

# The Story of Great Power Concert: A Pluralist Narrative for US Grand Strategy

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## **Abstract**

This article explores the implications of a pluralist strategic narrative for contemporary US foreign policy. Despite US adherence to grand strategies of primacy, alternative approaches for achieving national interests have recently emerged that account for the Eurocentrism of US hegemony and liberal world order. These include great power concert, a strategy that can preserve internationalism through a consciously created balance of power. I argue that a concert strategy can produce a stable world order if articulated in the context of a pluralist strategic narrative about US identity and the world system. Based on Chantal Mouffe's radical democratic theory, I argue that pluralism can enable the United States to resolve the struggle for recognition in world politics and provide ontological security for its revisionist rivals. By recognizing competitors as adversaries and not enemies, the United States can signal status quo intentions and dampen security competition. The resulting great power cooperation can enable further collaboration to regulate the global economy and resolve ecological crises. Rather than a liberal world order, the United States can realize a constitutional one whose rules and institutions emerge through processes of norm contestation.

## Introduction

The Donald Trump presidency has created an existential crisis for American foreign policy. Since his inauguration in January 2017, President Trump has systemically challenged almost every principle the United States' liberal hegemonic foreign policy framework. The United States is on the verge of abandoning its allies in Europe and East Asia, has renounced trade openness in favor of protectionism, and turned its back on international institutions and multilateral agreements regarding climate change and other global problems. Instead, Trump has pursued more transactional diplomacy with authoritarian regimes in Russia and North Korea while eroding domestic democratic norms and the rule of law, all consistent with his ethnonationalist populist rhetoric and "America First" foreign policy. However, the United States still regularly uses force as an extension of the War on Terror and has implicitly or explicitly sought regime change in Iran and Venezuela.

These foreign policy initiatives have resulted in a rigorous debate within the national security community about the future of US grand strategy. Establishment voices have bemoaned Trump's rejection of a US leadership role in world politics and his dismantling of the liberal world order which ensured global peace and prosperity since 1945 (Kagan 2018, Haas 2018).<sup>1</sup> In response, they advocate that the next US president should return to a liberal hegemonic grand strategy and protect the liberal order from threats posed by revisionist authoritarian states, especially Russia and China. A growing number of observers and scholars question this orthodoxy. Advocates of foreign policy restraint echo Trump's skepticism of US alliance commitments and military occupations while criticizing his unilateral use of force abroad. Based

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<sup>1</sup> By world order, I mean the arrangement of rules, norms, and institutions established among states which provide basic expectations for their behavior. By liberal world order, I refer to the framework established by the United States as a hegemon based on trade openness, cooperation through international institutions, and peace among democracies. See Lissner and Rapp-Hooper (2018: 8-10).

on structural realism, they argue that the United States can avoid antagonizing great powers and preserve its military primacy by adopting a strategy of offshore balancing (Walt and Mearsheimer 2016). By reducing its forward posture, the United States can reduce military spending and focus more on domestic priorities.

Although this grand strategic debate has become quite intense, it is not necessarily new. Security scholars have weighed various proposals for US grand strategy since the end of the Cold War based on traditional calculations of how to best realize the national interest. However, new research informed by constructivist frameworks has challenged the realist and liberal emphasis on power and self-interest as the source of strategic considerations as well as the general dismissal of rhetoric as a meaningless gesture that masks deeper state motives. Constructivists argue that both grand strategic choices and implementation are inseparable from policymakers' need for legitimation, or public justifications of one's actions based on what others understand about social reality. These legitimation claims are articulated in the form of narratives, or stories about one's own identity and a preferred vision of the world. Narratives thereby determine how states define their interests, threats, and a range of grand strategies which can best serve their objectives. But more importantly, narratives are expressions of a state's struggle for recognition and its need to resolve the existential anxiety inherent in all social life. If states seek ontological security rather than physical security, then both grand strategy and state behavior (whether cooperative or competitive) are a function how states talk to each other about who they are.

In this paper, I use these constructivist analyses of strategy and security to argue that a great power concert strategy is most appropriate for the contemporary United States. In purely instrumental terms, a concert strategy can enable the United States to create a stable balance of

power while enabling international cooperation to cope with major non-state threats such as catastrophic climate change or the destabilizing effects of economic inequality. However, the national story which complements a concert strategy is even more significant. I claim that a pluralist strategic narrative, if articulated publicly within institutional forums, can enable the United States to provide ontological security to its rivals and generate status quo intentions. Based on the radical democratic theory of Chantal Mouffe (1994, 2005, 2008, 2013), I show how a pluralist narrative makes possible restrained foreign policy practices of concession and accommodation that resolve disputes with other great powers on the basis of mutual coexistence. By defining its identity in terms of pluralism and recognizing the diverse cultural foundations of political authority among sovereign states (Reus-Smit 2018), the United States can recognize others as equal participants in deliberations without imposing its own Eurocentric norms and institutions upon them. If policymakers publicly articulate this narrative, they can credibly commit to abide by norms of mutual deliberation and generate a collective intentionality to forego gains at the expense of others (Mitzen 2013, 2015).

A great power concert legitimated by a pluralist narrative can accomplish what alternative grand strategies cannot. First, it can generate an equilibrium of power among the United States, China, Iran, and Russia by combining both restraint and deterrence. A concert would enable the United States to maintain its existing alliances and make future aggression costly. However, public recognition of its rivals as equal partners in maintaining world order can ensure that those commitments are perceived as defensive expressions of US status quo intentions rather than offensive threats to the security of other great powers. In this way, a pluralist narrative enables collective commitments to power balancing that can dampen security competition and deescalate great power rivalries. Second, a pluralist narrative can activate the

latent constitutional aspects of the existing world order and revive global governance. Because a pluralist strategic narrative is constitutive of a global public, it enables states to treat each other as equal participants in the development of new norms and institutions for regulating transnational processes. As the United States recognizes the valid claims of other states on the basis of their diverse cultural foundations (Reus-Smit 2018), it makes possible an open-ended process of norm contestation within existing institutional forums and the subsequent development of legitimate robust rules and international institutions without a hegemonic US posture (Wiener 2008, Acharya 2018). The resulting system of global governance would be consistent with a constitutional order and allow states to address their intense economic and ecological interdependence through robust, and even democratic, cooperation. In this way, the pluralist de-escalation of security competition can enable the de-escalation of economic competition and limit the degree to which global economic flows concentrate economic power and generate environmental externalities that threaten all states around the world.

My argument proceeds in three parts. First, I examine how existing US grand strategic proposals cannot be evaluated without considering the identities and narratives which make them possible. I then demonstrate how a pluralist narrative can generate the collective intentionality necessary for a great power concert and open up the contestation of institutional norms to non-Western actors. Lastly, I suggest precisely how public articulations of pluralism can activate more robust cooperation in existing international forums.

