Summary

OF THE

Building a Sustainable International Order Project
An Imperiled International Order

As the Second World War drew to a close, U.S. officials discussed ways of preventing such conflicts in the future. They reviewed the war’s leading causes: the economic chaos of the Great Depression; the failure to confront aggressive revisionist states; and the rise of a hostile and paranoid nationalism within several major powers. They concluded that the United States should work to shape the postwar settlement, and the character of international politics going forward, in more structured, collaborative and rule-bound ways. And they conceived of a number of specific organizations—notably the United Nations (UN); what became the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); and, eventually, the network of U.S. alliances—to promote collective problem-solving; avert protectionist impulses; and stabilize the world economy, whose health would represent the bedrock of any stable arrangement.

The resulting institutions, processes, habits, rules, and norms became what we now know as the postwar international order. It was founded on both realist and normative grounds: None of its founders were under any illusions about the relative importance of the great powers, and the UN Security Council reflected the sort of great-power leadership that has been part of every notable modern international order. When the hoped-for global consensus gave way to a bipolar Cold War, moreover, these institutions provided the rallying point against Soviet coercion and aggression. But the U.S. architects of the order also held idealistic assumptions about the future of world politics—in particular, the spread of liberal values, both economic and political. In the process, they hoped to establish a foundation for collective problem-solving while locking in U.S. involvement in world politics in a way that would contribute to peace.

The resulting multilateral sensibility, as well as the concrete institutions, norms, rules, and processes of the order, have underwritten an incomplete but still meaningful form of international community. Even the realist scholar and practitioner Henry Kissinger has portrayed the postwar rise of an “inexorably expanding cooperative order of states observing common rules and norms, embracing common economic systems, forsaking territorial conquest, respecting national sovereignty, and adopting participatory and democratic systems of governance.”

U.S. national security strategies since the 1950s have reflected these same themes and placed a shared order at the top of U.S. global priorities. As long ago as 1953, and in a document as unsentimental and hawkish as National Security Council (NSC) Paper 68—which laid out an aggressive global application of the containment doctrine—there was a clear recognition of the value of a shared order. “Even if there were no Soviet Union,” it argued, the United States would still “face the great problem of the free society . . . of reconciling order, security, the need for participation, with the requirement of freedom. We would face the fact that in a shrinking world the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable.”

---

There are limits on the power of any multilateral order: International institutions and norms cannot decisively shape the international system or deter aggressive states on their own.

The question today is whether this case for the strategic value of a shared order remains valid, and whether such a vision of a shared order can or should continue playing a leading role in U.S. strategy. A RAND Corporation research team, assisted by scholars and policymakers from around the country and the world, undertook a two-year project, sponsored by the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, to examine the issue in depth. The project was inspired by a concern that the post-1945 order has come under unprecedented strain from the ambitions of increasingly revisionist powers, challenges to the underlying neoliberal ideology of the order, and more.

The resulting project began with an assessment of the character of international order and the elements and nature of the postwar version in particular. The team examined the historical context for international orders, the status and health of the current order, the relationship between the postwar order and U.S. grand strategy, possible alternative constructs for order over the coming decades, and the specific approach to order taken by Russia and China.

This essay reflects both a summation of these analyses and a restatement and collation of key lessons that flow from those analyses. On their own, international institutions and norms cannot decisively shape the international system, nor can they deter aggressive states. Nonetheless, the overall study concluded that the postwar order has boosted the effectiveness of other instruments of U.S. statecraft, such as diplomacy and military strength, and helped to advance specific U.S. interests in identifiable and sometimes measurable ways. In short, a strong international order is strongly beneficial for the United States. Our research also suggests that the seven-decade rise of a shared order has had identifiable socialization effects, and that incomplete but important hints of a lasting international community have emerged among the order’s leading member states. This is partly in evidence today; nations around the world show staunch support for the concept of a rule-based order as the best international structure through which to pursue their individual national interests. One implication, which we discuss later, is that if international politics is indeed headed for an era of intensified competition, the U.S. role as architect and leader of a multilateral order is a profound competitive advantage.

Yet those conclusions must be counterbalanced by another: The U.S. predominance so characteristic of the postwar order must give way to a more truly multilateral order, one that takes seriously the sometimes-differing perspectives of other major powers. We do not envision agreeing to every one of Beijing’s interpretations of rules or ignoring Russian efforts to undermine key institutions;
a more multilateral and shared order would simply be one in which decisionmaking in leading institutions is more evenly shared, new institutions reflecting the voice of rising powers can join established institutions to shape the order, urgent challenges are handled through multilateral processes where many states have a voice, and use of force to advance liberal values is predicated on truly international endorsement. Revisionist pressure against the order today, we find, is not opposed to the idea of multilateral rules and institutions per se as much as it is opposed to U.S. hegemony over key aspects of the international order. Our research on the perspectives of other leading nations suggests that, if the United States clings too tightly to a particular vision of specific norms, it is likely to accelerate the order’s decay.

The study reaffirmed the idea that, apart from the United States, one country—China—will have a disproportionate effect on the fate of a shared order. Its rapidly growing power and influence mean that any order will have difficulty surviving without Beijing’s supportive engagement. The picture of China’s posture is mixed: Our study of its attitude and behavior toward the postwar order revealed many areas of progress, but any hopes that it would simply step into U.S.-led institutions and play by their rules have not been borne out. China’s determination to extend its influence beyond its borders and predatory trade practices imply that it might not be willing to respect the rules and norms of the order over time. Both history and theory argue that such a risk enhances, rather than undermines, the relevance of a multilateral, rule-based order: It lays out the standards we expect countries like China to uphold, and it offers the most powerful tool available to rally multilateral pressure for shaping China’s behavior.

Defining the Order

This project initially conceived of international order as the body of rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among the key players in the international environment. We refer to this as the “institutional order,” and Figure 1 outlines its major components.

While there is a tendency to equate the postwar order with a list of its most significant institutions, it is more than the sum of these parts. The order also embodies and promotes two other factors, reflected in Figure 2. The first is the habit and practice of multilateralism. It reflects a growing recognition that the prospects of states and peoples are interlinked, that sustainable prosperity can only be built in concert, and that action to promote national interests is much more effective if coordinated among many countries. The habit of multilateralism remains radically incomplete, and shapes only a portion of national choices and policies. But the impulse toward shared problem-solving is now a significant feature of the international system, and in its current guise it is inextricably bound up with the postwar order.

