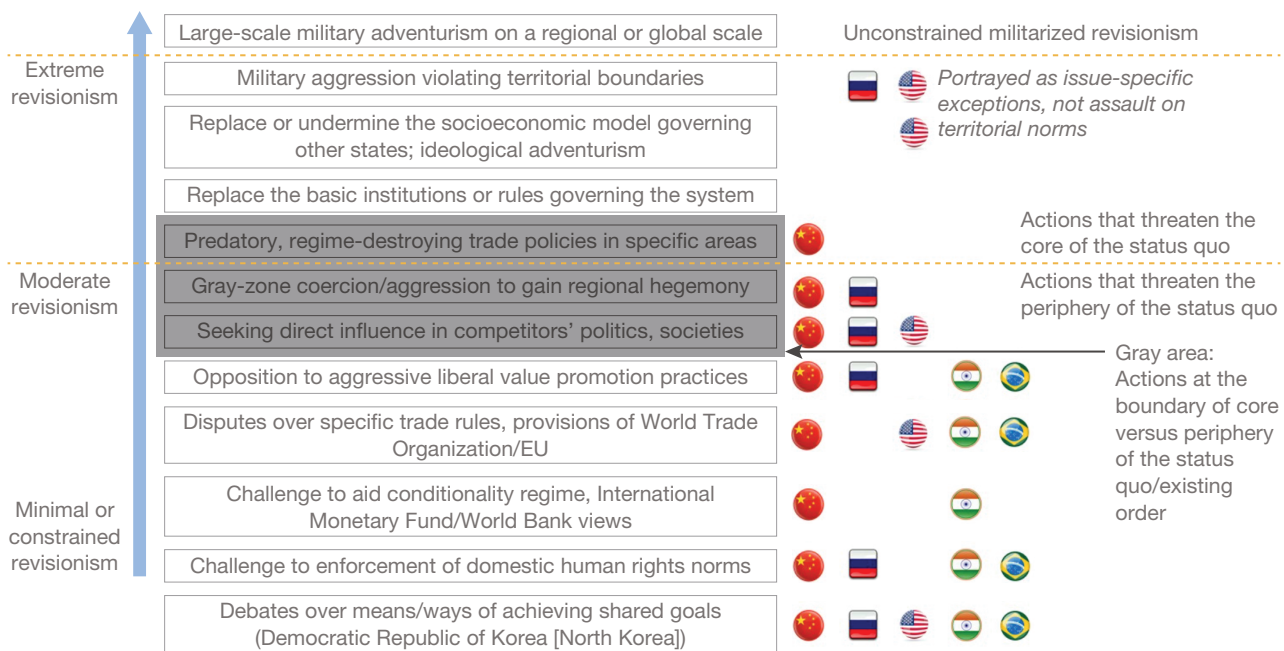
in their regions that are more subject to their influence and less beholden to U.S. financial backing or power. But other major powers, including India, Germany, Japan, and Brazil, are increasingly interested in exercising independent influence on international rules and institutions. The competition to design and shape the new order is already in progress.

The alternative norms favored by Russia and China would not, at least on their face, lead in the direction of an anarchic system. Both believe that the promotion of liberal values, insofar as they threaten and impose conditions on state sovereignty, violates the foundational norm of the postwar order: Territorial integrity as expressed in the inviolability of state sovereignty. They advocate for a “Westphalian” order built on a base of sovereignty rather than a “post-Westphalian” order based on such concepts as the Responsibility to Protect and forcible humanitarian intervention. In this argument, the two countries are in fact joined by most emerging democracies, including India, Brazil and Indonesia, which oppose forcible value promotion and share a commitment to a largely Westphalian order.

As shown in Figure 2, one actor has become engaged in partial or selective revisionism across the widest range of issues—and that is China. No other state, not even Russia, is pressing the existing power structures and rules sets across such a consistently broad spectrum. As the United States evaluates the shape of the emerging competition, officials must take seriously an uncomfortable but unavoidable fact: Many nations, most especially China and Russia, see the *United States* as the world's dominant

Nations compete to influence the prevailing international order through influence over its rules, norms, and institutions.

FIGURE 2
Degree of Revisionism



revisionist. They view U.S.-led military actions in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and elsewhere, as well as U.S. support for democratic revolutions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, as aggressively adventurist behaviors that threaten the stability of the international system. U.S. officials do not have to accept the equivalence of their “revisionist” behavior to appreciate the fact that leading challenger states see American rhetoric and behavior as potentially threatening.

How Do They Compete?

The third question regards *how* competitors compete—what strategies, tools, techniques, and capabilities do they deploy to achieve their objectives? To assess this question, we differentiated between two categories or levels. One is at the highest level of national strategies—grand strategic concepts for competing. The other level refers to specific means or tools countries can employ in the context of these larger grand strategies. Table 1 describes several basic grand strategic perspectives for achieving competitive advantage against other nations in the international realm, derived from the literature surveyed for this report.

Table 1 raises an initial question about the ways in which states compete: Does a nation have a grand strategy for competitive success? Does it have a causal logic by which it seeks to bind together individual policies or actions and that offers a persuasive rationale as to why those actions will achieve the desired goals? Few nations explicitly commit to such a concept, and fewer still have one that persists beyond one government. The United States has arguably had one since 1945: The notion that U.S. policy sought to build a safer and more rule-bound and institutionally linked world, which would, in turn, create a context in which the United States was itself more safe, secure, and prosperous.

Table 2 lists ways nations can employ those strategies. While not comprehensive, the table provides a sense of the range of means available to competitors. Tables 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive—a nation could use combinations of strategies or tools. A country’s grand strategic approach to competition, for example, could marry neutrality with economic advantage.

In assessing such strategies and tools, it is important to keep in mind that different nations define and conduct competition in very different ways. U.S. or Western notions of competition are

TABLE 1
Grand Strategies of Competition

Strategy	Essential Concept
Isolationism/neutrality	Remain aloof from disputes among most powers while providing ultimate protection for territorial integrity.
Hegemony/military primacy	Acquire sufficient national and especially military power to exercise hegemonic control, generally over one's own region.
Alliances/coalitions/balance of power	Acquire friends and allies whose collective power enhances that of the state itself and improves competitive standing; in effect, this strategy represents the active use of the balance of power for competitive gain.
Economic advantage	Seek global leadership in key sectors of the economy, both to enhance national power and to provide leverage through interdependence.
Harassment/spoiler role	If a state does not possess sufficient national power to seek influence through primacy, it can use asymmetric means to harass rivals, win concessions, and enhance its status.

not universal: China, for example, may have unique conceptions of ways to compete and the best strategies for prevailing in competition. These conceptions would be derived from its own view of the Asian geopolitical experience, which differs in important ways from the European one. Status and prestige are important for some countries but not for others; some major powers crave a global security profile, while others do not. Competitors will therefore assemble distinct postures from the means available to compete and pursue very different goals.

We did not attempt to make a comprehensive assessment of the national strategies for competition being undertaken by major powers in this analysis. Our research did, however, lead us to one essential conclusion about the geopolitical or military strategies for competition among the challenger states nominated by the current U.S. national strategies (China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea): *Because of a combination of the risk of nuclear escalation, the continued (if less predominant) U.S. military capabilities in key regions, and the desire to preserve status in the eyes of the world community, these challenger states have adopted strategies to coerce and apply military pressure below the threshold of major war.* Each country still prepares capabilities for traditional warfare and uses conventional military forces as a backdrop for its lower-threshold initiatives. But each of these countries aims to avoid rather than seek escalation to major combat operations. They instead place at the centerpiece of their strategies the use of a wide range

of nonmilitary tools and techniques for competitive advantage.

