

Keeping the Republic: American Hegemony & Decline in Perspective

by

David A. Beitelman, M.A.

Graduate Program in American Studies

MRP submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© David A. Beitelman 2011

This is a work in progress and should not be cited or used in any other manner without
written permission of the author.

ABSTRACT: The United States, it is often said, is in a state of decline. Throughout the entirety of its history, and for a multitude of reasons, the Republic is said to be in danger of being lost. Since the end of World War II, seven ‘waves’ of declinism have swept through the nation, beginning with the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957. Today, the seventh wave has yet to break and American decline has, once again, become ‘conventional wisdom’. The purpose of this paper is to place these waves of declinism in historical context and to evaluate the theoretical implications of American decline on the international system. The paper is organized into three sections: a broad historical analysis, covering 1945 – 2011; a close examination of the two most recent waves of declinism, 1980 – 2011; and, a theoretical examination of American hegemony, the international system, and the perceived ‘threat’ from China. Throughout, it is demonstrated that while declinism serves an important function by bringing difficult issues to the forefront of the national consciousness, the United States shows no signs of decline.

Table of Contents

Introduction: ‘A Republic, if you can keep it.’	1
Section 1: Fighting the Tide	4
Section 2: Doomsayers & Decline	25
Section 2.1: Defense	32
Section 2.2: Economy	42
Section 2.3: Declinism in Perspective	56
Section 3: The Indispensable Nation	67
Section 3.1: A Shinning City Upon a Hill	79
Conclusion: Back to the Future	91
Works Cited	95

Figures

Figure 2.0: U.S. Federal Deficit, Debt, & Interest, 1980 – 1985	43
Figure 2.1: U.S. Federal Year-End Debt, 1981 – 1989	
Figure 2.2: Total Government Expenditures, 1981 – 1989	
Figure 2.3: Government Outlays for R&D, 1980 – 2010	46
Figure 2.4: GDP Based on PPP Share of World Total, 1980 – 2009	52
Figure 2.5: Annual GDP Percentage Growth, 1980 – 2010	
Figure 2.6: Total Education Spending, 1980 – 2010	55
Figure 2.7: Total Government Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP, 1980 – 2010	61
Figure 2.8: Year-End Debt, 2000 – 2010	
Figure 2.9: Total Government Expenditures, 2000 – 2010	62

Introduction: ‘A Republic, if you can keep it.’

In 1762, French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau asked, “If Sparta and Rome perished, what state can hope to endure forever?”¹ It is a question that plagues the American psyche and flows through the nation’s history like a tide. Believing the republic has fallen from grace is one of America’s favorite pastimes. From its founding, the nation’s leaders “worried about avoiding the fatal errors of the Greek and Roman republics.”² Letters exchanged between Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams “are filled with foreboding and gloom,” continuing “a great American tradition” of “contemplating decay.”³ Worry about decline has become an American institution in itself. Indeed, as Charles Dickens once observed, “[I]f its individual citizens, to a man, are to be believed, [America] always *is* depressed, and always *is* stagnated, and always *is* at an alarming crisis, and never was otherwise.”⁴ A thread of declinism is woven into the collective fabric of American society; it is the land of the “red, white, and truly blue.”⁵

The recurrence of declinism throughout American history is itself revealing. James Fallows suggests that statements of decline throughout America’s history are composed of two “staple ingredients,” the first being “exaggerated complaint by whichever group is out of political power.”⁶ The second ingredient is “what historians call the bracing ‘Jeremiad’ tradition of harsh warnings that reveal a faith that American can be better than it is,”⁷ and stems from America’s Puritan roots. In 1630, sailing toward New England on a rickety wooden boat called the *Arbella*, John Winthrop delivered his famous *Model of Christian*

¹ Mark Stephen Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs: Contemporary Visions of American Decline* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2008), 1.

² Ronald H. Spector, “America’s Staying Power,” *The Washington Post*, April 29, 1990, Final Edition.

³ Fareed Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?” *Time Magazine* (online), March 3, 2011.

⁴ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Zakaria’s World,” *Foreign Policy* (online), March 8, 2011.

⁵ Henry Allen, “Red, White & Truly Blue; With Depression the Sigh of the Times, Gloom and Doom Are Sweeping Across America,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 1990, Final Edition.

⁶ James Fallows, “How America Can Rise Again,” *The Atlantic* (online), January/February 2010.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Charity sermon, wherein he promised his Puritan followers that “we shall be as a city upon a hill,”⁸ a model for all to follow. Just six years later, a Congregationalist minister was already “lamenting the lost golden age of the colony, asking parishioners, ‘Are all [God’s] kindnesses forgotten? All your promises forgotten?’”⁹ And so the tradition of declinism was born. Winthrop’s sermon would come to characterize the way many Americans view their country and its place in the world: chosen by God and blessed with the power to vanquish his enemies, and a shining ‘city upon a hill’ for the world to see. Often referred to as ‘American exceptionalism,’ “this sense of mission has clung to the American scene in different guises down to the present.”¹⁰ The declinism of today is simply one of these guises – it is the fear that America is failing to live up to its exceptional status. The ‘city upon a hill’ imagery endures, popping up in speeches and writings throughout the twentieth-century. John F. Kennedy used it in a speech before the Massachusetts General Court in 1961, and Ronald Reagan famously used the phrase in both his 1984 acceptance of the Republican Party nomination and in his 1989 farewell address. A detailed examination of the cultural and religious origins of declinism are beyond the purview of this analysis, however it can be said that America comes by its constant fear of decline honestly.

Today, the tradition of American decline continues unabated. The late Samuel Huntington suggested that by 1988, the United States had already reached its “*fifth* [emphasis added] wave of declinism since the 1950s.”¹¹ The first wave was sparked by Soviet advances in missile and space technology in the late 1950s, culminating with the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957; the second came in the late 1960s, with the projected end of the bipolar world; the third

⁸ John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity*, Introduction, University of Western Ontario Course Pack No. F-0139, Fall 2005, 24.

⁹ Fallows, “How America Can Rise Again.”

¹⁰ Edward A. Tiryakian, “American Religious Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 527: Religion in the Nineties (May 1993), 46.

¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 2 (Winter, 1988), 76.

wave followed the OPEC oil embargo and subsequent energy crisis in 1973; the fourth wave came in the late 1970s, following the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (among other things); and, lastly, the fifth wave in the 1980s which was “largely triggered by budget and trade deficits and the seeming competitive and financial threat from Japan.”¹²

The tide of declinism receded again in the 1990s only to rise twice more: briefly following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and again shortly after the economic collapse in 2008. Three years later, with the economy struggling to find its footing and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan grinding on for close to a decade, the ‘seventh wave’ of declinism has yet to break. Books and articles detailing America’s untimely demise as the global hegemonic power continue to dominate popular discourse; there is, as one observer put it, a “declinism industry in America.”¹³

With every new incarnation, theorists and pundits insist “This time it’s different – This time it’s for real.”¹⁴ And yet, despite the assured certainty of American decline expressed generation-after-generation, America not only endures – it thrives. The purpose of this analysis is to understand what triggers these waves of declinism and put this “chronic strain in America” in perspective;¹⁵ to evaluate the strength and validity of the arguments suggesting American decline; and, to examine the theoretical consequences America’s decline may have on the international system. Accordingly, the analysis is divided into three sections. The first is a broad narrative surveying episodes of declinism in America since World War II, and putting them in historical context. The second section is an examination

¹² Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 94-95. All five ‘wave’ descriptions come from Huntington.

¹³ Examples of this are too numerous to list, however the January/February 2011 issue of *Foreign Policy*, focused on ‘American Decline,’ is illustrative of the popularity and prominence of the topic in public discourse. ‘Declinism industry in America’ comes from Daniel W. Drezner, “The Declinism Industry in America,” *Foreign Policy* (online), October 7, 2010.

¹⁴ Paraphrasing Gideon Rachman, “Think Again: American Decline,” *Foreign Policy* (online), January/February 2011. In the article, Rachman writes ‘This time it’s for real,’ and ‘This time it’s different’.

¹⁵ Allen, “Red, White & Truly Blue.”

of the most common arguments for American decline, which include both foreign and domestic policy issues ranging from America's aging infrastructure to its global military and security commitments. In this section, particular attention is given to the most recent waves of declinism, from 1980 to the present. The final section will address the theoretical aspects of American decline, using a framework provided by David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi in *American Power in the 21st Century* (2004) as a guide. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that while fears of American decline are not without merit, they are vastly overstated. As Huntington noted, "[t]he declinists play an indispensable role in preventing what they are predicting."¹⁶ Declinists bring critical, long-term challenges of the nation to the forefront of the public consciousness and spur intense debates, which then, ideally, lead to solutions. In this regard, many of the issues declinists raise (for example, debt, infrastructure, and education) are deserving of the nation's attention. That said, the veracity of their statements and projections concerning actual decline are not accurate reflections of American power – the recurring waves of declinism throughout American history attest to that.

Section 1: Fighting the Tide.

The United States emerged from World War II as the only country which became richer rather than poorer because of the war.¹⁷ Over the course of the war, the U.S. expanded its gross national product (GNP) from \$88.6 billion to \$135 billion, equaling nearly half of the world's total.¹⁸ It produced more than a third of the world's goods and was its largest

¹⁶ Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 96.

¹⁷ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 358.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

exporter; owned half of the world's supply of shipping; and possessed two-thirds of the world's gold reserves.¹⁹ The United States produced 52 percent of the world's steel and 49 percent of its energy.²⁰ And, until 1949, it enjoyed a monopoly on nuclear weapons and technology. It is hard to overstate the extraordinary economic and strategic position the United States found itself in by the end of the war. However, as Alex de Tocqueville noticed in the mid-nineteenth century, Americans "never stop thinking of the good things they have not got."²¹ It did not take long before America's preeminent economic and strategic advantage was said to be in decline.

When the United States dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending World War II, its technological superiority was beyond question. The Soviet Union followed up this show of force by demonstrating its own atomic prowess in 1949 and America's technological confidence was shaken, but never faltered - its dominance remained seemingly beyond reproach. Then in 1957, the Soviet Union launched its *Sputnik 1* satellite, becoming the first nation to successfully place an object in orbit above the Earth and shocking the world in the process. Suddenly, America's technological preeminence was called into question and its politicians, scientists, and military leaders scrambled to explain to both its own population and its allies how the Soviet Union was able to pull off such an extraordinary feat of science and engineering *before* the supposed leaders of the free world. The launch of *Sputnik* brought with it the perceived assurance that the United States was in decline.

Following seven years of frustrating foreign policy set-backs, the effects of the *Sputnik* launch on the American psyche were even more pronounced. There was the Soviet

¹⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 358.

²⁰ John T. Rourke, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Politics* (2nd Edition), (Connecticut: The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc, 1989), 122.

²¹ Allen, "Red, White & Truly Blue."

Union's acquisition of nuclear weapons technology and the 'loss' of China to communism in 1949, followed immediately by the Korean War in 1950 which ended in a stalemate three years later. In the throes of the Cold War, where fear of nuclear war and Soviet motives were the order of the day, *Sputnik* caused mass panic, with public reverberations not seen in America since the attack on Pearl Harbour.²² The most substantial consequence of this shift in public perception, along with shattering America's complacency about its lead in science,²³ was a change in the dynamics of domestic politics. The launch of *Sputnik* forced Republican President Dwight Eisenhower to alter his approach to both space and Soviet policies and gave the Democratic Party further grounds to attack a sitting administration and build its case for the upcoming election. The idea that the U.S. was in unquestionable decline became the "main theme" of John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign when he ran against Vice President Richard Nixon.²⁴ During their second televised debate, Kennedy stated that

the relative strength of the United States both militarily, politically, psychologically, and scientifically, and industrially - the relative strength of the United States compared to that of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists together - has deteriorated in the last 8 years and we should know it, and the American people should be told the facts.²⁵

Kennedy eventually won the election and carried the fear of American decline into his presidency.

The political fears born out of the *Sputnik* launch were as pronounced as the public ones. In the international chess game that was the Cold War, being first counted for a lot in

²² Walter A. McDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1985), 142.

²³ Charles D. Sheldon, II, *Review of the Soviet Space Program: With Comparative United States Data*, (Washington, D.C. Mc-Graw-Hill Inc., 1968), 47.

²⁴ In the second Kennedy-Nixon debate on October 7, 1960, CBS reporter Paul Niven characterized Kennedy's main campaign theme as the 'decline of American power and prestige over the last eight years.' John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, (online).

²⁵ John F. Kennedy, Second Kennedy-Nixon Debate October 7, 1960. During this debate, Kennedy plainly stated "I believe that our power and prestige in the last 8 years has declined." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, (online).

terms of ensuring the support of allies. In a 1961 memorandum to President Kennedy, Vice - President Johnson wrote that “other nations, regardless of their appreciation of our idealistic values, will tend to align themselves with the country they believe will be the world leader – the winner in the long run.”²⁶ With “Dramatic accomplishments in space [...] being increasingly identified as a major indicator of world leadership,”²⁷ President Kennedy decided to pursue the most dramatic accomplishment that could be envisioned: putting a man on the Moon.²⁸

Kennedy’s decision to ‘race’ to space was motivated almost entirely by the belief that if the U.S. intended on winning the “battle for men’s minds,” the nation must “take a clearly leading role in space achievement.”²⁹ In a private meeting in 1962, Kennedy expressed his frustrations, stating that “we’ve been telling everybody we’re preeminent in space for five years and nobody believes it [...] If you’re trying to prove preeminence, this is the way to prove your preeminence.”³⁰ Personally, Kennedy was “not that interested in space.”³¹ However, it was acknowledged that the most “impelling reason,” for America’s effort was the international political situation which demanded that it demonstrate its technological capabilities if it was “to *maintain* [emphasis added]” its position of leadership.³² Congress was quick to go along with Kennedy’s plans in order to avoid placing itself in “an ostensibly unpatriotic position.”³³ Americans began “‘racing themselves’ in trying to land a man on the

²⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, *Memorandum for the President*, “Evaluation of Space Program,” April 28, 1961, NASA Historical Reference Collection, NASA Headquarters, Washington D.C.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ In a Memorandum for the Vice President, dated April 20, 1961, President Kennedy asks the Vice President, as Chairman of the Space Council, to identify a space program “which promises dramatic results in which we could win.” Presidential Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Mass.

²⁹ John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs,” May 25th, 1961.

³⁰ John F. Kennedy, “Transcript of Presidential Meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House,” November 21, 1962.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The President’s Science Advisory Committee, “Report of the Ad Hoc Panel on Man-in-Space,” December 16, 1960. NASA Historical Reference Collection, History Office, NASA Headquarters, Washington D.C.

³³ John W. Finney, “Congress has Second Thoughts on Space Funds,” *The New York Times*, April 7, 1963.

Moon,”³⁴ despite the acknowledgement that by most measures, the United States was already ahead scientifically.³⁵ It was the *perception* of decline, rather than any *actual* decline, which motivated the political response to notions of America’s slipping position that Kennedy himself had promoted in his presidential campaign. When discussing a 125 million dollar linear accelerator at Stanford University, which made the U.S. “number one in the world,” Kennedy acknowledged the importance of perception when he turned to NASA Administrator James Webb and said, “I’m sorry, that’s wonderful, but nobody knows anything about it!”³⁶ The launch of *Sputnik*, and the fear that it meant America’s relative decline in relation to the Soviet Union, led to one of the most expensive and ambitious national scientific programs ever undertaken.

The purpose of this lengthy account of the launch of *Sputnik* and its effects on the United States is to reinforce and illustrate the impact that the *idea* of decline has in American social and political history. As far as responses to perceived decline go, the space race is unmatched. It is not a coincidence that in his 2011 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama referred to America’s current efforts to develop renewable energy and compete with China’s surging economy as “our generation’s *Sputnik* moment.”³⁷ It is somewhat ironic that in response to Obama’s use of the space race symbolism, *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer remarked, “From the Moon landing to solar shingles. Is there a better example of American decline?”³⁸ For those looking, “Everything becomes a sign that things are getting worse,”³⁹ even solar panels.

³⁴ Clyde H. Farnsworth, “Soviet Moon Trip Called Doubtful,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1963.

³⁵ John F. Kennedy, “Transcript of Presidential Meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House.” Kennedy said “We know all about the number of satellites we put up, two or three times the number of the Soviet Union...we’re ahead scientifically.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, both quotes.

³⁷ Barack Obama, *State of the Union Address*, January 25, 2011.

³⁸ Charles Krauthammer, “The Old Obama in New Clothing,” *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2011, Regional Edition.

³⁹ Allen, “Red, White & Truly Blue.”

The wave of decline leading up to the space race eventually broke as the nation became preoccupied with the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement at home. However, by the end of the decade, President Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger “took the lead in announcing the end of the bipolar world.”⁴⁰ The fungibility of America’s military power was called into question and the superpower status of the Soviet Union and United States was said to be challenged by the rising economic power of Europe and Japan (among others).⁴¹ In a multipolar world, “American decline was inevitable.”⁴² Speaking to Midwest news editors in Kansas City in 1971, Nixon was even more direct, telling his audience “that great civilizations of the past, as they have become wealthy, as they have lost their will to live, to improve, they then have become subject to the decadence that eventually destroys the civilization. The United States is now reaching that period.”⁴³ And then in October 1973, a month shy of the ten year anniversary of President Kennedy’s assassination, the United States was rocked by an Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo. Following a similar situation in 1967, OPEC initiated a cutback in oil production and imposed an oil embargo against the U.S. as retaliation for America’s support of Israel, which was engaged in a war with its oil producing Arab neighbors.⁴⁴ World energy prices quadrupled, with the cost of a barrel of oil rising from \$2.50 to \$11.65 within a year,⁴⁵ further straining an already fragile global economy.⁴⁶ European nations, more affected by the energy crisis than the U.S., balked at the American

⁴⁰ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 94.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Karen Elliot House, “The Second Century,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 1989, Eastern Edition.

⁴³ “American Notes: Of the U.S. and Rome” *Time Magazine* (online), July 19, 1971.

⁴⁴ Allen Sens & Peter Stoett, *Global Politics: Origins, Currents, Directions* (3rd Edition), (Toronto: Thompson-Nelson, 2005), 143.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁶ Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 133.

suggestion of using force to break the embargo.⁴⁷ With an acknowledgment by the U.S. that “the use of force was not a feasible alternative to diplomacy,” in ending the crisis, the earlier projection that a pillar of U.S. power (military force) was eroding under the pressure of more peripheral economic powers seemed vindicated.⁴⁸

In the years leading up to the 1973 energy crisis, the U.S. economy had begun to buckle under the weight of the costs of the Vietnam War and President Johnson’s domestic programs (e.g.: the War on Poverty). In 1971, the United States experienced its first trade deficit.⁴⁹ 1971 also marked the collapse of the Bretton Woods system that had been in place since the end of World War II, and with it, the end of the gold standard. Inflation soared and eventually led to “a severe recession in 1974.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, 1973 marked the year the United States military switched to an all volunteer force, placing further strain on both the American war effort in Vietnam and its ability to broadly project force.⁵¹ With mounting challenges and no clear solutions, the early 1970s again raised the specter of American decline.⁵²

As the decade progressed, the tide of declinism rose. In 1974, Richard Nixon resigned the presidency in the wake of the Watergate Scandal. Less than a year later Saigon fell and the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam. A dark cloud of defeat hung over the United States and in 1976, Jimmy Carter became president of a nation in need of renewal and direction. It was not to be. The global economy remained stagnant and by the late 1970s, the United States seemed “seized with what Cyrus Vance called ‘the limits of [its] power.’”⁵³ In 1979,

⁴⁷ David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987), 63.

⁴⁸ Richard J. Barnet, *Real Security: Restoring American Power in a Dangerous Decade* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 84.

⁴⁹ Sens & Stoett, *Global Politics*, 143.

⁵⁰ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 94.

⁵³ Robert Kagan, “Still No. 1,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2008. Regional Edition.

the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and long time U.S. ally Iran found itself in the throes of an Islamic revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution resulted in yet another energy crisis, sending the cost of oil skyrocketing. Making matters worse, 52 Americans were taken hostage when angry students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran later that year. A failed hostage rescue attempt on April 24, 1980, known as ‘Operation Eagle Claw,’⁵⁴ further sank Carter’s presidency.⁵⁵ In a televised speech in 1979, Carter acknowledged that something was wrong. “It’s clear that the true problems of our Nation are much deeper -- deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession,” he said.⁵⁶ “The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.”⁵⁷ America was suffering from a “crisis in confidence,”⁵⁸ that Carter was unable to mend.

“Overseeing a dismal economy and a mismanaged foreign policy that left the United States feeling victimized by the international community,”⁵⁹ the Carter Administration brought the theme of decline back into mainstream political discourse. As the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) put it, “The 1980 Republican platform was a fearsome account of imminent collapse.”⁶⁰ Promising Americans an “era of national renewal,”⁶¹ Ronald Reagan rode the wave of declinism and “generated the political currents” necessary

⁵⁴ The mission is also popularly known as ‘Desert One,’ after the desert rendezvous point where one of the rescue helicopters collided with a refueling plane and exploded. ‘Operation Evening Light,’ and ‘Operation Rice Bowl’ are two other names commonly attributed to the rescue attempt. For more on the failed mission, see Col. Charlie A. Beckwith (Ret.) & Donald Knox, *Delta Force: The Army’s Elite Counterterrorist Unit* (New York: Avon Books, 1983); Eric L. Haney, *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America’s Elite Counterterrorist Unit* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2002); and David Tucker & Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ Carter would later attribute the failed hostage rescue as playing a major role in his re-election defeat. “Jimmy Carter: Iran hostage rescue should have worked,” *USA Today* (online)

⁵⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Crisis of Confidence*, July 15, 1979.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Donald E. Abelson, “Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010), 89.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Debunking the Myth of Decline,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1988, Late City Final Edition.

⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, *Inaugural Address*, January 20, 1981.

to win a landslide victory over Carter.⁶² Minutes after Reagan delivered his inaugural address, the embassy hostages were released.⁶³ The dark cloud that hung over the nation began to lift. Reagan's National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane later said, "President Reagan has really turned it around. The expectation of American decline is ended."⁶⁴ Reagan, for his part, said, "The self-doubts in the 1970s are giving way in America to a new era of confidence and a sense of purpose."⁶⁵ A *New York Times/CBS* poll in 1984 revealed that only 2 in 10 people felt things would get worse.⁶⁶ However, as the old adage goes, 'you can't fight the tide'. Several years later, the only thing 'renewed' in Reagan's 'new era of confidence' was the certainty that the United States was in terminal decline.

Reagan's economic policies, also known as Reaganomics, were "large-scale increases in defense expenditures, plus considerable decreases in taxation, but *without* significant reductions in federal spending elsewhere,"⁶⁷ premised "on the assumption that domestic governmental spending could be curtailed and that lower tax rates would stimulate investment, growth and revenues."⁶⁸ "[W]e can lecture our children about extravagance until we run out of voice and breath," suggested Reagan, "Or we can cure their extravagance by simply reducing their allowance."⁶⁹ The problem was that Reagan forgot to take away the children's credit card. The U.S. federal deficit rose from \$59.6 billion in 1980 to \$202.8 billion in 1985, pushing the nation's overall debt from \$914.3 billion to \$1.8 trillion.⁷⁰

⁶² Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 95.

⁶³ Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan Takes Oath As 40th President; Promises An 'Era Of National Renewal,'" *The New York Times* (online), January 21, 1981.

⁶⁴ Lou Cannon, "President Ends Tour, Sees Payoff; McFarlane Cites Reverse in Image of U.S. Decline," *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1983, Final Edition.

⁶⁵ Cannon, "President Ends Tour, Sees Payoff."

⁶⁶ Allen, "Red, White & Truly Blue."

⁶⁷ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 527.

⁶⁸ Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 79.

⁶⁹ Ronald Reagan, *Address to the Nation on the Economy*, February 5, 1981.

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 527.

Spurred by the burgeoning budget and trade deficits which saw the U.S. move from being the world's largest creditor to its largest debtor, the "production of books and articles about the 'decline' of the United States" became "a true growth industry."⁷¹ The deficits brought about through Reaganomics compounded with the anxiety that an economically spry Japan was poised to take advantage of America's missteps and replace it as the world's leading nation. Fear of Japan's rising sun had begun in earnest with Ezra Vogel's aptly named *Japan as Number One* (1979). Less than a year after an economic collapse on Wall Street that resulted in "a galling increase in stock prices on Tokyo's exchange,"⁷² Paul Kennedy published *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1988), referred to by one observer as the "bible of American doomsayers."⁷³ Kennedy's book "flourished in [the] atmosphere of gloom and apprehension,"⁷⁴ and spent 24 weeks on the best-seller list.⁷⁵ The string of books published around this time all make similar claims: the U.S., suffering from never seen before trade and budget deficits, in addition to extensive military commitments overseas and "the seeming competitive and financial threat from Japan,"⁷⁶ was following the path of the great powers that had come before it – rise, overstretch or stagnation, and eventual decline. Vogel wrote,

To expect Americans, who are accustomed to thinking of their nation as number one, to acknowledge that in many areas its supremacy has been lost to an Asian nation and to learn from that nation, is to ask a good deal. Americans are peculiarly receptive to any explanation of Japan's economic performance that avoids acknowledging Japan's superior competitiveness.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Ronald H. Spector, "America's Staying Power," *The Washington Post*, April 29, 1990, Final Edition.