Second, and more importantly, our research suggests that the institutional and multilateral aspects of the postwar order rely upon a common foundation: an informal but strongly interlinked “guiding coalition” of states at the heart of the order that recognize the value of postwar order and behave in largely order-promoting ways. This coalition is not expressed in any single, discrete organization, but its members share many interests and preferences and it has been formalized and regulated by the institutions and rules of the postwar order. Many members view themselves as
part of a *de facto* community. The resulting combination—a critical mass of like-minded states that form the center of gravity in international politics; a broader global community—is a precondition for the success and sustainability of the institutional order.

The resulting order represents the aggregation of a number of important suborders, each with its own rules, institutions, norms, and levels of adherence. These include the international trade order, the financial and monetary order, the order built around liberal values and human rights, and the security order. States express starkly different attitudes and behaviors depending on the suborder they are dealing with, and these complexities must be kept in mind when conceiving of the larger development we refer to as the postwar order.

---

**Figure 1. Components of the Postwar International Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASELINE GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS</th>
<th>SECURITY ISSUES AND NORMS</th>
<th>INSTITUTIONS DEVOTED TO LIBERAL VALUES AND COLLECTIVE GOODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ The United Nations system</td>
<td>▪ Fundamental security norm of nonaggression</td>
<td>▪ The postwar legal and normative framework, including conventions and treaties, in the area of human rights (International Criminal Court, European Court of Justice, Interpol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Semiformal global associations (G-7/8, G-20, G-77, BRICS, etc.)</td>
<td>▪ U.S. treaty alliances</td>
<td>▪ The postwar legal and normative framework on the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The norm (legal and institutional principle) of territorial sovereignty</td>
<td>▪ U.S. security partnerships</td>
<td>▪ Organizations for coordinating policy and providing services in the area of health and welfare (WHO, UN Program on HIV/AIDS, WFP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ International law of armed conflict and related legal standards and norms</td>
<td>▪ Arms control and nonproliferation treaties and organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Regional security institutions (EU, Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, African Union)</td>
<td>▪ International law of armed conflict and related legal standards and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Arms control and nonproliferation treaties and organizations</td>
<td>▪ Multilateral and bilateral treaties of pacific settlement, transparency and confidence-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Multilateral and bilateral treaties of pacific settlement, transparency and confidence-building</td>
<td>▪ Other intergovernmental and informal IOs dedicated to transparency, security problems, arms reduction, and peacebuilding (Conference on Disarmament, Missile Technology Control Regime, OSCE, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Proliferation Security Initiative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Other intergovernmental and informal IOs dedicated to transparency, security problems, arms reduction, and peacebuilding</td>
<td>▪ Other intergovernmental and informal IOs dedicated to transparency, security problems, arms reduction, and peacebuilding (Conference on Disarmament, Missile Technology Control Regime, OSCE, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Proliferation Security Initiative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ IMF</td>
<td>▪ Other intergovernmental and informal IOs dedicated to transparency, security problems, arms reduction, and peacebuilding (Conference on Disarmament, Missile Technology Control Regime, OSCE, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Proliferation Security Initiative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ GATT/WTO trade treaties and legal and regulatory systems and dispute resolution mechanisms</td>
<td>▪ International law governing intellectual property and patents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Regional trade institutions (NAFTA, EU, APEC, Mercosur)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ IMFS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Global and regional development banks and programs (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN Development Program, OECD, UN Economic Commissions for various regions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ BIS and associated central bank monetary coordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ International law governing intellectual property and patents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS</td>
<td>▪ IMF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Fundamental neoliberal economic norm of liberalizing systems and free trade</td>
<td>▪ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; WFP = World Food Programme; WHO = World Health Organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** ASEAN = Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; BIS = Bank for International Settlements; BRICS = Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa; IO=International organizations; G-7/8 = Group of 7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom [UK], the United States and formerly Russia); G-20 = Group of 20 (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the United States, and the European Union); G-77 = Group of 77 (a UN coalition of developing nations now numbering 134); GATT/WTO = General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization; NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement; OSC = Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; WFP = World Food Programme; WHO = World Health Organization.
Figure 2. Conceiving “International Order”

**INSTITUTIONAL ORDER**

UN system, GATT/WTO, IMF, World Bank, G-7, G-20, EU, ASEAN, and dozens more that create architecture of forums, rules, processes

**THE GUIDING COALITION**

A group of 45 states most tightly integrated into the shared economic, political, and institutional elements of the postwar order, and engaging in broadly order-producing behavior (in trade, diplomacy, and military affairs).

**SOCIALIZED NORMS, HABITS, AND PROCEDURES OF MULTILATERALISM**

Expectation, habit, and perceived requirement for joint resolution of shared issues, from climate to terror

---

**THE GUIDING COALITION** – first tier: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, and United States.

**Second tier**, less integrated but still deeply engaged in order: Algeria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Egypt, Estonia, Israel, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco, Nigeria, Qatar, Taiwan, Ukraine.

---

aMeasured across nine indexes of engagement, including exports/imports, level of trade integration, level of globalization, institutional participation, and foreign aid amounts.

bThese countries collectively represent roughly 73% of global GDP and 71% of global defense expenditure.
Major Findings of the Study

The study’s five major research reports, three smaller reports or workshop proceedings, and multiple essays generated a number of overarching insights about the character and condition of the postwar international order.

The order is under unprecedented strain—but retains areas of persistent strength.

This project stemmed from the concern that the postwar order was under significant pressure. Figure 3 summarizes the health of the order based on a number of leading indicators surveyed for this study. Our research confirmed that the postwar order is indeed facing strong headwinds.

Other great powers, most notably China and Russia, are openly challenging the pattern of U.S. predominance. At the same time, long-term economic stagnation and globalization’s persistent assault on national cultures have sparked intense populist and nationalist reactions against the order’s basic neoliberal economic model. The essential bargain of the order was always built on collective self-interest. If key states and populaces come to doubt that the habits, norms, and institutions of the order offer strategic and, especially, economic value, it is likely to collapse.

