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**Back to the Future: Political Paralysis Cost Britain America, What Will it Cost the
United States?**

by Shane Rutherford MBA

Wing Commander, Royal Air Force

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Back to the Future: Political Paralysis Cost Britain America, What Will it Cost the United States?

by Shane Rutherford, Wing Commander, Royal Air Force

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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Abstract

Back to the Future: Political Paralysis Cost Britain America, What Will it Cost the United States?

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”¹

-Abraham Lincoln, “House Divided Speech”

The year is 1763 and despite presiding over a vast commercial and political empire, Britain’s parliament has failed to embrace the buds of what will eventually become understood as collective responsibility. Instead, the British government is characterized by paralysis and polarization. Worse, the government has been exposed by separate internal factions that are infatuated with economic speculation, personal power, wealth, status, and estate.

Consequently, the common ground could only be found in a common enemy, leading to strategic mistakes, such as the mistreatment of allies and partners that would prove catastrophic at Yorktown some two decades later. The Colonies are mistaken as a periphery issue, debated infrequently in the Houses of Parliament, and in 1765, it elects to pass a taxation law without deliberation, known as the Stamp Duty Act, that lights the tinderbox of rebellion in America. Concurrently struggling with the application of a constitutional monarchy, a deteriorating political situation set the stage for the abuse of executive power. The conditions were set for catastrophic strategic failure.

Back to the future, the summary above could be applied to America today. After freely pursuing liberal democracy, pure and unrivalled power and prestige have built intrinsic

¹ “House Divided Speech - Lincoln Home National Historic Site (U.S. National Park Service),” accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/housedivided.htm>.

strategic complacency. The unchecked thirst for individual power and profit permeates politics, where it has been exchanged for collective responsibility and effective foreign policy. The abuse of executive power synonymous with the Trump presidency and the debacle at the opening of the 118th Congress will only entrench polarization, as personal motives prevent progress.

Strategic allies and partners continue to be cast aside, mismanaged, and overlooked by the art of the deal, where short-termism and American profit are prioritized over mutually beneficial strategic partnerships. The country is more polarized, more extreme, and more divided than it has been since the Civil War, leading to President Biden's remarks that the "country is at an inflection point."²

If the U.S. is indeed in a "decisive decade," the World needs it to get its response right.³ President Biden is correct to suggest that, by revisiting the past, the U.S. can forge a path of success in the future. The essay that follows is the author's contribution to understanding how the past can help today.

² "Remarks by President Biden on Standing up for Democracy | The White House," accessed November 30, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/11/03/remarks-by-president-biden-on-standing-up-for-democracy/>.

³ The White House, "FACT SHEET: The Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy," The White House, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/10/12/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-administrations-national-security-strategy/>.

For my wonderful family, Carla, Eden, Evelyn, Skyler, and of course, my parents. Kiddos, if you shoot for the moon, at the very least you will land among the stars.

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Chapter 1

Context

Thesis Statement

Research Problem

Back to the Future: Political Paralysis Cost Britain America, What Will it Cost the United States?

“Your failure is, I am persuaded, as certain as fate. America is above your reach, her independence neither rests upon your consent nor can it be prevented by your arms. In short, you spend your substance in vain, and impoverish yourself without hope.”¹

-Thomas Paine, “The American Crisis”

Introduction and Context

Thomas Paine was accurate when he inferred in the above epigraph that Britain did not lose America on the battlefields of Yorktown, or Lexington and Concord. They lost it in the aftermath of the Seven Year's War, in Britain's parliament, and the palatial halls of the King, which constitutes the entry point for the following comparative case study.

If Clausewitz was right that “war is a continuation of politics by other means” and that policy defines strategic ends, then British military failures during the American Revolution could have been predicted because of coexisting conditions of paralysis and polarization in British politics that disconnected the necessary bridge between politics and military strategy.² Although it is true, in hindsight, that different decisions by the military men who lost America may have altered the outcome of the physical war for a time, in fact, America was needlessly already lost.