⁷² Joel Kotkin, "Making Sashimi of the Experts' Predictions; Why Japan Didn't Turn Out to Be the World Power Everyone Feared," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1997, Final Edition.

⁷³ House, "The Second Century."

⁷⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "...Is History History?" *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1989, Final Edition.

⁷⁵ House, "The Second Century."

⁷⁶ Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 95.

⁷⁷ Kotkin, "Making Sashimi of the Experts' Predictions."

Not only was the United States in decline, it was in denial. Others stressed an increasingly unified Europe as being America's biggest threat, and some even considered the possibility that Cold War nemesis, the Soviet Union, would be the nation to push Uncle Sam out of the number one spot. Regardless of who was doing the pushing, all the critics seemed to reach the same conclusion: "The United States has become a hegemon in decay, set on a course that points to an ignominious end."⁷⁸ However, as Huntington observed, the fears of decline in the 1980s bear "certain resemblances to the second wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and familiar themes are repeated."⁷⁹ And just as those earlier waves of declinism had eventually broken and receded, so too did the 'fifth wave'.

When the Soviet Union collapsed under its own weight and finally dissolved in 1991, foreign policy analysts - declinists and American stalwarts alike - were left scratching their heads. Few had seen the forest for the trees. And yet, despite this seemingly positive outcome for the United States, the talk of decline and fear of Japan persisted. "They continue to talk of American decline, even as our one great adversary implodes, leaving us alone on the world stage," wrote an irritated Charles Krauthammer.⁸⁰ He continued:

Not content to wallow in our troubles, we find it necessary to blame them on others, particularly on foreigners, most particularly on racially different foreigners. It is a blot on America that not two weeks after the official death of our great superpower enemy, our leaders are competing with each other to create a new superpower enemy – Japan – to serve as repository of our collective resentments.⁸¹

The declinism of the 1980s languished, eventually replaced by a new debate surrounding the direction of American foreign policy in a post-Cold War world. It was America's 'unipolar moment,' "where world power resides in one reasonably coherent, serenely dominant

⁷⁸ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 220.

⁷⁹ Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 95.

⁸⁰ Charles Krauthammer, "Misplaced Malaise," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1990. Final Edition.

⁸¹ Charles Krauthammer, "America's Case of the Sulks; In the face of great success, the country is in a petulant mood," *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1992, Final Edition.

entity.”⁸² “Every other nation on earth,” Krauthammer opined, “would like to be in our position.”⁸³

Where some advocated for an American foreign policy of “robust and difficult interventionism,”⁸⁴ others saw the unipolar moment as an opportunity for retrenchment. “What doth it profit a nation if it gain the whole world, and lose its own soul?” asked a reflective Pat Buchanan.⁸⁵ All the “Beltway geo-babble about ‘unipolarity’ and ‘[America’s] responsibility to lead,’” would be Americas undoing, he argued.⁸⁶ “Our war, the Cold War, is over. Time for America to come home.”⁸⁷ While the debate continues to this day,⁸⁸ the majority of Americans did not share Buchanan’s views, evidenced in part by his failure to progress beyond the Republican Party’s presidential primaries when he ran against incumbent George H. W. Bush in 1992. President Bush spoke of choice between a “move toward an historic period of cooperation...a new world order,”⁸⁹ and a “return to...the malaise days,” of the Carter Administration.⁹⁰ The American people decided on the former, though chose to be led towards the ‘historic period of cooperation’ by someone else. Despite a quick victory over Iraq in 1991, Bush reneged on a promise not to raise taxes and lost the election to Bill Clinton.⁹¹

⁸² Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment; Enjoy it now. It won’t last long,” *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1990, Final Edition.

⁸³ Charles Krauthammer, “Bless Our Pax Americana,” *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1991, Final Edition.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Patrick J. Buchanan, “Now That Red Is Dead, Come Home, America; The New World Order Is Bunk’ It’s Time to Look Out for No. 1,” *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1991, Final Edition.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For example, see Krauthammer “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” *National Interest* 70 (Winter 2002/03), 5-17.

⁸⁹ George H. W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit,” September 11, 1990.

⁹⁰ Allen, “Red, White & Truly Blue.”

⁹¹ This is, of course, a simplified and superficial account of why Bush lost the election. For more on this topic, see Bob Woodward, *The Choice: How Bill Clinton Won* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Proving that “What was done in the 1980s can be undone in the 1990s,”⁹² Clinton was able to turn things around for the United States, aided in part by the very tax hikes that had cost Bush the election.⁹³ In the words of Carter’s National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski,

By 1995 the nation’s global status was probably at its peak. The world had accepted the new reality and much of mankind even welcomed it. American power was not only seen as unquestionably dominant but also legitimate, and America’s voice was credible.⁹⁴

By 1998, the U.S. economy had grown by 27 percent, “almost twice that of the European Union (15 percent) and three times that of Japan (9 percent),” America’s formerly touted primary competitors.⁹⁵ A continued investment in defense matched the economic growth, with the United States spending “more on defense than all other great powers combined and more on defense R&D than the rest of the world combined.”⁹⁶ The fifth wave of decline that had swept through the U.S. during the 1980s seemed a distant memory; “The apocalypse turned out to be a market correction.”⁹⁷ Clinton’s

economic and financial stewardship transformed the ominously escalating budget deficits of earlier administrations into large surpluses. That turnaround gave a dramatically appealing gloss to America’s new global standing. The American model was now seen as a successful fusion of effective political guidance and free enterprise, worthy of international emulation.⁹⁸

The tremendous growth and relatively stable international system experienced under Clinton would lead Krauthammer to refer to the 1990s as a “holiday from history”; America finally

⁹² Moynihan, “Debunking the Myth of Decline.”

⁹³ E. J. Dionne Jr., “Haunted by decline,” *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2010, Regional Edition.

⁹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 130.

⁹⁵ G. John Ikenberry, “Introduction,” *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, G. John Ikenberry Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1.

⁹⁶ Charles Kupchan, “Hollow Hegemony or Stable Multipolarity?” in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, G. John Ikenberry Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 70.

⁹⁷ Krauthammer, “...Is History History?”

⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Second Chance*, 131.

got its long promised 'era of renewal'.⁹⁹ Though American power had "reached its zenith under Clinton,"¹⁰⁰ Brzezinski argues that he "never made a concerted effort to develop, articulate, and pursue a comprehensive strategy for a responsible American role in the volatile world that confronted him."¹⁰¹ The aimless prosperity of the Clinton era would continue until the 'volatile world' confronted the U.S. with the devastating attacks on September 11, 2001, shattering the unipolar moment's aura of invulnerability.¹⁰²

Caught off guard by the violence and magnitude of the attacks, many Americans were left asking, "Why do they hate us?"¹⁰³ A wave of declinism briefly washed across the United States. The world's lone superpower, incomparable "in terms of power and influence to anything known in modern history,"¹⁰⁴ knocked off balance not by Japan or Europe, but 19 terrorists. The immediate economic costs of 9/11 have been estimated at \$27.2 billion, "a tiny fraction of the estimated cumulative loss in national income, which was initially projected to be as high as 5 percent of GDP."¹⁰⁵ Historian Niall Ferguson offers a more complete accounting:

For the insurance industry, the disaster's final costs were said to be between \$30 billion and \$58 billion; the American airlines were also hit hard, as was tourism. Taxpayers faced a bill not only for reconstruction but also for airline bailouts and substantially increased defense and 'homeland security' expenditures. The longer-term costs of the 9/11 attacks – in the form of increased uncertainty, market volatility, security costs and risk premiums – can still only be guessed at.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Dionne Jr., "Haunted by decline."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Brzezinski, *Second Chance*, 131.

¹⁰² Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs*, 132.

¹⁰³ This is an allusion to Fareed Zakaria's article "The Politics of Rage: Why Do They Hate Us?" *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ Ikenberry, "Introduction," 2.

¹⁰⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 126.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

More than the economic losses, it was the incalculable effects of renewed uncertainty, not felt since the end of the Cold War, that helped usher in the brief (and understandable) wave of declinism following the attacks.

As is customary when a calamity befalls the U.S., some pundits “used the events of 9/11 as a platform for a broader analysis of the current American and world condition.”¹⁰⁷ In his book *Why We Fight* (2003), William Bennett blamed the “post-9/11 crisis of faith,” on “‘sophisticates,’ liberals, leftists, and especially postmodernists,” the same “forces and people” he considered responsible for “national decline in the 1990s.”¹⁰⁸ With the prosperity and growth of the 1990s being recorded fact, it should come as little surprise that Bennett had been Reagan’s Secretary of Education and George H. W. Bush’s Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy – two administrations partially defined by the theme of American decline. Similar to Bennett, Victor Davis Hanson saw 9/11

as an opportunity to recapture and revalue the marital virtues necessary to the defense of the West. He “advocate[d] the unapologetic and aggressive practice of old-fashioned Periclean values.” He “implore[d] us wimpy moderns to see the world as the ancients did, in tragic and heroic terms.”¹⁰⁹

The only way to stave off national decline was for Americans to “recapture that sense of mission that has driven them throughout history...They must be galvanized, like their noble ancestors, to make sacrifices for a distant and unknown future.”¹¹⁰ To recover their values, Americans “must be willing to lead a global crusade for democracy and justice.”¹¹¹ The problem, according to Hanson, was that Uncle Sam had gone soft. On the opposite end of the spectrum from Hanson’s colorfully described ‘Hollywoodesque’ martial bravado were those who saw global crusades as being the cause rather than the cure.

¹⁰⁷ Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

For Gore Vidal, 9/11 “simply accelerated the antidemocratic and imperialistic tendencies of modern American politics.”¹¹² Harking back to his earlier warnings, Pat Buchanan saw 9/11 as the “inevitable product of the sin of imperialism,” with America being “punished for turning away from [its] true principles and rejecting [its] old ideals in favor of power.”¹¹³ In contrast to Buchanan’s imagined and romanticized view of history, America now faced “potential disaster of every front.”¹¹⁴ “‘Quo vadis?’ Where are you going America?” he mused.¹¹⁵ In an ironic, if not deserved, repetition of history, Buchanan once again found his dismal poetry falling on deaf ears and “A country that seemed for a time unwilling to face up to its international responsibilities,” seemed “prepared once again to bear any burden, pay any price, for freedom.”¹¹⁶ While the Bush Administration projected the willingness to bear any burden and pay any price, the American people soon “reverted to their pre-9/11 complacency.”¹¹⁷ Despite the doom and gloom of popular punditry, by November 2001, a military response began to unfold in Afghanistan, “the U.S. economy quickly absorbed the shock and uncertainty that [had] followed” the attacks, and the wave of declinism receded.¹¹⁸ *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson once remarked that, “Only Americans feel vindication or guilt at the limits of their power.”¹¹⁹ No statement better describes the tone of the debate that would take hold for the next six years.

As the Bush Administration shifted its focus from Afghanistan to Iraq in the early months of 2003, the debate beginning to echo around the world was not whether the United States was in decline, but rather if it was an unrestrained imperial power. When it invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003, the United States seemed less like a superpower prone to bouts of

¹¹² Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs*, 140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹¹⁸ Jim Hoagland, “Managing America’s Superiority,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2002, Final Edition.

¹¹⁹ Michael Gerson, “Delusions of Decline,” *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2011, Regional Edition.

perceived decline and more like the ‘hyperpower’ characterized by former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine four years earlier.¹²⁰ On May 3, 2003, just over a month after the invasion had begun, President George W. Bush landed in an S-3 Viking jet aircraft on the deck of the *USS Abraham Lincoln*, a state-of-the-art 1,092-foot-long Nimitz-class nuclear powered supercarrier, to declare the combat phase of the Iraq War “mission accomplished.”¹²¹ The image of the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. armed forces climbing out of a jet in full flight gear on one of the most advanced aircraft carriers in the world was one of assertive strength. The aimless foreign policy of the Clinton era gave way to the Bush Doctrine, famous for stating America’s willingness to engage perceived threats preemptively.¹²² With Bush’s ‘War on Terror,’ America had found direction. Americans demonstrated their approval by re-electing Bush in 2004.

Those like Hanson who advocated an assertive, more militaristic foreign policy felt vindicated by the Bush Administration’s decisions. Many others, however, felt guilt, and lamented the decision to go to war with Iraq either because they felt it was a distraction from the campaign in Afghanistan or simply because the reasons for the war were unclear.¹²³ There were as many people speaking out in favor of the Bush Doctrine as there were against it, which, if anything, is a sign of the enduring vitality of American democracy. The debate, however, was global, and the Iraq War was just as polarizing among America’s traditional allies. For example, France and Germany decided not to support the decision to go to war while the United Kingdom and Poland did. Books detailing an ever-widening fracture in the

¹²⁰ Charles Krauthammer, “Not for Moi, Thanks,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 1999, Final Edition.

¹²¹ George W. Bush, “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended: Remarks by the President from the USS Abraham Lincoln, At Sea Off the Coast of San Diego, California.” Bush never actually - used the words ‘mission accomplished,’ however there was a large banner printed with those words that hung behind the President as he spoke.

¹²² George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002.

¹²³ The number of authors/pundits/etc who wrote books and articles criticizing the Bush Administration and its rationale for going to war in Iraq are as numerous as those who wrote in support of the decision. As an example of those against, see Gwynne Dyer, *Ignorant Armies: Sliding Into War In Iraq* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2003). For a ‘pro-Bush’ account, see David Frum & Richard Perele, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Western Alliance once again filled the shelves.¹²⁴ Those upset by Europe's lack of enthusiasm for the Bush Doctrine claimed that, "on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus."¹²⁵ The characterization of the U.S. as Mars, the god of war, and Europe as Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, was of course not accidental, with the implication being that Europe simply lacked the fortitude needed for global leadership. Europe had grown soft and weak and it resented American power. "When the European great powers were strong, they believed in strength and martial glory," wrote Robert Kagan. "Now they see the world through the eyes of weaker powers."¹²⁶ As Krauthammer had said a decade before, "Every other nation on earth would like to be in [America's] position,"¹²⁷ especially those nations who once were. Rather than decline, pundits now debated the limits and application of American power. Imperial America in an age of unipolarity was both the new fear and the new promise; guilt or vindication. It was not to last.

For myriad reasons that lie beyond the scope of this analysis, the war effort in Iraq began to nosedive between 2005 and 2007. Violence in the country surged during this time, with 903 American deaths recorded in 2007 –the bloodiest year of the war to date.¹²⁸ A 'surge' of an additional 30,000 troops to Iraq in late 2007 helped reduce casualty rates and restore a measure of order however the damage had been done. Rather than books about 'imperial America,' best-seller lists were instead dominated by titles like *Fiasco*, *Descent*

¹²⁴ The theme of dividing U.S./European relations is of course nothing new. For more on this, see Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987); and Tod Linberg, Ed., *Beyond Paradise and Power: Europe, America and the Future of a Troubled Relationship* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹²⁵ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 – 11.

¹²⁷ Krauthammer, "Bless Our Pax Americana."

¹²⁸ United States Department of Defense, "Global War on Terrorism – Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Report by Month," March 19, 2003 – May 2, 2011.

into Chaos, and *State of Denial*.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, the war in Afghanistan, placed on the backburner since the invasion of Iraq, continued to simmer and bubble. The tide of decline began rising steadily as the war efforts faltered. As Stephen Walt put it, “the Bush administration [sic] managed to mismanage foreign policy and fiscal policy simultaneously,”¹³⁰ and in December 2007, as Bush neared the end of his presidency, the U.S. economy crashed, causing a global recession that continues to this day.¹³¹ It is the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.¹³² Under the weight of increasingly bad news, the levees broke and a wave of declinism has once again swept America. Robert Pape suggests that the Bush era may one day be seen as “the death knell for American hegemony.”¹³³ While that remains to be seen, Bush’s Presidency has unquestionably “brought forth a torrent of writing on the relative decline of the United States.”¹³⁴ The return has been so rapid and forceful that the belief America is in decline has almost “hardened into conventional wisdom.”¹³⁵ The financial burdens of two ongoing wars and a \$700 billion economic bailout combined with eight years of tax cuts under the Bush Administration, and once again alarm bells began ringing about America’s soaring deficits. The doom and gloom of Bush’s final years in office carried into the 2008 presidential election.

“The danger of today’s declinism,” suggests Robert Kagan, “is not that it is true but that the next president will act as if it is.”¹³⁶ With that danger in mind, Kagan asked, “Is

¹²⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008); Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

¹³⁰ Stephen M. Walt, “Is the unipolar era over?” *Foreign Policy* (online), January 22, 2009.

¹³¹ Chris Isidore, “It’s Official: Recession Since Dec. ’07,” *CNN*, CNNMoney.com.

¹³² Dionne Jr., “Haunted by decline.”

¹³³ Robert A. Pape, “Empire Falls,” *First Draft of History* (January/February 2009), 21.

¹³⁴ Michael Fullilove, “Reports of U.S. Decline Could Be Premature,” *Brookings Institute*, January 7, 2009,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Kagan, “Still No. 1.”

Barack Obama the candidate of American decline?”¹³⁷ He soon got an answer. Obama campaigned on a promise of hope and change; “Yes we can,” became his battle cry. Speaking at a dinner two months before the Iowa caucuses, Obama tapped into the feeling of decline that had once again taken hold of America. “The dream that so many generations fought for feels as if it’s slowly slipping away,” he said.¹³⁸

Though Obama was eventually elected for many reasons, central to his victory was “the country’s underlying desire to reverse th[e] sense of decline.”¹³⁹ Three years into his presidency, however, the alarm bells continue to ring. It is the 1980s all over again, only this time the competitor looming on the horizon is China. America has become “sclerotic,” debating budget changes that are tantamount “to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*.”¹⁴⁰ The U.S. debt-to-revenue ratio is approximately 338 percent¹⁴¹ and Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “has identified the burgeoning national debt as the single largest threat to U.S. national security.”¹⁴² For many of today’s doomsayers, it is now a “post-American world,” characterized by a “rise of the rest.”¹⁴³ The fear of a multipolar world has returned. Fueled primarily by economic concerns, declinism continues to be a driving force in American politics as it heads towards another presidential election.¹⁴⁴

Today there is, as David Ignatius put it, “a sense that something is torn in the national quilt, and nobody quite knows how to mend it.”¹⁴⁵ But is the United States truly in decline?

¹³⁷ Kagan, “Still No. 1.”

¹³⁸ Fallows, “How America Can Rise Again.”

¹³⁹ Dionne Jr., “Haunted by decline.”

¹⁴⁰ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”

¹⁴¹ Manoj Joshi, “U.S. unlikely to be a successful imperial power: Niall Ferguson,” *India Today* (online), March 20, 2011.

¹⁴² Gideon Rachman, “Think Again: American Decline,” *Foreign Policy* (online), January/February 2011.

¹⁴³ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”

¹⁴⁴ Krauthammer, “The Old Obama In New Clothing.”

¹⁴⁵ David Ignatius, “Thankful for resilience,” *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2010, Regional Edition.

If some are to be believed, “America was in decline before there even was an America.”¹⁴⁶ However, if the preceding historical overview is any indication, the U.S. continues to fall from new heights. Just as the response to *Sputnik* demonstrated, anxieties over America’s decline “have an existence of their own that is quite distinct from [its] actual geopolitical position.”¹⁴⁷ Perhaps because “Americans adore frightening themselves,” the idea that the United States is in decline is a near constant theme in its history, and continues to be as the nation moves forward.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, as Cullen Murphy notes, “If you go back and pick any decade in American history, you are guaranteed to find the exact same worries we have now...Fifty years from now, Americans will be as worried as they are today.”¹⁴⁹

Seven ‘waves of declinism’ have been identified since the end of World War II. That is one wave for approximately every nine years, and because many of them last for longer than one year, the gap is even smaller. In many cases, one wave has barely receded before the next one rolls in, and more often than not, the current wave bears strong similarities to the one before it. The perception that the United States was losing its military and technological edge to the Soviet Union lay at the center of the waves of declinism in both the late 1950s and the early 1980s.¹⁵⁰ From the deficit concerns to the perceived pending threat from an Asian powerhouse, the wave of declinism that nearly drowned America in the 1980s is remarkably similar to the one that threatens it today; “History may not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.”¹⁵¹ It is because of the striking similarities between the declinism of the 1980s and the declinism of today that the arguments deserve careful analysis. The following

¹⁴⁶ Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ David A. Bell, “Political Columnists Think America Is In Decline. Big Surprise.,” *The New Republic* (online), October 7, 2010.

¹⁴⁸ House, “The Second Century.”

¹⁴⁹ Fallows, “How America Can Rise Again.”

¹⁵⁰ House, “The Second Century.”

¹⁵¹ This quote is often attributed to Mark Twain, though it never appears in any of his written works. Variations of it also appear.

section will do just that, closely examining the arguments made both for and against American decline from the 1980s to present.

Section 2: Doomsayers & Decline

As outlined above, proclamations about America's ongoing (or impending) decline are a mainstay throughout the nation's history. In that regard, the declinism of the 1980s and today is nothing new. What makes the declinism of these periods different, however, is the widespread and mainstream attention they garnered – a large number of Americans, it seems, are routinely ready to believe the United States is in decline. This is reflected in the surge of literature and newspaper headlines heralding the end of the American era in both periods.

“Everywhere these days, there is headshaking and hand-wringing over the decline of America,” wrote *The Wall Street Journal's* Karen House in 1989.¹⁵² “Clearly, pessimism is in vogue.”¹⁵³ Just over twenty years later, Lionel Beehner and Nuno Monteiro remarked in a *USA Today* op-ed that “much of foreign-policy punditry these days has one underlying message: Disaster is upon us.”¹⁵⁴ Pessimism has once again become the ‘haute couture’ of popular political commentary. However, as House also noted, “as with many fashionable ideas, this one doesn't bear up well on closer scrutiny.”¹⁵⁵

In 1981, Richard Barnet suggested that the “American Century lasted about twenty-six years.”¹⁵⁶ The doomsayers of the 1980s echo this sentiment, though not always as explicitly. The numerous theorists and pundits who suggested U.S. decline in the 1980s have a common thread running through their arguments: the economy. Though the particular

¹⁵² House, “The Second Century.”

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Lionel Beehner & Nuno Monteiro, “In foreign policy circles, doom-n-gloom for sale,” *USA Today*, November 29, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ House, “The Second Century.”

¹⁵⁶ Barnet, *Real Security*, 11.

focus of their arguments differs, each bases their argument on some aspect of the U.S. economy. The same is true of today's wave of declinism. The late Samuel Huntington noted that declinists tend to offer "three core propositions."¹⁵⁷ The first is relative economic decline compared to others, "most notably Japan," (or in the case of contemporary declinism, China), where the focus is on economic performance and "scientific, technological and educational factors presumably related to economic performance."¹⁵⁸ The second proposition is the centrality of the economy to a nation's power, whereby a decline in economic power leads to the eventual decline of other elements of national power.¹⁵⁹ Lastly, the third proposition is the suggestion that America's relative economic decline is caused primarily by inflated defense spending, leading to what Paul Kennedy dubbed 'imperial overstretch,' where a nation attempts to "maintain commitments abroad that the country can no longer afford."¹⁶⁰ In most cases, there is considerable overlap, with authors pointing to debt levels, military spending, productivity, education, and overall growth rates (among other things) as being the collective harbingers of American decline.¹⁶¹

Accordingly, it is easiest to analyze these arguments by breaking them down into two subsections: defense and the economy. The defense subsection will consider arguments made concerning America's defense spending and global military commitments. The economy subsection explores issues related to productivity, manufacturing, innovation, trade, and perceived economic indicators like education and infrastructure. Before doing so, however, it is useful to establish some context.

¹⁵⁷ Huntington, "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" 76.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Because of this overlap, some of the subtleties of each respective theory are necessarily lost in an attempt to present a more general accounting of the 'declinist school' of thought, though every attempt is made to highlight important distinctions where appropriate.