An important finding of the study, in fact, is that the most significant overarching threat to the postwar order comes not from direct challenges by states but from rising grievances against the order’s underlying socioeconomic consensus. Historical cases suggest that orders must rest upon some normative and teleological foundation, a shared vision among the societies and governments of a critical mass of leading powers. If that fades, there is no basis for a multilateral order.

But the study also suggests, as also reflected in Figure 3, that the order retains powerful elements of stability. Until recently, measurable indicators of the rules-based order remained broadly stable in such areas as trade, institutional participation, and conflict. In the categories we assessed, we did not see any notable declines until the last several years: Trend lines remained relatively positive (apart from the financial crisis in 2008) through about 2010, when trends in trade integration, democratic governance, and conflict began to show backsliding.

In geopolitical terms, what we are seeing is not yet an outright revisionist rebellion against the order. Major powers are competing for status, influence, and economic primacy. But direct military competition on irresolvable interests remains very limited. It is notable that both China and Russia have been pursuing strategies of limited coercion designed to avoid a direct clash with the norms of the order. These major powers (and others) are pushing back on U.S. domination of rule-setting and enforcement. That can lead to fragmentation—but is also a natural concomitant to a more multipolar system.

In particular, we should not underestimate the importance of the core coalition supporting the order. These states constitute a stabilizing center of gravity in world politics. The tightly interlinked global economy that they share exercises an intense gravitational pull on all states concerned about prosperity and constrains the degree of their hostile acts. So far, most remain committed to a strong multilateral order—as evident in the numerous efforts to sustain key elements of that order in recent months, such as the Paris
A review of 19 separate indicators of trends and measurements associated with the postwar order confirms the view that it is under unprecedented threat—but also turns up surprising areas of resilience and does not paint a picture of generalized collapse.

Order indicates the importance of each area to the stability of the order.

1 **TRADE** — WORSENING/HIGH RISK
Integration drops in 2008–2009, recovers, then slows or reverses again; collapse of new regional trade accords; populist movements.

2 **CONFLICT** — WORSENING/MODERATE RISK
Number of high-fatality conflicts initiated rises from 4 in 2006 to 11–12 in 2014–2015; gray zone aggression on the rise.

3 **ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP** — STABLE/IMPROVING
U.S. ties with Japan and Korea stronger in face of North Korea challenge; NATO responding to Russia challenge.

4 **OFFICIAL SIGNALING** — STABLE/GROWING RISK
Many countries continue to endorse multilateral solutions; China signals support for globalization; essential U.S. role as nexus of official support for order in question.

5 **DEMOCRACY** — WORSENING/MODERATE RISK
Backsliding in global democratic ratings and emergence of specific illiberal regimes; ebbing popular support for democratic principles.

6 **PUBLIC ATTITUDES** — STABLE
More Americans think UN is doing a good job in 2017 than in 2008; trade opinion indicators stable; strong support for NATO; EU attitudes recovering.

7 **INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS** — STABLE
Membership remains steady; functioning of institutions persists; concern for future of regional institutions (EU, NAFTA).

8 **FOREIGN AID/PEACEKEEPING** — IMPROVING
Contributions of emerging powers growing; global coordination deepening.

**Challenges to the Order**

- **IDEOLOGY**
  - Resistance to Western-led globalization
  - Demand for multipolarity
  - Substantial dissatisfaction with foundational socio-economic model of order

- **GEOGRAPHICS**
  - Identity-seeking and ambitions
  - Power transition and related instability in order
  - Yet many shared interests and continuing commitment to avoid major war

If Western and global populaces continue to lose faith in the political and economic values and systems that have been central to the order, it will be hollowed out from within and sustain a fatal blow. A second major finding is that the postwar order has had significant value—both for the world community as a whole, in promoting such shared goals as peace and prosperity, and for the United States in particular.

Evaluating the effects of the postwar order is a challenging task. Many factors conspire to produce the results sought by the order—global economic growth, peace and stability, democratization—and it can be difficult to separate out the effect of specific institutions or actions. In fact, our research suggests that the components of the postwar order can only have significant effects when pooled with other factors, ranging from U.S. power to supportive international opinion to associated macroeconomic trends.

With this qualification, a combination of quantitative evidence, case studies, and expert validation suggests that the postwar order has had important value in legitimizing and strengthening U.S. influence and in institutionalizing and accelerating positive trends. Combined with the role of other factors, such as U.S. power, and global trends, such as democratization and economic liberalization, the postwar order has helped to produce a form of equilibrium that has promoted stability and reduced uncertainty. As an example of this process, Figure 4 outlines the mechanisms by which the order supported postwar developments in one issue area—international economics.

Beyond such qualitative factors, we also evaluated the possible quantitative, measurable value of the order across a number of issue areas. In one of our study reports, we examined value estimates for such issues as allied contributions to military and peacekeeping operations, moderating the effect of major economic crises, and forestalling...
Figure 4. The Value of the Shared Order—Underwriting Post-War Progress

While national economic policies provided the most important spurs to economic growth since 1945, the international economic order has played a very useful—and, at certain moments, critical—role in providing a support system for national policies. It has done this through a number of means and mechanisms, from a shared global system of trade rules to coordination and emergency lending in crises.

GDP measured in trillions of current USD; World Bank figures

NOTE: BIS = Bank for International Settlements; ECC = European Economic Community; GATT = General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; IMF = International Monetary Fund; GDP = gross domestic product; NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement; WTO = World Trade Organization.
trade wars in the aftermath of such crises. The resulting estimates are necessarily suggestive, but the sum total is significant: In each of these examples, we find specific causal evidence that the elements of the order were either a necessary condition or a strongly contributing variable to realizing values ranging from tens of billions of dollars in some cases to hundreds of billions in others. Sustaining postwar tariff reductions, for example, may have contributed an additional 2 percent to U.S. GDP for a number of years and been associated with more than 300,000 jobs; international collaboration after the 2008 financial crisis may have avoided an additional loss of 5 to 10 percent of U.S. GDP for two or more years; and allied contributions to peacekeeping in the Balkans provided $10 billion to $15 billion in support, including the presence of up to 5,000 peacekeepers. Meantime, the direct costs of U.S. contributions to the institutions and processes of the order total less than $15 billion annually. America’s investment in the postwar order has therefore been a relative bargain, considering the U.S. interests at stake.