### **The Constitutive Relationship between Identities and US Grand Strategies**

Grand strategy refers to the employment of all forms of national power and influence, whether military, political, economic, or cultural, to achieve long-term security (Kennedy 1998). Scholars study grand strategy in one of three ways: 1) as process of decision-making and

planning, 2) as a variable aspect of state behavior, or 3) as blueprint for how to achieve state objectives (Lissner 2018). Regardless of which aspect is studied, research on grand strategy is generally informed by conventional assumptions about states in international relations. We empirically and normatively assume that states are rational actors pursuing their self-interest in an anarchic international environment. Debates about US grand strategy, which fall into the third kind of research, are no different. Strategy thereby functions as a bridge between policy ends which fulfill national interests and various tools, or means, of statecraft employed to achieve them (Gray 2010). In other words, grand strategy enables states to instrumentally “cause” security for themselves in a particular context (Posen 2014). Objectively, states can choose among a range of strategic blueprints ranging from least to most ambitious in terms of the scale and scope of desired outcomes (Parent and MacDonald 2018: 7).<sup>2</sup> In today’s world, debates about various grand strategic blueprints are about how to address core US interests. I define these as avoiding great power war, ensuring economic prosperity for all Americans, curbing nuclear proliferation, and coping with potentially catastrophic climate change.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar distribution of power, liberal hegemony has served the dominant grand strategic framework. This strategy is liberal because it seeks to create a peaceful rules-based world order based on liberal principles of trade openness, institutional cooperation, and the democratic peace, but also primacist because it calls for the United States to maintain a global preponderance of US military power employed in the service of these principles. This strategy has been realized in two forms, both of which rely on hegemonic stability theory (Krasner 1976, Gilpin 1983, Webb and Krasner 1989). The first is *liberal internationalism*, in which the United States binds itself to international institutions as a

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<sup>2</sup> From least to most ambitious, these strategies are: isolationism, offshore balancing, great power concert, cooperative security, primacy, and global empire.

means of fostering international legitimacy and socializing other states into adopting liberal norms (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, Ikenberry 2011). A second variety is *neoconservatism*, which prioritizes the unilateral use of military power to uphold liberal rules in an anarchic world and directly spread liberal forms of governance despite the disapproval of some allies (Kagan 2003, Nau 2015). In either form, liberal primacists argued a hegemonic grand strategy best served US interests because it spread peace and prosperity across the globe, thereby guaranteeing US security and future economic growth through open trade access. The combination of overwhelming US military power and the economic benefits enjoyed by other states ensured that US unipolarity was stable and that other states would refrain from traditional counterbalancing behavior (Wohlforth 1999, 2009).

However, liberal primacy strategies have always been subject to criticism by advocates of foreign policy restraint. They argue that the US nuclear arsenal, its diverse economy, and distant geographic position in world politics prevents any great power rival from threatening its security (Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997). Rather than guarantee US security and prosperity, restrainers claim that forward US commitments led to unnecessary wars on the basis of liberal ideology and enabled US allies to free-ride on its unnecessary military expenditures (Walt and Mearsheimer 2016). To better align means and ends, they argue that the United States should adopt a strategy of *offshore balancing*, in which it retrenches from security commitments in Eurasian regions where no potential regional hegemon looms on the horizon (Mearsheimer 2001, Layne 2006). Retrenchment offshore will force US allies to develop their own military capabilities while removing potential threats to US rivals that can activate the security dilemma. Overall, restraint would enable world politics to settle into a stable balance of power and permit the United States

to focus solely on protecting the global commons rather than paying for an expansive yet unnecessary force structure (Posen 2014).

Advocates of liberal primacy and offshore balancing have challenged each other's assumptions and arguments in the last several years (Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth 2013, Glaser 2018, Mearsheimer 2018, Walt 2018), while other observers have wisely sought to clarify the theoretical assumptions of each grand strategy to better enable a rational debate about which strategy can reconcile means and ends (Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018). However, our discussions about US national security and grand strategy have never truly reckoned with the role of rhetoric and narrative in making possible foreign policy behavior, especially grand strategy. Critical and poststructural theorists have long argued that foreign policy cannot be understood without reference to how policymakers give meaning to the world around them (Campbell 1992, Huysmans 1998). From these perspectives, state action is not necessarily a product of the rational appraisal of national interests but instead is constituted by policymakers who rhetorically define what "the nation" is, and in turn, draw boundaries between a "national" self and a "foreign" other which are then reaffirmed by the enactment of policy. Strategy itself is only possible in the broader context of a story that rationalizes and shapes it (Freedman 2013: 614-615). If we want to analyze why states make particular foreign policy choices and examine how they are implemented in world politics, we have to examine national security narratives used to legitimate them and the process by which policymakers rhetorically contest each other's narratives (Miskimmon et. al. 2013, 2017, Krebs 2015, Krebs and Goddard 2015).

The implications for grand strategic debates are significant. Our available grand strategies cannot be evaluated without also considering how it can be legitimated by a particular story about US identity and its role in world politics, especially in relation to other states, institutions,

and non-state threats. In particular, we need to examine how various grand strategies invoke the master narrative of American exceptionalism, a story about US identity which defines the United States as a unique nation whose liberal principles of governance can serve as a model for the rest of the world. (McCartney 2004, Jackson 2006: 56-63 Restad 2014, 2018).

First, consider newly articulated strategies designed to uphold the liberal world order in a context of relative hegemonic decline. Brooks and Wohlforth (2016) call for a strategy of *deep engagement*, in which the United States affirms its security and institutional commitments to deter authoritarian great power rivals from further revisionism and uphold liberal norms. This strategy is consistent with calls to responsibly managing great power competition through deterrence while exploring avenues for cooperation without making security concessions (Wright 2017, Wright 2019). It is also less ambitious than primacist strategies because it seeks to merely conserve rather than expand the liberal order (Wohlforth and Lind 2018).<sup>3</sup> However, its call to restore US liberal hegemony is consistent with a vindictionalist narrative of exceptionalism which legitimates both liberal internationalism and neoconservatism. Since Fukuyama (1994), US policymakers and scholars have represented US liberalism as the highest form of human organization and endowed the United States with a mission to actively spread liberal freedom across the world and further the cause of human progress (Kagan 2004, Kagan 2012, Kagan 2014, Mandelbaum 2004, Mandelbaum 2009, Sullivan 2018). This particular narrative has deep historical roots in Woodrow Wilson's anti-pluralist understanding of the universality of US liberal principles (Ambrosius 2002: 28, Smith 2011), and constitutes non-liberal societies as fundamentally illegitimate and as a threat to the existence of liberalism itself (Owen 1994: 95-96, Desch 2007, Rae and Reus-Smit 2013). So long as policymakers and observers retain this

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<sup>3</sup> In its refusal to use military force to expand the liberal order, deep engagement resembles an older strategy of selective engagement (Art 1998). I consider the differences between the two to be merely semantic.

narrative, the United States will succumb to the temptations of enlarging the liberal order through intervention or institutionalizing global governance on the basis solely on the basis of liberal principles (Musgrave and Nexon 2013). Deep engagement's abstract constraints on expansion will be discarded and persistent great power competition will doom cooperative endeavors to resolve economic and ecological threats to US society.