As outlined in Section 1, waves of declinism do not exist wholly unto themselves and are partially carried by the currents of the waves that preceded them. The declinism of the 1980s owes much to the fears and insecurities expressed in the 1970s. In 1971, Richard Nixon told a group of news-executives that he believed the global economy was now driven by five economic powers: Western Europe, Japan, China, the USSR, and the United States. “These are the five that will determine the economic future, and because economic power will be the key to other kinds of power, the future of the world in other ways in the last third of this century,” he said.¹⁶² The suggestion that the United States was losing its place as the economic leader was part of the view expressed by Nixon and Kissinger that the world was moving back towards a multipolar world system (as outlined in Section 1), which necessarily entails a certain loss of American power. David Calleo asserted that the U.S. economy had been internally and externally unbalanced since “at least the late 1960s,”¹⁶³ owed in large part to the Vietnam War and President Johnson’s ‘Great Society,’ without any corresponding tax increases to pay for them.¹⁶⁴ The result was rising inflation and a loss of confidence in the dollar. As Barnett put it, “until the withdrawal from Vietnam and the collapse of the Nixon-Kissinger vision of détente, it scarcely occurred to anyone that the United States was declining in influence.”¹⁶⁵ While that is not the most accurate statement (as the many waves of pre-Vietnam era declinism outlined above prove), the sentiment remains true. The seeds of decline planted during the Nixon Administration began to gestate in the nation’s subconscious.

¹⁶² Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 413.

¹⁶³ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 216.

¹⁶⁴ Barnett, *Real Security*, 65.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

The Carter Administration sought to distance itself from the traditional *real politik* balance-of-power approach to foreign policy and replace it with “world order politics.”¹⁶⁶ “It is more likely in the near future that issues of war and peace will be more a function of economic and social problems than of the military-security problems which have dominated international relations since World War II,” Carter said, with an echo of Nixon’s earlier pronouncement.¹⁶⁷ However in the context of the Cold War, accommodation (or the attempt to accommodate) was often perceived as weakness, by both domestic hawks and foreign ‘enemies’.¹⁶⁸

By the time Carter had finished his first term, an “emotional reaction against all that had ‘gone wrong’ with the United States over the preceding two decades,” took hold of the nation.¹⁶⁹ In the wake of all the setbacks and embarrassments experienced by the country throughout the 1970s, the seeds of decline planted in the Nixon era sprouted, leaving many Americans feeling that the “foundations of security were collapsing.”¹⁷⁰ The Carter years “appeared to demonstrate how inadequate American military power had become,”¹⁷¹ and as Barnett notes, “the anodyne for a growing sense of powerlessness was muscle-flexing.”¹⁷² It was with this ‘muscle flexing’ that Reagan won the presidency, immediately increased defense spending (more so than the four percent increase per-year that had begun under Carter),¹⁷³ and moved from the policy of détente to calling the USSR the ‘evil empire’.¹⁷⁴

The purpose of this brief re-cap is to underscore the fact that many of the arguments for

¹⁶⁶ Barnett, *Real Security*, 41.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 410.

¹⁷⁰ Barnett, *Real Security*, 63.

¹⁷¹ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 114.

¹⁷² Barnett, *Real Security*, 63.

¹⁷³ Laurence I. Barrett, Edwin Warner, Johanna McGeary, “Nation: Dueling Over Defense,” *Time Magazine* (online), Sept. 1, 1980.

¹⁷⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando,” Florida, March 8, 1983.

decline expressed during the 1980s have foundations in pre-existing anxieties, namely the status of American military power and the state of the American economy. While these anxieties may have become more pronounced during the Reagan era, largely due to massive deficit growth and the economic success of Japan, they were reflections of pre-existing issues.

Similarly, the declinism of today, despite being further removed in terms of years-passed than the Nixon-Reagan corollary, has its roots in the declinism of the 1980s. Though the wave of the 1980s eventually receded in the early 1990s as America embraced the favorable geostrategic position it found itself in for the second time in fifty years, (and this time without a rival), decline is never far from the public consciousness. What makes these recurring waves of declinism so interesting, in that sense, is that despite having origins in recent history, each subsequent wave of declinism is presented, and often interpreted, as if it were a novel, stand-alone, experience. “We are permanently the United States of Amnesia,” suggests Gore Vidal. “We learn nothing because we remember nothing.”¹⁷⁵ This is less true of the political analysts and commentators’ writing about decline, however for Joe Public, Japan’s economic growth in the 1980s is not a memory worth holding onto. This is partially what fuels the ‘fear’ aspect of the recurring declinist narrative and makes it so compelling, particularly for public consumption: never before, Americans are told, has the nation been so close to the precipice of irreversible decline. “America is in *unprecedented* decline,” [emphasis added] warns Robert Pape.¹⁷⁶ As Gideon Rachman said in his 2011 piece on American decline in *Foreign Policy*, “This time it’s different.” Only it is not – it is very much the same. Contemporary declinism is rooted in precisely the same fears that defined the 1980s: a relative economic decline in the face of a rising economic power (in this case,

¹⁷⁵ Jendrysik, *Modern Jeremiahs*, 139.

¹⁷⁶ Pape, “Empire Falls,” 21.

China), along with a perceived slip in economic performance indicators like education and infrastructure; the impact of America's declining economic power on its ability to lead and influence other states; and lastly, the perceived impotence of America's military (at least against current threats, like trans-national terrorist networks) and its overwhelming cost.

Even the broad political context in which these events are carrying out have historical similarities to the declinism of the 1980s, only this time the Carter-like President (Obama) comes *after* the Reagan-esque one (Bush). Fittingly, a January/February 2010 issue of *Foreign Policy* featured an article by Walter Russell Mead (a holdover from the 1980s declinist camp)¹⁷⁷ comparing Barack Obama's approach to foreign policy with Jimmy Carter's.¹⁷⁸ The article immediately following Mead's: a piece by Robert Fogel warning of China's impending economic hegemony.¹⁷⁹ "Be warned," reads the ominous caption under the title.

The parallels between Obama and Carter or Reagan and Bush are superficial, but illustrative. In the case of Obama and Carter, you have administrations looking for a more cooperative/multilateral approach to global governance that recognizes the limits of American power. Just as Carter spoke of 'world order politics,' in 2009 Obama told a graduating class at the New Economic School in Moscow that

a great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries. [...] given our interdependence, any world order that tries to elevate one nation or one group of people over another will inevitably fail. The pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game – progress must be shared.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Though never as deep a believer in American decline as some of his peers, Mead nevertheless wrote extensively on how America had lost its lead and eroded the foundation of its hegemony. For example, see "On The Road To Ruin," *Harper's Magazine* (March 1990), pp. 59-64, wherein he describes a situation where unless the U.S. alters its thinking on foreign policy, America risked becoming "the Argentina of the twenty-first century."

¹⁷⁸ Walter Russell Mead, "The Carter Syndrome," *Foreign Policy* January/February 2010, 58.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Fogel, "\$123,000,000,000,000," *Foreign Policy* January/February 2010, 70.

¹⁸⁰ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation," Moscow, Russia, July 7, 2009.

Reagan and Bush, for their part, shared a more aggressive, unilateral view of how America should lead and engage with other nations.¹⁸¹ For Reagan's 'evil empire,' Bush had the 'axis of evil'.¹⁸² Sharing common language or a common philosophical foundation, however, is not unique to these four presidents. There are some further similarities, though. Both Republican presidents oversaw increases in military spending while simultaneously cutting taxes (and thus the means to pay for the spending), resulting in seemingly dramatic and potentially terminal deficits. Both Democratic presidents assumed office during times of global economic and political uncertainty.¹⁸³ Reagan and Obama were able to capitalize on the dark moods that had taken over the country immediately preceding their elections, promising to revitalize a nation yearning for better days. Again, the similarities are superficial, but illustrative.

The conditions surrounding both waves of decline are similar, characterized by periods where defense spending had increased but the nation felt weaker and the domestic economy was buckling under the weight of ever-mounting debt, all while an Asian nation with robust economic growth threatened to close the gap on America's lead. Paul Kennedy noted the similarities in a 2010 television interview on *PBS*. In reference to the 1980s, he remarked that "[t]here were indicators of an overstretch in defense spending and an overstretch in the budget deficits," which warranted "a cautionary message."¹⁸⁴ Responding to a question of what is happening in 2010 to once again make "the notion of the fall of the United States plausible," Kennedy points to two things: fears of military overstretch after

¹⁸¹ This could, of course, have something to do with the personal connections between the two administrations, namely George H. W. Bush, who served as Reagan's Vice-President, and then George W. Bush who 'borrowed' many of the people who served under his fathers presidency (e.g. Dick Cheney).

¹⁸² George W. Bush, *State of the Union Address*, January 29, 2002.

¹⁸³ This is not to suggest that at any other time there is certainty with these issues, but rather that there was a heightened sense of awareness and uncertainty in these periods. 'Instability' may be a more appropriate term.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Kennedy & Paul Solman, "Is the U.S. the Latest World Power in Decline?" *PBS Newshour* Interview, March 2, 2010.

years of fighting two wars and the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁸⁵ It is not surprising, then, that the arguments presented in both periods suggesting that these conditions are symptomatic (or emblematic) of America's decline also mirror one another.

Section 2.1: Defense

David Calleo, Paul Kennedy, and Richard Barnet all shared concerns with the scope and utility of America's global security commitments. Kennedy, referred to by Charles Krauthammer as a "splendid historian and a one-note bore,"¹⁸⁶ placed the strength and vitality of a nation's economy at the center of its national defense capability.¹⁸⁷ "[W]ealth is usually needed to underpin military power, and military power is usually needed to acquire and protect wealth."¹⁸⁸ This is not a particularly controversial or novel claim and is one shared by many. David Calleo and Felix Rohatyn share this view, with Rohatyn noting that "[t]he two – economic policy and national security policy – are related to each other, depend on each other, and must be considered as worldwide in their scope."¹⁸⁹ Carl von Clausewitz likened the relationship between the economy and combat to "the craft of the swordsmith to the art of fencing."¹⁹⁰ Linking the economy and national security makes sense, however it is the *degree* of determinism that Kennedy (for example) emphasizes that distinguishes the declinist argument. More specifically, it is the suggestion that the United States is in decline as a result of an overly ambitious national security policy that deserves attention.

¹⁸⁵ Kennedy & Solman, "Is the U.S. the Latest World Power in Decline?"

¹⁸⁶ Charles Krauthammer, "We're Not Spending Too Much On Defense," *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1990, Final Edition.

¹⁸⁷ Kennedy identifies two major arguments in his book: that "there exists a dynamic for change, driven chiefly by economic and technological developments, which then impact upon social structures, political systems, military power, and the position of individual states and empires," and that the "uneven pace of economic growth has had crucial long-term impacts upon the relative military power and strategic position of the members of the states system." *The Rise and Fall*, 439.

¹⁸⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, xvi.

¹⁸⁹ Felix Rohatyn, "America's Economic Dependence," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 1 (America and the World, 1988/1989), 55.

¹⁹⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 349.

David Calleo focused primarily on NATO and America's disproportionate contributions to European defense. NATO ate up 58 percent of the Pentagon's requested defense budget in 1985, with 40 percent of the entire defense budget tied to manpower costs.¹⁹¹ His proposed solution was devolution – scale back on the number of divisions stationed in Europe.¹⁹² The connection between the ever increasing defense budgets and America's NATO commitments is explained:

Roughly one-third of the army's standing divisions are in Europe; another third have European defense as their primary mission. These heavily armored divisions have enormous capital expenditures, including major equipment and ammunition. Since the mid-1970s, these capital costs have been growing in relation to manpower costs.¹⁹³

Calleo concludes by suggesting that “America's endemic economic disorder is today a more serious threat to the postwar international liberal order than is any plausible Soviet aggression,” and so a “strategy of devolution...seems the logical way out.”¹⁹⁴ Maintaining current commitment levels, thereby placing greater strain on the United States in a time of ‘endemic economic disorder,’ would actually be putting Europe (and the world) at a greater risk than if the U.S. were to scale back and have other NATO members increase their shares. “America's oversized military commitments, of which NATO is the biggest single component, have pressed the United States into fiscal and financial practices destructive to American, European, and global prosperity.”¹⁹⁵ The fundamental underlying issue for the United States military, however, is maintaining conventional force requirements based on the “manifestly unrealistic pretension that it can take the immediate lead in two major continental land wars simultaneously,” as it had in World War II.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 125.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

For Kennedy, like Calleo, the issue was that the United States was trying to maintain a level of commitment that exceeded its support capacity. The diversion of resources towards the military, argued Kennedy, “is likely to lead to a weakening of national power.”¹⁹⁷ A large military establishment resting on a weak (or weakening) foundation “runs the risk of a future collapse.”¹⁹⁸ The United States was facing such a predicament, where it maintained “roughly the same massive array of military obligations across the globe as it had a quarter-century ago, when its shares of world GNP, manufacturing production, military spending, and armed forces personnel were so much larger than they are now.”¹⁹⁹ The military buildup under Reagan only served to reinforce Kennedy’s belief that the U.S. was a nation in decline, noting that “Great Powers in relative decline instinctively respond by spending more on ‘security,’ and thereby divert potential resources from ‘investment’ and compound their long-term dilemma.”²⁰⁰ Kennedy’s use of the word ‘instinctively’ implies “subordination of mind, the irrelevance of choice and the autonomy of ‘natural’ processes,” and is indicative of Kennedy’s deterministic approach to history and economics.²⁰¹ In a 2010 interview with Paul Solman on *PBS News Hour*, Kennedy acknowledged the deterministic bent in his work – something he had previously denied²⁰² - saying “[t]he idea that this is all deterministic, and it’s all mechanistic [...] in a very long sense, it’s true.”²⁰³

Barnet echoes Kennedy and Calleo, noting that the continuation of “a U.S. military shield for the global array of nations we used to call the ‘free world’ is no longer feasible.”²⁰⁴ Barnet, however, focused less on the actual cost of such a commitment and instead highlighted the decreased utility of using the military to secure or achieve political ends.

¹⁹⁷ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, xvi.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 521.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

²⁰¹ George F. Will, “‘Tides in the Lives of Nations’” *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1988, Final Edition.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Kennedy & Solman, “Is the U.S. the Latest World Power in Decline?”

²⁰⁴ Barnet, *Real Security*, 105.

Forward operating bases (FOBs) acted as a symbol of U.S. economic and military preeminence and helped provide stability in the “bipolar world of the postwar era.”²⁰⁵ That world, Barnet argued, “has now gone.”²⁰⁶ “The United States can neither control political and economic change [...] nor act as a global policeman.”²⁰⁷ Despite its technological superiority and global reach, “the nation can accomplish less with military might than in the past,” Barnet contended.²⁰⁸ Because of the size and “uncontrollability” of large military operations, in addition to the potential of nuclear war, the relationship between war and politics was “fundamentally altered.”²⁰⁹ Despite being the “only nation in the world with a string of hundreds of bases far from our shores,” and unmatched technological superiority, the United States was unable to translate military might into political power.²¹⁰ “The power that can make us secure,” Barnet wrote, “is not the power to bend other nations to our will.”²¹¹ The U.S. should re-allocate its resources accordingly.

Barnet was writing in response to the Reagan defense build up, which saw a 40 percent increase in defense spending in his first five years in office,²¹² and the misplaced belief that “if only the U.S. would spend more on the military and use military power more aggressively, the decline in power could be reversed.”²¹³ Like Jimmy Carter, Barnet believed future prosperity and security was guaranteed less by traditional military deterrence and more by political and economic strategies. Just as Carter had called for ‘world order politics,’ Barnet argued that the “only basis of national power is a stable international order. Such an order cannot be imposed by any nation. It can be constructed only by the cooperative efforts

²⁰⁵ Barnet, *Real Security*, 105.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²¹² Larry M. Bartels, “Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Buildup,” *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 2, (June, 1991), 457.

²¹³ Barnet, *Real Security*, 12.

of many nations.”²¹⁴ In fact, Barnet argued, the perceived failure to project power was due to America’s “preoccupation with military strategies...and our insufficient attention to political and economic,” ones.²¹⁵ The world had changed and the rules of statecraft had changed along with it – the United States was trying to win tomorrow’s game with yesterday’s strategies; “The nature of power has changed, while our strategy has not.”²¹⁶

The various troubles of the Carter and Reagan Administrations “distracted attention from the larger forces which were shaping global power politics – and most particularly that shift from a bipolar to a multipolar world.”²¹⁷ American military power had been “a wasting asset for a generation,”²¹⁸ and the nation suffered from a “distortion of priorities that has become so acute that as the Administration counsels a massive increase in military spending, essential services in every major American city are being cut.”²¹⁹ The continued emphasis on military power, which was becoming increasingly expensive as the technology of weapons platforms matured, was draining American power and hastening its decline.

The real debate, Barnet argued, was between those in the United States who believed the nation had insufficient military power to ensure “a world hospitable for American goods, American values, and the servicing of American needs,” who then encouraged increases to defense spending, and those who believed “the objective cannot be achieved with any quantity of military power.”²²⁰ Under the Reagan Administration, the former won the debate, resulting in the “largest military expansion in peacetime American history.”²²¹ Kennedy explained the danger of such a victory, whereby a leading nation feels threatened by “the growing foreign challenges to their position,” and is then “compelled” to “allocate more and

²¹⁴ Barnet, *Real Security*, 112.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

²¹⁷ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 410.

²¹⁸ Barnet, *Real Security*, 82.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

²²¹ Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, 331.

more of their resources into the military sector.”²²² This, in turn, “squeezes out productive investment and, over time, leads to the downward spiral of slower growth, heavier taxes, deepening domestic splits over spending priorities, and a weakening capacity to bear the burdens of defense.”²²³ The United States was at risk of tumbling down the rabbit hole. In line with his deterministic approach to history, economics, and international relations, Kennedy warned that if the U.S. continued to devote 7 percent or more of its GNP to defense spending, its downward spiral was “inevitable.”²²⁴ “We are in the evening of the American Century,” Barnet solemnly concluded.²²⁵

Modern declinists parrot similar arguments. Robert Pape presented an argument in a paper titled ‘Empire Falls’ so close to Kennedy’s that even the language repeated itself. For example, Pape noted that “[g]reat powers in decline seem to almost *instinctively* spend more on military forces in order to shore up their disintegrating strategic positions,” [emphasis added].²²⁶ Like Kennedy and Calleo, Pape believes that due to its current financial challenges, the U.S. can no longer “afford to keep [its] previous promises.”²²⁷ He even warns about the “self-reinforcing spiral” of spending increasing amounts of money to maintain increasingly costly military commitments, in turn suffocating productive investments, mentioned by Kennedy above.²²⁸ Echoing Calleo’s concerns, Pape challenges the notion that the U.S. can maintain a military posture built around the need to wage two large scale wars simultaneously. “The harsh reality is that the United States no longer has the economic capacity for such an ambitious grand strategy.”²²⁹ Like Calleo, he advocates a

²²² Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 533.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 532.

²²⁵ Barnet, *Real Security*, 109.

²²⁶ Pape, “Empire Falls,” 31.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

“slow and steady reduction in the U.S. military presence in Europe and Asia.”²³⁰ Given his reverence of Kennedy and Calleo’s work, it is remarkable that Pape makes the claim that “America is in *unprecedented* decline,” [emphasis added].²³¹

Similarly, in his 2010 book *Lament for America*, Earl Fry outlines America’s global security commitments and points out that such a commitment comes with the expense of “an estimated one thousand military bases and other installations in more than 130 countries,” home to “more than a half million American military and civilian personnel and their dependents.”²³² The Defense Department’s 2006 ‘Base Structure Report,’ however, puts the numbers at 766 bases in forty countries acting as home to 394,000 personnel (including civilians and dependents).²³³ The result, opines Fry, is that “U.S. global military commitments are unsustainable over a long period of time when placed within the context of debilitating U.S. domestic problems, growing competition from abroad, and the changing dynamics of globalization.”²³⁴ What Fry means by ‘a long period of time’ is left unsaid, however in an earlier chapter he suggests that “at its current rate of decline,” the U.S. “risks” losing its superpower status by 2050 “or perhaps even as early as 2040.”²³⁵ The word ‘risks’ suggests that it will take another thirty to forty years until the U.S. finds itself in a position where it ‘might’ be credibly challenged by another state – and that is if policy makers decide to do nothing to confront America’s current challenges and maintain its alleged ‘current rate of decline’.

What is interesting with Fry’s argument (like Pape’s), however, is that it could just as easily have been written to describe the United States in the 1980s as it could the U.S. today.

²³⁰ Robert Pape, “Declinism Revisited,” *The National Interest* (online), January 28, 2009.

²³¹ Pape, “Empire Falls,” 21.

²³² Earl H. Fry, *Lament for America: Decline of the Superpower, Plan for Renewal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 73.

²³³ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008; 2009), 237-238.

²³⁴ Fry, *Lament for America*, 73.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

The United States in the 1980s faced “debilitating U.S. domestic problems, growing competition from abroad, and the changing dynamics of globalization,” just as it has throughout its entire history, particularly since the end of World War II. Fry acknowledges the connection to the declinism of the 1980s, giving mention of Kennedy’s argument for imperial overstretch and framing his own argument in reference to it, noting that the overstretch predicted by Kennedy is “now occurring.”²³⁶ Fry draws attention to the fact that the U.S. spends approximately 41.5 percent of the world’s share of defense spending without noting that defense spending accounts for less than 5 percent of U.S. GDP – below Kennedy’s 7 percent threshold.²³⁷ While the arguments outlined above draw attention to important issues like efficient management of resources and the costs of America’s global security commitments, the impact of defense spending on the U.S. economy and the likelihood of it causing the terminal decline of the nation are vastly overstated.

As Samuel Huntington noted, “there is little comparative evidence to suggest that military expenditures are necessarily a drag on economic development,”²³⁸ particularly when defense spending is at a historically average low point (since World War II). Addressing declinist arguments like those outlined above, which draw a correlation between the amounts of money spent on defense versus similar investments made by America’s economic competitors, Joseph Nye noted that “such simple correlations are misleading.”²³⁹ Nye pointed out that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, both South Korea and China spent more of their GNP on defense than the United States, yet experienced higher economic growth rates than Japan – America’s perceived primary economic rival in the 1980s.²⁴⁰ In the 1980s,

²³⁶ Fry, *Lament for America*, 71.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 72; Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI): http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/milex_gdp

²³⁸ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?”, 86. See also: Joseph Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990), 10.

²³⁹ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 10.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Huntington suggested that “Consumerism, not militarism,” was the primary “threat to American strength.”²⁴¹ In 2004, responding to similar declinist arguments, Niall Ferguson drew the same conclusion, further highlighting the similarities in both waves of declinism and the responses to them.²⁴² The impact of consumerism on the U.S. economy is addressed in more detail in the conclusion of this section.

While the United States may spend an exorbitant amount of money on defense, it does so at a minimal cost (in terms of percentage of GDP) and because it is responsible for providing security guarantees on a global scale – a commitment no other state has. This is an acknowledged aspect of America’s national security strategy. Maintaining and expanding military superiority has been the cornerstone of every administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS) since the onset of the Cold War, and has remained the case since Soviet dissolution in the early 1990s. Bill Clinton wrote in the 1996 NSS that U.S. “military might is unparalleled,” and stated that the first central goal of the government’s National Security Strategy is “[t]o enhance our security with military forces that are ready to fight and with effective representation abroad,” as a means of “focusing on new threats and new opportunities.”²⁴³ A decade later, George W. Bush wrote that the U.S., “must maintain and expand our national strength. [...] We must maintain a military without peer.”²⁴⁴ President Obama continued the tradition in the 2010 NSS, writing that the United States “will maintain the military superiority that has secured our country, and underpinned global security, for

²⁴¹ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 88.

²⁴² Ferguson, *Colossus*, 267. Ferguson says, “It is not, then, the cost of regime change and nation building that threatens the American empire with overstretch. It is expenditure much closer to home. For the American economy has come to rely to a greater extent than at any time in its history on consumption and credit – both public and private.”

²⁴³ *National Security Strategy of the United States 1996*, Preface.

²⁴⁴ *National Security Strategy of the United States 2006*, Intro.

decades.”²⁴⁵ And it is able to do so while spending almost as little on defense as the nation did before World War II.²⁴⁶

Given the current budget crunch and low level of defense spending (in terms of percentage of GDP) by all other leading nations, including perceived rivals like China and Russia, it is possible to make reductions, even to pre-2001 levels (under \$400 billion),²⁴⁷ and still be leagues ahead of everyone else. Stephen Walt noted in 2010 that the U.S. could cut 20-30 percent of its defense budget (a substantial reduction) and *still* be spending approximately \$400 billion.²⁴⁸ With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan slowly but surely winding down, defense spending is poised to face budget cuts over the next few years – something advocated by recently retired Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.²⁴⁹ Even in Europe, the U.S. Army is in the process of reducing its footprint, with 37,000 troops expected to be stationed on the continent by 2015 – a reduction of approximately 10,000 personnel since 2007.²⁵⁰ Between 1989 and 2003, “the U.S. Army closed 70 percent of facilities in Europe,” and reduced its total troop numbers from 213,000 in 1989 to 42,000 in 2011.²⁵¹ The Bush Administration had developed a plan that called for even deeper cuts.²⁵² Ultimately, in absolute numbers, American defense spending is substantial, however as a percentage of actual output, it is manageable and does not place enough strain on the U.S. economy to be the cause of its decline or undoing.