More broadly, the U.S.-led order has served as an important source of U.S. competitive advantage in the postwar world. As the leader and sponsor of a multilateral order, the United States has not been merely another great power. It has been the architect of a system of mutual advantage, a role that has allowed the United States to tie its power to a broadly endorsed purpose. This legitimizing function has had very specific benefits for the United States. Most notably, it has meant that few, if any, states have perceived a need to undertake classic balancing of U.S. power—thus potentially saving the United States tens of billions of dollars in additional defense expenditures that would have been necessary had others sought to balance its power more aggressively.

Looking ahead, the issues likely to dominate the U.S. agenda in coming years include managing stable strategic competitions, dealing with climate change, building a more just economy, and countering terrorism.

The international economic order has been the engine of the broader geopolitical and security order.

Our analysis of the progress of the order since 1945 led us to conclude that the economic components of the order are the essential foundation on which all the other pieces rest. A dominant early focus of the order was generating economic prosperity and avoiding the sort of beggar-thy-neighbor instability that helped bring about
the Great Depression. The GATT, and later WTO—along with regional trade treaties and economic institutions, the IMF, World Bank, BIS, and, most recently, the economically focused G-20—form the institutional centerpiece of the economic order. These global and regional economic mechanisms are the most established in the order—and in terms of national interests, the order’s leading offer to states is prosperity: Participation in its trade and investment structures and the accompanying institutions and rules has been an essential support system to most states.

This conclusion has two leading policy implications, somewhat in tension with one another. The first speaks to preservation: Keeping the international economic order effective and coherent is the sine qua non for a meaningful multilateral order. But the second demands reform: The models and theories of the liberal international order have produced significant inequality and slowing growth. Those models and theories must be refreshed and reformed if the overall order is to survive.

Orders grow out of broader realities in world politics, such as the degree of shared interests and values among leading states—but once institutionalized, the structure and habits of an order can shape state preferences and behavior.

This conclusion stems from the study’s historical analysis and assessment of the current health of the postwar order. Like all previous international orders, the postwar order is a function of states’ perceptions of their interests more than the cause of those perceptions. States have joined, invested in, and supported the emergence of institutions, rules, and norms because they saw the process as being in their interests—both material and otherwise—and as a product of their willingness to cooperate with other countries.

As a result, international orders tend to reflect the degree of community on the part of participating nations, especially the great powers of the era. One implication is that order is easiest to create and has its greatest effects among states that share significant norms and values—today, the global community of democracies. This finding also emphasizes the critical role of the guiding coalition at the heart of the order: If the coalition were to fragment, the order’s institutions, rules, and norms could not survive on their own.

Yet there is limited but powerful evidence that the principles and habits of an international order can become socialized among member states and thus, at a certain point, self-reinforcing. As just one example, the norm against outright territorial aggression embedded in the postwar order is now deeply socialized in the societies and leadership classes of dozens of major countries.

The order will be more robust and sustainable if it becomes more multilateral and shared.

The level of U.S. dominance of the international order must give way to a more equitable multilateral governance process.
Figure 5a. Power and a Changing International Order—From G-7 to E-7 (2016)

Between 2016 and 2050, the landscape of the world’s economic powers will shift considerably—and with it, the list of states that will play leading roles in setting and enforcing global rules.

**TOP GLOBAL GDPs***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP (T)</th>
<th>GDP per capita (in U.S.$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>$21.4T</td>
<td>15.5k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>$18.6T</td>
<td>59.0k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>$8.7T</td>
<td>6.5k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>$5.3T</td>
<td>42.2k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>$4.0T</td>
<td>48.8k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>$3.6T</td>
<td>24.8k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>$3.1T</td>
<td>15.1k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>$2.8T</td>
<td>42.6k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>$2.8T</td>
<td>41.3k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2016
- 8 of 11 top global GDPs are in U.S. alliances

In 2050
- 5 of 11 top global GDPs are in U.S. alliances
- The EU27 is less than 10% of global GDP
- Brazil/Mexico bigger than Japan/Germany
- “E7” will be double the size of G7
- U.S. in 3rd place

**MAJOR INSTITUTIONS OF GLOBAL COORDINATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Total Commitments (in current international dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>$645B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-7</td>
<td>$12B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU/NATO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-20</td>
<td>$29B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>$4.4B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIIB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDB</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDB</td>
<td>$39B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2016 measurements from World Bank data, in current international dollars; all GDP figures in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms. Amounts for multilateral institutions reflect most recent year total commitments; in case of IMF figure is total quota resources.

** GDP per capita in PPP terms; 2016 figures from World Bank.

*** E-7 includes China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, Mexico and Turkey.
**Figure 5b. Power and a Changing International Order—From G-7 to E-7 (2050)**

**CHINA**

$58.5T

45.0k

**INDIA**

$44.1T

28.0k

**UNITED STATES**

$34.1T

28.0k

**INDONESIA**

$10.5T

89.0k

**BRAZIL**

$7.5T

31.0k

**RUSSIA**

$7.1T

60.0k

**MEXICO**

$6.9T

39.0k

**JAPAN**

$6.7T

67.0k

**GERMANY**

$6.1T

85.0k

**UK**

$5.3T

75.0k

**FRANCE**

$4.7T

68.0k

**UNITED STATES**

$34.1T

28.0k

**BRAZIL**

$7.5T

31.0k

**RUSSIA**

$7.1T

60.0k

**MEXICO**

$6.9T

39.0k

**JAPAN**

$6.7T

67.0k

**GERMANY**

$6.1T

85.0k

**UK**

$5.3T

75.0k

**FRANCE**

$4.7T

68.0k

**WORLD BANK**

**IMF**

**G-7**

**EU/NATO**

**ADB**

**UN**

**ASEAN**

**BRICS NDB**

**BRICS CRA**

**CMI**

**SCO**

**NOTE:** ADB = Asian Development Bank; AIIB = Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; CRA = Contingency Reserve Arrangement; CDB = China Development Bank; CMI = Chiang Mai Initiative; NDB = New Development Bank; SCO = Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

A number of analyses in the study point to the conclusion that the level of U.S. dominance of the international order must give way to a more equitable multilateral governance process. Part of the reason stems from changing power dynamics in the international system:

As suggested in Figure 5, the world on which the order is built is becoming less U.S.- and Western-centric. Moreover, the United States arguably does not possess the will or ability to continue enforcing all the rules in the same way that it has. Increasingly, the question is which order will be appropriate for the emerging distribution of power and influence as the world heads toward a more multipolar future. The full economic and geopolitical ramifications of this trend will take decades to emerge—but already, the perceptions of major powers are changing as a result of the expectation of such shifts.