What about offshore balancing? This strategy faces three problems. The first is a mismatch between its structural realist logic and the narratives invoked by policymakers to realize some of its principles. Advocates of offshore balancing rely on an exemplarist US identity compatible with a less ambitious form of liberalism associated with libertarian ideology. When its advocates critiques primacist strategies as relying on a progressive liberal ideology, they ties this vision of global reform to domestic attempts at social engineering which threaten individual freedom and violate the Founding Fathers goal of designing a limited government which protects the Lockean rights of its citizens (Preble 2009, Boaz 2010, Ashford 2018, Mearsheimer 2018). However, Restad (2014) demonstrates that opposition to Wilsonian liberal ambition has never invoked an exemplarist narrative which complements libertarianism but instead relied on a kind of unilateral internationalism compatible with vindicationism. The absence of any historical foundation for an exemplarist narrative renders the adoption of "ideal" offshore balancing unlikely, although elements of the strategy may be articulated within alternative narratives which ultimately distort it. For example, Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy combines offshore balancing's desire for buckpassing to free-riding allies with a militaristic clash of civilizations story about world order to justify a strategy of illiberal hegemony (Posen 2018). This unilateral nationalist approach to foreign policy should not be

regarded so much as a tragic lost opportunity to rationally match ends with means (Walt 2019), but the only strategy logically compatible with his narrative about the United States.

The second and third problems involves structural realism's purely materialist ontology and its undertheorization of both balancing and institutional cooperation. While retrenchment offshore is certainly a viable means for a declining great power to stabilize their position in world politics (MacDonald and Parent 2018), rising great powers do adopt more predatory goals when declining states cannot obstruct their ambitions (Shifrinson 2018). Given this historical record, we cannot assume that buckpassing to former allies will mechanically produce a stable balance of power without either arms races (Brands 2015: 16-21) or acceptance of a new dominant hegemon (Tin-bor Hui 2005, Wohlforth, et. al. 2007).<sup>4</sup> Lastly, the state-centrism of structural realism inhibits its development a credible account of international cooperation based on norms and institutions. Even if we accept that institutions are mere reflections of the distribution of power in world politics (Mearsheimer 1994), it remains unclear how the United States can foster collective action to offset the pernicious effects of globalization in a stable multipolar system. This theoretical lacuna leaves offshore balancers incapable of explaining how the United States can resolve non-state threats to its existence.

#### *Great Power Concert: A Classical Realist Strategy of Restraint and Institutions*

If our existing grand strategic blueprints and their subsequent narratives cannot realize US interests, then we should consider alternatives. I argue that a great power concert can do so by combining a modicum of foreign policy restraint with norms and institutions. A concert strategy would seek a collective partnership among all great powers which jointly collaborate as equals in maintaining a stable world order. Each participant would acknowledge each other'

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<sup>4</sup> Per Blyth (2003), "structures do not come with an instruction sheet."

security interests as valid and pursue a consensus regarding all disputes based on a mutually acknowledged right of consultation. No great power would pursue power or influence at the expense of the other, and their overriding concern is to maintain a balance of power. The theoretical basis of a concert lies in classical realism, which includes morality and ethics as ideational factors that generate norms of restraint and a systemic equilibrium (Rosenthal 2002, Williams 2004). Morgenthau's analysis of the early nineteenth century Concert of Europe relied heavily on a "moral consensus" (1948: 215-219) among conservative great power monarchies, all of which recognized each other as members of a European civilization with a shared cultural background and regime type. This shared identity rationalized limits on the use of power against one another within the informal institutional setting of the Congress of Vienna. Ideas and the distribution of power were two sides of the same coin for Morgenthau, and both were essential for the creation of restraints that served the interests of all participants.

Concert strategies have previously been offered by observers who sought to bind pro-US democracies together in a collective security agreement to uphold the liberal order (Daadler and Lindsay 2007, Lind 2008), but only recently has a true concert been proposed that includes US rivals. Porter (2013) argues that a concert-balance strategy is best suited for the emergence of multipolarity and the Indo-Pacific's emergence as a core region of the world economy. According to Acharya (2014), this strategy can complement the "multiplex" character of world politics and accommodate the diverse range of non-Western cultures otherwise excluded from international society. In this way, a concert strategy operates as a "post-hegemonic" kind of internationalism that produces a flatter, less hierarchical order rather than one defined solely by US liberalism (Ikenberry 2009). Even if rival great powers seek to challenge the status quo, their

integration into a concert as an equal to all other members will lead them to pursue change within institutions rather than seek to overturn the entire order (Goddard 2018).

A concert strategy is superior to both deep engagement and offshore balancing because it can resolve the tension between establishing a balance of power through military restraint and achieving international cooperation through norms and institutions. First, concerts enable a more stable equilibrium compared to offshore balancing. Rather than rely on the pressures of anarchy to force states to mechanically rearm or form alliances, a concert strategy would seek purposeful commitments among all the great powers to form a counterhegemonic coalition. This institutionalization of balancing reduces uncertainty how other powers will respond to any one actor's aggression and makes collective action to preserve the concert more plausible (Kupchan and Kupchan 1991). Second, a concert provides for more sustainable international cooperation compared to deep engagement by anchoring norms in the dynamics of power politics rather than relying on the utopian moral schemes of a single hegemon (Carr 1939). Such norms and institutions will fail if the hegemon either abandons them completely (as after World War I) or if it no longer holds a preponderance of power (as has occurred today). Given these dynamics, a concert strategy can combine elements of deep engagement with a more tolerant rationale for international organizations. The United States would adopt limited retrenchment by foregoing future expansion of its power while maintaining existing US alliances to deter future aggression. However, it would also treat China, Iran, and Russia as equal participants in the development of a normative foundation for great power behavior rather than insist on their assimilation into liberal expectations. By combining restraint and deterrence, the United States can deescalate great power competition and pursue more robust forms of international cooperation regarding non-state threats.

Overall, great power concert can resolve problems of world order which other strategies cannot. However, we still lack an understanding of *how* the United States can generate shared norms and the “underlying ethos” of solidarity and community among the great powers which enable its execution (Porter 2013: 13, Kupchan and Kupchan 1991, Miller 1994). To explain how the United States can create the ideational prerequisite for a concert, we must employ a critical approach to strategic interaction in which states reflexively share ideas about Self and Other which enable security cooperation and the adoption of self-restraint (Wendt 1992: 419-422).