²⁴⁵ *National Security Strategy of the United States 2010*.

²⁴⁶ Krauthammer, “We’re Not Spending Too Much on Defense.” As a percentage of GDP.

²⁴⁷ Josh Rogin, “Bob Gates’ fuzzy math on defense budgets,” *Foreign Policy* (online), January 7, 2011.

²⁴⁸ Stephen Walt, “Indispensable or insolvent?” *Foreign Policy* (online), June 21, 2010.

²⁴⁹ See Rogin, “Bob Gates’ fuzzy math on defense budgets,” and Walt, “Indispensable or insolvent?” Gates’ term ended as of July 1st, 2011.

²⁵⁰ 37,000 figure: <http://www.eur.army.mil/organization/about.htm> ; there were approximately 48,000 Army personnel in Europe in 2007: <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/history/hst0712.pdf>

²⁵¹ Desmond Butler, “US planning to scale back troop cuts in Europe,” *Associated Press*, April 8, 2011.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

Section 2.2: Economy

The other pressing concern for doomsayers in the 1980s was the spiraling budget and trade deficits and the general state of the American economy. Federal deficits were nothing new, with Calleo noting that “[i]n thirty-two of the forty years from 1945 through 1985, the federal government finished its fiscal year in the red,” with only one year ending in a surplus since 1962.²⁵³ What made the deficits and government debt during the 1980s so alarming was both the speed of growth and sheer volume in dollars, as *Figures 2.0* and *2.1* illustrate. The deficit had tripled and the total federal debt had more than doubled from 1980 to 1985. Further troubling declinists like Calleo was that “two-thirds of America’s fiscal deficit,” was structural rather than cyclical, meaning that “with existing tax rates and spending commitments, even a return to near full employment would leave two-thirds of the colossal deficit intact.”²⁵⁴ Though Reagan had hoped to curb government spending by ‘reducing its allowance,’ federal spending rose consistently throughout his two terms in office, as shown in *Figure 2.2*. By 1985, the United States had become a net debtor for the first time since 1914, moving from the world’s largest creditor to its largest debtor in a matter of years.²⁵⁵ America, in the words of Felix Rohatyn, suffered from an “addiction to debt,”²⁵⁶ however it was an addiction that afflicted the world at-large. World debt grew from approximately \$100 billion in the early 1970s to almost \$900 billion by the mid-1980s.²⁵⁷ As *Time* magazine put it in 1983, “never in history have so many nations owed so much money with so little

²⁵³ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 109.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, 330; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 526.

²⁵⁶ Rohatyn, “America’s Economic Dependence,” 59.

²⁵⁷ Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, 317.

promise of repayment.”²⁵⁸ It is a statement as fitting today as it was nearly thirty years ago; global external debt now sits at \$60 trillion.²⁵⁹

Figure 2.0: U.S. Federal Deficit, Debt & Interest 1980-1985 (in billions of dollars)²⁶⁰

	<i>Deficit</i>	<i>Debt</i>	<i>Interest on Debt</i>
1980	59.6	914.3	52.5
1983	195.5	1,381.9	87.8
1985	202.8	1,823.1	129.0

Figure 2.1: U.S. Federal Year-End Debt 1981-1989²⁶¹
(in millions of dollars)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Year End Debt</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>
1981	994, 828	32.5
1982	1,137,315	35.3
1983	1,371,660	39.9
1984	1,564,586	40.7
1985	1,817,423	43.8
1986	2,120,501	48.2
1987	2,345,956	50.4
1988	2,601,104	51.9
1989	2,867,800	53.1

Table 2.2: Total Government Expenditures, 1981-1989 (in billions of dollars)²⁶²

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Government Expenditures</i>
1981	963.8
1982	1,058.0
1983	1,145.9
1984	1,215.5
1985	1,347.4
1986	1,429.3
1987	1,486.6
1988	1,582.2
1989	1,699.3

²⁵⁸ Jay Palmer, et.al., “The Debt – Bomb Threat,” *Time Magazine* (online), January 10, 1983.

²⁵⁹ CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>

²⁶⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 527.

²⁶¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 7.1

* The original chart lists ‘in millions’ though it is possible this is a typo as the figures seem inconsistent with other government charts and figures cited by various authors (Kennedy, for example). In the interest of accuracy, however, I have left it unchanged to ensure accurate referencing.

²⁶² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 15.2

The U.S. had maintained trade deficits since 1971, when it experienced its first merchandise-trade deficit in over a century.²⁶³ By 1987, the trade deficit had reached \$171 billion.²⁶⁴ The United States was “being inundated with rising imports and falling exports,” with imports comprising 42 percent of the growth in domestic spending between 1981 and 1984.²⁶⁵ Even agriculture, a historically strong exporting industry, “lost half its foreign markets between 1981 and 1984.”²⁶⁶ These declines were widespread. From 1965 to 1982, productivity growth in the private sector fell from 2.4 percent to 0.2 percent.²⁶⁷ “More Americans work in fast-food restaurants than in all of manufacturing combined,” wrote a disheartened Joel Kurtzman.²⁶⁸ Not only was production in decline, but the products, due in large part to an inflated dollar, were uncompetitive in foreign markets, leading to a \$160 billion trade deficit in 1986.²⁶⁹ Annual trade deficits ranged from approximately \$130 billion to \$150 billion.²⁷⁰ It is this sort of long-term trend, characterized by a decline in traditional sources of American economic growth, which led the declinists of the 1980s to believe the United States was decaying from within, “set on a course that points to an ignominious end.”²⁷¹ As Fred Bergsten put it, “a widely perceived weakening of the U.S. economy itself has contributed to the decline of U.S. power.”²⁷² All-in-all, the U.S. faced a “slow, steady, unrelenting decline of the economy as a whole.”²⁷³ There is also a strong connection made by the declinists between these trends and those outlined in Section 2.1.

²⁶³ Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), 297.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁶⁵ Lester Thurow, “America, Europe, and Japan: A Time to Dismantle the World Economy,” in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives* (2nd Edition), Charles W. Kegley Jr & Eugene R. Wittkopf, Ed. (New York: Random House, 1988), 314.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 435.

²⁶⁸ Joel Kurtzman, *The Decline and Crash of the American Economy* (New York: Random House, 1988), 12.

²⁶⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 526.

²⁷⁰ Rohatyn, “America’s Economic Dependence,” 55.

²⁷¹ Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 220.

²⁷² C. Fred Bergsten, “The United States and the World Economy,” in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives*, Charles W. Kegley Jr & Eugene R. Wittkopf, Ed. (New York: Random House, 1984), 286.

²⁷³ Kurtzman, *The Decline and Crash of the American Economy*, 13.

Maintaining current defense expenditures, “while its major economic rivals, especially Japan, allocate a far smaller proportion, then *ipso facto* the latter have potentially more funds ‘free’ for civilian investment.”²⁷⁴ By continuing to starve the American civilian economy of scientists, engineers, and R&D investment, “the American share of world manufacturing will steadily decline...and its economic growth rates will be slower than in those countries dedicated to the marketplace and less eager to channel resources into defense.”²⁷⁵ This is particularly true in a world where “increasingly, national power comes out of innovative minds rather than the barrel of guns.”²⁷⁶ A large defense establishment that spends hundreds of billions of dollars developing and building the world’s most technically advanced weapons platforms requires an army of skilled people. These are the some of the nation’s brightest engineers, scientists, computer programmers, and other professionals, who would otherwise be working in the private sector. “In 1988, for example,” writes Kennedy, “over 65 percent of federal R&D monies were allocated to defense, compared with 0.5 percent to environmental protection and 0.2 percent to industrial development.”²⁷⁷ Barnett also lamented this siphoning of talent and resources, saying “[t]he decision to invest a trillion dollars in the military rather than a crash energy-development program to reduce a dangerous dependence on foreign oil is a prime example of increasing the nation’s vulnerability by piling up hardware and expensive bureaucracies.”²⁷⁸

“Over half the nation’s scientists and engineers work directly or indirectly for the Pentagon,” Barnett remarked, with the United States lagging behind “every other industrial nation in the percentage of its gross national product devoted to research and development for

²⁷⁴ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 532.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Barnett, *Real Security*, 98.

²⁷⁷ Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, 298.

²⁷⁸ Barnett, *Real Security*, 98.

the civilian economy.”²⁷⁹ Lester Thurow made a similar argument, noting that “America invests less in civilian research and development than any of its major industrial competitors. American civilian R&D spending runs about 1.5% of GNP while our competitors are spending 2%.”²⁸⁰ A breakdown of government spending on both defense and non-defense related research and development is provided in *Figure 2.3*. The allocation of resources was indeed lopsided in favor of defense – a trend attributable to Reagan’s defense build-up and his more aggressive stance towards the Soviet Union.

Figure 2.3: Government Outlays for R&D, 1980-2010 (in millions)²⁸¹

<i>Year</i>	<i>Defense</i>	<i>Non-Defense</i>	<i>Total</i>
1980	14,643	15,592	30,235
1985	30,360	16,856	47,216
1990	41,078	22,732	63,810
2000	41,050	32,897	73,947
2005	70,646	49,200	119,846
2010	81,090	59,836	140,926

Without the precise figures it is impossible to confirm, however it is worth considering that in real dollars, the American contribution to civilian R&D may still have been equal to – or greater than – the contributions of other nations. The massive disparity in the size of national economies between the United States and other nations (even the U.S.S.R. at the time) makes the use of percentage points to draw conclusions questionable. That said, the “consequence of this neglect is the competitive advantage now enjoyed by West Germany, Japan, and other smaller nations that can produce consumer goods for export more cheaply and efficiently” than the U.S.²⁸² This relates to Calleo’s argument that nations like West Germany and Japan who fall under the American security umbrella should assume a larger share of the burden, freeing up resources and capital the U.S. can use to be more

²⁷⁹ Barnet, *Real Security*, 96.

²⁸⁰ Thurow, “America, Europe, and Japan,” 310.

²⁸¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 9.8.

²⁸² Barnet, *Real Security*, 96.

competitive. This type of neglect, however, was endemic of states the world over, with Kennedy noting that in 1984, world arms imports exceeded world trade in grain by \$2 billion (\$35 billion to \$33 billion, respectively).²⁸³ This is characteristic of a world economy that has been ‘militarized,’ where global military expenditures in 1985 (\$940 billion) were “more than the entire income of the poorer half of this planet’s population.”²⁸⁴ The United States and the Soviet Union, not surprisingly, were collectively responsible for more than half that amount.²⁸⁵ While a tragic reality it may be, Kennedy and Barnett’s concerns owed more to pragmatism than sympathy or moralism.

In addition to the staggering deficit numbers themselves, and the perceived erosion of American’s economic base (primarily manufacturing), declinists in the 1980s often pointed to economic indicators like education and infrastructure as being in decline. Collectively, these attributes are seen as indicative of the nation’s competitiveness and as an assessment of the foundational strength upon which America’s future growth depends. Thurow listed various statistics detailing America’s troubled education system, stating that “the average American 17-year-old knows half as much mathematics as the average Japanese 17-year-old,” and that test scores for those leaving high school and university had fallen 10 percent over 15 years.²⁸⁶ “Where America once had a labor force with educational abilities equal to that of the best,” he argued, “it no longer does.”²⁸⁷ Kennedy, Rohatyn, and Calleo also detailed America’s “failing educational system” and warned of its significant implications for “innovation, product development and research.”²⁸⁸ “There is increasing concern,” warned Kennedy, “over the extent to which America’s educational deficits will reduce economic

²⁸³ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 443.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. Kennedy notes that both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. spent more than \$250 billion/year.

²⁸⁶ Thurow, “America, Europe, and Japan,” 310.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Rohatyn, “America’s Economic Dependence,” 61. See also Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 111-112.

competitiveness.”²⁸⁹ Kennedy goes on to make a case for the decline in standards of education having a ‘dumbing down’ effect on democracy and politics in the U.S.²⁹⁰ Outside of the United States, some world leaders and foreign media considered American crime rates as evidence of the nation’s decline.²⁹¹

Modern declinists share the same concerns, with the only substantive change in argumentation being the figures cited. Fry notes that the U.S. began the decade (2000s) as the world’s largest exporter of merchandise goods only to end the decade surpassed by China and Germany.²⁹² He further remarks that America’s total share of merchandise exports fell over the course of the decade, from 13 to 8 percent, while China saw an increase from 4 to 9 percent.²⁹³ Fry goes on to make familiar arguments about America’s sagging education and deteriorating infrastructure.²⁹⁴ The seemingly endless list of numbers, facts, and figures detailing America’s manufacturing and trade troubles cited by declinists are truly dizzying and help to paint a convincing picture of a nation in decline.

Similarly, in 1999, Fareed Zakaria warned that the U.S. was becoming a “hollow hegemon,” which is a label reminiscent of Calleo’s ‘hegemon in decay’ prediction a decade earlier.²⁹⁵ “Americans seem unable to grasp the magnitude of the challenges that face us,” he wrote in a recent article for *Time* magazine.²⁹⁶ Even worse, suggests Niall Ferguson, American’s “refuse to believe” in their “fiscal crisis.”²⁹⁷ Zakaria goes on to list America’s educational and infrastructure failings and link them to a future where the country is no

²⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, 315. See also 306-307.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁹¹ “The Aftermath,” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1992, Final Edition.

²⁹² Fry, *Lament for America*, viii.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50 – 54.

²⁹⁵ Fareed Zakaria, “The Challenges of American Hegemony: Then and Now,” *International Journal* 54, no. 1 (Winter, 1998/1999), 20; Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, 220.

²⁹⁶ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”

²⁹⁷ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 262.

longer ‘number one’ – a ‘post-American world’ as he calls it.²⁹⁸ “Our infrastructure is ranked 23rd in the world, well behind that of every other major advanced economy,” he reports.²⁹⁹ The U.S. ranks 27th in life expectancy; 79th in elementary-school enrollment; 12th in college graduation; 17th in science and 25th in math.³⁰⁰ Zakaria is unique among declinists, however, in that he maintains a strong faith in the foundational strength of the U.S. and its ability to remain a dominant and leading nation – just not *the* dominant and leading nation. There is fundamentally nothing wrong with the structure of the U.S., Zakaria argues, but rather competition has increased and the country has yet to adapt to a world characterized by a ‘rise of the rest’.³⁰¹ “Every golden age comes to a close,” he writes. “This is [...] not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else.”³⁰² Others share this theory, for example Robert Lipsey and Irving Kravis.³⁰³ That said, the result is the same: the U.S. is falling behind.

However, just as the declinist arguments for military overstretch are overstated, so too are the declinist arguments relating to America’s economic vitality and its associated indicators. Responding to Kennedy and his brand of economic determinism, Susan Strange suggested that the declinist line of thought that relies on a particular conception of economic strength is “obsolete and therefore open to doubt.”³⁰⁴ At issue, Strange argued, was a fundamental change in the nature of the economy which was increasingly shifting from a domestic manufacturing base to an information and service based one. “It is information-rich occupations, whether associated with manufacturing or not, that confer power, much more

²⁹⁸ Zakaria, *The Post-American World*.

²⁹⁹ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid. He says, “Many of these changes have taken place not because of America’s missteps but because other countries are now playing the same game we are – and playing to win.”

³⁰² Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, xi and 1.

³⁰³ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 206.

³⁰⁴ Susan Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” in *Perspectives on World Politics* (3rd Edition), Richard Little & Michael Smith, Ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 352.

now than the physical capacity to roll goods off an assembly line.”³⁰⁵ This is a view shared by many and is seen as America’s progression from an industrial to a post-industrial or “technetronic society,” characterized by a service and knowledge based economy.³⁰⁶ Nye also outlined the impact of the ‘information revolution’ on the economy, noting that “raw materials and heavy industry are less critical indices of economic power today than are information and professional and technical services. [...] [T]he appropriate indicators of power today are related to manufacturing and services in the information industries.”³⁰⁷ The economic growth of the 1990s, fueled in large part by growth in high-technology and internet-based business (the ‘dot.com’ bubble) supports the argument put forward by Strange and Nye.

This high-tech shift also has implications on the ‘R&D allocation debate’ outlined above. Weapons systems and platforms are increasingly unmanned and/or robotic (such as bomb disposal/disarming devices), which translates into increased ‘spillover’ into the civilian economy.³⁰⁸ For example, the *iRobot* company manufactures both the PackBot, a robot used to examine, probe, and disengage explosives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Roomba, a ‘smart’ vacuum cleaner increasingly seen patrolling the floors of homes across America.³⁰⁹

Similarly, Nye and Huntington refuted the notion that the American economy was in decline. Both noted the relative constancy of America’s share of gross world product since the 1960s, maintaining a 20 to 25 percent share.³¹⁰ *Figure 2.4* supports this claim, detailing the GDP percentage of the United States and its two perceived rivals – Japan in the in 1980s and China today – and demonstrating that the percentage of the world’s GDP claimed by the

³⁰⁵ Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” 352.

³⁰⁶ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 95.

³⁰⁷ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 8.

³⁰⁸ For more on the changing nature of American warfare, see: P.W. Singer, *Wired For War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

³⁰⁹ Singer, *Wired for War*, 21-41.

³¹⁰ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 81; Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 72-78, 207.

U.S. has remained rather constant even while its competitor's shares have risen. Supporting this consistent global share is a relatively stable and constant annual growth rate of approximately 2 percent, outlined in *Figure 2.5*. The long-term stability of these figures challenges the very notion of decline. If the United States were, in fact, a nation in decline and decaying from within, its ability to maintain any growth, let alone at a consistent rate, would be impossible. Rather than holding a steady 20 percent of the world's GDP, even while it faced record deficits and economic challenges from Japan and China, the American share would reveal long-term signs of slippage. However, as *Figure 2.5* clearly demonstrates, this is not the case.

Throughout the 1980s, the period during which American decline was seen as inevitable, the U.S. economy grew at higher than average rates. Fareed Zakaria suggests that "America's elites misunderstood their own economy," and "did not foresee that the coming of the information revolution would find the United States [...] best placed to reap the benefits."³¹¹ In another ten or twenty year's time, Zakaria may be writing a similar sentence about the declinism of today. During the latter half of the first decade of the 2000s, where once again American decline is said to be a foregone conclusion, growth rates have remained steady. The 0.0 percent growth rate in 2008, -2.9 percent rate in 2009 (*Figure 2.5*), and the reduced global share percentage of 20.42 percent (*Figure 2.4*) are representative of the 2008 economic crisis and its impact on the American economy rather than terminal decline.

³¹¹ Zakaria, "The Challenges of American Hegemony," 13.

Figure 2.4: GDP Based on PPP Share of World Total 1980-2009 (percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>United States</i> ³¹²	<i>Japan</i> ³¹³	<i>China</i> ³¹⁴
1980	24.59	9.174	2.186
1985	25.26	9.360	3.184
1990	24.80	9.899	3.891
1995	22.97	8.728	5.679
2000	23.63	7.628	7.154
2005	22.37	6.854	9.405
2009	20.42	5.958	12.56

Figure 2.5: Annual GDP Percentage Growth, 1980-2010³¹⁵

<i>Year</i>	<i>GDP Growth %</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>GDP Growth %</i>
1980	-0.3	2000	4.1
1981	2.5	2001	1.1
1982	-1.9	2002	1.8
1983	4.5	2003	2.5
1984	7.2	2004	3.6
1985	4.1	2005	3.1
1986	3.5	2006	2.7
1987	3.2	2007	1.9
1988	4.1	2008	0.0
1989	3.6	2009	-2.6
1990	1.9	2010	2.9

The disparity between the declinists and stalwarts in interpreting the direction of the U.S. economy and the status of its general health in both periods points to a more fundamental issue touched on by Strange: traditional economic calculations may be obsolete. Steven Pearlstein offers the following explanation:

The simplest explanation for all of these seeming abnormalities may be globalization, which has fundamentally altered the structure and dynamic of economic activity. And because of the dramatic increase in the flow of goods and capital across borders, the vocabulary we use to talk about the economy, the statistics we have to measure it and some of the tools we have used to manage it have become obsolete.³¹⁶

³¹² Econstats.com, <http://www.econstats.com/weo/CUSA.htm>

³¹³ Econstats.com, <http://www.econstats.com/weo/CJPN.htm>

³¹⁴ Econstats.com, <http://www.econstats.com/weo/CCHN.htm>

³¹⁵ Econstats.com, Table 1.1.1., http://www.econstats.com/nipa/nipa_1_1_1y.htm

³¹⁶ Steven Pearlstein, "The Trials of Measuring and Managing in a Global Economy," *The Washington Post*, June 11, 2011.

Traditional metrics, such as manufacturing and exports, may - as Strange suggested – have become less important in an increasingly globalized and interconnected economy.

Contemporary debates about American manufacturing often point to a single example: the Apple iPod.³¹⁷ Apple, the second most valuable company in the world (behind ExxonMobil) in terms of market capitalization, employs 50,000 people in the United States. Its products, like the iPod, are manufactured in China by the Foxconn Corporation, which employs 1,000,000 people.³¹⁸ Some, like Fareed Zakaria (in the tradition of Susan Strange), argue that it is more important, in terms of economic growth, to be the company (and nation) conceiving and designing the products than the one manufacturing them. However, even using traditional economic metrics, the declinist argument comes into question.

A recent study from The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) reported that U.S. exports hit a record \$173 billion, an increase of 15 percent from 2010 and 37 percent from 2009.³¹⁹ BCG further noted that U.S. manufacturing output has risen “nearly 2.5 times,” since 1972.³²⁰ While manufacturing output has increased, however, manufacturing employment has decreased by almost 25 percent over the same period (since 1972), giving the impression that the manufacturing base of the U.S. is in decline.³²¹ The decline in employment in light of increased output is indicative of more automated and efficient methods of manufacturing rather than erosion in the nation’s ability to compete (and thus, an indication of decline). Further challenging the contemporary accounts of decline, *The Wall Street Journal* reported

³¹⁷ The iPod/Apple example is often cited by Fareed Zakaria, Niall Ferguson and other contemporary analysts/pundits. For example, see the recent Munk Debate on China: *Does the 21st Century Belong to China?* (House of Anansi Press, 2011).

³¹⁸ Fareed Zakaria, “The Future of U.S. Innovation: Can America Keep Pace?” *Time Magazine* (online), June 5, 2011.

³¹⁹ Aaron Task, “‘Made in America’: The Comeback,” *The Daily Ticker*, [Yahoo Finance](#), May 12, 2011.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

that “[i]n absolute terms, the U.S. enjoyed an incline this past decade,” with U.S. GDP increasing 21 percent in constant dollars from 2000-2010.³²²

As Stephen Walt noted in a *Foreign Policy* blog criticizing Robert Pape (and declinists in general), using percentages as a reliable indicator of strength or weakness tends to make situations appear “scarier.”³²³ “[P]ercentage increases are greater when one begins from a low starting point,” Walt suggests, questioning a substantial decline in the U.S. in the face of massive gains by China.³²⁴ “Equatorial Guinea’s share of gross world product is growing at an even faster rate than China’s,” he continues, “but that hardly means we should see it as our next great peer competitor.”³²⁵ China is considered America’s ‘next great peer competitor’ for reasons other than its economic record (e.g. its population size and rapidly developing military), however Waltz’s droll comparison still has a point: percentages and other figures do not tell the whole story. The arguments relating to economic indicators like education and infrastructure follow a similar trend.

Addressing the declinism of the 1980s, Karen House wrote, “[i]t was said then of the Soviets, as it is now said of the Japanese, that they were producing tens of thousands of scientists while U.S. education was producing football players.”³²⁶ As the numerous figures cited by Zakaria above indicate, concerns about the American education system have not changed. It would be just as apt to write ‘it was said then of the Japanese, as it now said of the Chinese’ to describe today’s debate as it was to use the Soviets and the Japanese in the 1980s. In March 2011, Providence, Rhode Island issued pink slips to all 2,000 of its teachers to help make up for a \$110 million budget shortfall, eventually laying-off 400.³²⁷ Those 400

³²² Charles Wolf Jr., “The Facts about American Decline,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2011.