This conclusion was strengthened by our analysis of specific forms of revisionist behavior under way in the international system. Again, these data tell a significant story about contestation at the lower ends of the spectrum and the use of more-ambitious revisionist techniques below the threshold of war (such as political manipulation and coercive maritime activities, largely by Russia and China). Very few actions, however, can be described as outright military revisionism. Nations seem intent on broadening their toolbox for aggressive competition in the space below traditional warfare. With major war still viewed as terribly destructive, and U.S. military power still a significant deterrent to adventurism, states with aggressive intent have been competing primarily in areas below that threshold.

Structure of the Competition

This analysis also considers the models or types of competition that could emerge in terms of the overall *structure* of the international system. In developing a set of categories, we referred to theoretical models as well as historical examples of competition.

The historical periods we evaluated show at least four specific structural models in the international system that can characterize competition. The first is the sort of full-fledged, multipolar great power clash that prevailed in the years before World War I—

TABLE 2
Means of Competing

Tool, Technique, or Strategy	Metrics or Criteria	Examples
Military power used for coercion, assurance, or direct action or aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity (size of the force) Capabilities Technological sophistication Posture or presence Military effectiveness (ability to translate power into outcomes) Military assistance, exercises, train and advise missions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military exercises held Regional military deployments Coercive use of military forces to intimidate others Global posture and presence
Formal alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total military power of combined alliance Measurements of alliance cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, U.S.-South Korea and U.S.-Japan alliances China–North Korea alliance
Informal partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner contributions to shared ends Knock-on effects of partnerships (e.g., political will) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. exercises with and visits to non-ally partners Russian regional organizations
State-led trade policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of tariffs and other trade restrictions Level of support from state-owned industries Number of intellectual property thefts Number of foreign firms required to share technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese state-supported competition policies Role of Russian state-owned industries U.S. government support for basic research and development
Economic statecraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number, degree of impact of general or targeted sanctions Number of coercive (or supportive) energy policies Amounts of economic assistance and trade concessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. general and targeted sanctions policies against Russia, North Korea, and Iran Russian energy diplomacy toward Europe Chinese Belt and Road Initiative U.S. foreign economic and military assistance
Investments in technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of research and development funding Number of capabilities produced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese national investment program to achieve predominance in targeted technology areas U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency funding
Diplomacy to shape international environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of major diplomatic activities to win supportive policies from other states Identifiable campaigns to undermine and counter competitors' strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. "Pivot to Asia" and "Indo-Pacific" initiatives China's Belt and Road Initiative
Embedding influence in rules and institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of international institutions participated in Specific uses of norms, rules, and institutions to achieve ends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. use of Nonproliferation Treaty, United Nations resolutions, International Atomic Energy Agency rules as umbrella for nonproliferation policies U.S. use of trade institutions and agreements as leverage on trade opening
Information and public diplomacy campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifiable campaigns with specific narrative goals Measurable achievement of specific goals (control of narrative, social disruption) Measures of global opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russian information/misinformation campaigns aimed at Europe and the United States U.S. global counter–extremist messaging Chinese propaganda and narrative-shaping efforts in Asia
Gray zone campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measurable shifts in regional status quo relative to goals Specific outcomes of campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese maritime advances and coercion in South China Sea Russian political subversion in Europe
Clandestine activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covert action to destabilize an opponent and promote friendly elements, as far as they are identifiable in open-source information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese operations to influence and coerce citizens living abroad Russian harassment of opponents living abroad

TABLE 2—CONTINUED

Tool, Technique, or Strategy	Metrics or Criteria	Examples
Intelligence activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence collection (both covert and open source) • Intelligence sharing with friends and allies • Counterintelligence activities to deny competitors information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General intelligence programs of major competitors
Lawfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of legal cases brought to international bodies • Number of international disputes resolved in state's favor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hague ruling on South China Sea territorial claims • International Criminal Court cases and proceedings
Territorial aggrandizement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of aggressions • Amount and type of land and maritime areas seized and under state control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian seizure of Crimea

eventually giving rise to the urge for order-building that became the League of Nations. The second structural model is a great power competition that is moderated by mutually agreed rules; the classic case of this model is the Concert of Europe. The third model is the post-1945 division of the international system into rival blocs: This was a bipolar clash of two dominant actors, who hopefully develop enough rules to moderate the intensity of the rivalry. And the period after 1989 reflects a fourth pattern, which is a largely unipolar system dominated by a single predominant power.

The range of structures throughout history makes clear that competition can take many forms, partly as a product of the dominant power balances of the period. This historical range offers a number of more-specific implications. One is *that truly zero-sum, unconstrained models of competition are rare*. More common are mixed models that involve both competition and cooperation, along a range from compartmented and limited to more severe but still allowing some room for pragmatic cooperation on shared interests.

A second and equally important message is that *the emerging era is likely to represent a historically unprecedented structure for competition*. Table 3 shows a comparison of two of the leading structural models used to describe the emerging era of competition. These factors suggest that the new era is not likely to re-create a Cold War–style bipolar stand-off because too many significant states with overlapping and diverging interests are rising in

world politics. The new era is also unlikely to be a replay of classic multipolar great power competition because most of the major powers in the world today are relatively aligned on key goals and values and do not perceive themselves to be in any form of absolute competition with others. The shape of the emerging competition will involve elements of many prior structures: Some degree of continued U.S. preeminence combined with an accelerating perception of multipolar power dynamics and an overarching bipolar dynamic between the United States and China. The pattern increasingly looks like a polycentric system with two leading peers and several second-order competitors. One difference, however, will be that several troublesome minor powers will now be armed with nuclear weapons.

The challenge of the new era is that well-established historical lessons and analogies might not apply, and there will be no certainty about the mechanics of the new system. The new era may also not generate any reliable, long-term patterns, which will make it more difficult to assess the status of the competition.

Moderating and Intensifying Factors

This analysis reviewed evidence on the factors that tend to moderate or intensify competitions. International competitive relationships can be stable or unstable; some demonstrate significant patterns of self-correction, whereas others show escalatory dynamics that lead to war. Understanding the factors

TABLE 3
Comparing Structures of Competition

Cold War	Great Power Competition	21st-Century Competition
Bipolar	Thoroughly multipolar with constant balance of power dynamics	Elements of unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity mixed in one system
Ideological competition	Competition for status, territory	Competition for status, territorial claims and control, and prosperity
Some accepted "rules of the road" and procedures for crisis resolution	In most intense periods, few accepted rules and norms	Strongly institutionalized order with powerful core rule-bound community
Zero-sum	Zero-sum on most issues at most times	Mixed-sum with many powerfully shared interests and objectives
Dominant measure of standing is military, especially nuclear	Dominant measure of standing is military	Dominant measures of standing will be economic, informational, and geopolitical

that tend to impel a competition toward each of these broad outcomes can help the United States manage the emerging era.

Factors That Tend to Exacerbate Competition

Theory and history show several factors that tend to intensify competition between specific rivals or more generally in the international system. One such factor is what is referred to in the international relations literature as the *polarity* of the international system. Polarity, the way in which power is distributed in the international system, is one important determinant of stability. Both offensive and defensive neorealism claim that bipolarity is an inherently more stable power structure than multipolarity, largely because there is less uncertainty in a bipolar system and the risk of war is diffused across fewer great powers.¹²⁴ If we accept that the international system has become more polycentric, then some recent traditions in international relations would lead us to expect more unpredictable and perhaps dangerous competition. Other traditions suggest that multipolar balances can be more stable, on the other hand, in that they offer more available power centers to sustain a balance.