### **Constituting the Concert: A Pluralist Strategic Narrative and the Ethos of Citizenship**

In this section, I extend my initial constructivist analysis of strategic narratives by demonstrating how a pluralist story about US identity that combines elements of exceptionalist rhetoric with Chantal Mouffe’s radical democratic theory. I then put this narrative in motion by demonstrating how it can provide ontological security and resolve the struggle for recognition among the United States and other rivals if articulated in public forums. By discursive acknowledging the autobiographical narrative of Eurasian rivals and their claim to great power status, United States can make minor concessions that generate a stable balance of power and foster the emergence of a constitutional world order by activating the process of norm contestation. I conclude by discussing how various normative aspects of world politics can be conceptualized in relation to the implementation of a concert strategy.

#### *Redefining US Exceptionalism in a Pluralist Strategic Narrative*

A strategic narrative informed by Chantal Mouffe’s theory of agnostic pluralism can enable the adoption and execution of a great power concert strategy. Mouffe argues that conflict is a formative element of all politics and serves as the basis of her radical approach to

democracy.<sup>5</sup> Her agnostic understanding of the political is rooted in the assumption that the properties of the political community are never truly fixed and are always under social construction. Politics, then, is a struggle among various actors to define the terms of communal inclusion and exclusion (Mouffe 2013: 6-7). This open and indeterminate aspect of politics makes the creation of a democratic system of governance dependent upon resolving the tension between liberal cosmopolitan and communitarian moral commitments. Mouffe argues that democracy requires respect for every individual's legal freedom from state interference while also cultivating civic participation and the moral obligations that members of a community have toward each other. Anyone can be a member of the *respublica*, regardless of their identity, once they commit to the practical respect of liberty and equality for all for all other citizens. To enact this political system, we must engage in "a practice of civility specifying not necessarily normatively appropriate performances, but the "conditions to be subscribed to in choosing performances" (Mouffe 1993: 67). Political participation is thereby broadened and expanded by recognizing the right of any person to offer their own interpretation of communal norms (Mouffe 2005: 102). Democracy can thereby succeed because it enables agonistic conflict without violent antagonism in a plural community: different peoples can consensually participate in rule-making based on their mutual respect for each despite disagreements over the good life (Ibid., 102-103). Agnostic pluralism can also be applied to international relations. Mouffe (2005) earlier predicted that the liberal world order created by the United States would never be sustainable due to its universal liberal principles and inability to respect communitarian difference. On this basis, the only way to convert antagonism to agonism and avoid a clash of civilizations is for world powers

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<sup>5</sup> Like IR constructivists, Mouffe (1993: 11-12, 2005: 26-34) assumes that democratic political systems (including their boundaries and norms of appropriate behavior) have no ontologically "real" foundation because they are socially created on the basis of shared ideas and thus always open to contestation by political actors.

to accept each other's particular cultural properties as legitimate and choose to coexist in a multipolar world order. By applying the ethic of citizenship in foreign affairs, states can create the institutional conditions for conflicts to be resolved peacefully as limited struggles between legitimate adversaries (Mouffe 2013: 41).

Mouffe's agnostic pluralism cannot be applied abstractly to develop a new strategic narrative for the United States – it has to be anchored in a pre-existing story about US identity that reconfigures its literary elements while tapping into past relationships otherwise made unthinkable by the dominance of liberal exceptionalism (Krebs 2015: 11-14). I define this novel reinterpretation of US identity as *pluralist exceptionalism*. Its democratic aspirations are consistent with the core aspect of US society which made it different from the Old World – its commitment to government forged on the basis of the rights of citizens. However, the inclusionary aspect of agnostic pluralism reframes the origin story of US democracy enshrined in liberal exceptionalism. By defining democratic citizenship in terms of respect for liberty and equality for all - regardless of one's identity - pluralist exceptionalism challenges long-standing racial and gender exclusions in US society based on its antebellum Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity or minimally inclusive postbellum civic identity predicated on the continued political repression of non-whites (Horsman 1986, Cha 2015). Those same exclusions, which serve as the basis of Trump's clash of civilizations world order and Jacksonian identity as well as the Eurocentric order envisioned by liberal internationalists such as Woodrow Wilson (Ambrosius 2002, 2007), are stripped away in a pluralist narrative. However, it retains US exceptionalism on the basis of the aspiration of maximal civic inclusion and requirement that every citizen must recognize every other's right to participate in the polity. In this way, pluralist exceptionalism enshrines tolerance as a restraint-producing norm in ways that the liberal variant of exceptionalism cannot

due to its insistence on assimilation of liberal values (Mouffe 2005: 102). It further suggests a different narrative plot compared to liberal exceptionalism. Rather than assume that the democratic values of the United States were a product of the genius of the Founding Fathers, pluralist exceptionalism suggests that the United States is becoming more democratic as it embraces a diverse citizenry composed of peoples from around the world. It also complements what Acharya has described as plural universalism, or a single world order composed of multiple normative foundations rather than only liberal US principles (Acharya 2014: 648-649).

Pluralist exceptionalism builds upon previous representations of US identities and great power relationships in which the United States defines itself as equal to other peoples and cultures. Consider President Barack Obama's discussion of the exceptionalisms held by various countries and the need to acknowledge the unique sentiments of various peoples:

"Now, the fact that I am very proud of my country and I think that we've got a whole lot to offer the world does not lessen my interest in recognizing the value and wonderful qualities of other countries, or recognizing that we're not always going to be right, or that other people may have good ideas, or that in order for us to work collectively, all parties have to compromise and that includes us" (Financial Times, 4 April 2009).

Obama's statement suggests that the moral values of other nations ought to be equally included in the formation of norms and rules for international order. Such relationships among the great powers have already existed in a rudimentary form and served as the foundation of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Four Policemen" alliance system during World War II and plans for global stability (Hendriksen 2008, Costigliola 2013). However, these representations of cultural and political equality always competed with dominant vindictionalist narrative articulated in terms of Western civilization as the basis of US hegemony during the Cold War (Jackson 2006) which then was reasserted during the slow resolution of the Iraq war crisis and economic recovery after the 2008 recession (Krebs 2015). That persistently dominant story

structured national security debates in ways that represented other nations as legally equal members of the liberal order so long as they accepted its US defined principles and norms. Not only do rising powers reject this representation of world politics, but the contemporary historical moment is ripe for an alternative pluralist narrative that treats them as equals and makes possible a more inclusive and flexible order. The broad loss of public faith in liberal exceptionalism amid rising economic inequality and racial tension have unstructured debates about national security and created an opening for a new narrative to become dominant that stabilizes US identity (Beinart 2018). Combined with the disjunctive nature of the Trump presidency (Skowronek 1993), a pluralist narrative can now be articulated that redefines US identity and its relationships with other nations while also breaking what Porter (2018) has described as the habit of primacy.