³²³ Stephen Walt, “Is the Unipolar Era Over?” *Foreign Policy* (online), January 22, 2009.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ House, “The Second Century.”

³²⁷ Liz Goodwin, “Providence teachers in speed date-like interview process,” *Yahoo News*, June 13, 2011.

then had to compete for 300 available positions through an interview process that consisted of a fifteen minute ‘audition’ for principals, reminiscent of speed-dating and American Idol-like talent shows.³²⁸ This certainly gives the impression of a less-than stellar education system. However, as demonstrated with manufacturing, perception often beguiles fact. Ben Wildavsky points out that Americans have been warned of a ‘crisis in education’ since the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957.³²⁹ Even after a massive influx of money in 1958 via the National Defense Education Act, meant to address perceived long-term deficiencies in America’s education system and its potential impact on the Cold War, American children still performed poorly in the first major international math test in 1967.³³⁰ Poor test results continued throughout the 1980s, just as they continue today. *Figure 2.6* outlines U.S. education spending from 1980 to 2010, demonstrating that any failings in the U.S. education system, as expressed by international test rankings, cannot be accounted for through dollars alone. The United States is home to 17 of the top 20 universities in the world, while China, whose test scores are often compared to Americans, do not even place in the top 100.³³¹ The impact of these test scores on America’s economic performance, as demonstrated by consistent growth rates, seems to be vastly overstated.

Figure 2.6: Total Education Spending, 1980-2010 (in billions)³³²

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Government Expenditure</i>
1980	66.2
1985	47.1
1990	51.4
2000	60.4
2005	96.1
2010	112.4

³²⁸ Goodwin, “Providence teachers in speed date-like interview process.”

³²⁹ Ben Wildavsky, “Think Again: Education,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2011.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ Fallows, “How American Can Rise Again.”

³³² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 9.9, *In constant 2005 dollars.

Infrastructure finds itself in a similar situation as education, weighed down by comparisons to foreign investments. High-speed rail is often cited as being an indicator that the U.S. is falling behind. However, as Michael Lind notes, while the U.S. may not have a high-speed rail infrastructure in place, unlike Japan and China, it “leads the world in freight rail, which at \$265 billion a year is far more important to the economy.”³³³ “Unfortunately,” Lind remarks, “freight trains and other more rational projects [...] just don’t capture the imagination,” an observation reminiscent of John Kennedy’s dismissal of the leading linear accelerator in his 1962 cabinet meeting recounted in Section 1 (page 8).³³⁴ The general trend, just as with education or the economy, does not point to long-term decline but rather a nation as fallible as any other.

Section 2.3: Declinism in Perspective

The arguments both for and against American decline are nuanced, complex, and deep, warranting their own extensive analyses. That said, the above analysis is representative of the major lines of argumentation taken by both sides of the debate. When considered in the broader historical context outlined in Section 1, declinist arguments fail to demonstrate any substantial, fundamental, foundational, long-term decline. Rather, declinist arguments read more like extensive lists of everything the United States is doing wrong and all its economic competitors are doing right; something akin to a national report card. David Calleo suggests that the declinism he argued for in the 1980s was merely “slumbering” throughout the 1990s until the onset of the financial crisis in late 2007/early 2008.³³⁵ “[T]he declinists of the 1980s were right,” adds Christopher Layne, “[t]he Great Recession is the culmination of

³³³ Michael Lind, “So Long, Chicken Little,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2011.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Christopher Layne, “Book Review,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (June 2011), 478.

the termite decline that they predicted would gradually erode the foundations of U.S. supremacy.”³³⁶

Of course, this level of certainty has been expressed before. In 1988, Clyde Prestowitz confidently proclaimed that “[t]he American Century is over,” and that “the big development in the latter part of the century is the emergence of Japan as a major superpower.”³³⁷ With the resurgence of declinism after the 2007 economic crash, Prestowitz was once again making pronouncements, suggesting that American decline had become the “new” conventional wisdom.³³⁸ If newspaper and magazine headlines are to be believed, then Prestowitz and the other declinists are correct. Titles abound heralding the end of American hegemony and national decline. “The global order fractures as American power declines,” writes Alan Beattie of the *Financial Times*.³³⁹ *The Wall Street Journal* reported that “pluralities in 13 of 25 countries believe that China will replace the U.S. as the world’s leading superpower,”³⁴⁰ and CBS announced that in August 2010, 65 percent of Americans “believed the country was now ‘in a state of decline.’”³⁴¹ However, as Joseph Nye wrote in his 1990 rebuttal to the declinist debate *Bound to Lead*, “[d]ecline is a tricky word.”³⁴²

Declinists and stalwarts both discuss and debate decline, however on a certain level seem to be arguing different things. Declinists speak of *relative* decline – the power of the United States relative to other states, while stalwarts tend to focus on *absolute* decline – the “loss of critical power resources or of the ability to use one’s own resources effectively.”³⁴³ With respect to relative decline, both stalwarts and declinists agree that the power of the

³³⁶ Layne, “Book Review,” 479.

³³⁷ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 92.

³³⁸ Clyde Prestowitz, “New Blowing Wind: American Decline Becomes New Conventional Wisdom,” *Foreign Policy* (online), June 15, 2011.

³³⁹ Alan Beattie, “The Global Order Fractures as American Power Declines,” *The Financial Times*, June 14, 2011.

³⁴⁰ Joseph Nye Jr., “The Misleading Metaphor of Decline,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2011.

³⁴¹ Alfred W. McCoy, “The Decline and Fall of the American Empire,” *CBS News*, December 6, 2010.

³⁴² Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 16.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

United States relative to others has decreased. “There is no doubt that the United States is less powerful now at the end of the twentieth century than it was in mid-century,” Nye admitted.³⁴⁴ “Erosion,” of power is seen as “natural” by both stalwarts and declinists.³⁴⁵ The difference of opinion lies in what relative decline means for the actual power of the United States.

Declinists suggest relative decline means “the end of world dominance is coming soon for the United States.”³⁴⁶ Stalwarts, conversely, suggest that “[a]ll the talk of American decline [...] obscures [...] continuing U.S. dominance.”³⁴⁷ Taken as a whole (political, military, and economic power), America’s “relative power is greater now than at any time during the Cold War.”³⁴⁸ That is to say, even as America faces growing economic competition from nations like China, it remains in a class of its own in terms of overall power. Just as power is relative, so is decline and ‘erosion’. For example, a change in global GDP from 25 to 20 percent is indeed a decline, however when the closest competitor sits at 12 percent (China, as shown in *Figure 2.4*), the impact of the decline and its long term effects are often overstated. Contrasting the stability of the U.S. share with the yet unproven longevity and durability of Chinese growth, this becomes even more apparent. Because declinist arguments are often economic in nature, built around evidence of the growing GDP of competitor states like Japan or China, perceptions of U.S. decline often belie the actual status of the nation.³⁴⁹ Whatever the chosen metric, “a portrait in one dimension distorts rather than reflects reality.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁴ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 5.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 534.

³⁴⁶ “US Failed where India Got Things Right: Ferguson,” *India Today*, March 19, 2011.

³⁴⁷ Robert Samuelson, “Kiss No. 1 Goodbye, Folks,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1988, Final Edition.

³⁴⁸ Fullilove, “Reports of U.S. Decline Could Be Premature.”

³⁴⁹ Bell, “Political Columnists Think America Is In Decline.”

³⁵⁰ Wolf Jr., “The Facts about American Decline.”

Furthermore, as the U.S. economic growth and collapse of the Japanese economy in the 1990s proved, relative decline is often a temporary or fragile condition. The transient nature of official reports and estimates prove this. For example, “[d]uring the Clinton administration [...] the Congressional Budget Office projected budget surpluses,”³⁵¹ whereas today it predicts a \$7.1 trillion deficit between 2010 and 2019.³⁵² The National Intelligence Council (NIC) released a report in 2004 titled *Mapping the Global Future 2020*, predicting the continuation of *Pax Americana*, despite an erosion of its relative power position.³⁵³ In 2008, the NIC released *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, wherein the emergence of a multipolar world, characterized by a less dominant America is predicted.³⁵⁴ The 2008 NIC report is reflective of the wave of declinism that surfaced with the struggling war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and most importantly, the economic crisis,³⁵⁵ whereas the 2004 report was representative of the ‘hyper-power’ fears present in 2004. These disparities are due to the fact that official reports like those from the NIC or the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) are written with a mind to the present, assuming “current laws and policies remained unchanged.”³⁵⁶ And this is the fundamental point in the declinism debate, both past and present: what is considered relative decline is often simply a matter of correcting existing policies.

Numerous theorists and commentators make the point simply: what has been done through one set of policies can be undone through another.³⁵⁷ The declinists themselves

³⁵¹ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 269.

³⁵² Alister Bull & Andy Sullivan, “White House, CBO Debt Forecasts Challenge Obama,” *Reuters*, August 25, 2009.

³⁵³ National Intelligence Council, *Mapping the Global Future 2020* (December 2004), 11, 63.

³⁵⁴ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (November 2008), vi, xi.

³⁵⁵ Eric Edelman, *Understanding America’s Contested Primacy*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Belfer Center (2010), Summary.

³⁵⁶ Congressional Budget Office, *Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2010 to 2020*, January 2010, Summary.

³⁵⁷ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 79; Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” 354; Moynihan, “Debunking the Myth of Decline.”

implicitly acknowledge this. Kennedy, for example, finishes *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* by concluding that “the nation’s resources remain considerable, *if they can be properly organized*,” [original emphasis] which is, of course, a matter of policy.³⁵⁸ Fry offers an entire chapter detailing a ‘plan for renewal’ filled with policy recommendations.³⁵⁹ Declinists should not be saying the U.S. is *in* decline, but rather that if it does not address certain issues and change course (policies) then it is *headed* for decline. The economic crisis of the 1980s is often attributed to Reaganomics; the crisis of today owes much to the Bush Administration’s decision to cut taxes, subsidize prescription drugs for the elderly, and engage in two wars. These are the results of policy, not long-term systemic failure. There was a budget surplus in 2000 and there is no reason not to believe in the possibility for another one in the not-so-distant future. That said, many of these policies are reflective of structural weaknesses and deep-rooted systemic flaws inherent in the U.S. government as a highly complex institution. The fundamental issue, as Huntington and others have observed, is primarily one of consumption.

The United States consumes more than it produces, leaving it to import the balance. Specifically, the U.S. government spends more than it brings in. In 2010, federal expenditures were approximately \$3.397 trillion, while revenues were \$2.092 trillion.³⁶⁰ Borrowing money is, in and of itself, not the problem. Businesses and people use credit to make large purchases or long-term investments regularly. As Walter Russell Mead put it, “[d]ebt is the cornerstone of the American Dream.”³⁶¹ The issue is simply the rate at which the government spends and the aggregate total of its compounded debt. *Figures 2.7 – 2.9* illustrate this growth. As *Figure 2.7* shows, the actual amount of government expenditures

³⁵⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 534-535.

³⁵⁹ Fry, *Lament for America*, 123-154.

³⁶⁰ CIA World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>

³⁶¹ Walter Russell Mead, “On the Road to Ruin,” in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives* (3rd Edition) Charles Kegley Jr., & Eugene Wittkopf, Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 296.

as a percentage of GDP is high, but not far removed from the historical trend for the past thirty years. However, *Figure 2.8* illustrates the massive growth in the aggregate total of U.S. debt, having risen by nearly \$8 trillion from 2000 to 2010 and totaling a staggering 93.2 percent of America’s total GDP. It is estimated that the U.S. borrows 40 cents for every spent dollar.³⁶² At the time of writing, the U.S. has officially reached its \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling – the total amount of money the government is allowed to borrow to finance its operations.³⁶³ As Joel Kurtzman put it in 1988, “How ironic for a nation with such strong Puritan origins to be teetering on the brink as a result of our foolish tendency to live beyond our means.”³⁶⁴

Figure 2.7: Total Government Expenditures as Percentage of GDP, 1980-2010³⁶⁵

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Government Expenditures</i>
1980	31.3
1985	32.5
1990	32.5
2000	28.8
2005	31.0
2010	35.0

Figure 2.8: Year End Debt, 2000-2010³⁶⁶

<i>Year</i>	<i>Year End Debt</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>
2000	5,628,700	57.3
2001	5,769,881	56.4
2002	6,198,401	58.8
2003	6,760,014	61.6
2004	7,354,657	62.9
2005	7,905,300	63.5
2006	8,451,350	63.9
2007	8,950,744	64.4
2008	9,986,082	69.4
2009	11,875,851	84.2
2010	13,528,807	93.2

³⁶² “U.S. reaches debt ceiling,” *Finance Symptico.Ca*, May 16, 2011.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Kurtzman, *The Decline and Crash of the American Economy*, 79.

³⁶⁵ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 15.3.

³⁶⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 7.1.

Figure 2.9: Total Government Expenditures, 2000-2010 (in billions)³⁶⁷

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Government Expenditures</i>
2000	2,830.5
2001	2,982.8
2002	3,208.4
2003	3,432.6
2004	3,610.1
2005	3,860.0
2006	4,118.5
2007	4,289.5
2008	4,664.9
2009	5,144.0
2010	5,078.4

The proverbial credit card Reagan forgot to take away from ‘the kids’ has no credit limit and continues to be used as if owned by a teenager – with little-to-no thought to the future or the consequences of their actions. The U.S., like the rest of the world, is still ‘addicted to debt’. “Like all borrowers, we have become too soft and decadent and unwilling to sacrifice,” suggests Charles Krauthammer.³⁶⁸ Fareed Zakaria echoes this sentiment, saying “we’ve almost lost the ability to inflict any kind of short-term pain for long-term gain.”³⁶⁹ That is the quintessential ‘trap’ of credit – particularly easy credit. It is what keeps banks and creditors in business. It is not surprising, then, then “in the wake of the financial crisis, U.S. borrowing costs have gone down, not up.”³⁷⁰ There is, once again, a ‘crisis of confidence’ in America. It is a crisis of confidence not just in the president - though for many that is enough - but of the system itself and the direction it is headed. E.J. Dionne Jr. suggests that “What’s lacking is a coherent call for reform and restoration.”³⁷¹ In part because there is such partisan divide in how the issues facing the nation are to be addressed, the political system is in a state of gridlock. Negotiations to raise the debt ceiling between

³⁶⁷ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>, Table 15.2.

³⁶⁸ Krauthammer, “We’re Not Spending Too Much On Defense.”

³⁶⁹ Fareed Zakaria, “America vs. China: Who does economic policy better?” *CNN*, May 20, 2011.

³⁷⁰ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”

³⁷¹ Dionne Jr., “Haunted by decline.”

President Obama and the Republican-lead House of Representatives are increasingly acrimonious.³⁷²

These difficulties have implications for America's credibility as the leading nation – as the shining city for all to emulate. In the 1980s, Japan told America to get its fiscal house in order.³⁷³ In 2011, China told it the same thing.³⁷⁴ The message from the Japanese in the 1980s is the same as it is from the Chinese today: “If the United States expects to revitalize its international standing and improve its domestic health, the country must set its own economic house in order.”³⁷⁵ In 1988, *The Washington Post* reported that the Japanese increasingly saw the U.S. as being a declining power in part due to its spiraling deficits,³⁷⁶ and following the economic crisis in 2008, Chinese authors “launched ‘a flood of declinist commentary about the United States.’”³⁷⁷ Being told to balance the books by China and Japan underscores another important element of declinism: foreign ownership of U.S. debt.

As James Fallows remarked, “[o]nly with America's emergence as a global power after World War II did the idea of American ‘decline’ routinely involve falling behind someone else.”³⁷⁸ Today, China and Japan are the largest holders of U.S. debt, owning approximately 20.4 percent and 20.2 percent respectively.³⁷⁹ For some, this creates the impression that the United States is a ‘beggar’ nation.³⁸⁰ However, the fact that China and Japan are willing to buy so much U.S. debt is a sign of America's capacity for renewal and its

³⁷² Jay Newton-Small, “Obama vs. Cantor: Tempers Flare as Debt Ceiling Negotiations Take a Dramatic Turn,” *Time Magazine* (online), July 14, 2011.

³⁷³ Robert Scalapino, “Asia and the United States: The Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 1 (America and the World, 1989/1990), 103.

³⁷⁴ Jonathan Karl & Gregory Simmons, “Chinese Official Lectures Senators: Get Your Fiscal House in Order,” *ABC News*, May 16, 2011.

³⁷⁵ Scalapino, “Asia and the United States,” 103.

³⁷⁶ Margaret Shapiro & Fred Hiatt, “Confident Japanese See United States in Serious Decline,” *The Washington Post*, July 3, 1988, Final Edition.

³⁷⁷ Joseph Nye, “American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis,” *The Washington Quarterly*, October 2010, 143.

³⁷⁸ Fallows, “How American Can Rise Again.”

³⁷⁹ Greg Bocquet, “Who Owns the U.S.?” *Yahoo Finance*, February 28, 2011.

³⁸⁰ Zakaria, “The Challenges of American Hegemony,” 18; Philip Rucker & Dan Balz, “GOP Speakers hit the notes at conservative forum,” *The Washington Post*, February 20, 2010.

overall economic strength— it is, after all, an investment.³⁸¹ These countries expect a return, and thus profit from a healthy and vibrant U.S. economy – an economy they need access to in order to sell their exports. Everyone recognizes that for the time being, the U.S. is the world’s largest market. If American’s stop buying iPod’s, Chinese people lose their jobs. China has a vested interest in underwriting American consumption,³⁸² just as Japan did to sustain its growth in the 1980s.³⁸³ However, the size of China’s holdings spur fears that it is destined to be an economic hegemon, capable of using its debt holdings as leverage against the U.S. and its interests.³⁸⁴ The Chinese government denies the utility of such measures.³⁸⁵

News reports about a new bridge in San Francisco being built in China and shipped to the U.S. tend to add a measure of public hysteria to the debate; it gives the impression of weakness on the part of the U.S. and strength on the part of China.³⁸⁶ The impact of China’s rise as a global power is analyzed in more detail in Section 3. Suffice it to say that central aspects of arguments for American decline have as much to do with the performance and rise of other nations as they do with America itself. In his article detailing American decline, Gideon Rachman spent more time outlining Chinese successes than he did American failures, implying that one comes at the expense of the other.³⁸⁷ The stability of American growth detailed above challenges that perception, in both the case of Japan and China. That is to say, the U.S. has continued to maintain its approximate share of global GDP, and enhance its strategic position, as Japan and China experienced rapid growth.

³⁸¹ A view shared by many, including Carla Norrlof. See: *America’s Global Advantage: U.S. Hegemony and International Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³⁸² Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, 124.

³⁸³ Nye, “American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis,” 147.

³⁸⁴ Fogel, “\$123,000,000,000,000.”

³⁸⁵ Nye, “American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis,” 148.

³⁸⁶ David Barboza, “Bridge Comes to San Francisco With a Made-in-China Label,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2011.

³⁸⁷ Rachman, “Think Again: American Decline.”

Ultimately, the United States has serious, long-term issues it must confront and resolve if it is to continue to function as a productive member of the new economy. But so must every nation. Just as there are numerous articles touting the arrival of the new Chinese ‘superpower,’ there are an equal number detailing the challenges it faces with regards to domestic consumption,³⁸⁸ inflation,³⁸⁹ reliance on exports,³⁹⁰ academic plagiarism,³⁹¹ political stability,³⁹² and infrastructure.³⁹³ During a speech in Russia, President Obama told his audience “[p]overty exists here, it exists in the United States, and it exists all around the world,”³⁹⁴ the point being that every country has serious, systemic, long-term problems. It is at the intersection where need meets capacity that American strength is “peculiarly multidimensional,”³⁹⁵ a truth recognized by both declinists when they offer a caveat of retarding or reversing American decline through policy corrections, and by America’s foreign competitors.³⁹⁶ The United States, by virtue of the explicit arguments made by the stalwarts and the implicit acknowledgments made by the declinists, is not in decline. The decline experienced relative to Japan in the 1980s proved to be less than advertised and preceded a decade of significant growth. The U.S. economy grew by 27 percent from 1990 to 1998 – three times that of Japan.³⁹⁷ This fact alone should be enough to call into question any hasty predictions of decline – using similar arguments to interpret a similar circumstance and

³⁸⁸ Jonathan Holslag, “China’s Vulnerability Trap,” *Survival* 53, no. 2 (April-May 2011), 79.

³⁸⁹ Task, “Made in America,”; “China inflation at 34-month high on rising food prices,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2011.

³⁹⁰ “China exports slow as global demand weakens,” *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2011; Karen Maley, “China’s thinning economic grip,” *Business Spectator*, May 24, 2011; Geoffrey Rogow, “Goldman Sachs cuts China, Asia growth forecasts,” *The Wall Street Journal, MarketWatch*, May 24, 2011.

³⁹¹ Benjamin Robertson, “China’s Universities Struggle with Academic Plagiarism,” *VOANews.Com*, June 10, 2006.

³⁹² Cheng Li, “China’s Team of Rivals,” *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2009, 88 – 93; Minxin Pei, “Think Again: Asia’s Rise,” *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2009, 32 – 36.

³⁹³ Michael Bristow, “China acknowledges Three Gorges dam ‘problems’” *BBC News*, May 19, 2011.

³⁹⁴ Obama, “Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation.”

³⁹⁵ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 90.

³⁹⁶ A Senior Chinese government official referred to America’s ability to change course as “remarkable strength.” Fallows, “How American Can Rise Again.”

³⁹⁷ Ikenberry, “Introduction,” 1.

deriving the same conclusions is likely to produce the same outcome: failure. Though it is far too early to say for certain, the same is likely true of America's decline in the face of a growing China – the ultimate test being whether China can sustain a high rate of growth *and* convert economic power into political power, to say nothing of the political and social hurdles it must overcome along the way. As Walter Russell Mead said, “[t]here is nothing inevitable about the future.”³⁹⁸

Though it may feel like this time is, in fact, different, the truth is: it is not. “[O]ne must beware the golden glow of the past,”³⁹⁹ warned Joseph Nye. “It is easy to show decay by comparing the good in the past with the bad in the present.”⁴⁰⁰ The U.S. has been, in terms of scale and severity, in much worse situations (like the Great Depression or World War II). The situation is bad, but not terminal. Furthermore, when financial and economic sectors recover, they tend to grow back stronger.⁴⁰¹ As Warren Buffett observed, “In the 20th Century, the United States endured two world wars and other traumatic and expensive military conflicts; the Depression; a dozen or so recessions and financial panics; oil shocks; a flu epidemic; and the resignation of a disgraced president. Yet the Dow rose from 66 to 11,497.”⁴⁰²

The issues highlighted by declinists are important and serve a necessary function - it is through such debates that solutions to challenging issues are found. “Worrying about decline has helped us avert that very condition.”⁴⁰³ Just as Bill Clinton declared in his 1993 inaugural address, in which national renewal was the principal theme, “[t]here is nothing

³⁹⁸ Mead, “On the Road to Ruin,” 301.

³⁹⁹ Nye, “Zakaria’s World.”

⁴⁰⁰ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 203.

⁴⁰¹ Alan J. Stoga, “If America Won’t Lead: The Uncertain Future of the World Economy,” in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives* (2nd Edition) Charles Kegley Jr., & Eugene Wittkopf, Ed. (New York: Random House, 1988), 321.

⁴⁰² William Tobey, “Milton Friedman was Right, Thomas Friedman is Not,” *Foreign Policy* (online), December 16, 2010.

⁴⁰³ Zakaria, “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?”; Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 96.

wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America.”⁴⁰⁴ The debate about American decline has existed since the nation’s founding and is likely to continue until the U.S. is no more. It is a permanent fixture in the American narrative, and as Huntington suggested, “[d]ecline [...] may be in the eye of the beholder.”⁴⁰⁵

The declinism outlined above tends to be inward looking – Americans worried about America. There is another side to the debate, however, which looks outward and considers the implications of American decline on international relations. The U.S. does not exist in a bubble and as much as declinism is owed to fiscal imbalances and crises, among other things, the debate is also a reflection of perceived changes in the global system and power shifts among nations. A decline in U.S. power has enormous repercussions on the stability and continuity of the existing world order. The NIC forecasts, while not written in stone (as the disparity between the 2004 and 2008 reports attest), suggest that the U.S. government is considering a world where America is the most important power, but not the preponderant power it is today. Because American decline, and all its associated repercussions, have global implications, it is important to evaluate possible outcomes. The final section will do just that, offering a brief survey of the literature and arguments for the implications of American decline on the international system.

Section 3: The Indispensable Nation

On December 15, 2010, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld took to *Twitter*, an online social networking site, and wrote, “[t]here’s a solution to all this talk of America’s preordained ‘decline,’ ‘multipolarity,’ ‘end of U.S. primacy,’ etc. It’s called

⁴⁰⁴ Bill Clinton, *Inaugural Address*, January 20, 1993.