Therefore, our research suggests that a revised order has to bridge a critical dilemma if it is to retain the commitment of many great and rising powers: The order must become more flexible, multispeed, and shared without losing so much coherence that it falls apart. Henry Kissinger has argued that sustaining a “more stable world order” demands fostering “a perception of a joint enterprise that is not just about buying into an American project.”

This finding points to the importance of continued reforms of major international institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank and some UN agencies, designed to share authority more broadly among leading member states. It suggests that the United States must be willing to allow for the setting and enforcement of rules by others, including through the means of regional institutions that parallel global ones—such as China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. It emphasizes the value of bilateral diplomatic initiatives to strengthen understanding and ties with emerging powers such as India, Indonesia, Mexico, and Brazil. It suggests that the United States would be well-served to seek opportunities for other states to take multilateral leadership roles on significant but not vital policy issues—even if their ideas and approaches differ somewhat from those of the United States. And it highlights the fact that the United States will need to demonstrate restraint in unilateral interpretations of rules and norms.

China is not an outright foe of the order—but it is ignoring or sidestepping key rules and norms, and its future trajectory relative to the order is unclear.

The dominant actor in determining the future of the order, apart from the United States, will be China. If the United States and China can come to some sort of broad agreement on a critical mass of ordering mechanisms, the order is likely to survive in some meaningful form. If they cannot, it is far more likely to fragment.

China’s engagement with the order has been and remains a complex, often contradictory work in progress. The full picture of what it desires in a changed order, and the degree to which those aspirations can be accommodated in a truly shared system, are unclear and will remain so for some time.

Broadly speaking, though, China should be viewed not as an opponent or saboteur of the postwar international order but as a conditional supporter. Since China undertook a new policy of international engagement in the 1980s—and putting aside the one area, liberal values and human rights, where Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has the greatest degree of conflict with the U.S.-led order—the level and quality of its participation in the order rivals
have growing issues with liberal principles that demand violation of state sovereignty to promote certain values. The central dilemma in U.S. policy may be that sustaining the order demands both stronger enforcement of key norms and a more inclusive—and, at times, relaxed—approach to those same norms to earn the support of leading states.

The order is in the most danger in areas where—and, in some cases, partly as a result of the fact that—it has been pushed to the far edges of plausibility. On issues such as liberal interventionism, the reach and extent of EU bureaucracy, and the speed of global trade integration, the evidence suggests that overly ambitious efforts to advance such elements of the order could be destabilizing. In two areas, nonaggression and trade, our findings suggest that rules and norms must be rigorously enforced. But the history of the current and previous orders suggests that the United States could afford to compromise in the aggressive promotion of specific liberal values without fracturing the order.

Sustaining a Viable Multilateral Order: Lessons and Implications

On the basis of the findings listed here, as well as the broader analysis in its multiple reports and essays, this study has produced a number of broad lessons and implications that could help inform U.S. national security policy choices. Whatever specific means and ways are selected, this study suggests that a revised and sustained approach must continue to reflect the two most important foundational elements of the current order: a shared global economic system and a
Even as more states have indicated concern about the postwar order’s interventionist promotion of liberal values, that tendency has become more aggressive. The order is becoming more ambitious even as emerging powers with more influential voices are questioning its ambitions.

**Figure 6. A Growing Legitimacy Gap**

THE LEGITIMACY GAP: The growing gap between the perceived authority and legitimacy of U.S. and Western models and the degree of their ambition and stated absolutism of their objectives. This is a qualitative judgement based on analysis of trends in international public and official opinion and the ambitions of the liberal order as reflected in national statements and specific policies.
clear and powerfully enforced rule against territorial aggression—including activities below the threshold of major war, a growing challenge to global stability. The order’s foundational promise is growing economic prosperity: If public and governmental audiences perceive that the order no longer underwrites this goal, support for its rules, norms, and institutions could be fatally weakened, in part because so many other variables are affected by economic ones. And the order’s foundational rule is a prohibition on unprovoked, large-scale territorial aggression, without which the security elements of the order would have little meaning.

The findings of this study suggest that a healthy, sustainable multilateral order may end up being more mixed, shared, and multipolar than the current one, but that if it is to be meaningful, it must remain committed to those two cardinal principles. Such an order is also likely to remain a system led—though less dominated—by the United States. For the foreseeable future, America will remain the hub around which the values, goals, and power of any order must revolve. Without that leadership and binding role, these various parts could spin off into chaos, and the management of its multiple layers would become far more difficult.

A General Approach to Order-Building

Figure 7 offers the results of one of the study’s analyses about alternative designs for international order. That analysis laid out four ideal types of order, noted in the figure, and tested their advantages and disadvantages. That analysis held a number of leading implications.

First, models of order that imply either tense divisions of world politics into hostile camps or a rigidly unified and rule-bound order are equally infeasible and undesirable. It may be that levels of aggressive hostility from Russia and China make a truly shared order impossible, but the United States should strive to avoid that outcome even at significant cost. At the same time, idealistic post-Cold War assumption about the potential for a rapidly expanding order committed to liberal values must give way to more complex and nuanced models.

Second, in a more competitive era, when other major powers self-consciously work to undermine some U.S.-led institutions, the United States needs a strategy that can sustain as much multilateral cooperation as possible—while also hedging against the failure of that approach. Of the various possible future orders, an antagonistic stand-off between a smaller U.S.-led order and a range of adversarial states would pose the greatest threats to U.S. interests. But our research emphasizes that Russia and China’s challenge to the order could indeed become much more

Active efforts to cultivate ties among democracies would continue to knit together a critical mass of status quo powers, creating a basic stabilizing anchor to keep world politics from drifting too far from its moorings.
History and theory highlight at least four broad models of international order that might provide an alternative to the current conception—but each comes with significant risks and costs, and the most promising option is likely to be some combination of them.
aggressive. Emerging trends related to postwar order call for policies that aim to both sustain order and hedge against the potential for increasingly belligerent challenges.