*Developing the Will to Concert: From Pluralist Narrative to Collective Intentionality*

Constructivist theories of identity and intention formation suggest that a pluralist narrative can enable the successful realization of a great power concert. Contemporary constructivists break with mainstream IR theories by challenging the assumption of methodological nationalism – they refuse to take granted the existence of nation-states as the only form of political organization in the modern world (Wimmer and Schiller 2006). Instead, they assume that social ties and discourses (including those articulated with narratives) make possible states' corporate identity, or their internal attributes, boundaries, and behavioral limits in relation to one another (Cederman and Daase 2003, Nexon and Jackson 1999, Jackson 2006, Nexon 2009). Since states lack an intrinsic sense of self, their identities must be affirmed through relationships with to avoid the existential anxiety rooted in all social life. On this basis, constructivists argue that states pursue ontological security, or security of the self, and struggle to gain recognition of their own biographical narrative by other states (Mitzen 2006, Steele 2007,

Murray 2018: Chapter 2). States thereby seek to stabilize their identity by routinizing relationships with others through either cooperation or competition, and can result in physical insecurity if states stabilize their sense of Self by treating the Other as an enemy. The need for ontological security is thus the true driver of the security dilemma (Jervis 1978), and the struggle to have one's identity recognized by another rival can lead states to build institutions and military capabilities which serve no rational purpose but merely escalate conflict.

This perspective can help us explain much of the ongoing disorder in world politics in terms of heightened ontological insecurity for both states and citizens. As globalization drives greater connections among peoples, they rearticulate identities in ways that are often deeply exclusionary and produce extreme forms of ethonationalism (Kinnvall 2011). As for US rivals (like Russia, China, and Iran) whose desired identity as a great power is directly challenged by US primacy and a universally liberal world order, they can only achieve ontological security by adopting revisionist intentions and pursuing physical security through conflict spirals. This process of identity formation suggests that the threats faced by the United States are a product of its broad complex of relationships with state and non-state actors in world politics. Not only are states more reliant one each other for ontological security than ever before, but globalization has also complicated their ability to provide ontological security for their citizens (Zarakol 2017: 62). Overall, constructivist theoretical frameworks suggest that the United States can resolve those threats by developing an alternative representation of great power identities which provides ontological security for itself and its rivals.

I argue that a pluralist narrative can do so, and in turn, convert revisionist their intentions to satisfaction with a new status quo maintained in a stable balance of power. By describing world order in terms of a plurality of coexisting cultural traditions, US policymakers can indicate

respect for non-liberal systems of authority that define the politics of nations outside of the West while also delegitimizing any claim to US military primacy and hegemony based on the supposed universal applicability of liberalism. This pluralist representation thereby enables the United States to recognize claims of great power status made by rising powers as valid as well as their great power practices (Murray 2018: Chapter 2). The United States would acknowledge their right to contest the terms of regional and global order, accept as legitimate their possession of exemplary military capabilities, and acknowledge their hierarchical position as first-tier states over others within their respective regions. The resulting relationships would provide ontological security to US rivals through cooperation, and in turn, enable the emergence of a stable balance of power. In this narrative context, the United States can make minor concessions that break conflict spirals and signal status quo intentions (Jervis 1976). Given the contemporary world system's multipolarity and diverse unit-level systems of authority, a pluralist narrative coupled with minor concessions can stabilize its inherent tendency toward power balancing (Nedal and Nexon 2019).

Although a pluralist narrative enables the de-escalation of power politics by recognizing difference, it still can bind the United States and other great powers together in a shared identity that constitutes them with collective intentions. The public articulation of pluralism in open and recurring forums enables the United States to construct a plural subject among the great powers, in which they jointly commit to a set of actions based on their mutual recognition of each other's identity as equals and representation of their interests in terms of a global public (Mitzen 2013: 41-42). In this way, recognition of other rising powers' great power status compels them to act in ways consistent with that shared identity, but without necessarily eliminating their agency or distinctiveness. These publicly maintained relationships enable any one actor to rhetorically

challenge another for violating great power norms. Rivals that persist in revisionism and violate expectations of mutual accommodation and decision-making by consensus make themselves vulnerable to the representational force of demands by others to uphold joint commitments consistent with their great power identity (Mattern 2004). They further risk losing the support of their domestic and regional audiences which may reject its justifications for aggression based on its framing of itself as a great power and the discursive boundaries established by collective recognition of that identity (Krebs and Jackson 2007). The very fact of extreme globalization makes shielding domestic audiences from the contradictions of one's revisionist actions and great power narrative even more difficult. As people increasingly move across borders and develop multiple definitions of the self (Erskine 2002), revisionism by a state leader may lead its citizens to experience contradictions between their national and transnational identities, leading to a loss of legitimacy. In this context, revisionist intentions and a subsequent identity narrative that rationalizes such actions will fail to achieve ontological security and be challenged through various forms of balancing (whether hard or soft). Overall, a pluralist narrative can generate a commitment to a concert once articulated by the United States. The recognition of difference enables status quo intentions, but the inclusion of all great powers within a single plural identity simultaneously generates a collective intent to maintain that status quo and balance against any actor that engages in revisionism.

#### *Enabling Norm Contestation from Sovereignty to Human Rights*

The agnostic qualities of pluralism which enable purposeful commitments to a balance of power make possible new processes of norm emergence and diffusion as well as more democratic international institutions. IR scholars have previously conceptualized norm emergence and diffusion in terms of the spread of cosmopolitan standards of behavior by norm-

making hegemons and non-state entrepreneurs to norm-taking lesser powers (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). However, these unidirectional theories of norms ignore how non-hegemons and small states can contribute to norm development. In the context of a pluralist narrative that makes possible a collective intentionality, I argue that these processes characterize the emergence of norms in a great power concert. The practice of civility among participants in a concert permits each actor to contest the validity of norms and subsequent institutional rules based on their own particular interpretation of them (Wiener 2008). A constitutional order can further permit the development more robust regional systems of law and institutions as states localize global norms or simply declare a right of subsidiary and opt-out (Acharya 2004, 2018). These mechanisms ensure that no “strict” template of norms and rules can be diffused to all states while respecting their autonomy. Depending on their cultural values, states will modify existing norms as consistent with their own traditions and embrace regional solutions as they see fit. And, whereas past iterations of great power concert privileged solely the great powers at the expense of small states, a pluralist-inspired concert which builds upon existing universal norms and institutions can enhance their agency in world politics while limiting domination by the great powers.