⁴⁰⁵ Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” 95.

leadership.”⁴⁰⁶ In this instance, the former secretary is correct. A crisis of confidence in America’s internal stability creates a similar ‘crisis’ in the international community, with both allies and rivals alike questioning America’s ability – and determination - to lead. It is because the United States is recognized as the global leader that the idea of American decline has implications for the stability of the international system.⁴⁰⁷ “America is responsible for global stability and the economy. The collapse of America will mean the collapse of the world.”⁴⁰⁸ Acknowledging the ‘crisis of confidence’ in its leadership capabilities in the face of fiscal challenges and rising competitors, President Obama stood before members of British Parliament on May 25, 2011, and reaffirmed America’s commitment to its allies and the world. “The time for our leadership is now,” he declared, before asking, “[i]f we fail to meet that responsibility, who would take our place, and what kind of world would we pass on?”⁴⁰⁹ This section seeks to answer that question by examining the international system and America’s place within it. By doing so, it is possible to extrapolate the strength of America’s leadership position and the durability of the system in which that leadership takes place. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that American power and leadership are firmly intact and the global system, barring unforeseen events, is unlikely to see dramatic changes in the near future, despite popular claims to the contrary.

While the preceding sections have demonstrated that calls of American decline are both cyclical and greatly exaggerated, the perception of decline has very real effects.⁴¹⁰ As then Vice-President Lyndon Johnson noted, “other nations, regardless of their appreciation of our idealistic values, will tend to align themselves with the country they believe will be the

⁴⁰⁶ Donald Rumsfeld, Official Twitter account, December 15, 2010, 11:04 am.

⁴⁰⁷ Brzezinski, *Second Chance*, 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Michael Getler, “Decline and Resurgence: In Japan and Germany, Taking Leave of the American Century,” *The Washington Post*, December 15, 1991, Final Edition.; As Ikenberry put it, the U.S. has been “a producer of world order.” Ikenberry, “Introduction,” 1.

⁴⁰⁹ Nancy Benac, “Obama to world: West leadership role still strong,” *Yahoo News* (online), May 25, 2011.

⁴¹⁰ Shapiro & Hiatt, “Confident Japanese See United States in Serious Decline.”

world leader – the winner in the long run.”⁴¹¹ Robert Gilpin notes that “both statesmen and the public act on assessments of the trend of events, and that prognostications frequently become self-fulfilling prophecies.”⁴¹² Furthermore, “hegemonic wars are preceded by an important psychological change in the temporal outlook of peoples. The outbreaks of hegemonic struggles have most frequently been triggered by the fear of ultimate decline and the perceived erosion of power.”⁴¹³ The principal fear surrounding American decline for the global community is war, particularly among states looking to take over as the global leader. This fear is based heavily on realist theories concerning the balance of power and its effects on the stability of the international system,⁴¹⁴ and as Daniel Drezner put it, “[i]f realists have a literary trope, it’s talking about the decline and fall of great powers.”⁴¹⁵ Accordingly, “[p]erceptions of change in the relative power of nations are of critical importance to understanding the relationship between decline and war.”⁴¹⁶ In the prevention of both decline and war, “leadership is key.”⁴¹⁷

This vast and complex topic fundamentally involves worldviews and international relations theories, and accordingly, is far too expansive a subject to be fully addressed in the limited space available. This section will not address or seek to settle theoretical debates between realism and other theories, nor will it be a comprehensive accounting of various sub-theories, or any of the other associated aspects of debate inherent to such an analysis. Furthermore, for many observers, principally those who subscribe to a realist world view,⁴¹⁸ “the question is not whether the United States will lose its unchallenged global power, but

⁴¹¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, *Memorandum for the President*, “Evaluation of Space Program,” April 28, 1961, NASA Historical Reference Collection, NASA Headquarters, Washington D.C.

⁴¹² Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 232.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴¹⁴ Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” 352.

⁴¹⁵ Daniel Drezner, “The decline and fall of America’s supporters?” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 17, 2010.

⁴¹⁶ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 17.

⁴¹⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*, Moderated by David Ingatius (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 152.

⁴¹⁸ Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” 352.

just how precipitous and wrenching the decline will be.”⁴¹⁹ Attempting to answer this particular question is of limited utility, however, as “the number of potential futures is vast, and which one comes to pass will depend in part on decisions not yet made.”⁴²⁰ ‘Nothing ages as quickly as yesterday’s version of the future,’ and so this section will avoid any long-term predictions, focusing instead on the current state of the international system and American power.⁴²¹ There is a focus on U.S. – Sino relations, given the fact that China is widely perceived as America’s “chief rival for global influence.”⁴²² This is accomplished using a framework provided by David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, outlined in more detail further below. However, because many theorists and writers use words and concepts differently, it is first necessary to establish an understanding of key terms, including ‘hegemony,’ ‘unipolar,’ ‘multipolar,’ and ‘superpower’.

Hegemony is a weighty term used by many but understood by relatively few. Accordingly, it changes meaning with each use.⁴²³ Niall Ferguson, for example, suggests that “hegemony means more than mere leadership, but less than outright empire.”⁴²⁴ Joshua Goldstein defines hegemony as “being able to dictate, or at least dominate, the rules and arrangements by which international relations, political and economic, are conducted.”⁴²⁵ The definition found in international relations textbooks characterize hegemony as “political dominance; either undisputed leadership in politics or dominance in the realm of ideas,”⁴²⁶ or

⁴¹⁹ McCoy, “The Decline and Fall of the American Empire.”

⁴²⁰ Nye, “Zakaria’s World.”

⁴²¹ “Nothing ages so quickly as yesterday’s version of the future,” Richard Corliss, via Donald Rumsfeld, official twitter, November 15, 2010, 8:42 am.

⁴²² Fry, *Lament for America*, 98.

⁴²³ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 37 – 40; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *Word Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 22.

⁴²⁴ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 9.

⁴²⁵ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 39.

⁴²⁶ Sens & Stoett, *Global Politics*, 505.

“political (and/or economic) domination of region, usually by a superpower.”⁴²⁷ There are as many definitions as there are people writing them. What’s more, particular calculations of what may actually constitute ‘domination’ is a matter of debate. Robert Gilpin, one of the original hegemonic stability theorists, offers a succinct and useful definition, stating “[h]egemony [...] refers to the leadership of one state (the hegemon) over other states in the system.”⁴²⁸ This definition avoids the complication of determining what constitutes a reliable metric for dominance. Furthermore, it matches American power throughout the post-World War II era and should be understood as the default meaning of the term in this section.

As Joseph Nye argues throughout *Bound to Lead*, “even at its post-war peak, the power of the United States was far more limited,” than is often suggested.⁴²⁹ “Many observers casually assume a degree of American influence in the postwar years that simply did not exist.”⁴³⁰ The consequence of exaggerated hegemony diminishes the present and leads to the perception of decline.⁴³¹ Ultimately, if hegemony is taken to mean dominance, then the U.S. “never had full hegemony.”⁴³² Channeling Karl Marx, John Ikenberry writes, “powerful states make international order but not entirely as they wish.”⁴³³ Subsequently, the requirement of dominance for hegemony becomes onerous and unrealistic as a meaningful descriptor. According to such a definition, “there never has been a global hegemon, and there is not likely to be one anytime soon.”⁴³⁴ The purpose of this analysis, however, is not

⁴²⁷ John Baylis & Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations* (3rd Edition), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 95.

⁴²⁸ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 116.

⁴²⁹ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 12. See also: 87 – 95, 108, 174; Tamara Cofman Wittes, “American Hegemony: Myth and Reality,” *Brookings Institute*, March 22, 2007.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 95; Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 18 – 20.

⁴³³ Ikenberry, “Introduction,” 3.

⁴³⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 41.

to argue the definition of hegemony or if the United States meets the requirements thereof.⁴³⁵

Regardless of whether the term used is ‘hegemony’ or ‘primacy,’ the principal aim is to highlight the power differential between the U.S. and other states. This relates to another important concept: polarity.

Similar to hegemony, the concepts of unipolarity and multipolarity are used widely, often with different meanings.⁴³⁶ The stability of both systems and their respective application to describe the current balance of power in the international system are the subject of intense debate.⁴³⁷ For example, Samuel Huntington argued that a unipolar system contains a superpower and no “significant” major powers, where the sole superpower is single-handedly capable of “resolving important international issues.”⁴³⁸ Charles Krauthammer, conversely, suggests that such a definition is “a standard not for unipolarity but for divinity.”⁴³⁹ “If today’s American primacy does not constitute unipolarity, then nothing ever will.”⁴⁴⁰ Joseph Nye takes another approach altogether, arguing that such characterizations miss the wider changes in the diffusion of power in the international system which has come to resemble a “three-dimensional chess game.”⁴⁴¹ In some realms (political-

⁴³⁵ For more on this, see: Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (5th Edition), G. John Ikenberry Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), 540 – 550; G. John Ikenberry, “Getting Hegemony Right,” in *Liberal Order & Imperial Ambition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 186 – 196; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 40 – 42.

⁴³⁶ For example, see: Richard N. Haas, “This Isn’t Called the [Blank] Era for Nothing,” *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2006, Final Edition.

⁴³⁷ For example, see: Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring, 1997): 49 – 88; William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January, 2009): 28 – 57; Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer, 1999): 5 – 41; Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” *National Interest* 70 (Winter, 2002/2003): 5 – 17.

⁴³⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (5th Edition), G. John Ikenberry Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), 541.

⁴³⁹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (5th Edition), G. John Ikenberry Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), 551.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 4, 136 – 137.

military), the world is unipolar with the U.S. on top.⁴⁴² In other realms, such as economics, the world is multipolar and the U.S. must compete on a more level playing field.⁴⁴³ Again, the purpose of this analysis is not to evaluate the credibility of these theories, but rather to determine a common understanding of terms. It would be fair to say that it is widely accepted amongst international relations theorists that at present, the global balance of power is characterized by a unipolar system.⁴⁴⁴ Huntington provides a useful definition of a multipolar system, describing it as having several major powers of comparable strength that “cooperate and compete with each other in shifting patterns.”⁴⁴⁵

The last term to be defined is less contentious and can thus be resolved with a measure of brevity. The term ‘superpower’ is used carelessly in popular discourse (newspapers, for example) and in a way that often does not match its actual meaning. Characterizations of China as a possible ‘economic superpower,’ for example, represents a gross misuse the term.⁴⁴⁶ The term was first used to describe the Soviet Union and the United States after World War II because before then, “no two countries have ever stood so far above the rest in terms of their own power resources.”⁴⁴⁷ A useful definition comes from Andrei Gromyko via Charles Krauthammer, who defined a superpower as “a country that has a say in every corner of the globe and without whose say nothing truly substantial can be achieved in any such corner.”⁴⁴⁸ No nation other than the United States fits such a description. In all measures of power (political, military, economic, cultural/soft power), the

⁴⁴² Nye, *Soft Power*, 136.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁴⁴ For example, see: G. John Ikenberry Ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, Eds. *American Power in the 21st Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004). This view, of course, is not universal. See Nye, *Soft Power*, 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” 541. This definition is supported by others, for instance: Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 173.

⁴⁴⁶ For example: Pew Global Attitudes Project, “China Seen Overtaking U.S. as Global Superpower,” July 13, 2011; Malcolm Moore, “China: a force fit for a superpower,” *The Telegraph* (online), January 10, 2011; John Fraser, “An old warrior, a new world order,” *Maclean’s Magazine*, May 30, 2011, 38 – 39.

⁴⁴⁷ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 69 – 70.

⁴⁴⁸ Krauthammer, “Misplaced Malaise.”

United States remains in a class of its own.⁴⁴⁹ With the key terms now established, it is possible to examine U.S. power, its relationship with the international system, and the endurance of American hegemony.

In *American Power in the 21st Century* (2004), David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi offer a framework suggesting five possible outcomes for American power and the global system: A move toward empire; a move toward a multipolar balance of power; a move toward a collective security system; a move toward global democracy; and lastly, a continuation of the status quo.

A move toward empire is characterized by a concentration of “crucial power resources in the hands of the governments of the United States,” and “an increasing willingness by American administrations to take decisions about the use of force in defiance of international norms and procedures.”⁴⁵⁰ This particular approach focuses on American military power and the willingness to use it to secure, maintain, or advance American interests. While it is important not to understate American strength, as many are wont to do, it is just as important not to overstate it. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have had a sobering effect on those who mistook America’s ‘unipolar moment’ as being an invitation to selectively reshape the world through military power.⁴⁵¹ Though it remains the preeminent military power, the United States lacks the capacity for empire. Moreover, it lacks the public and political will.⁴⁵² While it is not impossible to conceive of a time when the ‘unipolar moment’ will once again be ‘revisited,’ the current Obama Administration has been directing

⁴⁴⁹ Brooks & Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 2; Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” 541; Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” 552.

⁴⁵⁰ David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, Eds. *American Power in the 21st Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 3-4.

⁴⁵¹ Brooks & Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 1.

⁴⁵² For more on America as an empire, see Ferguson, *Colossus* (2004).

the U.S. back towards multilateralism.⁴⁵³ Empire, simply put, is not presently an option for the United States and is unlikely to be for the foreseeable future.

The second outcome, toward a multipolar balance of power system, uses the historical precedent of weaker states reorganizing themselves to ‘resist’ or ‘counter’ the power of stronger states.⁴⁵⁴ America’s ‘unipolar moment’ “will inevitably be replaced by a multipolar international system, in which a limited number of states will cooperate and compete with an eye to preventing any of them from gaining or retaining the upper hand.”⁴⁵⁵ The move to a multipolar system can be the result of either an intentional effort on the part of other states, or relative American decline. In such a system, the United States would remain an important power, however it would lose its hegemonic position. Furthermore, the emergence of such a system is premised on the result of two trends.

First, “a number of states would improve or acquire the capacity to project military power regionally or globally, by spending more on their armed forces and/or by pooling efforts with other states.”⁴⁵⁶ Second, the contending/balancing powers in the system would “use or threaten to use force with greater discretion than is now the case.”⁴⁵⁷ Because a return to a multipolar system is the most often predicted outcome of American decline, due largely to the rising power of states like China, India, and Brazil, this scenario warrants careful analysis. Though it will be addressed in more detail further below, it is possible to dismiss this scenario on the grounds of its two required ‘trends’.

With respect to the first trend, the world seems to be moving in the opposite direction. From 2000 to 2010, most nations saw an overall increase in military spending,

⁴⁵³ For example, see Obama’s remarks on July 7, 2009 at the New Economic School in Moscow, where he makes several mentions of needing ‘global partnership’ and of ‘independence’ among nations.

⁴⁵⁴ Held and Koenig-Archibugi, *American Power in the 21st Century*, 7.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

however among all current and soon-to-be great powers, military spending accounts for less than 4 percent of their respective GDP.⁴⁵⁸ Germany and Japan, two likely ‘poles’ in a multipolar system, saw reductions to their overall spending during this period. Great Britain is preparing to retire its only remaining aircraft carrier,⁴⁵⁹ though it is in the process of building two new, state-of-the-art carriers expected to launch between 2016 and 2020.⁴⁶⁰ The U.S., conversely, has 11 carriers in active service.⁴⁶¹ The bottom line is that no state other than the U.S. is capable of projecting power globally, and its perceived rival China has yet to fully develop the capacity to build and launch an aircraft carrier – a necessary requirement for global power projection.⁴⁶² China’s attempts to enhance its regional power projection, which is discussed further below, is still not enough to meet the requirements of a move towards a multipolar system.

As a natural extension of the first trend, states with a limited military capacity are not in a position to use, or threaten to use, force, particularly when the power disparity (militarily) between the U.S. and every other nation remains so vast. Said another way, since the end of the Cold War, it is difficult for any single nation, or group of nations, to use, or threaten to use, force without the consent (tacit or otherwise) of the United States, except in limited circumstances, such as the brief ‘war’ between Georgia and Russia in 2008. Doing so comes with the risk of reprisal from the United States – as Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990

⁴⁵⁸ SIPRI, “The 15 countries with the highest military expenditure in 2010.” Current and soon-to-be great powers: Russia, France, UK, China, Brazil, India, Germany, Japan, U.S. With the exception of Russia (4.0% of GDP), all other nations spend less than 3% of their GDP on their military/defense. Germany and Japan reduced spending from 2000-2010.

⁴⁵⁹ Clyde Prestowitz, “Let China have it,” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 25, 2011.

⁴⁶⁰ Chris Summers, “Aircraft carrier: A mind-boggling building job,” *BBC News* (online), April 7, 2011.

⁴⁶¹ United States Navy. <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/ships/carriers/cv-list.asp>

⁴⁶² “China aircraft carrier confirmed by general,” *BBC News* (online), June 8, 2011. The single aircraft carrier China owns is a Soviet-era craft purchased from the Ukraine that it has yet to launch.

proved.⁴⁶³ Lastly, these limited engagements are not the same as using force as a means of balancing against other states, let alone the U.S., in a multipolar system.

The third possible scenario is a move to a collective security system. This would come into being following a decentralization of military power, where armed intervention is carried out by a plurality of states rather than “prevalently by the United States.”⁴⁶⁴ A move to a collective security system would also require the further constitutionalization of military power, where the exercise of military force is subject to “precise, impartial, and legally binding”⁴⁶⁵ rules. In this system, “[i]ndividual states relinquish the capacity to decide autonomously when armed intervention is justified,” and rule changes are made “on the basis of participative procedures and not as a result of unilateral decisions.”⁴⁶⁶ While a noble system this would be, it is difficult to imagine the United States, China, Russia, India or any other nation with legitimate security concerns abdicating control of their militaries. Such a scenario would also necessarily involve overcoming the over-arching principle in international relations: anarchy. Enforcing ‘precise, impartial, and legally binding’ rules requires both capacity and resolve, something the international community has shown itself to be lacking. And, lastly, as current military operations in Libya demonstrate, even when armed intervention is carried out by a plurality of states, the United States ends up being the ‘prevalent’ contributor.⁴⁶⁷ Much like a move towards empire, this scenario is simply unrealistic, at least for the foreseeable future.

The fourth scenario is a move toward global democracy, made possible by both the process of constitutionalization and centralization. In this system, “the organization of force

⁴⁶³ There are other examples, of course, where two states used or threatened to use force on one another (the 1999 Indo - Pakistani War, for instance), however this is different than using force as a means of balancing against other states, as is implied in a multipolar system.

⁴⁶⁴ Held and Koenig-Archibugi, *American Power in the 21st Century*, 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Robert Burns & Bradley Klapper, “Gates presses US allies to do more against Libya,” *Yahoo News* (online) June 8, 2011.

would take on a global element, that is, decisions to authorize and sanction the use of coercive power for peacemaking and peacekeeping would be monopolized by one (collective) entity.”⁴⁶⁸ This view essentially suggests the formation of a world ‘government’ made possible by the increasing interdependence of the global economy and weakening of the sovereign state, and is often associated with a cosmopolitan ethical outlook.⁴⁶⁹ This scenario closely resembles the last, and is highly unlikely for similar reasons. Any scenario dependent upon the “centralization of military might” is unlikely to come to fruition until a situation arose that could, again, overcome the insecurities inherent in an anarchic system.

The final scenario, the continuation of the status quo, requires little explanation. The four preceding scenarios are dependent on certain political, economic, and social forces moving in a particular direction or way.⁴⁷⁰ However,

It is conceivable that during the twenty-first century the relations between the United States and the rest of the world will not become more imperial than they are at present, that emerging states will not challenge US military supremacy, that genuine collective security will not be realized, and that the world will not experience the emergence of a democratic global policy.⁴⁷¹

Of these five scenarios, the only two that offer realistic outcomes are the return to a multipolar system or a continuation of the status quo. Examining contemporary international affairs, with a focus on U.S. – Sino relations (the supposed nexus of a hegemonic power shift), it is clear that the most likely scenario is a continuation of the status quo. Even accepting a measure of relative decline, such as that outlined in the NIC reports, does not necessitate the end of American hegemony.⁴⁷² Maintenance of the status quo is consistent with the centrality of leadership highlighted above.

⁴⁶⁸ Held and Koenig-Archibugi, *American Power in the 21st Century*, 14.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² Again, so long as ‘hegemony’ is understood to mean leadership rather than domination.

As the guarantor of the international system, other states look to the U.S. for leadership as a means of guaranteeing stability, which by extension, means the United States must be seen as being stable. When the United States is perceived as being unstable, as is the case at the moment due to perceived gross fiscal mismanagement and imbalances, the capacity of the United States to lead, and thus the stability of the international system, is called into question. American stability involves the three traditional metrics of power: political, economic, and military. So long as these elements are perceived as being stable, they are seen as being reasonably predictable.⁴⁷³ This analysis will focus primarily on concepts rooted in, or associated with, hegemonic stability theory, namely cost/benefit incentives of changing the system and the difficulty of counter-balancing against the U.S.

Section 3.1: A Shinning City Upon a Hill

The widespread acknowledgment of the unprecedented scope and nature of American power – at least in modern times – brings the utility of using previous system studies into question.⁴⁷⁴ Even Paul Kennedy noted that “[n]othing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing.”⁴⁷⁵ Nuclear weapons, information/communication technology, and the increasingly interdependent global economy are just three examples of system-wide changes that international relations has never before had to account for – at least on such a scale. The power disparity between the U.S. and other nations, in addition to these changes, make historical analogies dubious. And yet, despite this widely held view, some contemporary theorists suggest the “future is likely to be like the past,” forgetting that the present is rather

⁴⁷³ G. John Ikenberry, “Getting Hegemony Right,” in *Liberal Order & Imperial Ambition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 186 – 196; Ikenberry, “Introduction,” 17 – 23.

⁴⁷⁴ Brooks & Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 10. This is not to suggest that nothing can be learned from such studies, however, only that using them to draw specific conclusions can have questionable results.

⁴⁷⁵ Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited,” 551.

unlike the past.⁴⁷⁶ “China is rising and threatening the U.S. just as Germany challenged Britain and France superseded Spain; as its economy grows in technological prowess and accumulates greater stocks of dollars its challenge is likely to intensify,” argues Mark Gilbert.⁴⁷⁷ Gilbert’s argument is typical of the contemporary declinists who focus on America’s perceived terminal fall from grace and China’s inexorable rise. “The Pax America is drawing to a close and, driven by the rise of China and others, is giving way to a period of hegemonic transition,” writes Christopher Layne.⁴⁷⁸ Such arguments represent a gross misrepresentation of the current geopolitical situation, particularly as it concerns American and Chinese power.

To begin, comparisons of the United States and China today to any previous balance of power struggle distorts the enormous power disparity between the U.S. and China. Existing in a multipolar system, Britain and Germany were of comparable strength and were thus in a position to challenge one another for supremacy in Europe and control of the seas. Comparable strength is, after all, a defining characteristic and necessary requirement of a multipolar system. China and the United States do not share any such similarities and thus China’s ‘challenge’ is nothing like Germany’s challenge to Britain. Furthermore, Germany’s challenge was not characterized by purchasing large amounts of Britain’s debt, but rather by challenging it militarily. China is, by its own admission, in no such position.⁴⁷⁹ “China does not have the capability to challenge the United States,” Chinese General Chen Bingde said during a speech at the U.S. National Defense University.⁴⁸⁰ “China never intends to challenge

⁴⁷⁶ Mark Gilbert, “Rereading Paul Kennedy’s Rise and Decline of the Great Powers,” *BC Journal* (online) vol. 13, December 29, 2010.

⁴⁷⁷ Gilbert, “Rereading Paul Kennedy’s Rise and Decline of the Great Powers.”

⁴⁷⁸ Layne, “Book Review,” 479.

⁴⁷⁹ Robert Burns, “China general says his military no match for US,” *Yahoo News* (online), May 18, 2011.

⁴⁸⁰ Burns, “China general says his military no match for US.”

the U.S.”⁴⁸¹ And, as mentioned in Section 2, it is a long standing official U.S. policy to ensure that China (or any other state) never finds themselves in a position to try.⁴⁸²

Layne’s assertion of hegemonic transition is also wildly inaccurate. On the issue of hegemonic transition, there is perhaps no better source than one of the pioneers of hegemonic stability theory, Robert Gilpin. In order to demonstrate just how misplaced Layne’s assertion is, it is useful to outline the principles of hegemonic systems theory using Gilpin’s 1981 classic *War and Change in World Politics*.