A second source of instability in competitions is a context of power transition between the leading states and rising challengers. Various theories of international relations suggest that such transitions are the most dangerous period in international politics.¹²⁵ One approach known as *hegemonic*

stability theory, for example, argues that the most stable power distribution is when a preponderance of power is concentrated in a single state.¹²⁶ Hegemonic stability theorists expect that periods without a hegemon will be marked by instability and closed economic systems, as was the period between the two World Wars.¹²⁷ These shifts threaten to “erode the international hierarchy,” which prompts a rising state to challenge certain aspects of the hegemon-led order and provides the hegemon with an incentive to take action to prevent a loss of power to the challenger.¹²⁸ Hegemonic fears of being undermined and losing power have preceded most of history’s hegemonic wars.¹²⁹

A recent research project at Harvard University’s Belfer Center identified 16 cases of power transition between a major ruling power and a major rising challenger over the past five centuries. In 75 percent of these cases, major war broke out and dramatically altered the international power structure. War is not inevitable, however: In four of the 16 cases in the study—including three from the 20th century—concerted efforts and “imaginative statecraft” prevented war.¹³⁰ When the parties managed to avoid war, however, it required “huge, painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged.”¹³¹

A third major theme in the literature on international relations deals with the role of uncertainty in intensifying the natural competition

for power and influence.¹³² It is precisely because states cannot be certain about the intentions of others that they perceive a need to expand their own power. The result—at least in circumstances where major powers have some degree of mutual mistrust and competing interests—can be a mutual spiral of mistrust and security investments that generate a security dilemma. One of the especially pernicious things about the role of uncertainty is that, given the pressures of an anarchic system (at least according to realists), it cannot easily be counteracted. Simple assurances of peaceful intentions will not achieve much because so many states in history have used such pledges to cover aggressive intent. The role of uncertainty seems especially powerful today: U.S. officials and experts have significant degrees of uncertainty about Russian and especially Chinese intentions. Combined with some degree of aggressive behavior, the uncertainty is producing intensifying fears about Russian and Chinese intentions and growing urgency about the U.S. response.

Factors That Tend to Moderate Competition and Rivalry

Several factors can, in some circumstances, mitigate the engines of a more intense and violent rivalry, easing the intensity of a competition and producing more cooperative outcomes. One such factor is economic interdependence: Nations with tightly interlinked economies would presumably see significant costs in going to war or even undertaking severe measures of competition short of war—if such responses could threaten their economic ties.¹³³ There is some debate about the effects of interdependence, with recent literature emphasizing the need to consider this variable in context. However, broadly speaking, the social science literature supports the proposition that interdependence reduces the potential for conflict and thus moderates competition.¹³⁴ Interdependent interests create a perception that states that try to impose severe costs on others will see blowback on their efforts, thus making extreme forms of aggressive competitiveness self-defeating, at least in some issue areas.¹³⁵

A second moderating factor in international competition is the role of formal and informal

international institutions. In some circumstances, these can facilitate greater cooperation between nations in the management of threats and opportunities of mutual concern, which reduces competition and the likelihood of conflict.¹³⁶ There is strong empirical support for the proposition that institutions and their associated relationships and interactions have the potential to increase trust, improve communications, and promote stability, which decreases the likelihood that states will need to resort to conflict to deal with problems.¹³⁷

A third and related moderating factor is a specific form of institution: mechanisms for consultation and transparency, notably in terms of conflict avoidance and resolution. Since uncertainty is such a driver of competitive dynamics, ways of easing that uncertainty—encouraging mutual understanding, transparency in political-military activities, and early warning of possible concerns—help moderate the intensity of a competition.¹³⁸ These can take many forms, from communications links, such as hotlines, to regular forums for notifications of military exercises to agreements (such as the Cold War “open skies” policies) that enhance mutual transparency. The practice goes back as far as the Concert of Europe, in which participating states took pains to keep one another engaged on major diplomatic initiatives.

One of the especially pernicious things about the role of uncertainty is that, given the pressures of an anarchic system (at least according to realists), it cannot easily be counteracted.

A fourth moderating factor reemphasizes the importance of the distinction between democracies and nondemocracies. The well-known democratic peace theory holds that democratic states do not go to war with one another, although they are not inherently more peaceful in their relations with other states more broadly.¹³⁹ This theory lends itself to the conclusion that more democracies in the world would promote stability and peaceful relations between states.

Fifth, it is generally accepted that the destructive effects of nuclear weapons have deterred militarized competition in the past 70 years. The nuclear-deterrent relationship can moderate a competition by raising the potential costs of extreme competition or conflict to levels that make any conscious resort to such actions self-defeating.¹⁴⁰ Such a reality provides all sides with some degree of fundamental confidence that others will not be able to undermine their essential security and eases fears of being cheated.¹⁴¹ The history of rivalries since 1945 would tend to support the notion that the risk of nuclear escalation helped resolve multiple Cold War crises short of war. Major powers are aware that their own consciously chosen strategies must stop somewhere short of aggressive war, and this creates a critical restraint on competition across the board.

Sixth and finally, competition can be moderated if the major powers of an era and other states join in multilateral approaches to challenges to the system. This can be done through formal international organizations, such as the United Nations or the G-20; more informal but regular processes; or in ad hoc diplomatic initiatives. This partly involves major powers not allowing disruptive state or nonstate actors to exacerbate their competitive dynamics. One outcome of such a regularized practice is that it creates an expectation that major challenges to

the system will be met with a strong multilateral response rather than fragmenting the alignment of the major powers.¹⁴²

Factors That Can Either Exacerbate or Moderate Competition and Rivalry

Finally, our research suggests that some variables have the potential to affect the intensity and character of a competition—the effects of which cannot be known in advance. These variables can have either an exacerbating or moderating influence, depending on the circumstance.

The first of these conditional or contextual factors is the notion of state identity and self-conception. As noted earlier, identity plays a leading role in shaping a nation's conception of its interests and thus will influence how nations view, and behave within, a competitive environment. One implication is that competition is not a necessary aspect of interstate life, and identity factors can either moderate or exacerbate competitive dynamics through their effect on mutual perceptions. A history of repeated interactions between pairs or groups of nations “rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other”¹⁴³; those ideas can be hostile, suspicious and competitive, or they can be mutually cooperative.¹⁴⁴

A second conditional factor is the character and role of the leading domestic interest groups in a country, which shape preferences and behavior. These interests can represent dozens of major domestic constituencies, from business to the military to ethnic or tribal groups to political parties. Given their multiplicity, it is impossible to know in advance how the constellation of domestic interests will affect a nation's competitive preferences or behavior. In some cases, the interests may impel a country

[O]ur research suggests that some variables have the potential to affect the intensity and character of a competition—the effects of which cannot be known in advance.

to severe competition or war; in others, they can restrain national ambitions, as in congressional checks on the U.S. President's ability to wage war.

The third contextual factor shaping the intensity of a competition is the beliefs and perceptions of national leaders. Beliefs can exist at the broad societal level, among specific groups, or be held by individual leaders. Very high-level social beliefs have contributed to war (as in the social Darwinism characteristic of European elite society before World War I) and constrained national aggression (as with the broadly held isolationist sentiments in the United States until 1941). The beliefs of specific groups in society can also influence levels of conflict—whether militaristic, pacifist, or somewhere between.¹⁴⁵

The beliefs of specific leaders are arguably one of the decisive variables in world politics, in part because all other influences are filtered through them. Recent approaches have sought to adjust rigid structural approaches to understanding international politics to reflect the explanatory value of decisionmakers' perceptions.¹⁴⁶ Decisionmakers' beliefs and worldviews influence their policy orientations and specific policy choices.¹⁴⁷ Personal idiosyncrasies and relationships are central to the conduct of international relations.¹⁴⁸ These individual-level beliefs can either spur conflict, as in the beliefs of aggressive leaders, or constrain conflict if the beliefs tend toward moderate, status quo preferences.

Fourth and finally, nations often seek to compete through the acquisition of military capabilities. The nature of these capabilities and their inherent technology can have a significant effect on the nature of a competition—either benign or malign. The most well-established theoretical tradition in this regard has examined the difference between offensive and defensive capabilities.¹⁴⁹ Those that favor the offense tend to promote competition and encourage aggression. Defensive technologies and doctrines, on the other hand, tend to promote stability. Unfortunately, it is not always easy for states to determine whether a given capability is meant for offense or defense—or whether, at a given moment, the offense or the defense is dominant in each rivalry or the international system more broadly.