Norm contestation within a concert can produce a more robust norm of sovereign equality and more stability for non-great powers for two reasons. First, a collective intention to maintain the balance of power obviates any interest in accumulating power and influence through intervention into a weaker state or providing support for regime change. Greater integration at the global level, even the “thin” kind manifest in a plural subject (Mitzen 2015), will create fewer incentives for great powers to mobilize sub-state actors in middle or small powers and contribute to their fragmentation (Goddard and Nexon 2016). In other words,

declining global competition will facilitate declining domestic competition. Second, a world system defined by pluralism and equality among the great powers would broaden the terms of sovereign recognition beyond the long-standing Eurocentric standard of civilization (Weber 1994, Biersteker and Weber 1995, Sharman and Hobson 2005). The legitimately public reasons that could be offered to legitimate intervention would subsequently narrow and the result would be a more robust norm of non-intervention. Given this normative context, the United States must renounce regime change and electoral interference. While a liberal exceptionalist narrative justified these violations of state sovereignty as a means of defending or expanding the liberal order, they are inconsistent with agnostic pluralism and great power concert. Peacebuilding interventions can still be possible, but only in concert with other great powers, prominent regional actors, and when authorized by international institutions. The subsequent postconflict order will not be a liberal one but a hybrid which emerges out of respect for local cultural traditions (Richmond 2011). However, since the de-escalation of power politics in the world system will contribute to less domestic political competition, we should expect that the need for such interventions will decline as well.

Democracy and human rights norms would also be broadened beyond a single universal template or an agreement among the great powers. Pluralism allows the United States to account for the implicit liberal bias inherent in its democracy promotion activities and acknowledge the contested nature of the concept of democracy (Kurki 2015). Rather than champion procedural democratic institutions on the basis of liberal individualism, the United States can recognize governments which depart from its own ideals and match those of the cultural norms and values held by their citizens, including collective forms of legitimate authority found in non-Western cultures. Human rights norms can be further expanded to include justifiable demands for equality

included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) alongside political liberty but otherwise ignored within a purely liberal internationalist framework. Pluralism in world politics would lead the United States to recognize demands of social and economic rights as legitimate as well as the subsequent creation of welfare state institutions (Moyn 2018). No single interpretation of rights would be treated as universal, and states are thereby permitted to develop their own interpretations of the UDHR.

### **Pluralism and the Construction of a Constitutional World Order Through Public Talk**

In this final section, I discuss how the public articulation of a pluralist narrative can complement policy initiatives that result in the construction of a constitutional world order based on its liberal predecessor. A constitutional order is one defined by four principles: 1) rule of law enacted through formal processes of community participation, 2) separation of powers, 3) public power based on popular legitimacy, and 4) guarantees of rights to actors with legal standing (Lang, Jr. and Wiener 2017). A great power concert governed on the basis of norm contestation can realize these principles by ensuring the deconcentration of power through balancing and recognizing the right of all states to challenge and make laws through institutional processes. A constitutional order is thereby analogous to what Deudney (2007: 48-49) describes as a negarchy, or the ordering of states on the basis of mutual restraint with balancing mediated by the institutionalization of claim-making. Below, I discuss how a pluralist narrative can activate the latent aspects of a concert which already exist within the liberal world order. I begin by discussing great power relations with China, Iran, and Russia, and then discuss how pluralism can enable a post-hegemonic form of multilateralism and regionalism which refuses to subordinate international institutions to US interests. Per classical realism, power balancing in

the political domain thereby reinforces a balance between competing principles of organization in other domains, such the economy and the environment (Williams 2004: 650).

*Enacting a Balance of Power along the Eurasian Rim*

The most important US great power relationship involves China, whose rise has generally been theorized in terms of power transition theory. A pluralist representation of the United States and the Indo-Pacific can enable both states to co-exist on the basis of their equal status as great powers. The United States can ensure China's ontological security by refraining from representing its identity as a "responsible stakeholder" in a US-designed liberal order and accepting its rhetorical claim for "mutual respect" of each other's "core interests" (Denyer 2017). More importantly, the ontology which grounds a pluralist narrative is compatible with the concept of relationality, or the notion that the great power identities of both China and the United States depends on the maintenance of moral obligations toward one another and other states rather than a purely rights-based understanding of states as autonomous individuals (Qin 2011). This narrative of the Indo-Pacific region makes possible an order of "compatible universalism" (Zhao 2012) and mutual tolerance of each state's interests, along with those of existing US allies. Rather than seek to contain China on the basis of Quad Cooperation and polarize the region into two competing blocs, the United States would represent India as a neutral third pole and publicly renounce any interest in encircling China. It would further join Chinese-founded institutions such as the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank and accept China's desire to build deeper ties with Eurasia through the Belt and Road Initiative. Once the United States engages these institutions, it can use the relational principles of great power recognition to rhetorically challenge China if it violates the sense of communal morality among states in the region and encourage soft balancing in response to its aggression. This kind of approach can result in more

stable outcomes when dealing with security challenges in the South China Sea rather than insisting on arbitration through the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague. Instead, attempts to further expand China's geographic influence at the expense of other states should be challenged on the basis of its moral responsibilities to others as the central state in the region, and further include India in any discussion of great power responsibilities (see Babones 2019).

In the Middle East, the United States faces a region in the midst of a struggle for power between a rising Iran and increasingly aggressive US allies, combined with the threat of transnational terrorism embodied in the Islamic State and al Qaeda. However, the past diplomatic initiatives of the Obama administration suggest a path forward consistent with great power concert and a pluralist acceptance of non-secular forms of political community and democracy. The United States should build on President Obama's 2009 Cairo Declaration and announce Islamist political movements are a legitimate expression of the aspirations of both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims across the Middle East. Such clear expressions of respect can mitigate fears by Islamist movements that any realization of political power will be lost in the future and thus must be consolidated rapidly (Hamid 2014: 151). It should then rejoin the Iran nuclear deal without pre-conditions and relax primary and secondary sanctions against Iran enacted by the Trump administration. Next, the United States should de-escalate conflicts among regional powers through a policy of conditionality (Pampinella 2017). The United States would offer Iran the prospect of diplomatic recognition and normalization of relations (including the lifting of remaining sanctions) if it recognizes the State of Israel and commits to ending its support for non-state armed groups across the region. Second, the United States would make ongoing military assistance to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt dependent upon their compliance with existing international law and ending domestic political exclusions. Israel must respect the rights

of Palestinians in either a one- or two-state solution, Saudi Arabia must end its war in Yemen and blockade against Qatar, and Egypt must permit the Muslim Brotherhood to contest fair elections without state repression. All three states must also accept the Islamic Republic as a legitimate actor in the region. De-escalation among all regional powers can enable greater cooperation to deal with the threat of violent extremism and dampen Sunni-Shi'a sectarian tensions as a driver of religious conflict.