Political paralysis is essentially governmental inertia due to a lack of collective responsibility. Often interpreted as incompetence, it is caused by polarization within a toxic

¹ Paine, Thomas. *American Crisis, The*, Infomotions, Inc., 2000. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/lib/nationaldefense-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3314614>, 63.

² Carl von Clausewitz and Beatrice Heuser, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, reissued, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26.

system, which materializes when the betterment of the country is exchanged for party identity, or the interests of an individual or small groups intent on shaping politics and policy for personally distinguished favorable outcomes, such as profit and power. These agendas compromise domestic and foreign policy, which entrenches polarization in a vicious cycle intensified by other factors, such as the media and the abuse of executive power. Prevalent in 18th-century Britain, this set of coexisting conditions restricted effectual foreign policy development in an environment that exuded the hallmarks of the “big cycle of world order” we understand today.³ Perhaps worse, they eroded the ability to absorb the inevitable strategic shocks associated with international power that can cause strategic failure.

Alarmingly, America today is reeling from a similar set of conditions. As noted by Frances Fukuyama in *Foreign Affairs*, “the U.S. government is captured by powerful elite groups that distort policy to their own benefit and undermine the legitimacy of the regime as a whole.”⁴ Political legitimacy is being eroded further because America today is more polarized, more extreme, and more divided than it has been since the Civil War, a situation exacerbated by the egregious abuses of executive power by a President whom, Adam Schiff stated, “represented a clear and present danger to American democracy.”⁵ Applying Thucydides’ approach to “see clearly what has happened and what will happen again,” will ensure the situation is not overlooked or interpreted as simply the nature of American democracy.⁶

³ Ray Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed or Fail*, 2021.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “Rotten to the Core?,” December 13, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-01-18/rotten-core>.

⁵ Adam B. Schiff, *Midnight in Washington: How We Almost Lost Our Democracy and Still Could*, First edition (New York: Random House, 2021), 16.

⁶ Donald Kagan, *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History*, History (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2010), 1.

The current President of the United States recognizes the situation and is right to implore the people to “revisit the principles of the nation to save its democracy”, principles that originated in the Revolutionary war period.⁷ Indeed, as Murray and Sinnreich support, “to be prudent and provident, history must be examined to find out what pitfalls are to be avoided by taking note of the disasters which have befallen others in a similar position.”⁸

Therefore, the American Revolution remains more relevant today than might be imagined, and revisiting it can help America avert a similar strategic disaster that befell the British in 1776.

Thesis Statement

Unless democracies embrace collective responsibility, governments will be unable to navigate the inevitable strategic change within the world order or absorb the co-occurring strategic shocks. Without it, the virus of political paralysis and polarization infects government functions and compromises policy and strategy, meaning catastrophic strategic failure awaits, particularly in contexts of economic turmoil and abuse of executive power.

Thus, the root cause of Britain’s loss of America can be traced to the aftermath of the Seven Year's war and the subsequent years before 1776. Through examination, a remarkable comparison to today's America can be identified, inferring strategic catastrophe is on the horizon.

⁷ “Remarks by President Biden on Standing up for Democracy | The White House.”

⁸ Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *Successful Strategies: Triumphant in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 69.

The Research Problem

Hence, to contribute to academic rigor and help frame the problem, a comparative case study follows to draw situational parallels between 18th-century Britain and America today, the two most recent dominant superpowers. Intended to add support to addressing America's political polarization problem for the sake of global security, the work fills a gap of understanding in how some strategic catastrophes occur. It is intended to inform historically minded strategists with contemporary context and educated future projections. The work though is limited in scope, therefore, should be considered a deliberately contentious and provocative contribution to spark conversation and wider thinking.