The beliefs of specific leaders are arguably one of the decisive variables in world politics, in part because all other influences are filtered through them.

Initial Assessment: Sources of Intensifying and Moderating Competition

Based on the review of current trends conducted for this analysis, it is possible to categorize where many of these indicators stand in broad terms. Figure 3 shows three categories: factors that seem to be impelling an intensified competition, factors that continue to moderate or are increasingly moderating the competition, and factors whose effect either appears to be ambiguous or for which we do not have a sufficient basis to make a judgment. These brief assessments are referring to a limited time frame, roughly from 2013 to the present, with binary judgments being made as of early 2018. They do not account for the full effect of recent events, including evolving U.S. policies toward major international institutions.

This brief assessment conveys a concerning but not yet catastrophic portrait of rising tension between persistent sources of moderation and stability and rising sources of increasingly hostile confrontations. This survey begins to hint at a basic approach to these risks—one that would work to revalidate and improve on the continued sources of moderation; bend the ambiguous factors toward positive outcomes; and mitigate the worst effects of the exacerbating factors.

FIGURE 3

Status of Variables: Intensifying or Moderating Competition

Factor	Assessment
Intensifying factors	
Polarity	Emergence of “polycentric” structure; many stabilizing elements with bipolarity at top
Power transition	✓ Under way between China and the United States; elements of classic risk model clearly in evidence
Uncertainty	✓ Significant and rising; hostile competitive actions among U.S., China, Russia, lack of leadership relationships and decline of trust and transparency
Moderating factors	
Interdependence	— Globally at high levels but trade integration ebbing; view of constraint remains; significant degrees financial, supply chain interdependence remain
Institutions	— Most functional; regional organizations growing; popular support recovering
Consultative mechanisms	— Weakening in U.S.-China, Russia contexts, though many remain in place
Democracy	— Slight illiberal advance but ratio remains strong
Nuclear deterrence	— Restraining effect; desire to compete below the threshold
Multilateral problem-solving	— Highly imperfect but remains instinct of many major powers
Context-dependent factors	
State identity	✓ Self-conception of aggressive, “greedy,” nationalistic major powers may intensify competition
Role of domestic interests	— Constraining in some cases (EU), possibly exacerbating in others (China)
Leader goals and character	✓ Aggressive leader beliefs/goals, notably in Russia, China, Iran; more limited nationalist ambitions in places such as Turkey and India
Type of military forces	— Nuclear deterrence remains a predominantly stabilizing factor; regional military balances not heavily in offense-dominant category; future concern of societal attack technologies could be destabilizing

✓ Evidence of notable negative trends — Positive or stable trends

Conclusion: Hypotheses About the Emerging Competition

Based on this study, we propose the following hypotheses about emerging competition from our tentative findings from this initial phase.¹⁵⁰

Hypothesis 1: The emerging competition is not generalized but rather likely to be most intense between a handful of specific states with status grievances and countervailing regional and global coalitions, including the wider international community.

The sources of competition lie in a few identity-asserting major powers determined to achieve key regional goals while pushing back against U.S. predominance and the disproportionate U.S. influence in setting global norms. As a result, the United States will continue to have the opportunity, if it chooses, to lead a predominant coalition of value-sharing democracies and other largely status quo states to help preserve stability.

Hypothesis 2: The hinge point of the competition will be the relationship between the architect of the rules-based order (the United States) and the leading revisionist peer competitor that is involved in the most specific disputes (China).

China is the one rising state with the combination of emerging power, aggressive self-conception, and specific regional ambitions to create significant disruption in the system on a consistent basis. (Russia has the potential to cause difficulties on specific issues but does not have the global economic role or overall national power to reshape the system absent self-destructive bouts of aggression. In this and in other ways, Chinese and Russian challenges to the existing order should be sharply distinguished.) China’s lack of a meaningful boundary between public and private ventures and its wide-ranging and intrusive efforts to gain competitive advantage and coercive leverage over states within its region and beyond—including numerous predatory economic policies—carry significant risk of an escalating clash

Global patterns of competition are likely to be complex and diverse, with distinct types of competition prevailing in different issue areas. The United States should think of the emerging era as an environment of multiple competitions, not a singular “strategic competition.”

with the United States. It is not yet clear whether China will be willing to constrain these habits for the sake of international legitimacy.

As a result, we hypothesize that the interaction between China and the United States will be decisive for the character of the overall competition. Put another way, the dominant competition in the emerging era—the only truly global, comprehensive national-level competition—will be between the United States and China. If it resolves into a wary but stable and mutually respectful competition over largely economic issues, the overall global competition is likely to remain within strict bounds. If the U.S.-China relationship tends toward open conflict or a much more hostile and destructive form of long-term societal warfare, the ripple effects will create more intense competitions well beyond the U.S.-China relationship. As noted earlier, whatever one makes of models such as the Thucydides Trap (the Belfer Center study), our historical research points to very significant risks of ballooning mutual threat perceptions and miscalculation in such an across-the-board competition.

Hypothesis 3: Global patterns of competition are likely to be complex and diverse, with distinct types of competition prevailing in different issue areas. The United States should think of the emerging era as an environment of multiple competitions, not a singular “strategic competition.”

Some issues will see more competitive and relative gains-obsessed behavior; others will be

viewed as either a positive-sum issue area or one that demands coordination for common security. The competition is likely to be multilayered and interactive. No single theme or model will capture the complex mosaic of global competition, and the intersections among diverse types of competition—how success or failure in one area exacerbates or mitigates others—will be a crucial determinant of relative success. Figure 4 reflects this idea, drawing on research to date to suggest four overlapping fields of competition: Direct clashes over deeply held regional ambitions, independent rivalries among regional powers that carry global implications, competition for economic and ideological advantage, and contests over the making and interpretation of rules and norms.

This complex map implies that the United States will not merely be engaged in one competition; it will undertake several at the same time, competitions that will be determined by different behaviors and capabilities and waged under differing sets of rules. Strategic advantage in this competition will often lie in the manipulation of the boundaries and interactions among these four areas—merging two or more issue areas when it is to U.S. advantage or redirecting competition from one of these areas to another.

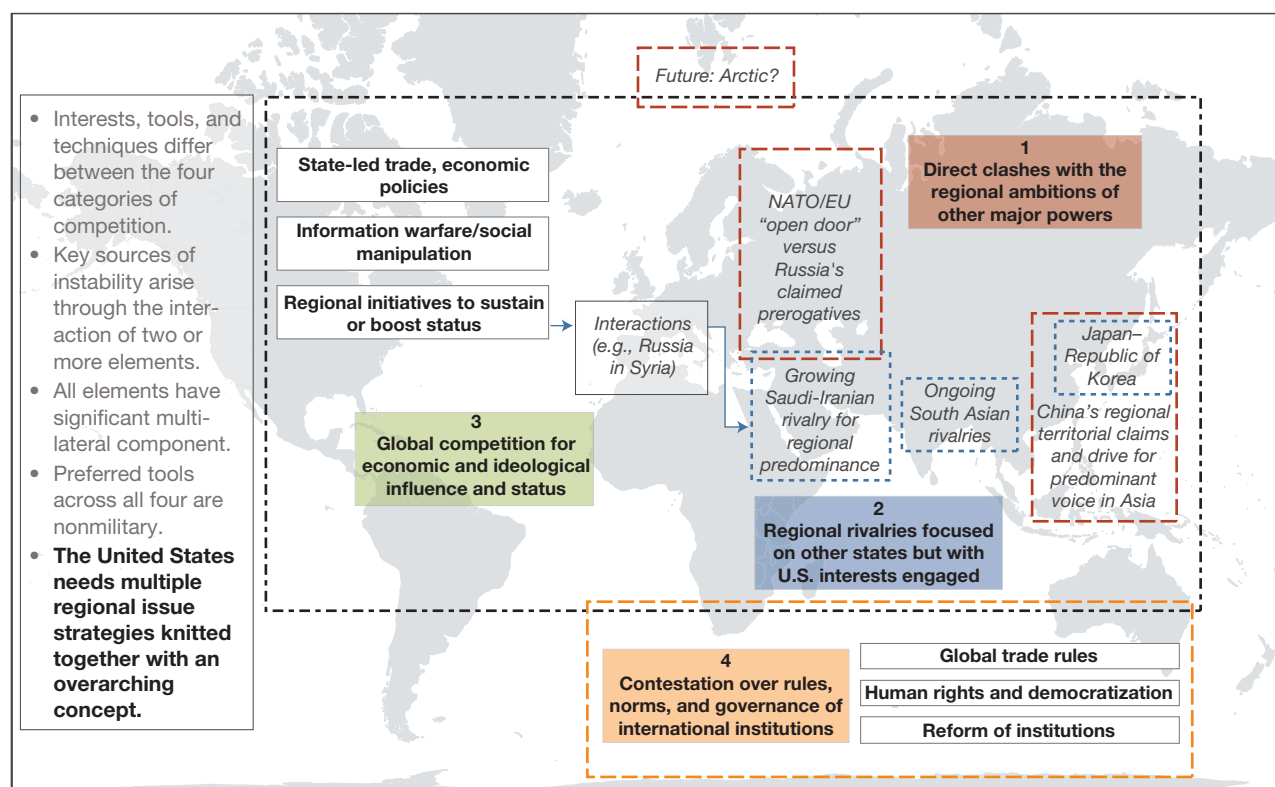
Hypothesis 4: Managing the escalation of regional rivalries and conflicts, and keeping the United States from being drawn into them in service of secondary interests, is likely to be a major focus of U.S. statecraft.