In Europe, a pluralist narrative would lead the United States to build upon the historical memory of its alliance with the Soviet Union. Together, both states successfully prevented a single fascist hegemon from dominating the continent. On that basis, it would renounce the Wilsonian narrative that Russia is inherently revisionist (Gunitsky and Tsygankov 2018) and acknowledge that Russia's attempts to control its weaker neighbors is a function of the post-Cold War expansion of a liberal European order up to its frontier (Babayan 2015, Tsygankov 2015). Instead, the United States can represent Russia as a great power equal to the United States and publicly recognize this identity throughout European security forums. This diplomatic declaration complements a unilateral moratorium on NATO expansion and the treatment of non-members (especially Ukraine and Georgia) as neutral (O'Hanlon 2018). The United States should subsequently seek to revive arms control agreements with Moscow, especially the INF Treaty but also an expansion of START, to reduce tensions with Moscow and further development cooperative habits. These endeavors can be pursued through the Organization for Security and Cooperation for Europe, an institution initially founded on the basis of great power equality during the Cold War (Kupchan and Kupchan 1991). While it pursues an initial rapprochement with Russia, the United States should maintain the existing deployment of military forces in Europe to maintain its Article V commitment to European allies but not

enhance its military posture to avoid further threatening Moscow. Lastly, the United States should not compromise on the illegality of Russia's annexation of Crimea, but offer a new dialogue regarding the status of the peninsula based on acknowledge of Russian's legitimate interest in maintaining its naval base at Sebastopol and influence in the Black Sea.

*Multilateralism in the Multiplex: Escaping the Paradox of Hegemony*

A plural balance of power can complement the revival of multilateral diplomacy and global governance by reforming existing institutions rather returning to returning to the instrumental multilateralism of hegemonic stability theory. The post-hegemonic framing of US interests in terms of a global consensus on transnational problems inclusive of a multiplicity of cultural traditions enables the United States to realize a more principled kind of multilateralism,<sup>6</sup> or multilateralism for multilateralism's sake (Cox 1992). Pluralism can thereby resolve the paradox of hegemony, or the tension between the pursuit of narrowly understood US national interests and its adherence to systemic rules and institutions of its own creation (Cronin 2001).

The United Nations illustrates how a transition from instrumental multilateralism to principled multilateralism is possible by building upon existing diplomatic practices but rearticulating them in a pluralist narrative. Although the United Nations was initially conceived as a way to project US power within an idealist narrative of liberal internationalism, it was nonetheless designed with a balance of power as the foundation of interstate cooperation (Wertheim 2019). A pluralist narrative enables further cooperation while discarding the liberal tendency to prioritize Anglo-American values as the basis of diplomacy. In this way, pluralism can deepen multilateralism by building upon its latent aspects within institutions like the Security Council, which already functions as a great power concert (Bosco 2014). By publicly committing

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<sup>6</sup> I am deeply indebted to Jennifer Mitzen for articulating "principled multilateralism" as a descriptor for this kind of diplomacy.

to a pluralist ethos of citizenship while sitting in the Council chamber, the US can make possible a more robust consensus on resolving disputes based on each member's responsibility to uphold international peace and security. No P5 member could reasonably justify its own unilateral action by itself or its allies or invoke the veto to obstruct resolutions that prevent the realization of naked self-interest.

Principled multilateralism can also realize collective action to resolve pressing non-state economic and ecological threats. Since the 1970s, the United States promoted economic norms of free trade and capital mobility based on the principles of freedom and efficiency. These ideas led to the disembedding of the global economy from national economic institutions and the erosion of economic sovereignty preserved in the Bretton Woods institutions (Blyth 2002, Swartz 2003, Rodrik 2010). These neoliberal principles of economic governance were seen as serving the interest of US multinational firms, but limitations on state economic regulation enabled private capital and transnational criminal syndicates to effectively evade any legal framework and accumulate power at the expense of state institutions (Gilman 2014). Renewed multilateral cooperation would seek to break up the concentrated power of these private actors by scaling up economic regulation to the global level and reembedding global economic flows within institutional frameworks. The normative basis of for such institutions can emerge out of a pluralist interpretation of rights and inclusion of economic norms that diverge from economic liberalism. A pluralist narrative about the economy would thereby accept the social democratic principle of collective economic regulation for the benefit of the public as a valid foundation for new norms of global economic governance alongside liberal norms. Trade openness can still be permitted, but regulated at the transnational level to ensure that its efficiencies benefit the global public rather than simply permit greater accumulations of private capital. Such policy changes

are possible given alternative discursive representations of economic relationships that emphasize *solidarity* rather than *competition*. Rather than describe workers in other states as economic competitors or champion the United States as the most competitive economy in the world, a pluralist narrative would frame all workers as striving for basic human needs and dignity.

The articulation of such a narrative along with a US commitment to norm contestation would build upon existing global economic and ecological institutions and further constitutionalize them. Although the pre-Trump economic aspects of the liberal economic order did have some constitutional features, it was never truly legitimate because it failed to achieve broad and equal participation in rule-making or guarantee economic and social rights (Schöwbel-Patel 2017: 411-412). A pluralist narrative would enable the United States to reform the existing institutional architecture in five ways. First, it would fully participate in already existing economic institutions which it previously had shunned on the basis of free market principles. Both the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development were products of welfare and postcolonialism internationalisms informed by reform socialism and the New International Economic Order (Steffek and Holthaus 2018). A pluralist narrative would rationalize US participation in these institutions and inclusion of their principles in global trade talks rather than isolate or manipulate them to accommodate the interests of multinational corporations (Payne 2001). Second, it would appoint labor norm entrepreneurs to investment dispute arbitration panels and embrace legal norms which redefine how the formal texts of trade agreements can be interpreted by national courts. Such actions would enable norm contestation to play out both domestic judicial institutions and in arbitration proceedings rather than ensure that only liberal economic norms guide such processes (Tucker

2018a, 2018b). Third, it would participate in an ongoing treaty negotiation process which would create a binding legal instrument to regulate global business practices on the basis of human rights. This initiative has been largely led by the G-77 but blocked by the United States on the basis of normative disputes over the prioritization of human rights or investment treaties (Seitz 2018). Pluralism would enable the United States to participate in such discussions and reframe its participation in the treaty in terms of reducing economic competition between states and their labor forces. Fourth, the United States could consider Piketty's call for a global wealth tax (2014) to break up concentrated economic power and make it available for public investment around the world

Lastly and most importantly, pluralism would lead Washington to relinquish hegemonic control of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and enable both institutions to mobilize capital to cope with climate change on a collective basis. Not only would the United States accept reform of voting shares and give up the hegemonic privilege of appointing the World Bank's head, but it would also consider more equal forms of monetary governance. These include Keynes' original vision of developing a common accounting unit for international payments (Piketty 2014, Adler and Faroufakis 2019). In the context of an overall de-escalation of great power competition and lesser need by states to focus on relative economic gains (Purdon 2014), the United States contribute to more adequate responses to the demands for action by epistemic communities of climate scientists beyond those which are normative constrained by a commitment to free-market capitalism.

#### *Regionalism in Service of Balancing*

A great power concert also has important implications for Europe, Latin America, and Africa, three regions which have engaged in regional integration projects of varying intensity. A

concert strategy executed in a multiplex world complements the expansion of these regional projects as a means of enabling their states' own self-sufficiency and reducing their subordination to extraregional hegemons and vulnerability to divide-and-rule strategies (Acharya 2014, Nexon and Wright 2007). Regionalism can thereby foster both hard and soft balancing and make attempts at extraregional domination by great powers more difficult by ensuring that states can realize public goods through cooperation with regional partners (Paul 2005, Pape 2005, Acharya 2017).