Chapter 2

An Overview

When the World Order is in Transition: An Overview

“The strategic environment is the realm in which the national leadership interacts with other states or actors and the possibilities of the future to advance the well-being of the state.”¹

-Harry Yarger, *The Strategic Appraisal*

As it does today, Great Power competition characterized early 18th-century Europe. France had shared a balance of power era with Hapsburg Spain until a usurping Great Britain began to exploit industrial mechanization and international trade, eventually becoming powerful enough to challenge the existing world order. Analogous to Yarger’s model in the epigraph above, the country’s first officially titled Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, oversaw a period of unity and concession to find common ground to advance the well-being of the State. He navigated the country ably through the financial turmoil of the South Sea Bubble, an ominous sign of financial speculation that would revisit Britain in the aftermath of the Seven Year's War, and, unique to his tenure, he remained in position as the country transitioned through the death of King George I to the ascension of King George II.

In conjunction, Britain was steered toward its natural seafaring tendency in accordance with Sir Walter Raleigh’s maxim, “whosoever controls the sea, commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the World commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself,” which developed into a Grand Strategy known as Blue Water policy.² Naval successes combined with internal development enabled Britain to preside over a vast commercial and political empire without committing the large ground forces one might

¹ Harry R. Yarger, “The Strategic Appraisal: The Key to Effective Strategy,” VOLUME I: (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12115.7>.

² “Blue-Water Gambit - The Statesman,” accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/blue-water-gambit-1503010896.html>.

expect to maintain it, bringing concentrated wealth to the establishment formed by the Members of Parliament (MPs) and the House of Lords.

MPs were a network of wealthy aristocrats, many of dynastic lineage and global royal connections, and 23 held military commissions. Despite the industrialization of cities beyond London, and new wealth in other areas of the country, the constituents of these areas were largely unrepresented in the House, meaning power became centralized and policy biased toward favorable conditions to the preeminent establishment. Notably, although the power of the purse lay with parliament, which constrained him, executive power lay with the monarch. Despite these challenges, according to the British historical site Britannica, advancement in the 18th century can be directly correlated to “leadership, unity, and general political cohesion.”³

Although cohesion began to erode before Walpole’s eventual resignation, without his leadership, parliament took the course of Athens without Pericles. Unity unraveled, accelerated by Britain’s entry into unnecessary and costly wars. Apathy, peerage, and status were exchanged for political cohesion, which complicated a rift within the constitutional monarchy. King George II grew increasingly irate with political ineptitude that he did not commit himself to rectify.

Despite extraordinary economic growth, the government was exposed to personal interests based on concentrated wealth within 5 percent of the population. Political identity began to define policy, which was compromised by greed and quests for individual power. Consequently, parliament quickly became polarized and devoid of any form of collective responsibility.

³ “Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford | Prime Minister of Great Britain | Britannica,” accessed December 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Walpole-1st-Earl-of-Orford>.

Parliamentary archives indicate that political polarization over the course of the 18th century developed into a crisis that meant “foreign policy could not feature at the forefront of discussion,” unless great power competition concentrated political minds.⁴ Further, as Nick Bunker states in *Empire on the Edge*, Britain became characterized as a “nation addicted to financial speculation,” particularly evident in its entrenched dependency on the tea market and the East India Company.⁵

These circumstances meant that the country became ill-equipped to absorb strategic shocks. The period of instability reached a crescendo in 1760 with the ascension of King George III, who took reign at a time when the country suddenly faced the prospect of terminal decline. Convinced that a pivot to nationalism would reverse the situation, his influence rushed the country toward catastrophe, as polarization and dysfunction were exacerbated by continuous manipulation. The King was determined to seat traditional royalists at the head of government, an example of his abuse of executive power developed later, which disrupted an already fractious political situation.