Third, and finally, the role for U.S. defense policy and military capabilities is similar across all variants of likely orders. That role is twofold: to underwrite strong networks of cooperation and mutual security among value-sharing democracies and other partners, and to serve as the core military capability of a global veto on interstate aggression.

The lessons of this analysis of alternative possible orders support an approach that is global rather than exclusionary, is grounded in the twin pillars of a shared economic order and a nonaggression norm, builds outward from a core group of value-sharing democracies but does not limit itself to them, and seeks different forms and levels of cooperation depending on the issue and suborder at stake. What is called for is an eclectic, multilayer order rather than a simple one built around a single idea. The resulting order will be untidier and more dispersed than before, but such a design can still serve U.S. interests.\footnote{12}

Our analysis, and in particular the emphasis on a guiding coalition of states as providing the center of gravity of the order, points to one overriding objective: To nourish the informal coalition at the heart of the order and thus sustain its geopolitical effects. An order with the leading global democracies—including India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and other linchpin states—and other important, order-producing partners at its core could be resilient against pressures from regional revisionist states, nonstate extremists, and other dangers. But if that core group fragments, the hope for a truly global order will be lost. Sustaining and deepening partnerships within the order’s guiding coalition ranks as an urgent task for U.S. strategy.

**Lesson One:**

**An Effort to Strengthen Ties Among Value-Sharing Democracies Is Likely to Strengthen and Sustain the Order**

One implication of our analysis is that the United States would be well served by a renewed effort to build strong ties among global democracies. A coalition of democracies need not be the exclusive emphasis of any new order: The United States has too many important interests at stake with nondemocracies, and democracies differ too sharply in their approach to various issues. But both theory and history suggest that reemphasizing the role of value-sharing democracies as the gravitational core of a persistent order is one of the most feasible and effective ways of preserving its coherence and ability to shape behavior. Our research highlights several reasons why this is true.

The United States shares the most interests and values with full-fledged democracies, and our evaluation of historical systems suggests that successful orders must be built on some degree of shared values. Empirical studies confirm that alliances, trade treaties, human rights conventions, and other forms of multinational coordination achieve their most measurable effects when implemented among democracies.\footnote{13} Democracies tend to respect international commitments, and the role of civil society makes them more subject to international norms. For these and other
reasons, active efforts to cultivate ties among democracies would continue to knit together a critical mass of status quo powers, creating a basic stabilizing anchor to keep world politics from drifting too far from its moorings.

A logical component of any effort to enhance collaboration among democracies could be a U.S. effort to reaffirm, and seek ways to strengthen, its direct treaty alliances with fellow democracies—in NATO, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. The history of the postwar order, and evidence about the deterrent effect of U.S. military power, suggest that continued collaboration with allies would allow the United States to revalidate a core role it has played in keeping the order stable: leading collective efforts to deter major aggression. At the same time, an effort to bolster networks of cooperation among democracies could also build on existing diplomatic engagements to develop more-active and more-tailored strategies for a handful of the most important emerging democracies and invite them into more-influential leadership positions in a shared order. Different observers will have distinct ideas of what countries should populate this list. According to one recent PwC projection, the emerging 20 democracies toward the top of the global GDP list by 2050 will include India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Mexico.¹⁴

However, the history of U.S. leadership of the postwar order also indicates that such an emphasis on democracies need not be exclusionary. States that as of this writing do not belong to the community of full democracies have made important contributions to a shared and stable order. But the emphasis on allies and democracies provides one of several mechanisms of hedging built into this strategy for order. If the hope for cooperation with non-democracies fades, and if illiberal states begin to form counter-alliances and orders, the United States will be able to fall back on the shared interests and values, and tight collaboration, it had been cultivating with global democracies.

Lesson Two:

Prioritize the Global Economic Order

A leading implication of our research is that the economic components of the postwar order—the baseline networks of trade, institutions such as the WTO and IMF, and the generally accepted norms and values of a neoliberal economic model—represent the load-bearing foundation for the larger order. It is the promise of prosperity, as well as technological advances essential to national strength and security, that has bound states together, and the

Through intensified defense collaboration and some degree of expanded forward presence, the United States can revalidate a core role it has played to keep the order stable: leading collective efforts to deter major aggression.
often-implicit leverage of the postwar economic order has played a critical role in shaping preferences on many other issues. To the extent that this order has helped to prevent worst-case outcomes in the international economy, moreover, it has played a critical role in avoiding depression-fueled nationalism and conflict on the scale of the 1930s.

Yet many assumptions of the postwar order are now being challenged, and some of its key institutions are flagging. The WTO’s trade rounds have stagnated for some time. The European Union appears to be in near-permanent crisis. Regional trade agreements involving the United States—e.g., the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the U.S.-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the future of NAFTA—are under growing pressure, in many cases from the United States itself. China is vigorously pursuing state-led trade and industrial practices that flout the spirit—and, in many cases, the rules—of the postwar international economic order. Most broadly, populaces throughout the world are losing faith that the order and its associated ideas, values, and institutions can deliver equitable prosperity for their societies.

These findings produce a lesson that is straightforward in theory but will be exceedingly complex to put into practice: If the economic order is not refreshed and revalidated, the broader geopolitical and security order could be in mortal danger. Yet while support for the general benefits of international economic collaboration remains strong, rising skepticism, stalled large-scale trade deals, and evidence of growing inequality highlight the need to address its perceived socioeconomic costs and restore the faith that major elements of the order work to enhance prosperity. It is likely that any sustainable revalidation of the global economic order will have to include a meaningful dialogue on mechanisms to enhance equality and fairness in economic outcomes. Most of the ultimate policy solutions to this problem would have to be implemented at the national level. But the dialogue could produce ideas for elements of future trade agreements that would support this objective, as well as unearthing multilateral initiatives that could promote equality. Any effort to sustain a stable economic order will also have to address China’s predatory trade practices, which, if left unchecked, have the potential to undermine the norms at the heart of the current international economic order.

**Lesson Three:**

**A Revised Strategy for Liberal Value Promotion Will Help Sustain a Truly Multilateral Order**

The postwar order has included significant components related to liberal value promotion, from the foundational human rights conventions to more-recent notions of humanitarian intervention and the “responsibility to protect.” As important as the normative aspects of the order are, our research suggests two conclusions. First, the normative aspects of the order have always been more qualified than the two leading issue areas of economics and security. Second, in recent years the pursuit of those norms has created a sort of “liberal overreach” that threatens the consensus underlying the order.