According to Gilpin, “a group or state will attempt to change the political system in response to developments that increase its relative power or decrease the costs of modifying political arrangements.”⁴⁸³ He further argues that an international system is in a state of “equilibrium” if the states in the system are “satisfied with the existing territorial, political, and economic arrangements.”⁴⁸⁴ “[W]here no one has an incentive to change the system, the status quo may be said to be stable.”⁴⁸⁵ The stability of a system is determined largely by its capacity to adjust to the demands of the powerful actors within it.⁴⁸⁶ “Territorial, political, and economic adjustments among states in response to conflicting interests and shifting power relationships function to relieve pressure on the system,” allowing for its preservation.⁴⁸⁷ In addition, “the passage of time makes peaceful coexistence among major competitors easier,” with states learning from long-term interaction, and governing rules evolving “that facilitate control and management” of competition.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸¹ Burns, “China general says his military no match for US.”

⁴⁸² *National Security Strategy of the United States 2002*: “Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States,” 30.

⁴⁸³ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, xii.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 – 12.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

The behavior of states, or the way demands are expressed, is partially limited by the system itself.⁴⁸⁹ An increasingly important objective of states is “to control or at least exercise influence over the world economy.”⁴⁹⁰ To this end, “the rules or regimes governing international commerce, technical cooperation, and such matters are among the most important rules influencing interstate behavior,”⁴⁹¹ and “the power of creating wealth” tends to be “more important than wealth itself.”⁴⁹²

Gilpin outlines three “broad types” of changes characteristic of international systems: *systems* change, *systemic* change, and *interaction* change.⁴⁹³ A *systems* change is the most fundamental type of change and involves a change in the nature of the actors comprising the system.⁴⁹⁴ A *systemic* change involves a change to “the form of control or governance,” of the system and is a change *within* the system, “rather than a change of the system itself.”⁴⁹⁵ This type of change is of particular importance for the purposes of this analysis, as “the essence of systemic change involves the replacement of a declining dominant power by a rising dominant power.”⁴⁹⁶ Lastly, an *interaction* change is simply a change in the form of regular interactions or processes among the actors within the system.⁴⁹⁷

The structure of a given system affects the capacity and willingness of a state, or group of states, to try and change the system, and a state that “fails to become socialized into the prevailing norms of the larger system pays a price.”⁴⁹⁸ Adding to the first point, the structure of the system has profound effects on the cost of exercising power and changing the

⁴⁸⁹ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 28. “The relationships among states have a high degree of order...the system does exercise an element of control over the behavior of states.”

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 39 – 40.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 42.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85 – 86.

system and the number of states, and distribution of capabilities among them, impacts the ease of forming alliances and/or counter-balancing power.⁴⁹⁹ Gilpin further argues that the “growth and expansion of a state and economy,” eventually encounters resistance and possible “countervailing forces.”⁵⁰⁰ Opposing power also serves to limit the ability of an expanding state to change the system.⁵⁰¹ Lastly, Gilpin asserts that as a rising state’s relative power increases, it will attempt to change the rules governing the international system, the division of the spheres of influence, and the distribution of territory.⁵⁰² The dominant power then attempts to adjust its policies in a bid to restore equilibrium to the existing system, with failure to do so often leading to war.⁵⁰³

Superficially, it can be argued that China fits the description of a rising, and credible, challenger to the American-led system. However, such arguments are just that – superficial. Not only does China fail to meet the requirements of a hegemon, given that its power is one dimensional (economic), but it is not yet in a position where the benefits of attempting to challenge/change the system outweigh the costs/risks. Furthermore, hegemony and challenges to existing power structures are dependent not only on a state’s *capacity* to affect such change, but also its *willingness* to exercise its power to such an end.⁵⁰⁴ China has no such desire. There are certainly theorists and analysts who are convinced otherwise, John Mearsheimer, Niall Ferguson, and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher among them.⁵⁰⁵ Similarly, some Chinese view the two nations as being destined for conflict.⁵⁰⁶

⁴⁹⁹ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 88.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁰⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 4; Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 178. See also: John J. Mearsheimer, “China’s Unpeaceful Rise,” *The National Interest* (Fall, 2005): 81 – 87; Patrick M. Cronin, “Ferguson vs. Kissinger on the future of China, and what it means for the rest of us,” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 17, 2011.

Ultimately, it is a matter of perception. “Conflict,” notes elder statesman Henry Kissinger, “is not inherent in a nation’s rise.”⁵⁰⁷ At the very least, China and the U.S. are in competition with one another, though this does not necessarily involve or imply hostility.⁵⁰⁸ However, even if China harbored such intentions, there is plenty standing in its way, both domestically and internationally. Briefly examining China’s current power status, the challenges it faces, and the direction it seems intent on following reinforces the argument that China is not a challenger to American hegemony, furthering the argument for the endurance of the status quo.

For the time being, China’s power is purely economic. In this respect, it is very similar to Japan in the 1980s.⁵⁰⁹ And, like Japan in the 1980s, China is dependent on exports to sustain its growth, with the largest percentage (18.4)* of its total exports going to the United States.⁵¹⁰ Its domestic consumption is weak, with the share of GDP of household consumption dropping from 43 to 36 percent between 2003 and 2009.⁵¹¹ While Robert Fogel predicts that China is poised to reach a global GDP share of 40 percent by 2040,⁵¹² he fails to acknowledge the fragility of China’s growth. China currently requires “\$5.4 of extra investment to produce an extra \$1 of output, a proportion vastly higher than that in developed economies like Britain or the United States.”⁵¹³ The country has already seen a reduction in export growth as a result of the financial crisis, and has seen its 2012 Goldman Sachs growth

⁵⁰⁶ Henry Kissinger, “The China Challenge,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2011. Kissinger references a book by Chinese Colonel Liu Mingfu, “China Dream,” which includes the view that no matter how committed China is to a peaceful rise, conflict is inherent in U.S. – China relations.

⁵⁰⁷ Henry Kissinger, “Avoiding a U.S. – China Cold War,” *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2011.

⁵⁰⁸ Daniel Drezner, “wait, did you saying wining AND dining??!!” *Foreign Policy* (online), March 4, 2011. Drezner quotes Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as saying, “Let’s just talk straight realpolitik. We are in competition with China.”

⁵⁰⁹ Thurow, “America, Europe, and Japan,” 312 – 313.

⁵¹⁰ CIA World Fact Book: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> *In 2009.

⁵¹¹ Holslag, “China’s Vulnerability Trap,” 79.

⁵¹² Fogel, “123,000,000,000.”

⁵¹³ Will Hutton, *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21st Century* (London: Abacus, 2008), 165.

forecasts reduced.⁵¹⁴ Furthermore, as the nation's economy continues to grow, it has begun to see its 'cheap labor edge' diminish in the face of 20 to 30 percent wage increases.⁵¹⁵

In the 1980s, Japan was the world's second largest economy, a position currently held by China, however because its "economy, institutions, and politics were still not fully modernized, the country could not make that final leap."⁵¹⁶ China may meet the same fate, considering that it is still largely a rural, agrarian society with massive development issues.⁵¹⁷ Furthermore, one of the reasons China's economy has been able to grow at such a rapid pace has been the fact that it is still modernizing, giving it the "advantages of backwardness."⁵¹⁸ Once an economy fully modernizes/industrializes, growth tends to slow.⁵¹⁹ With a population that has almost as many smokers as the United States has people, a slow growing economy can be disastrous.⁵²⁰ While it can tout the fact that it graduates 1.5 million engineers and scientists per year, it must maintain a rate of growth that ensures it has demand to match its supply.⁵²¹ Placing further strain on this equation, China has a rapidly aging population and, thanks to its 'one child policy,' has a population growth rate of 0.7 percent – 50 percent less than that of the United States.⁵²² It is for these reasons, and those addressed in Section 2, that "Beijing's world view" is "far less confident about terminal American decline and its own strengths than many people assume."⁵²³

⁵¹⁴ "China exports slow as global demand weakens."; Rogow, "Goldman Sachs cuts China, Asia growth forecasts."

⁵¹⁵ Maley, "China's thinning economic grip."; Task, "Made in America."

⁵¹⁶ Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, 20.

⁵¹⁷ This is covered widely, for example see Fallows, "How America Can Rise Again."

⁵¹⁸ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 160.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ "China launches ban on smoking in public venues," *Yahoo News* (online), April 30, 2011. China has more than 300 million smokers.

⁵²¹ Stephen S. Roach, "Ten Reasons Why China is Different," *Project Syndicate* (online), May 27, 2011.

⁵²² William Antholis & Martin Indyk, "How we're doing as the world shifts," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2011, Final Edition.

⁵²³ John Lee, "Hu's Real Agenda," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2011.

More to the point of hegemony, however, is the fact that just because China's economy may become the largest in sheer scale, does not "necessarily mean that it will surpass the U.S. as the most powerful country."⁵²⁴ In the 1980s, "Japan supplanted the United States as the dominant creditor nation and financial power," however even with a more modern military than China's it was never afforded the same level of confidence in 'future hegemonic status' as China is today.⁵²⁵ Arguments asserting China's impending usurpation of America's hegemonic status are based not just on economic power, but *projected* economic power. Power is fickle – Japan's stalled ascent to superpower status and the quick dismissal of American power are testaments to that.

As successful as it has been since rejoining the global community in the early 1970s (thanks to the United States), its continued rise is far from guaranteed, and as outlined above, despite its growth, China's economy is fragile. If its economy were to stall, it would have no other 'leg to stand on,' so-to-speak. Such is the one dimensional nature of China's 'hegemony'. John Ikenberry posits a situation whereby American hegemony, and the world order to a large degree, could come undone as a result of a prolonged economic downturn, leaving Europe and East Asia to "pursue their own visions of regional economic order."⁵²⁶ Were this to happen, however, China and the rest of the world would still have to contend with the disparity in military power that exists between the U.S. and everyone else. 11 aircraft carrier and battle groups do not suddenly disappear during an economic slump.

Should China's economic growth continue, however, and should it seek to translate that success into military power, it still does not pose a threat to American hegemony. As Gilpin noted, the "growth and expansion of a state and economy," eventually encounters

⁵²⁴ Nye, "The Misleading Metaphor of Decline."

⁵²⁵ Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, 328.

⁵²⁶ G. John Ikenberry, "Conclusion: American Unipolarity: The Sources of Persistence and Decline," in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, G. John Ikenberry, Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 306.

resistance and possible “countervailing forces.”⁵²⁷ And, as he also noted, “geographic position and distance continue to be relevant factors in international relations.”⁵²⁸ In this respect, China’s geographic position poses an obstacle to its ability to achieve a measure of power capable of rivaling America’s. As Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth note, “nothing China can do will allow it to escape its geography, which leaves it surrounded by countries that have the motivation and ability to engage in balancing of their own should China start to build up an expansive military force.”⁵²⁹ Because the United States is isolated, geographically speaking, from all the other great powers, it seen as less threatening.⁵³⁰ Subsequently, the nations surrounding China look to the U.S. to guarantee regional stability.⁵³¹

On a visit to Singapore, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates made a point of reassuring Asian nations that “impending” defense budget cuts would not result in a smaller or weaker U.S. presence in the area, where it maintains close military ties with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, and Singapore.⁵³² Amid increasing tension in the South China Sea over sovereignty rights for the Spratly Islands (and its valuable mineral deposits), Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan look to the United States to ensure China’s power remains checked, despite Chinese assurances it

⁵²⁷ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 146.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵²⁹ Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” in *Classic Readings and Contemporary Debates in International Relations* (3rd Edition), Phil Williams, Donald M. Goldstein, Jay M. Shafritz, Eds. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 705.

⁵³⁰ Ikenberry, “Introduction,” 15.

⁵³¹ Nye, “Zakaria’s World.”

⁵³² Robert Burns, “Gates sees improvements in US – China relationship,” *Yahoo News* (online), June 3, 2011.

would not use force to resolve the dispute.⁵³³ The tension has prompted concerns of a “maritime arms race.”⁵³⁴

The nations sharing China’s other borders are also weary of the rising power in their midst. Russia has begun investing in rebuilding its military capabilities in response to China’s rising power.⁵³⁵ What’s more, it is moving closer towards formal security alliances with the United States and NATO, including seeking partnership in Europe’s missile defense shield.⁵³⁶ On a visit to India, Tea Party shill Sarah Palin called China’s military modernization build up into question. “What’s with the military buildup?” she asked, before suggesting “China’s military growth can’t just be for defensive purposes.”⁵³⁷ The rapid growth of the two large, nuclear armed nations has raised the possibility of an arms race.⁵³⁸

Rather than come at the expense of American power, China’s rise actually reinforces it by enabling it to act as the off-shore regional stabilizer. Naturally, this is something China resists, however in order to prove itself as a trust-worthy regional power, it must acquiesce to American leadership on issues like stability on the Korean peninsula.⁵³⁹ Ultimately, despite China’s growing clout, the United States has a global network of allies who support American leadership for their own reasons, often to counterbalance against other regional powers. The U.S. has a security relationship with over 60 nations – more than it had during

⁵³³ “China and Vietnam in escalating dispute in South China,” *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2011; “China ‘will not use force’ in South China Sea disputes,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2011; Charles Simmins, “Navy Sailing in Troubled Waters,” *Yahoo News* (online), June 7, 2011.

⁵³⁴ Jonathan Marcus, “China extending military reach,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2011.

⁵³⁵ Michael Auslin, “Russia Fears China, Not Japan,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2011.

⁵³⁶ Simon Shuster, “Russia Wants a Finger on Europe’s Nuclear Shield,” *Yahoo News* (online), May 25, 2011.

⁵³⁷ Katy Daigle, “Palin warns of China’s rise in visit to India,” *Yahoo News* (online), March 19, 2011.

⁵³⁸ Christian Caryl, “Don’t Even Think About It,” *Foreign Policy* (online), July 13, 2011; C. Raja Mohan, “India’s Strategic Future,” *Foreign Policy* (online), November 4, 2010.

⁵³⁹ Don Durfee, “China urges U.S. to stay out of sea dispute,” *Reuters*, June 22, 2011; Matthew Pennington, “China challenges US predominance in Asia-Pacific,” *Associated Press*, March 7, 2011; David Ignatius, “Some foreign policy spine,” *The Washington Post*, December 26, 2010, Regional Edition. “China concerned at Korean tensions: US envoy,” *Yahoo News* (online), June 10, 2011.

the Cold War - whereas China has formal security ties with only two.⁵⁴⁰ The U.S. maintains stronger bilateral ties with “with each of the other G-20 members than most do with each other.”⁵⁴¹ Ultimately, China’s growth is severely limited by its geography and lack of formal ties with other nations – nations whose support would be required to uphold a Chinese hegemonic world order. These constraints make it difficult to build up its military power to a level that it could credibly challenge the United States in a conventional war. China has been developing its computer-based strategic capabilities, often involving hacking, in an effort to close the technological gap between itself and the United States, however in the face of increasing web-based ‘attacks,’ the U.S. Department of Defense recently announced it has begun treating cyberspace as an operational domain on par with land, air, sea, and space.⁵⁴² This limits China’s maneuverability as “[n]o country, or group of countries, wants to maneuver itself into a situation in which it will have to contend with the focused enmity of the United States.”⁵⁴³

When all these elements are considered as a whole, it is clear that China is far from the hegemonic threat that it is suggested to be by the likes of Fogel, Layne, and others. Representations of current global affairs as being characterized by “major changes in the balance of power,” between a “rising China and a weakened America,” overestimate both China’s strength and America’s weakness.⁵⁴⁴ Apple Inc., an American company, conceptualizes, plans, innovates, and executes the world’s latest and greatest gadgets. The

⁵⁴⁰ G. John Ikenberry, “The Future of the Liberal World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June, 2011), 67; Michael Hirsh, “We’re No. 11!” *Newsweek*, August 12, 2010.

⁵⁴¹ Drezner, “The decline and fall of America’s supporters?”

⁵⁴² Brian Grow & Mark Hosenball, “Special report: In cyberspy vs. cyberspy, China has the edge,” *Reuters*, April 14, 2011; David Wise, “China’s spying on U.S.,” *CNN*, June 14, 2011; United States Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=64686>

⁵⁴³ Brooks & Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” 705.

⁵⁴⁴ Pape, “Empire Falls,” 27; Rachman, “Think Again: American Decline.”

best China can do at the moment is build them or sell them out of counterfeit Apple stores.⁵⁴⁵ This is hardly the profile of a nation posing a credible challenge to American hegemony.

The future is likely to look less like the past because the present balance of power in the international system is unlike anything seen before. China cannot resist the structure of the world order because the firmly established norms favor American primacy. Furthermore, China does not *want* to resist the structure, *or* American hegemony. Rather, as Ikenberry notes, it wishes “to gain more authority and leadership” within the system.⁵⁴⁶ If China’s economic power continues to rise, and its military power along with it, then it is likely that an adjustment to the system would be made to accommodate it. As Gilpin argued, “the passage of time makes peaceful coexistence among major competitors easier.”⁵⁴⁷ However, this is not a loss of American power but a reaffirmation of it.⁵⁴⁸

A strong China capable of helping share the burdens of global governance is something the United States not only welcomes, but seeks.⁵⁴⁹ The U.S. can learn to use the growing strengths of others to further American goals, which above all else, is global stability.⁵⁵⁰ The U.S. shares this goal with China. Stability allows for economic growth and prosperity, and China’s principle concern is maintaining its economic growth and national modernization. Furthermore, stability and economic growth provides the possibility for American renewal, fueling consumption for commercial goods that are often manufactured in Chinese factories, and ultimately, ensuring China a return on its investment in U.S. debt. And once again, the key to stability is American leadership, premised in part on responsible

⁵⁴⁵ “Fake Apple stores found in Kunming city, China,” *BBC News*, July 21, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-14236786>

⁵⁴⁶ Ikenberry, “The Future of the Liberal World Order,” 57; Jim Hoagland, “Managing America’s Superiority,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2002, Final Edition.

⁵⁴⁷ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 92.

⁵⁴⁸ Strange, “The future of the American Empire,” 355.

⁵⁴⁹ Obama, “Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation.”

⁵⁵⁰ Jim Hoagland, “The American Disease,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1988, Final Edition.

economic policies.⁵⁵¹ If the U.S. is seen as being unstable, either politically, militarily, or economically, it has a ripple effect of undermining confidence in its capacity to lead, and thus in the stability of the international system itself. More than any other major power, “the United States remains an object of hope.”⁵⁵² Accordingly, a failure to manage its liabilities could cost the U.S. its leadership position,⁵⁵³ and as former Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice said, “the funny thing about the United States is, when it does lead, nobody likes it and when it doesn't lead, everybody doesn't like it,” - including China.⁵⁵⁴

Conclusion: Back to the Future

“The debates about unipolar stability and American hegemony are effectively over,” wrote a triumphant Christopher Layne.⁵⁵⁵ Indeed, he is correct – however, the debate did not end in his favor. Section 1 has shown that American’s are prone to bouts of declinism, often owing more to perception than the actual state of the nation. Section 2 took a closer look at the most recent waves of declinism, demonstrating that they are more reflective of economic anxieties than they are legitimate decline. In every instance that the United States was said to be on the brink of decline, ready to be replaced by a looming challenger, the nation not only survived, but thrived. With each wave of declinism, the U.S. manages to fall from ever greater heights. The very fact that the United States could be challenged by an economically spry Japan or China represents “the triumph of the U.S. polity of basing U.S. security on nurturing and protecting free nations with creative capitalist economies.”⁵⁵⁶ John Winthrop gave America the goal of being the shining city upon a hill – a beacon for all to see and

⁵⁵¹ Stoga, “If America Won’t Lead,” 318.

⁵⁵² Scalapino, “Asia and the United States,” 114.

⁵⁵³ Rohaytn, “America’s Economic Dependence,” 65.

⁵⁵⁴ Condoleeza Rice, “HBO History Makers,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 3, 2010.

⁵⁵⁵ Layne, “Book Review,” 479.

⁵⁵⁶ Will, ““Tides in the Lives of Nations.””

emulate. The economic success of countries like Japan and China, using a proto-American template, is the realization of that goal.

As the ‘rest’ have ‘risen,’ the global landscape has changed. More than that, however, the perception of America’s position within that global landscape has changed. This is not representative of a loss of American power but rather the reflection of an international system increasingly characterized by a diffusion of power – diffused amongst state and non-state actors alike. The truth is, “U.S. supremacy was never as total, or as meaningful, as either its admirers or its enemies claimed.”⁵⁵⁷ However, as Tamara Wittes notes, “[w]hat has diminished over the past few years has not been U.S. power itself, but rather our perceptions of that power and what it can do.”⁵⁵⁸ At the turn of the century, Americans were celebrating a decade of growth and its position as the world’s ‘lonely superpower.’ Ten years after writing a book arguing against decline, Joseph Nye had to write a book cautioning against triumphalism.⁵⁵⁹ After 9/11, Americans were sold an image of the U.S. as an all powerful, untouchable force for positive change in the world. However, when that image failed to materialize as promised, leaving the nation tied down in two far away countries and footing a large bill, Americans – as they are wont to do – were seized with another wave of declinism. Then they were promised ‘hope, and ‘change,’ which has also yet to fully materialize. As Russia went to war with Georgia and then, sometime later, the Middle East began to come apart at the seams, there was, as David Ignatius put it, “a sense that something is torn in the national quilt, and nobody quite knows how to mend it.”⁵⁶⁰ It was the Carter-era ‘crisis of confidence’ redux.

⁵⁵⁷ Wittes, “American Hegemony.”

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, xi.

⁵⁶⁰ Ignatius, “Thankful for resilience.”

The inability to prevent these international events from unfolding has been perceived as evidence of a decline in American power.⁵⁶¹ Such ideas, however, do not reflect reality. As Charles Krauthammer points out, during America's supposed height of power in 1950, the nation fought a war against North Korea and China that last three years, took over 50,000 American lives, and ended in a stalemate. "Forty-one years later we engaged in a war with Iraq: it lasted six weeks, cost 196 American lives and ended in a rout."⁵⁶² Feeling a sense of 'powerlessness' amid the flurry of changes taking place throughout the world on a regular basis is not entirely unwarranted, however.

As Robert Gilpin pointed out in 1981, "increased vulnerability to external influences" is a cost of increasing market interdependence among national economies.⁵⁶³ The accomplishment of that increased market interdependence, as mentioned above, is the realization of an American goal, not the harbinger of its decline. Every nation is experiencing a similar 'loss' of control.⁵⁶⁴ With such changes comes new challenges, however "these are also challenges for other countries, most of whom still look to America for leadership in meeting them."⁵⁶⁵ Section 3 reinforced the centrality of American leadership to the global system and the enduring qualities of American power, even while acknowledging that other nations have an important role to play as well.

Michael Lind wrote that "the world of 2050 will – in all probability – look pretty much like that of today."⁵⁶⁶ If that is the case, then it can be expected that by 2050, the U.S.

⁵⁶¹ Jim Hoagland, "Not Quite Ready To Dump America," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2008, Regional Edition; Gerson, "Delusions of decline."

⁵⁶² Krauthammer, "Bless Our Pax Americana."

⁵⁶³ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 129.

⁵⁶⁴ Robert J. Samuelson, "Superpower Sweetpstakes," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1989, Final Edition; Samuelson, "Kiss No. 1 Goodbye, Folks.,"; Kagan, "Still No. 1."

⁵⁶⁵ Fullilove, "Reports of U.S. Decline Could Be Premature.,"; Edelman, "Understanding America's Contested Primacy."

⁵⁶⁶ Lind, "So Long, Chicken Little."

will have passed through approximately four more waves of declinism.⁵⁶⁷ And if, as Mark Gilbert suggested, the future is anything like the past, then the United States is headed for ever greater heights. Josef Joffe said it best: “Oh Lord, if I have to live in a declining country, please let it be America.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁷ Using the approximate 8 year cycle explained in Section 1.

⁵⁶⁸ House, “The Second Century.”