Expanding the scope of European Union integration is essential to maintaining the balance of power in Europe and enabling new solutions that resolve the crisis of European integration. European policymakers are currently weighing proposals to develop strategic autonomy, yet this concept lacks a clear framework for retaining some degree of US commitments to Europe rather than engage in offshore balancing (Haddad and Polykova 2018, Drent 2018). A pluralist narrative can do so by renouncing the singular Western civilizational identity which served as the basis for US hegemony at the outset of the Cold War. This discursive construction treated the Soviet Union as an Eastern Other while simultaneously delegitimizing social democratic representations of Europe as a Third Force separate from both the Anglo-American West and communist-led East ((Neumann 1998, Jackson 2006). Were the United States to recognize a more diverse Western civilization, it can still justify maintaining existing security commitments while simultaneously enabling norm contestation within the European Union. Pluralism can thereby open up structural opportunities for proponents of pan-European social democracy and institutional consolidation which have otherwise been unable to contest hegemony at the domestic level since the restructuring of postwar national identities in the shadow of US liberal hegemony (Marcussen, et. al. 1999, Bulmer and Joseph 2016). Plural

representations of Europe can also ensure that EU enlargement will be frozen along with NATO expansion. If the EU's liberal democratic identity lead its member states to be rhetorically entrapped by bids for membership among liberal Eastern European states in the 1990s (Schimmelpfenning 2001), then pluralism will obstruct any normative consensus on enlargement given its multiplicity of identities and representations.

A pluralist representation of the West can also enable the United States to finally treat regions and states in the global periphery as equals rather than subordinates to "Western Civilization." Both Latin America and Africa feature states which function as regional powers yet have always subordinated to the US and European empires on the basis of racial hierarchy. In a global multiplex, the United States would refrain from forcing those states to assimilate into a liberal world order. Instead, it would recognize their own diplomatic endeavors, especially those within each region and between them, as equally legitimate. The result would be an enhanced kind of regionalism among Latin and African states in which new forms of internationalism can be explored and enable greater soft balancing. Rather than simply allow extrahegemons to pit nations against each other in a competition for investment or export markets, a pluralist-inspired post-hegemonic US foreign policy would respect efforts among those states to cooperate in ways promote resistance to external hierarchies. Latin America has already engaged in such forms of regional cooperation, both recently with the rise of the Pink Tide but also during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Long and Friedman 2015). Such initiatives can ensure that no single hegemon, whether the United States, China, or Russia, or any other, can accumulate power and influence at the expense any other or subjugate states in the periphery. In this way, regionalism can contribute to a broader balance of power and, when anchored in international institutions, further enhance the constitutionalization of world politics based on non-Western norms.

*Arguments against a Pluralist-Inspired Concert Narrative*

Before concluding, I address potential counterarguments against a great power concert strategy.

The first involves critical comparisons between a concert strategy and deep engagement. Both strategies seek similar forward postures as the United States in various Eurasian regions. Offshore balancers may argue that such commitments remain unnecessary and fail to achieve actual cost savings for the US public. However, the rejection of global primacy and the inclusion of other great powers in a constitutional order can enable the minimization of US force structure in several ways that contribute to a balance of power while signaling US status quo intentions. First, the United States can immediately scale back nuclear modernization programs and related systems which compromise deterrence and contribute to arms races. These include upgrades to the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Force known as Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD), and the development of the Long-Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO). These systems are either excessively redundant or unreliable and may promote further arms development by US rivals (Snyder 2019, Grego 2018, Kristensen 2016). Simply eliminating these three weapons systems can save \$116 billion over ten years and ensure that the defense budget stays largely flat.<sup>7</sup> But as diplomacy with US rivals dampens competition, greater savings can be generated as fewer weapons platforms are needed to maintain deterrence.

A second criticism involves the uncertainties inherent in long-term strategic planning and the threats posed to democracy around the world. Advocates of deep engagement (or a return to either primacist strategy) may argue that there is no guarantee that US rivals will adopt and

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<sup>7</sup> My calculation of \$116 billion is derived from the Congressional Budget Office's "Budget Options" tool, which offers various options for achieving savings in the federal budget. See: [://www.cbo.gov/budget-options?combine=&field\\_all\\_potential\\_savings\\_value\[min\]=&field\\_all\\_potential\\_savings\\_value\[max\]=&field\\_budget\\_function\\_bo\\_target\\_id\[916\]=916&field\\_display\\_date\\_value\[min\]=&field\\_display\\_date\\_value\[max\]=](http://www.cbo.gov/budget-options?combine=&field_all_potential_savings_value[min]=&field_all_potential_savings_value[max]=&field_budget_function_bo_target_id[916]=916&field_display_date_value[min]=&field_display_date_value[max]=)

maintain status quo intentions. Further, abandoning US moral leadership of the liberal order will contribute to the toleration of authoritarianism abroad and even at home. I claim that these are overblown and misattribute both the sources of the revisionism and the authoritarian revival. For example, Pollack (2018) argues that Iran is an inherently revisionist state whose Islamist leaders have refused every attempt made by the United States to foster cooperation. However, his representation of Iran ignores how most attempts at US collaboration (except for the Iran nuclear deal) never changed the underlying dynamic of the relationship in which the United States simply refused to acknowledge Iran's existence as a legitimate actor in international society. A concert strategy guided by pluralism would correct this deficiency. In addition, Kagan (2018) argues that the United States must completely reject any partnership with dictatorships due to their ability to perfect forms of technological surveillance and interference with free democratic societies. But his entire argument, which is predicated on the need to preserve liberalism as the only ideology which can facilitate human progress, fails to acknowledge how liberalism itself has produced the problems that threaten the United States. The potential for authoritarianism has long existed within the West, and liberal free-markets have now enabled concentrations of wealth that enable concentrations of political power which enable authoritarianism. Rather than fall back onto liberalism as the solution to contemporary problems, the United States should explore how to combine liberalism with other ideologies and the values of other cultures, even if they are currently ruled by authoritarian governments. By creating that kind of pluralist world order and lessening the sense of threat experienced by non-liberal nations, the United States can erode the legitimization claims of authoritarian states without acting directly to do so. In such circumstances, liberal democracy will not spread across the globe, but neither will authoritarianism.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that a pluralist strategic narrative can help us rethink American foreign policy, grand strategy, and global governance. By embracing pluralism and a great power concert, the United States can generate a stable balance of power and resolve the dilemmas of ontological security in faces in conjunction with its great power rivals. Pluralism can also enable the United States to revive global economic governance in ways that reduce economic competition worldwide for the benefit of its own citizens. By acknowledging the cultural diversity of world politics through agnostic pluralism, the United States can adopt the forms of restraint necessary to achieve its national interests.

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