This hypothesis highlights the importance of the second area of competition shown in Figure 4—regional rivalries. This analysis has focused on patterns of global competition, but several independent regional rivalries are also at play. Nowhere is this truer than in the Middle East, where a diverse set of actors (including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, Russia, and the United States) are competing over a range of issues, from the future of Syria to long-term regional predominance. Some of these regional competitions could become notably more violent, which would then have echoes into the global competition—such as, for example, the U.S. dispute with North Korea. As in past periods, they could become arenas for intensifying rivalry among major powers, dragging them into local conflicts that then escalate to engulf the general relationship. Managing such regional conflicts, and carefully moderating U.S. involvement in them, will be essential to avoiding costly misadventures that sap U.S. strength for the primary arenas of competition.

Hypothesis 5: Currently, the competition seems largely focused on status grievances or ambitions, economic prosperity, technological advantage, and regional influence rather than conquest or the conscious, intentional resort to large-scale war. In fact, the leading objective of the current competition may be the commitment by several major powers, spurred by identity-fueled nationalism, to recapture their “rightful place” in world politics.

None of the great powers is set on posing an existential threat to others, and the number of states with unrequited territorial ambitions is very small. The competition is not over survival of nations or systems: It is about relative strength and success. Major investments and national strategies are likely to be focused on dominating certain industries, attracting investment, making innovative breakthroughs, and enhancing domestic growth rates and social prosperity. “Classical” great power objectives such as territory, colonial or quasicolonial

FIGURE 4
Mapping the Global Competition



possessions, and achieving sufficient military power for wars of conquest are not likely to re-emerge.

States can interpret their national interests in many ways, based on their national identity and the concepts and theories that become popular in the official and unofficial debate in the country. As noted earlier, most states in the world today do not view their identity as requiring the acquisition of territory or subversion of other states. Significant dangers arise in those few cases where states do have identity- and grievance-based commitments to significant territorial or regional influence or ideological claims that will challenge the existing order. This is the case with China, first and foremost; Russia and North Korea; and, to a lesser extent, Iran.

Hypothesis 6: The competition is likely to be most intense and persistent in nonmilitary areas of national advantage—and the targeting of other societies with such means creates emerging, and poorly understood, escalatory risks.

Partly because of Hypothesis 3, states will seek advantage first and foremost in nonmilitary areas of power. These include economic and technological routes to national competitive advantage but also tools of influence, coercion, and power that are at the forefront of Russian and Chinese strategies—from cyber to disinformation to programs of social control to the use of state assets for unfair economic advantage. This is a positive trend if it means replacing large-scale aggression with less-destructive forms of coercive diplomacy. But the United States can still confront significant risks from the burgeoning use of such nonmilitary avenues to undermining the health, relative economic standing, independence, and institutions of other societies, and such techniques could produce dangers of a spiraling competition that edges into outright conflict.

Hypothesis 7: The postwar multilateral order provides the essential framework in which the emerging competition will unfold. In this context, a persistent and critical U.S. competitive advantage is the structure of alliances, regional organizations, and global institutions that draw together like-minded democracies and other advocates of a stable, rule-based order and magnify their power.

Only a rules-based order of some kind can provide a baseline against which to judge state actions as legitimate or illegitimate. The postwar order conceived and designed by the United States provides such a normative framework—in addition to offering multiple institutions and processes by which the status quo states can work together more smoothly and easily to promote stability, peace, and prosperity. While institutions alone cannot restrain state ambitions, the postwar order has played a significant role (along with U.S. military power and global trends such as democratization and economic growth) in setting the context for competition, mostly to U.S. advantage. Based on the current orientation of major and catalytic powers, we hypothesize that this order has not yet collapsed and in fact retains significant loyalty from many states. Competition both within that order, and to dominate its rule-setting, will remain the predominant general pattern. As suggested in this report, sustaining a predominant coalition of order-producing states—an implicit international community—ranks as the most important means of moderating an intensified global competition.

Our assessment of data, trends, and national strategies involved in the competition repeatedly

The competition is likely to be most intense and persistent in nonmilitary areas of national advantage—and the targeting of other societies with such means creates emerging, and poorly understood, escalatory risks.

Two obvious flashpoints for the emerging competition lie in regional territorial and influence claims and in the growing tendency of authoritarian states to seek to extend their reach and control beyond their borders.

pointed to the vital role of multilateral institutions, forums, and norms as mechanisms by which value-sharing democracies and other stability-seeking states seek to temper emerging competitive dynamics and, in some cases, constrain and deter revisionist states. These represent a significant U.S. and allied competitive advantage, inasmuch as China, Russia, or Iran do not currently serve—or have the prospect of serving—as the leading hub of such a network.

Hypothesis 8: Two obvious flashpoints for the emerging competition lie in regional territorial and influence claims and in the growing tendency of authoritarian states to seek to extend their reach and control beyond their borders.

The most pressing examples of the revisionist behavior that emerges from the identity-based aggressiveness described in Hypothesis 5 are in regional territorial or influence claims and growing efforts by autocratic regimes to use nonmilitary strategies to gain coercive leverage over other societies. To the extent that a combination of diplomacy, compromise, emergent norms, U.S. and allied deterrent power, and investments in defense and resilience can dampen these two specific dangers, the overall competition will be substantially moderated.

Hypothesis 9: The emerging era is likely to involve a drawn-out combination of contestation, competition, and cooperation in which “winning” or “victory” is the wrong mental model.

Winning a competition implies some strict limitation in terms of time or stakes, but the emerging era is not likely to respect such limits. The Cold War created a false impression in this sense by moving toward an identifiable conclusion that could be called a “victory”: the fall of the Soviet Union. (It bears emphasis that such a peaceful conclusion was not necessarily expected at the beginning of the conflict, and the two sides managed their rivalry to that relatively calm denouement only after weathering a series of perilous crises, in part with a good deal of luck.) Given the nature of the Russian and Chinese governments and societies, the United States is not likely to be able to aspire to a similar “victory” in any precisely defined moment. Instead, the emerging era of competition is likely to be a long-term, persistent struggle for advantage, something to be managed rather than won. U.S. and allied success in the Cold War, in fact, was ironically due in large part to not trying to win it decisively, but instead managing the situation and pursuing strategies that would be sustainable over the long term until the contradictions on the other side did their work. This same mindset is likely to be required on many of its subsidiary challenges—the contest against extremism, global trade disputes, and others.