Works Cited

- Abelson, Donald E. "Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 63 – 94.
- Allen, Henry. "Red, White & Truly Blue; With Depression the Sigh of the Times, Gloom and Doom Are Sweeping Across America." *The Washington Post*, November 26, 1990, Final Edition.
- Antholis, William & Martin Indyk. "How we're doing as the world shifts." *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2011, Final Edition.
- Auslin, Michael. "Russia Fears China, Not Japan." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2011.
- Barboza, David. "Bridge Comes to San Francisco With a Made-in-China Label." *The New York Times* (online), June 25, 2011.
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/business/global/26bridge.html?_r=2
- Barnet, Richard J. *Real Security: Restoring American Power in a Dangerous Decade*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981.
- Barrett, Laurence I., Edwin Warner, and Johanna McGeary. "Nation: Dueling Over Defense." *Time Magazine* (online), Sept. 1, 1980. Accessed February 20, 2011.
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,922112,00.html>
- Bartels, Larry M. "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Buildup." *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 2 (June, 1991): 457 – 474.
- Baylis, John & Steve Smith. *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations* (3rd Edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Beattie, Alan. "The Global Order Fractures as American Power Declines." *Financial Times*, June 14, 2011.
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/710032ee-96ae-11e0-baca-00144feab49a.html#axzz1SWfDKns4>
- Beehner, Lionel & Nuno Monteiro. "In foreign policy circles, doom-n-gloom for sale." *USA Today* (online), November 29, 2010. Accessed March 3, 2011.
http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-11-30-column30_ST1_N.htm#
- Bell, David A. "Political Columnists Think America Is In Decline. Big Surprise.," *The New Republic* (online), October 7, 2010. Accessed March 9, 2011.
<http://www.tnr.com/blog/foreign-policy/78216/america-in-decline-thomas-friedman>
- Benac, Nancy. "Obama to world: West leadership role still strong." *Yahoo News* (online), May 25, 2011. Accessed June 7, 2011.
http://old.news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110525/ap_on_re_eu/eu_obama
- Bergsten, C. Fred. "The United States and the World Economy." in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives*, Charles W. Kegley Jr. & Eugene R. Wittkopf, Eds. New York: Random House, 1984.

- Bocquet, Greg. "Who Owns the U.S.?" *Yahoo Finance*, February 28, 2011. <http://finance.yahoo.com/banking-budgeting/article/112189/who-owns-the-us?mod=bb-debtmanagement>
- Bristow, Michael. "China acknowledges Three Gorges dam 'problems.'" *BBC News* (online), May 19, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13451528>
- British Broadcasting Corporation. "China aircraft carrier confirmed by general." *BBC News* (online), June 8, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13692558>
- "China inflation at 34-month high on rising food prices." *BBC News* (online), June 14, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13758784>
- "China 'will not use force' in South China Sea disputes." *BBC News* (online), June 14, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13759253>
- "Fake Apple stores found in Kunming city, China." *BBC News* (online), July 21, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-14236786>
- Brooks, Stephen G. and William C. Wohlforth. "American Primacy in Perspective." in *Classic Readings and Contemporary Debates in International Relations* (3rd Edition), Phil Williams, Donald M. Goldstein, Jay M. Shafritz, Eds. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew, and Brent Scowcroft. *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*, Moderated by David Ingatius. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
- Buchanan, Patrick J. "Now That Red Is Dead, Come Home, America; The New World Order Is Bunk' It's Time to Look Out for No. 1." *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1991, Final Edition.
- Bull, Alister, and Andy Sullivan. "White House, CBO Debt Forecasts Challenge Obama." *Reuters*, August 25, 2009. Accessed May 17, 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/08/25/us-obama-budget-idUSTRE57M0WV20090825>
- Burns, Robert. "China general says his military no match for US." *Yahoo News* (online), May 18, 2011. <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/top-chinese-general-says-countrys-military-no-match-193910181.html>
- "Gates sees improvements in US – China relationship." *Yahoo News* (online), June 3, 2011. http://old.news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110603/ap_on_re_as/as_gates_china
- Burns, Robert & Bradley Klapper. "Gates presses US allies to do more against Libya," *Yahoo News* (online) June 8, 2011. http://old.news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110608/ap_on_re_eu/eu_us_libya

- Bush, George H. W. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit." September 11, 1990. George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Accessed Online January 19, 2011.
http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2217&year=1990&month=9
- Bush, George W. "State of the Union Address." January 29, 2002.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29644#axzz1Sj179sif>
- *National Security Strategy 2002*.
<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>
- "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended: Remarks by the President from the USS Abraham Lincoln, At Sea Off the Coast of San Diego, California." May 1, 2003.
<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>
- *National Security Strategy 2006*.
<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>
- Butler, Desmond. "US planning to scale back troop cuts in Europe." *Associated Press*, April 8, 2011.
- Calleo, David P. *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987.
- Cannon, Lou. "President Ends Tour, Sees Payoff; McFarlane Cites Reverse in Image of U.S. Decline." *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1983, Final Edition.
- Carter, Jimmy. "Crisis of Confidence." July 15, 1979. Accessed February 17, 2011.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/carter-crisis/>
- Caryl, Christian. "Don't Even Think About It." *Foreign Policy* (online), July 13, 2011.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/13/dont_even_think_about_it
- Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Fact Book*.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>
- Clinton, William J. "Inaugural Address." January 20, 1993.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46366#axzz1SbTqNhcy>
- *National Security Strategy 1996*.
<http://www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm>
- Congressional Budget Office. *Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2010 to 2020*, January 2010.
- Cronin, Patrick M. "Ferguson vs. Kissinger on the future of China, and what it means for the rest of us." *Foreign Policy* (online), May 17, 2011.
http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/17/ferguson_vs_kissinger_on_the_future_of_china_and_what_it_means_for_the_rest_of_us

- Daigle, Katy. "Palin warns of China's rise in visit to India." *Yahoo News* (online), March 19, 2011. Link no longer active.
- Dionne Jr., E. J. "Haunted by decline." *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2010, Regional Edition.
- Drezner, Daniel W. "The decline and fall of America's supporters?" *Foreign Policy* (online), May 17, 2010. Accessed March 23, 2011.
http://drezner.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/05/17/a_leader_needs_supporters
- "The declinism industry in America." *Foreign Policy* (online), October 7, 2010. Accessed March 23, 2011.
http://drezner.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/07/the_declinism_industry_in_america
- "Wait, did you saying wining AND dining??!" *Foreign Policy* (online), March 4, 2011.
http://drezner.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/04/wait_did_you_say_wining_and_dining
- Durfee, Don. "China urges U.S. to stay out of sea dispute." *Reuters*, June 22, 2011.
- Econstats. www.econstats.com
<http://www.econstats.com/weo/CUSA.htm>
<http://www.econstats.com/weo/CJPN.htm>
<http://www.econstats.com/weo/CCHN.htm>
http://www.econstats.com/nipa/nipa_1_1_1y.htm
- Edelman, Eric. *Understanding America's Contested Primacy*. Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Belfer Center, Harvard University, 2010.
- Fallows, James. "How America Can Rise Again." *The Atlantic* (online), January/February 2010. Accessed March 3, 2011.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/01/how-america-can-rise-again/7839/>
- Farnsworth, Clyde H. "Soviet Moon Trip Called Doubtful." *The New York Times*, July 17, 1963.
- Ferguson, Niall. *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Finance Sympatico.ca. "U.S. reaches debt ceiling." *Finance Sympatico.ca* May 16, 2011.
http://finance.sympatico.ca/home/us_reaches_debt_ceiling/3c81e3a4
- Finney, John W. "Congress has Second Thoughts on Space Funds." *The New York Times*, April 7, 1963.
- Fogel, Robert. "\$123,000,000,000,000." *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2010: 70 – 75.
- Fry, Earl. H. *Lament for America: Decline of the Superpower, Plan for Renewal*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Fullilove, Michael. "Reports of U.S. Decline Could Be Premature." *Brookings Institute*, January 7, 2009. Accessed March 23, 2011.
http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0106_obama_fullilove.aspx

- Gerson, Michael. "Delusions of Decline." *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2011, Regional Edition.
- Getler, Michael. "Decline and Resurgence: In Japan and Germany, Taking Leave of the American Century." *The Washington Post*, December 15, 1991, Final Edition.
- Gilbert, Mark. "Rereading Paul Kennedy's Rise and Decline of the Great Powers." *BC Journal* (online) vol. 13, December 29, 2010. Accessed May 12, 2011. <http://bcjournal.org/volume-13/rereading-paul-kennedys-rise-and-decline-of-the-great-powers.html>
- Gilpin, Robert. *War and Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- *The Political Economy of International Relations*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Goodwin, Liz. "Providence teachers in speed date-like interview process." *Yahoo News* (online), June 13, 2011. <http://beta.news.yahoo.com/blogs/lookout/providence-teachers-speed-date-interview-process-151244172.html>
- Grow, Brian & Mark Hosenball. "Special report: In cyberspy vs. cyberspy, China has the edge." *Reuters*, April 14, 2011.
- Haas, Richard N. "This Isn't Called the [Blank] Era for Nothing." *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2006, Final Edition.
- Hirsh, Michael. "We're No. 11!" *Newsweek* (online), August 12, 2010. Accessed March 16, 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/08/12/how-to-understand-american-decline.html>
- Hoagland, Jim. "The American Disease." *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1988, Final Edition.
- "Managing America's Superiority." *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2002, Final Edition.
- "Not Quite Ready To Dump America." *The Washington Post*, October 12, 2008, Regional Edition.
- Holslag, Jonathan. "China's Vulnerability Trap." *Survival* 53, no. 2 (April/May, 2011): 77 – 88.
- House, Karen Elliot. "The Second Century." *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 1989, Eastern Edition.
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?" *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 2 (Winter, 1988): 76 – 96.
- "The Lonely Superpower." in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (5th Edition). G. John Ikenberry Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.
- Hutton, Will. *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21st Century*. London: Abacus, 2008.

- Ignatius, David. "Thankful for resilience." *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2010, Regional Edition.
- "Some foreign policy spine." *The Washington Post*, December 26, 2010, Regional Edition.
- Ikenberry, G. John, Editor. *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- *Liberal Order & Imperial Ambition*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- "The Future of the Liberal World Order." *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June, 2011): 56 – 68.
- India Today. "US Failed where India Got Things Right: Ferguson." *India Today* (online), March 19, 2011. <http://conclave.intoday.in/story/american-decline-myth-and-reality/3128/37.html>
- Isidore, Chris. "It's Official: Recession Since Dec. '07." *CNN* (online), CNNMoney.com Accessed February 16, 2011. <http://money.cnn.com/2008/12/01/news/economy/recession/index.htm?postversion=2008120112>
- Jendrysik, Mark Stephen. *Modern Jeremiahs: Contemporary Visions of American Decline*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2008.
- Johnson, Lyndon Baines. "Evaluation of Space Program." Memorandum for the President, April 28, 1961. NASA Historical Reference Collection, NASA Headquarters, Washington D.C.
- Joshi, Manoj. "U.S. unlikely to be a successful imperial power: Niall Ferguson." *India Today* (online), March 20, 2011. Accessed March 23, 2011. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/story/india-today-conclave-2011-us-unlikely-to-be-a-successful-imperial-power-niall-ferguson/1/132931.html>
- Kagan, Robert. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- "Still No. 1." *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2008. Regional Edition.
- Karl, Jonathan, and Gregory Simmons. "Chinese Official Lectures Senators: Get Your Fiscal House in Order." *ABC News*, May 16, 2011. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/debt-ceiling-sen-michael-bennet-us-fiscal-crisis/story?id=13597776>
- Kennedy, John F. "Nixon/Kennedy 2nd debate." Accessed January 10, 2011. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/JFK-Speeches/Second-Televised-Presidential-Debate.aspx>
- Memorandum for Vice President, 20 April 1961. Presidential Files, John. F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Mass.
- "Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs." May 25th, 1961. Presidential Files, John. F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Mass.

-- Transcript of Presidential Meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House, November 21, 1962.

Kennedy, Paul. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

-- *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Random House, 1993.

-- Kennedy and Paul Solman. "Is the US the Latest World Power in Decline?" *PBS Newshour* (online), March 2, 2010. Accessed June 10, 2011.
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/jan-june10/kennedy_03-02.html

Kissinger, Henry. *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

-- "Avoiding a U.S. – China Cold War." *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2011.

-- "The China Challenge." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2011.

Kotkin, Joel. "Making Sashimi of the Experts' Predictions; Why Japan Didn't Turn Out to Be the World Power Everyone Feared." *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1997, Final Edition.

Krauthammer, Charles. "...Is History History?" *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1989, Final Edition.

-- "Misplaced Malaise." *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1990. Final Edition.

-- "The Unipolar Moment; Enjoy it now. It won't last long." *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1990, Final Edition.

-- "We're Not Spending Too Much On Defense." *The Washington Post*, Sept. 28, 1990, Final Edition.

-- "Bless Our Pax Americana." *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1991, Final Edition.

-- "America's Case of the Sulks; In the face of great success, the country is in a petulant mood." *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1992, Final Edition.

-- "Not for Moi, Thanks." *The Washington Post*, November 26, 1999, Final Edition.

-- "The Unipolar Moment Revisited." in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays* (5th Edition), G. John Ikenberry Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.

-- "The Old Obama in New Clothing." *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2011, Regional Edition.

Kupchan, Charles. "Hollow Hegemony or Stable Multipolarity?" in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, G. John Ikenberry Ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

- Kurtzman, Joel. *The Decline and Crash of the American Economy*. New York: Random House, 1988.
- Layne, Christopher. "Book Review." *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (June, 2011): 477-479.
- Lee, John. "Hu's Real Agenda." *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2011.
- Li, Cheng. "China's Team of Rivals." *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2009: 88 – 93.
- Lind, Michael. "So Long, Chicken Little." *Foreign Policy* (online), March/April 2011. Accessed May 22, 2011.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/22/so_long_chicken_little?page=full&sms_ss=email&at_xt=4da38c633b156779%2C0
- Maley, Karen. "China's thinning economic grip." *Business Spectator* (online), May 24, 2011.
<http://www.businessspectator.com.au/bs.nsf/Article/China-economy-markets-inflation-interest-rates-pd20110524-H5TNQ?opendocument&src=rss>
- Marcus, Jonathan. "China extending military reach," *BBC News*, June 14, 2011.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13761711>
- McCoy, Alfred W. "The Decline and Fall of the American Empire." *CBS News* (online), December 6, 2010. Accessed February 3, 2011.
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/12/05/opinion/main7121029.shtml>
- McDougall, Walter A. *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1985.
- Mead, Walter Russell. "On the Road to Ruin." in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives* (3rd Edition), Charles W. Kegley Jr. & Eugene R. Wittkopf, Eds. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992.
- "The Carter Syndrome." *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2010: 58 – 64.
- Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001.
- Mohan, C. Raja. "India's Strategic Future," *Foreign Policy* (online), November 4, 2010. Accessed February 9, 2011.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/04/indias_strategic_future
- Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. "Debunking the Myth of Decline." *The New York Times*, June 19, 1988, Late City Final Edition.
- National Intelligence Council. *Mapping the Global Future 2020*, December 2004.
- *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, November 2008.
- Newton-Small, Jay. "Obama vs. Cantor: Tempers Flare as Debt Ceiling Negotiations Take a Dramatic Turn." *Time Magazine* (online), July 14, 2011.
<http://swampland.time.com/2011/07/14/obama-vs-cantor-tempers-flare-as-debt-ceiling-negotiations-take-a-dramatic-turn/?xid=rss-fullnation-yahoo>

- Nye Jr., Joseph S. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990.
- "American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis." *The Washington Quarterly* (October 2010): 143 – 153.
- "The Misleading Metaphor of Decline." *The Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2011.
- "Zakaria's World." *Foreign Policy* (online), March 8, 2011. Accessed March 23, 2011. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/08/zakaria_s_world
- Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation." Moscow, Russia, July 7, 2009. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-new-economic-school-graduation>
- *National Security Strategy 2010*. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf
- "State of the Union Address." January 25, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address>
- Palmer, Jay, Gisela Bolte, Lawrence Malkin, and Frederick Ungeheuer. "The Debt – Bomb Threat." *Time Magazine* (online), January 10, 1983. Accessed April 16, 2011. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,923274,00.html>
- Pape, Robert A. "Empire Falls." *First Draft of History* (January/February 2009): 21 – 34.
- "Declinism Revisited," *The National Interest* (online), January 28, 2009. Accessed March 4, 2011. <http://nationalinterest.org/article/declinism-revisited-2988>
- Pearlstein, Steven. "The Trials of Measuring and Managing in a Global Economy." *The Washington Post* (online), June 11, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/the-trials-of-measuring-and-managing-in-a-global-economy/2011/06/06/AGZxdbQH_story.html
- Pei, Minxin. "Think Again: Asia's Rise." *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2009: 32 – 36.
- Pennington, Matthew. "China challenges US predominance in Asia-Pacific." *Associated Press*, March 7, 2011.
- President's Science Advisory Committee. "Report of the Ad Hoc Panel on Man-in-Space." December 16, 1960. NASA Historical Reference Collection, History Office, NASA Headquarters, Washington D.C.
- Prestowitz, Clyde. "Let China have it." *Foreign Policy* (online), May 25, 2011. http://prestowitz.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/25/let_china_have_it?wpisrc=obinsite
- "New Blowing Wind: American Decline Becomes New Conventional Wisdom," *Foreign Policy* (online), June 15, 2011. http://prestowitz.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/15/new_wind_blowing_american_decline_becomes_the_new_conventional_wisdom

- Rachman, Gideon. "Think Again: American Decline." *Foreign Policy* (online) January/February 2011. Accessed March 23, 2011.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/02/think_again_american_decline
- Reagan, Ronald. "Inaugural Address." January 20, 1981. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Library. Accessed February 16, 2011.
http://www.reaganfoundation.org/pdf/Inaugural_Address_012081.pdf
- "Address to the Nation on the Economy." February 5, 1981. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Library. Accessed February 16, 2011.
http://www.reaganfoundation.org/pdf/Address_Nation_the_Economy_020581.pdf
- "Remarks at Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida." March 8, 1983. Accessed February 16, 2011.
http://www.reaganfoundation.org/pdf/Remarks_Annual_Convention_National_Association_Evangelicals_030883.pdf
- Rice, Condoleezza. "HBO History Makers." *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 3, 2010. Accessed April 20, 2011.
<http://www.cfr.org/iran/hbo-history-makers-series-condoleezza-rice/p23556>
- Roach, Stephen S. "Ten Reasons Why China is Different." *Project Syndicate* (online), May 27, 2011. <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/roach5/English>
- Robertson, Benjamin. "China's Universities Struggle with Academic Plagiarism." *VOANews.Com*, June 10, 2006. Accessed May 23, 2011.
<http://www.voanews.com/tibetan-english/news/a-28-2006-06-10-voa5-90290347.html>
- Rogin, Josh. "Bob Gates' fuzzy math on defense budgets." *Foreign Policy* (online), January 7, 2011. Accessed May 19, 2011.
http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/07/bob_gates_fuzzy_math_on_defense_budgets
- Rogow, Geoffrey. "Goldman Sachs cuts China, Asia growth forecasts." *The Wall Street Journal, MarketWatch*, May 24, 2011.
<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/goldman-sachs-cuts-china-asia-growth-forecasts-2011-05-24>
- Rohatyn, Felix. "America's Economic Dependence." *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 1 (America and the World 1988/1989): 53 – 65.
- Rourke, John T., Editor. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Politics* (2nd Edition). Connecticut: The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc, 1989.
- Rucker, Philip, and Dan Balz. "GOP Speakers hit the notes at conservative forum." *The Washington Post* (online), February 20, 2010. Accessed June 4, 2011.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/19/AR2010021902191.html>
- Rumsfeld, Donald. Official Twitter Account. <http://twitter.com/#!/RumsfeldOffice>
- Samuelson, Robert. "Kiss No. 1 Goodbye, Folks." *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1988.
- "Superpower Sweetstakes." *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1989, Final Edition.

- Scalapino, Robert. "Asia and the United States: The Challenges Ahead." *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 1 (America and the World, 1989/1990): 89 – 115.
- Sens, Allen & Peter Stoett. *Global Politics: Origins, Currents, Directions* (3rd Edition). Toronto: Thompson-Nelson, 2005.
- Shapiro, Margaret, and Fred Hiatt. "Confident Japanese See United States in Serious Decline." *The Washington Post*, July 3, 1988, Final Edition.
- Sheldon II, Charles D. *Review of the Soviet Space Program: With Comparative United States Data*. Washington, D.C. Mc-Graw-Hill Inc., 1968.
- Shuster, Simon. "Russia Wants a Finger on Europe's Nuclear Shield." *Yahoo News* (online), May 25, 2011. Link no longer active.
- Simmins, Charles. "Navy Sailing in Troubled Waters." *Yahoo News* (online), June 7, 2011. http://old.news.yahoo.com/s/ac/20110607/us_ac/8601003_navy_sailing_in_troubled_waters
- Singer, P.W. *Wired For War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*. New York: Penguin Books, 2009.
- Spector, Ronald H. "America's Staying Power." *The Washington Post*, April 29, 1990, Final Edition.
- Strange, Susan. "The future of the American Empire." in *Perspectives on World Politics* (3rd Edition), Richard Little & Michael Smith, Eds. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Summers, Chris. "Aircraft carrier: A mind-boggling building job." *BBC News* (online), April 7, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12308437>
- Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). www.sipri.org
http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/milex_gdp
- Task, Aaron. "'Made in America': The Comeback." *Yahoo Finance* (online), May 12, 2011. <http://finance.yahoo.com/blogs/daily-ticker/made-america-comeback-125318772.html>
- Telegraph, The. "China exports slow as global demand weakens." *The Telegraph* (online), June 10, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/8567341/China-exports-slow-as-global-demand-weakens.html>
- China and Vietnam in escalating dispute in South China," *The Telegraph* (online), June 10, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8567652/China-and-Vietnam-in-escalating-dispute-in-South-China.html>
- Thzurow, Lester. "America, Europe, and Japan: A Time to Dismantle the World Economy." in *The Global Agenda: Issues and Perspectives* (2nd Edition), Charles W. Kegley Jr. & Eugene R. Wittkopf, Eds. New York: Random House, 1988.
- Time Magazine. "American Notes: Of the U.S. and Rome." *Time Magazine* (online), July 19, 1971. Accessed March 18, 2011. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,905344,00.html#ixzz1Rq9p1bbj>

- Tiryakian, Edward A. "American Religious Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 527: Religion in the Nineties (May 1993): 40 – 54.
- Tobey, William. "Milton Friedman was Right, Thomas Friedman is Not." *Foreign Policy* (online), December 16, 2010. Accessed June 16, 2011.
http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/12/16/milton_friedman_was_right_thomas_friedman_is_not?wpisrc=obnetwork
- U.S. Department of Defense. "Global War on Terrorism – Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Report by Month," March 19, 2003 – May 2, 2011. Accessed March 12, 2011.
<http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/oif-total-by-month.pdf>
- "DOD Releases First Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace."
<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=64686>
- U.S. Navy. <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/ships/carriers/cv-list.asp>
- USA Today. "Jimmy Carter: Iran hostage rescue should have worked." *USA Today* (online). Accessed January 17, 2011.
http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-09-17-iran-hostages-jimmy-carter_N.htm
- Walt, Stephen M. "Is the unipolar era over?" *Foreign Policy* (online), January 22, 2009. Accessed February 16, 2011. http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/01/22/is_the_unipolar_era_over
- "Indispensable or insolvent?" *Foreign Policy* (online), June 21, 2010. Accessed February 16, 2011. http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/06/21/indispensable_or_insolvent
- Washington Post, The. "The Aftermath." May 2, 1992.
- Weisman, Steven R. "Reagan Takes Oath As 40th President; Promises An 'Era Of National Renewal'." *The New York Times* (online) January 21, 1981. Accessed January 17, 2011.
<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0120.html#article>
- White House, The. Official Site. www.whitehouse.gov
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals>
- Wildavsky, Ben. "Think Again: Education." *Foreign Policy* (online), March/April 2011. Accessed May 22, 2011. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/22/think_again_education
- Will, George F. "Tides in the Lives of Nations." *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1988, Final Edition.
- Winthrop, John. *A Model of Christian Charity*. University of Western Ontario Course Pack No. F-0139, Fall 2005.
- Wise, David. "China's spying on U.S." *CNN*, June 14, 2011.
<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/14/chinas-spying-on-u-s/?iref=obinsite>

Wittes, Tamara Cofman. "American Hegemony: Myth and Reality." *Brookings Institute*, March 22, 2007.

Wolf Jr., Charles. "The Facts about American Decline." *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2011.

Yahoo News. "China launches ban on smoking in public venues." *Yahoo News* (online), April 30, 2011. <http://health.yahoo.net/news/s/afp/healthchinatobaccosmokingban>

-- "China concerned at Korean tensions: US envoy." *Yahoo News* (online), June 10, 2011.
Link no longer active.

Zakaria, Fareed. "The Challenges of American Hegemony: Then and Now." *International Journal* 54, no. 1 (Winter, 1998/1999): 9 – 27.

-- *The Post-American World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

-- "Are America's Best Days Behind Us?" *Time Magazine* (online), March 3, 2011. Accessed online March 23, 2011.
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2056610,00.html>

-- "America vs. China: Who does economic policy better?" *CNN* (online), May 20, 2011.
Accessed June 1, 2011.
<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/20/america-vs-china-who-does-economic-policy-better/>

-- "The Future of U.S. Innovation: Can America Keep Pace?" *Time Magazine* (online), June 5, 2011. Accessed June 10, 2011.
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2075226-2,00.html>