The concerns (and, in some cases, outright opposition) of some states to parts of the order—not only Russia and China but also India, Brazil, and others—has focused on these sovereignty-challenging liberal initiatives. In some
cases, as in Iraq and Libya, the value-enforcing elements of
the order are perceived to have generated huge instability
and even worse suffering for the nations involved. In other
cases, such as the “color revolutions” in Eastern Europe, U.S.
value promotion has run up directly against the interests
of other major powers with the potential to play dangerous
spoiler roles in the order. The United States must find a less
provocative and at times destabilizing means of promoting
liberal values if the overall order is to be sustained.

The answer cannot be to abandon liberal values, or even
to formally downgrade them relative to other interests. For
many states, the normative promise of the order represents
a critical part of its attraction, and value promotion is inher-
ent in the U.S. national character and global role. But there
are many options available that would compose a power-
ful, noninterventionist agenda for liberal value promotion
that is more likely to sustain multilateral support. Such an
agenda could include continued statements of support for
liberal values; redoubled efforts in the area of humanitari-
an assistance and relief; more significant support, in terms
of advice and direct assistance, to major liberal nations in
trouble—whether in the form of economic or political crises
or natural disasters; and expanded programs of human
capacity–building, direct assistance, and sponsored pri-
ivate-sector investment in countries that have already made
the difficult internal choices and reforms to put themselves
on the road to liberal-value outcomes. Such an approach
would have a much smaller role for large-scale interventions
in imposing a more liberal political system on an undem-
ocratic or unstable situation. There is substantial evidence
that such interventions represent one of the fault lines in
support for the postwar order.

Lesson Four:

**Mechanisms of Intergovernmental Collective Action and Nongovernmental Organizations Can Be Surprisingly Important to a Strong Order**

Any strategy for strengthening the international order can
place strong emphasis on apolitical and technical issues.
This is an important lesson of historical orders—often,
the most important long-term effects were achieved by the
cooperation that took place among technical and func-
tional groups and mechanisms that operated largely below
the radar of international attention but that build strong
networks of global collaboration and interdependence.
The lessons of history, therefore, suggest that investments
in a range of issue-specific organizations and processes
can have surprising levels of long-term impact.

There are many opportunities today for U.S. and multi-
lateral investments in such mechanisms of collaboration.

The United States must find a less provocative and at
times destabilizing means of promoting liberal values
if the overall order is to be sustained.
...often, the most important long-term effects were achieved by the cooperation that took place among technical and functional groups and mechanisms that operated largely below the radar of international attention.

One is for the United States to redouble investments in and diplomatic engagement with a range of regional organizations—such as the EU, the African Union, and ASEAN. Global, issue-specific organizations, such as the Nonproliferation Treaty, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the International Court of Justice, have proven useful in a number of contexts and could benefit from continued U.S. support.

The United States can also strengthen the connective tissue of society-to-society relationships underpinning the more-official order by working to deepen and strengthen informal networks of global coordination, whether intergovernmental or private. Anne-Marie Slaughter has argued for the growing role of nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations as catalysts for action across a number of issues. Other scholars have described the result as a form of “complex internationalism.” In particular, the United States should not underestimate the importance of personal relationships in building trust and forming the basis for collective action: Networks of judges, legislators, regulators, and other government officials can intensify the connective tissue among members of the order. The United States can expand support for dozens of Track 2 and other exchange programs—for example, U.S.-ASEAN Connect, which links private sectors and the Young Southeast Asia Leaders Initiative.

Lesson Five:

At Turbulent Moments, It Is Important to Clarify—and Prioritize—Baseline Rules

A more complex and nuanced order might appear to imply greater flexibility about the red lines of behavior the United States will enforce. In fact, the study’s theoretical and historical research suggests that the opposite may be closer to the truth: At a time when international orders are undergoing significant change, it can become more important, rather than less, for the leading states to be precise about what rules they will and will not enforce, and more generally for a multilateral order to be clearer about what is and is not allowed under the terms of that order. At a time when many states will be determining how far they can stretch agreed-upon rules and get away with actions in their own self-interest, the potential for a breakdown of any sense of shared rules becomes very real.

And yet, neither global consensus nor U.S. willpower are likely to be sufficient to enforce every violation: Some
prioritization will be required. Nor does history suggest that it is necessary to combat every violation of every rule to sustain an order: Every historical example of such orders, including the postwar, U.S.-led version, have reflected exceptions to many rules and imperfect enforcement. The challenge is to identify the rules and norms whose health is fundamental to the order. The analysis in this study points to two such rule sets that are likely to be of critical importance to sustaining the postwar order and that deserve priority emphasis in U.S. national security strategy. Figure 8 summarizes these.

The history of prior orders highlights a related danger: the destabilizing effects that can occur when the leader of an order routinely flouts its rules. Any order can absorb a certain number of violations—as the postwar order has sustained U.S. refusal to participate in certain institutions, such as the International Criminal Court. But a broad-based U.S. flouting of the norms of the order would undermine its key structural effects—the socialization and acculturation by which it holds some of its most profound long-term influence.

Lesson Six:

The Normative and Gravitational Power of an Order Can Underwrite Efforts to Shape the Behavior of Revisionist States

The health of any ordering mechanism will depend first and foremost on relations among the great powers. In this connection, the dominant analytical question facing the architects of a future order is the nature of Russia’s and China’s ambitions and whether the United States can build a meaningful order with them, or will ultimately end up needing to build an order in opposition to them. Perhaps the single overriding test for a future order is whether it can meet the status and identity demands of these great powers in a fashion that does not disrupt the coherence of international politics.17

Such an outcome might not be possible, and this study is clear about the need to hedge against that possibility—in ways that do not spark dynamics, such as arms races and security dilemmas, that bring about the very hostility that the hedging strategies are trying to avoid. We do find persistent hope for a meaningfully shared order among the major powers. Our studies of both China and Russia suggest that, despite their aggressive actions, each continues to see value in a stable global system and in some specific components of the current order. It remains possible that each could be persuaded to pursue its objectives in ways that do not become full-scope assaults on that order.