Notes

¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 2.

² Jim Mattis, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge, U.S. Department of Defense, January 20, 2018, p. 1.

³ Mattis, 2018, p. 1.

⁴ Mattis, 2018, p. 2.

⁵ Mattis, 2018, pp. 1–2.

⁶ Former Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has suggested that the world was headed to a return to “great power competition,” a time when “not just American power but also global peace and stability will be increasingly challenged by other powers” (Max Fisher, “The New Era of Great Power Competition,” *Vox*, April 13, 2016). When the Obama administration announced its final (fiscal year 2017) defense budget, it did so by describing it as a response to “emergent great powers”; Jim Garamone, “Obama’s FY 2017 Budget Addresses Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Terrorism,” press release, U.S. Department of Defense, February 9, 2016.

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds., Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 88.

⁸ The overall study focuses on competition as a broad-based, systemic phenomenon. It is not primarily about bilateral rivalries, though it seeks to understand how sets of those dynamics can add up to a larger competitive context. The focus is limited to states as the players on the competitive landscape, considering other nonstate actors as part of the environment for competition rather than as primary agents in the competition.

⁹ These criteria include economic and military weight—the world’s top countries in terms of gross domestic product (in purchasing power parity terms as of 2016) and by military expenditure; projected global economic status in 2040–2050; degree of regional or global geopolitical ambitions; and role in international institutions and processes.

¹⁰ “Competition,” *Cambridge Dictionary*, webpage, undated-b.

¹¹ “Competition,” *Cambridge Dictionary*, webpage, undated-a.

¹² “Competition,” undated-a.

¹³ Robert H. Mnookin, Scott R. Peppet, and Andrew S. Tulumello, *Beyond Winning*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004, p. 51.

¹⁴ This distinction is important in terms of the literature that bears on our topic: The field of international relations is largely preoccupied with the causes and nature of conflict, not competition.

¹⁵ Emily Pia and Thomas Diez, “Conflict and Human Rights: A Theoretical Framework,” SHUR Working Paper Series, SHUR WP 1/07, January 2007, p. 2.

¹⁶ As just one example, Kenneth Waltz’s 35-page “Structural Realism After the Cold War” uses the word “competition” only three times, although the concept of competition is essential to his understanding of the post–Cold War strategic environment.

Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Summer 2000.

¹⁷ Helen Milner, “Review: International Theories of Cooperation: Strengths and Weaknesses,” *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 3, April 1992, p. 468.

¹⁸ Daniel Burkhart and Alison Woody, “Strategic Competition: Beyond Peace and War,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 86, June 19, 2017.

¹⁹ Robert Keohane defines cooperation as occurring “when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination” (*After Hegemony*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 51–52). This definition is from Charles Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy*, New York: Free Press, 1965, p. 227. Helen Milner’s definition emphasizes the objective of absolute gains: “goal-directed behavior that entails mutual policy adjustments so that all sides end up better off than they would otherwise be” (Milner, 1992, p. 468).

²⁰ See, for example, Charles Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010; Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986; and Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978, pp. 167–214.

²¹ Charles Glaser distinguishes between security-seeking states and “greedy” states—with “greed” encompassing anything from wealth to territory to prestige (Glaser, 2010, pp. 35–40). Our definition presumes that the self-interested pursuit of goods can and likely will occur along both of these two fundamental dimensions of motivation.

²² See, for example, Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, brief edition, New York: McGraw Hill, 1993, p. 5. One of his basic “principles of political realism,” indeed arguably the foundation stone for his entire theory, is the idea of “interest defined in terms of power.”

²³ Paul W. Schroeder, “The 19th-Century International System: Change in the Structure,” *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, October 1986, pp. 12–13.

²⁴ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 81.

²⁵ Georges-Henri Soutou, “Was There a European Order in the Twentieth Century? From the Concert of Europe to the End of the Cold War,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 9, No. 3, November 2000, p. 330. A number of these consultations took place through other means: one author notes that “[f]or most of the nineteenth century, though, conferences were exceptional, and matters were arranged by correspondence, diplomacy, and ad hoc missions between the more involved parties” (John P. Dunabin, “The League of Nations’ Place in the International System,” *Journal of the Historical Association*, Vol. 78, No. 254, 1993, p. 422).

²⁶ Dan Lindley, “Avoiding Tragedy in Power Politics,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Winter 2003/2004, pp. 195–229.

²⁷ Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System," *World Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2, January 1976, p. 164; Schroeder, 1986, p. 13.

²⁸ Henry Kissinger notes that "all his diplomatic skills would have availed Metternich nothing, had he not operated in a framework in which his invocation of the unity of Europe could appear as something other than a euphemism for Austrian national interest. [...] To Metternich's contemporaries the unity of Europe was a reality, the very ritualism of whose invocation testified to its hold on the general consciousness" (Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22*, Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1957, p. 320).

²⁹ Richard Elrod gives the example of Russia forgoing gains against Turkey in 1834 (Elrod, 1976, p. 168). For a mild critique of this point (bringing back some degree of self-interest in the Concert), see Robert Jervis, "Security Regimes," *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 363, fn. 10.

³⁰ As Paul Schroeder puts it, "The first and great commandment of the Concert was: 'Thou shalt not threaten or humiliate another great power'" (Schroeder, 1972, p. 405). See also Kyle Lascurettes, *The Concert of Europe and Great-Power Governance Today: What Can the Order of 19th-Century Europe Teach Policymakers About International Order in the 21st Century?* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-225-OSD, 2017, p. 10.

³¹ For a list of congresses and conferences that took place between 1814 and 1913, see Lascurettes, 2017, pp. 23–25.

³² Jervis, 1985, p. 67.

³³ Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale*, Hanover, N.H.: Brown University Press, 1985, p. 205.

³⁴ Paul W. Schroeder, "The Nineteenth Century System: Balance of Power or Political Equilibrium?" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 1989, p. 142.

³⁵ For an extensive list of these crises, see Schroeder, 1986, p. 3.

³⁶ As Robert Jervis states, "Of course the Concert did not banish conflict. But it did regulate it" (Jervis, 1982, p. 363).

³⁷ Thomas Wright, "The Rise and Fall of the Unipolar Concert," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Winter 2015, p. 9; Dunbabin, 1993, p. 422.

³⁸ Paul Schroeder notes that "the events of the Crimean War served to destroy for a significant period the existing international system in Europe and the prevailing rules by which foreign policy was conducted and peace maintained" (Paul W. Schroeder, *Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972, p. xi).

³⁹ Soutou, 2000, p. 334.

⁴⁰ Jervis, 1982, p. 368; Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Summer 1991, pp. 142–143, fn. 81.

⁴¹ Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991, pp. 142–143, fn. 81; Elrod notes that "The sea powers, in particular, were determined to inflict a humiliating defeat upon Russia and to conduct the war as a liberal crusade against autocracy (Elrod, 1976, p. 172).

⁴² Rich, 1985, pp. 204–205.

⁴³ For the argument that the Concert of Europe, even in its strongest form, never escaped balance-of-power dynamics, see Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994/1995, pp. 35–36.

⁴⁴ Schroeder, 1989, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Ikenberry, 2001, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Woodrow Wilson, "Address to the Senate of the United States: 'A World League for Peace,'" January 22, 1917.

⁴⁷ "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points," January 8, 1918, retrieved from The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, 2008.

⁴⁸ Ikenberry, 2001, pp. 132–133, 145.

⁴⁹ "The Covenant of the League of Nations," December 1924, retrieved from The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, 2008.

⁵⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, New York: Random House, 1987, 1989, p. 277.

⁵¹ Soutou, 2000, p. 335.

⁵² Kennedy, 1989, p. 277.

⁵³ Soutou calls it "a return to the former concert of the major powers, though one which of course took into account the new circumstances" (Soutou, 2000, p. 337).

⁵⁴ On this period, see, for instance, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "The Spirit of Locarno: Illusions of Pactomania," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 4, July 1972, pp. 752–754.

⁵⁵ Kennedy, 1989, p. 334.

⁵⁶ Dunbabin, 1993, p. 427.

⁵⁷ Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991, p. 117, fn. 7; Kennedy, 1989, pp. 319, 336.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, 1989, p. 290. Dunbabin adds that "It is also claimed that the League was paralyzed by the Article 5 requirement to obtain unanimity. This did indeed sometimes influence proceedings. Thus in October 1933 Germany blocked an Assembly resolution affirming that obligations under the minorities treaties covered religious minorities (e.g. Jews) as well as linguistic ones" (Dunbabin, 1993, pp. 429–430).

⁵⁹ Andrew Bennett and Joseph Lepgold, "Reinventing Collective Security After the Cold War and Gulf Conflict," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 108, No. 2, Summer 1993, p. 214.

⁶⁰ As Richard N. Rosecrance notes, "the League was simply not equipped to handle a dispute of the proportions of Democracy against Fascism" (*Action and Reaction in World Politics: International Systems in Perspective*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1963, p. 187).

⁶¹ Pierre Milza, *De Versailles à Berlin 1919–1945*, Paris: Masson, 1979, p. 256.

⁶² Kennedy, 1989, p. 283. An examination of the factors that caused the rise of authoritarian parties and leaders in the 1930s is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁶³ Milza, 1979, p. 256.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, 1989, pp. 336–337.

⁶⁵ Soutou, 2000, p. 338.

⁶⁶ On Roosevelt's "policemen" concept, see, for instance, Georg Schild, "The Roosevelt Administration and the United Nations: Re-Creation or Rejection of the League Experience?" *World Affairs*, Vol. 158, No. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 26–34.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, 1989, p. 493.

⁶⁸ Ikenberry, 2001, pp. 166, 170; Robert Jervis, "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, October 1985, p. 65.

⁶⁹ On the domestic and external factors that contributed to the U.S. turn in 1946 toward a more confrontational stance with the Soviet Union, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000 [1972], pp. 312–315.

⁷⁰ Ikenberry, 2001, pp. 206–207. On the limits of the comparison between NATO and the Concert of Europe, see Lascurettes, 2017, p. 3.

⁷¹ Ikenberry, 2001, p. 199.

⁷² Gaddis, 2000 [1972], p. 354.

⁷³ Gaddis, 2000 [1972], pp. 354–356.

⁷⁴ Gaddis, 2000 [1972], p. 359.

⁷⁵ On whether the 1815 Concert of Europe would have worked had a veto system been a place, see Lascurettes, 2017, pp. 19–20.

⁷⁶ Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991, p. 129. Jervis sees the 1945 Concert as ending in 1946, for "bipolarity and the development of nuclear weapons allowed the superpowers to limit the danger of war, without a concert" (Jervis, 1985, p. 68).

⁷⁷ Kennedy, 1989, pp. 400–401.

⁷⁸ Soutou, 2000, p. 347.

⁷⁹ On the argument that the foreign policy of U.S. President Richard Nixon attempted to revive some elements of the 1815 Concert, see Stephen A. Garrett, "Nixonian Foreign Policy: A New Balance of Power—or a Revived Concert?" *Polity*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Spring 1976, pp. 389–421.

⁸⁰ Sten Rynning, "The False Promise of Continental Concert: Russia, the West and the Necessary Balance of Power," *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 3, May 2015, pp. 539–552.

⁸¹ G. John Ikenberry, I, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 2015, pp. 450–455.

⁸² Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991, p. 144.

⁸³ Schroeder, 1986, p. 11.

⁸⁴ Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 3.

⁸⁵ On the role of trust and transparency in the success of the Concert, see Lindley, 2003/2004.

⁸⁶ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2017.

⁸⁷ The literature on the democratic peace theory is vast. For a summary of that literature, see Stephen Watts, Jennifer

Kavanagh, Bryan Frederick, Tova C. Norlen, Angela O'Mahony, Phoenix Voorhies, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Understanding Conflict Trends: A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1063-1/1-A, 2017, pp. 19–29; and Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4, December 1986, pp. 1151–1169.

⁸⁸ See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 391–425; and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999. See also Glenn Chafetz, Michael Spirtas, and Benjamin Frankel, *The Origins of National Interests*, London: Frank Cass, 1999.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Andrew Moravcsik, "A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Autumn 1997, pp. 513–553; and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991.

⁹⁰ The school of thinking in international relations that takes this idea seriously is known as constructivism. Rather than assume the material basis of state interests, as realist and liberal theories do, constructivists study the sociocultural origins of state interests. For important contributions to constructivist scholarship, see Wendt, 1992; Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Review: The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2, January 1998, pp. 324–325; and Wendt, 1999.

⁹¹ Richard Price and Nina Tannenwald, "Norms and Deterrence: The Nuclear and Chemical Weapons Taboos," in Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 114–152; Richard Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997; and Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁹² James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The Logic of Appropriateness," in Robert E. Goodin, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 479. See also James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*, New York: Free Press, 1989.

⁹³ Thomas U. Berger, "Norms Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan," in Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 317–356; and Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983; and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

⁹⁵ Eric Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain, eds., *Power and the Past: Collective Memory*

and *International Relations*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010, p. 26.

⁹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed., Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1925].

⁹⁷ Yinan He, “Ripe for Cooperation or Rivalry? Commerce, Realpolitik, and War Memory in Contemporary Sino-Japanese Relations,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 2008, pp. 162–197.

⁹⁸ Randall Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Summer 1994, pp. 72–107; Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Spring 2003, pp. 5–56; David M. Zions, “Revisionism and Its Variants: Understanding State Reactions to Foreign Policy Failure,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October–December 2006, pp. 631–657; and Jason W. Davidson, “The Roots of Revisionism: Fascist Italy, 1922–39,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Summer 2002, pp. 125–159.

⁹⁹ As noted earlier, Charles Glaser distinguishes between “security seekers” and “greedy” states and allows for various combinations of these two variables; Glaser, 2010, pp. 35–40. He suggests that there can be pure security seekers who are not greedy, which would presumably be restrained powers. Russia and China are both greedy in some respects, and an important question is how much their greed is moderated and channeled by their search for security.

¹⁰⁰ Miroslav Nincic, *Renegade Regimes: Confronting Deviant Behavior in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005; Wolfgang Wagner, Wouter Werner, and Michael Ondero, “Rogues, Pariahs, Outlaws: Theorizing Deviance in International Relations,” in Wolfgang Wagner, Wouter Werner, and Michael Ondero, eds., *Deviance in International Relations: “Rogue States” and International Security*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; K. P. O’Reilly, “Perceiving Rogue States: The Use of the ‘Rogue State’ Concept by U.S. Foreign Policy Elites,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 3, No. 4, October 2007, pp. 295–315.

¹⁰¹ We employed three sources of information to make these initial estimates: Subject-matter consultations with RAND experts on the various countries; any available national strategy documents from each of the major powers; and a brief review of recent analyses of the grand strategy and trajectory of each country. The judgments rely on work conducted for the RAND project Building a Sustainable International Order and its evaluation of the essential objectives relative to that order of leading powers. See Michael J. Mazarr, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, Kathleen Reedy, Alexander D. Rothenberg, Julia A. Thompson, and Jordan Willcox, *Measuring the Health of the Liberal International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1994-OSD, 2017; Andrew Radin and Clinton Bruce Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017; and Michael J. Mazarr, Timothy R. Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2423-OSD, 2018.

¹⁰² Michael J. Mazarr, “Preserving the Post-War Order,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2, Summer 2017, pp. 29–49.

¹⁰³ Glaser, 1994, p. 61. See also Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, Inc., 2010, p. 98.