This remains an open question. But our research suggests that the potential for rising challenges from aggressive states such as Russia and China makes the U.S.-led order more
aggression. The study highlighted a number of ways in which U.S. investment in a shared order can support efforts to shape Russian and Chinese behavior in favorable ways. These include coercive, competitive, and cooperative initiatives:

▪ using international organizations to reinforce—and, in some cases, enforce—the fundamental norm of nonaggression (These include the UN, U.S. alliance systems, and international legal institutions.)

▪ deepening and expanding the global trading community of open economies to reinforce the critical mass of states committed to the liberal economic order, and building a multilateral effort to combat predatory trade policies (This includes reaffirming support for the WTO and regional trade agreements and investing in such shared institutions as the IMF, Bank of International Settlements, and G-20.)

▪ recruiting Chinese and Russian engagement with cooperative efforts through international institutions, such as UN peacekeeping and regional development.

Elements of a shared order can also contribute to an essential objective in managing these relationships:

Sidestepping territorial and sphere-of-influence claims by these two states. Strengthening regional and global institutions and norms of a shared order can provide the critical foundation for U.S. policy on these issues, demanding that China and Russia resolve their claims in peaceful means. In both cases, there are opportunities to expand U.S. work with local partners, both states and regional institutions, to create a mediated, rule-based solution as the default outcome.

relevant rather than less so. It is precisely in its leadership of a global community of order-promoting states that the United States enjoys its dominant competitive advantage against any challenger. Others look to the United States to coordinate and galvanize multilateral responses to violations of many norms, from predatory trade practices to territorial
Figure 9. The Postwar Order Stagnates

After decades of consistent upward momentum on key measures associated with the effects of a multilateral order—such things as trade integration, conflict, and democratic governance—all of those measurements began to level off by the mid-2000s and continue to stagnate today.

Evidence for falling back:
In 2015, 72 countries showed a net decline in freedom; global trade value down 14% since 2007; conflict indexes show levels up 10–20% between 2014 and 2016.

Conclusion

International Order and U.S. National Security Strategy

The MIT professor Barry Posen has defined grand strategy as “a nation-state’s theory about how to provide security for itself.” By this definition, building and then leading a shared order has served as the focus of U.S. grand strategy since 1945—and participating in that order (and its key institutions, such as alliances) has become the leading grand strategy of dozens of other countries.

This study sought to evaluate whether that approach remains viable. We conclude that there is at least a chance that it does—and that leading a revised, more complex, and more fractious multilateral order continues to represent the grand strategy that would best serve U.S. national interests. Yet, as noted in Figure 9, there is clear evidence that the momentum behind the indicators of a shared order is ebbing, and, in some cases, has begun to turn toward a gradual decline. If participants believe that their interests will be served by arresting this pattern, the United States and other supporters of a shared multilateral order will need to take significant, coordinated action.

If the United States were to adopt a radically different global posture—for example, a form of retrenchment—the cost-benefit equation of a shared order might change. Even in that case, some components of the current order—such as a multilateral economic system—would remain valuable in advancing U.S. interests. But an important finding of this analysis is that if the United States wants to continue to lead globally, a functioning international order is indispensable. Without the benefits and legitimacy conferred by such an order, vibrant U.S. leadership would become financially and strategically unaffordable.

Indeed, support for some form of world order, both as an instrumental tool to safeguard American interests and as a collective effort to shape a better future, has become more than a strategy. It is now part of the American ethos. While the form of the U.S. global role has evolved, these principles have reflected a particularly American expression of international interests. That the postwar variety of this endeavor has measurably contributed to those interests reemphasizes the continuing relevance of this quintessentially American vision.
Notes


3 A large number of RAND analysts contributed to the project. Andrew Radin, Miranda Priebe, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos played crucial roles on the core project team. Other RAND scholars who offered significant support are James Dobbins, Stephen J. Flanagan, Timothy R. Heath, Clinton Bruce Reach, Ashley L. Rhoades, Julia A. Thompson, Jordan Willcox, Kathleen Reedy, and Alexander D. Rothenberg. We benefited from the participation of a world-class Core Study Group of outside scholars and practitioners; those who offered especially generous assistance included Ash Jain, Bruce Jones, Robert Keohane, Steven Krasner, Lisa Martin, Stewart Patrick, Gideon Rose, William Wohlforth, and Thomas Wright. The project team would like to extend its warmest thanks to Seth G. Jones, director of the International Security and Defense Program in the National Defense Research Institute at the time of this project, for his boundless energy and good cheer in supporting the research. Responsibility for the specific findings and recommendations in this report lies with its authors.


7 The methodology for these calculations is spelled out in Mazarr and Rhoades, 2018. We reached these estimates through a series of counterfactual analyses that aimed to identify the role that elements of the order play in
supporting economic- or security-related outcomes. We then identified estimates of value for those outcomes and what financial or budgetary value the United States might have lost in the absence of mechanisms of the order. In the resulting analysis, we can demonstrate two steps in the causal chain with a high degree of reliability: the value at stake (such as the specific amounts of budgetary support offered by allies in times of war), and the fact that elements of order played some role in achieving a positive outcome (through case histories, for example). The estimates are necessarily more subjective in the interpretation of what proportion of that value can be attributed to the elements of international order.


9 Important recent studies that make the case for a necessary transition to a more polycentric order include Flockart et al., 2014; and Oliver Stuenkel, Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order, London: Polity Press, 2016.


11 An excellent recent discussion of China’s attitude toward the order can be found in Evan A. Feigenbaum, “China and the World: Dealing with a Reluctant Power,” Foreign Affairs, December 2017.


15 Lawrence Summers has argued for a program of “responsible nationalism” and a new trade agenda along these lines, but his concept remains embryonic. See, for example, Lawrence Summers, “Voters Deserve Responsible Nationalism, Not Reflex Globalism,” Financial Times, July 10, 2016.


The growing threat to the rules-based postwar order has become a defining feature of current discussions about world politics. Over the last two years, a RAND project team, working with outside experts, has sought to understand the existing international order, assess current challenges to the order, and recommend future U.S. policies to advance U.S. interests in the context of a multilateral order. This report is the summary of that project, Building a Sustainable International Order, and outlines the overall project’s basic findings and lessons. For more information on the project, visit www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/international-order.

This research was sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense’s Office of Net Assessment and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

For more information on the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/isdp or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).