¹⁰⁴ The version of the theory typically known as “classical realism” holds that states compete for power because amassing power is the ultimate objective; it is human nature to possess an innate lust for power and desire for scarce goods (Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).

¹⁰⁵ Waltz, 2010. See also Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: Norton, 2014, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Waltz warns against conflating “peace” and “stability” and makes a distinction between “war-prone” and “stable” systems, arguing that if stability is understood as the ability to survive and endure after major wars, then multipolar, war-prone systems are also stable systems. This is a fair point, but today most scholars and practitioners understand “stability” to mean a lack of major conflict. Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Fall 1993, p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Waltz, 2014, p. 126.

¹¹¹ Balancing behavior can be internal, such as an arms buildup, or external, such as alliance formation. For more on balance of power theory, see Waltz, 2000, pp. 5–6.

¹¹² Glaser, 2010, p. 269.

¹¹³ The term *security dilemma* was coined by John H. Herz in his 1951 work *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) and expanded upon in Jervis, 1978.

¹¹⁴ Theorists use several terms to describe the basic notion of status: *Standing*, *prestige*, and others. There are fine distinctions among these concepts, but we will use the essential, and best-theorized, idea of *status*, defined as “standing, or rank, in a status community”; Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 4. It is therefore a relative measure of standing among a group that considers itself a community. That simple measure implies many other related qualities, however, including dignity, honor, prestige, reputation, and recognition. For a major work in this field, see T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

¹¹⁵ In just one example, Brazilian officials tend to see the West as a “club of the rich,” and “Brazilian diplomats usually reject the claim that Brazil is generally ‘satisfied’ with the current Western World Order” (Oliver Stuenkel, “Identity and the Concept of the West,” *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2011, p. 189).

¹¹⁶ Many popular books warned of the rising clash between the two countries, depicting Japan as a mercantilist state bent on undermining U.S. economic predominance. See, for example, Daniel Blustein, *Yen: Japan's New Financial Empire and Its Threat to America*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. One leading U.S. journalist wrote about the need to “contain Japan,” suggesting that despite critical areas of cooperation, “There is a basic conflict between Japanese and American interests— notwithstanding that the two countries need each other as friends—and it would be better to face it directly than to pretend that it doesn’t exist” (James Fallows, “Containing Japan,” *The Atlantic*, May 1989). A prominent economist argued in 1992 that the United States was then “experiencing the third episode of major economic conflict” with Japan in the previous 12 years (C. Fred Bergsten, “What to Do About the U.S.-Japan Economic Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1982).

¹¹⁷ Percy C. Bidwell, “Our Economic Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1942.

¹¹⁸ A leading recent assessment of economic tools in national competition is Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. On the U.S. use of financial sanctions, see Elizabeth Rosenberg, Zachary K. Goldman, Daniel Drezner, and Julia Solomon-Strauss, *The New Tools of Economic Warfare: Effects and Effectiveness of U.S. Financial Sanctions*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2016. For a broader argument on economic competition, see C. Fred Bergsten, “America’s Two-Front Economic Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2001.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Hanna Brock, “Competition over Resources: Drivers of Insecurity and the Global South,” Oxford Research Group, September 2011.

¹²⁰ Mark W. Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2, Spring 2001, pp. 215–250. For a summary of the literature on the norm, see Watts et al., 2017, pp. 70–79.

¹²¹ The United States does not dispute the unitary sovereignty of China and Taiwan but insists that reunification be peaceful and consensual and that China not use force to resolve the issue.

¹²² Morgenthau, 1993, p. 72.

¹²³ Michael J. Mazarr and Ashley L. Rhoades, *Testing the Value of the Post-War International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2226-OSD, 2017.

¹²⁴ This is in contradiction to classical realist Morgenthau’s claim that multipolar systems are more stable. See Morgenthau, 1993, chapters 14, 21. See also Waltz, 2000, p. 6. In a multipolar system, John Mearsheimer agrees, system dynamics can become characterized by an unequal distribution of power among three or more great powers, meaning that one state is a potential hegemon. This is the most dangerous distribution of power for international stability because states’ fear is most pronounced; Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 270.

¹²⁵ A. F. K. Organski’s power transition theory and George Modelski’s theory of long cycles share similarities with hegemonic war theory; they also build from the foundation Thucydides provides. Modelski’s full cycle can last from 87 to 122

years, with periods of global war lasting as much as one-fourth of the total long cycle. A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968; George Modelski, ed., *Long Cycles in World Politics*, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987.

¹²⁶ Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner, “Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 1989, p. 183. Unipolarity is prone to peace for most, because it obviates the conflict-inducing problem of hegemonic rivalry, although the hegemon may find itself fighting countless brush-fire wars as the price of sustaining its predominance (William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1999, p. 7).

¹²⁷ See Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 183.

¹²⁸ Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 592.

¹²⁹ Michael Howard, *The Causes of War*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 16.

¹³⁰ Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, “Special Initiative: Thucydides’s Trap,” webpage, undated.

¹³¹ Allison, 2017.

¹³² David M. Edelstein, “Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs About Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Autumn 2002, pp. 1–40; and Brian C. Rathbun, “Uncertain About Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 533–557.

¹³³ For more on this theory, see Edward D. Mansfield, *Power, Trade, and War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994; Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

¹³⁴ For a survey of the literature, see Watts et al., 2017, pp. 30–38. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye’s theory of complex interdependence is based on the basic premise that states and their welfare are inextricably bound together. According to Keohane and Nye, there are multiple channels that connect societies beyond formal government relations, such as informal governmental ties, multinational corporations and organizations, individual relationships, and more; Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1977.

¹³⁵ Robert Jervis, “From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation,” *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, October 1985, p. 64.

¹³⁶ Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1991, p. 63.

¹³⁷ Jervis has argued that it is in the interest of each actor to have others be “deprived of the power to defect” from an agreement or coalition. He claimed that each actor would be willing to restrict

his own ability to defect if it meant others would be restrained as well; Jervis, 1978, p. 171.

¹³⁸ Jervis, 1985, pp. 71–73.

¹³⁹ For more on this theory, see Michael Doyle, 1986; Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.

¹⁴⁰ For a review of the relevant literature, see Watts et al., 2017, pp. 78–84.

¹⁴¹ Jervis, 1982, pp. 360–365.

¹⁴² Jervis, 1982, p. 366.

¹⁴³ Wendt, 1992, p. 405.

¹⁴⁴ This emphasis supports the argument made in the strategic rivalry literature that states with a history of competition are more likely to engage in future rivalry or even conflict: Distrust and negative perceptions of another state are self-reinforcing constructs. See, for example, P. F. Diehl and G. Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ For an argument about the role of business preferences and conflict, see Jonathan Kirshner, *Appeasing Bankers: Financial Caution on the Road to War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976; Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1998, pp. 144–172.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Axelrod, ed., *The Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976; Michael D. Young, “Cognitive Mapping Meets Semantic Networks,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 40, No. 3, September 1996, pp. 395–414.

¹⁴⁸ Margaret Hermann sought to explain state behavior using the personal characteristics and policy orientations of political leaders (Margaret G. Hermann, “Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 1980, pp. 7–46). Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman argue that the perceptions and predilections of individuals with power are especially influential on a state’s overall strategy and relationships with other states when power is concentrated in the hands of one individual, when civil institutions are in conflict with one another, and during times of upheaval and transition (Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Spring 2001, p. 109).

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Glaser, 2010, pp. 43–46; Jervis, 1985, p. 62; and Jervis, 1978, pp. 167–214.

¹⁵⁰ Subsequent phases of the study will test these hypotheses through deeper assessments of specific categories of competition and the ambitions and character of leading actors.

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About This Report

This report summarizes the findings of a RAND Corporation study on the character of the emerging era of international competition. It is the first of three reports that examines the nature of that competition; evaluates its military, economic, geopolitical, and informational components; and assesses the perspectives of the major powers. This report should be of value to the national security community and interested members of the general public, especially those with an interest in the future of the international system and the U.S. role in dealing with rising competition.

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