Concurrently, to tie up the French on the continent, Britain relied upon a network of expensive alliances that came attached with associated debts that intensified an impending financial crisis. For financial reasons, exacerbated by complacency, Britain overlooked the power of alliances as the critical factor in consecutive victories in Europe and America,

⁴ “Parliament and Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century,” accessed September 11, 2022, <https://viewer-ebscohost-com.ndueproxy.idm.oclc.org/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=157984&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fdiscovery.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&profilid=eds&lpid=&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fdiscovery-ebsco-com.ndueproxy.idm.oclc.org%2f%2fqs3pqh%2fresults%3fq%3dParliament%2520and%2520foreign%2520policy%2520in%2520the%2520eighteenth%2520century%26autocorrect%3dy&isPLink=False&requestContext=..> 106.

⁵ Nick Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge: How Britain Came to Fight America*, First edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

attributing it solely to its Blue Water Policy. Growing formidability at sea reinforced a sense of invincibility and British international relations began to be conducted with a sense of superiority and arrogance, particularly toward the allies to whom it owed its status, a behavior that, coupled with the inability to see past competition with France, eventually alienated them.

Moreover, parliamentary inertia meant that the short time available to debate and collectively resolve domestic and foreign policy options was squandered by infighting and personal status advancement. For example, the Stamp Duty Act, one of the purest illustrations of disastrous foreign policy, was not even debated in Parliament. Bunker suggests that the Colonies were viewed as a “periphery issue, only debated seriously when considered through a competition with France lens”.⁶ An immediate lesson then is that, as Diamond wrote in all democracy is global, “foreign policy should not be measured as a global struggle between two political systems, foreign policy should be smarter than that.”⁷

Ignoring that its consolidation of power had been achieved by avoiding large commitments of land forces, in America, Britain departed from a strategic focus on favorable trade arrangements instead of deference to sovereign authority. Perhaps due to the feeling that the Colonials were always Royal subjects, as Britain became faced with a wicked debt problem, it decided to combine occupation with weaponizing the economy after exhausting domestic options.

So, Britain was barreling toward a tipping point, which came in the aftermath of the Seven Year's War, where a confluence of concealed in plain sight domestic and foreign

⁶ Bunker, 6–25.

⁷ Larry Diamond, “All Democracy Is Global,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2022, 186, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/democracy-global-america-fight-freedom-larry-diamond>.

policy deficiencies reaped havoc at a time of frequent strategic shocks, which began in the form of a financial crisis. An inability to effectually debate foreign policy and independently assess strategic interests preceded a sequence of fatal decisions. Paralysis and polarization prevented Britain from clearly defining its objectives. It even failed to complete a simple net assessment to be debated properly in Parliament, which would have identified the likelihood of failure in its coercive approach. Alas, Britain stumbled onward oblivious to the strategic mistakes it was committing.

Hence, the parallels between America today and Britain in the 18th Century emerge. American international relations have been conducted with a sense of superiority and arrogance, illustrated particularly in its unilateral decision to leave Afghanistan in 2021, and, as Graeme Allison described in *Destined for War*, it's enabling of China to transform itself from an “agrarian backwater to the biggest player in the history of the world”.⁸ Despite recognizing its miscalculation, evidenced by the national security pivot to the Indo-Pacific in 2017, polarization and political paralysis have, as Robert Spalding agreed in *Stealth War*, incapacitated the United States from evolving once it had become clear that “China had no interest in democracy or participating in the international rule-based order.”⁹

Indeed, effectual foreign policy toward strategic threats has taken the path of 18th-century Britain, and been exchanged for the weaponization of the economy, a characteristic of a paralyzed government. Paralysis coexists with veering political mandates and inertia, in turn creating a polarized environment pervasive to the abuse of executive power, such as that experienced during the Trump presidency, which coincided with a pivot toward nationalism

⁸ Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, First Mariner Books edition 2018 (Boston New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Mariner Books, 2018), 7.

⁹ Robert S. Spalding and Seth Kaufman, *Stealth War: How China Took over While America's Elite Slept* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019).

and the manipulation of structures to support his personal agenda. Trump's actions further disrupted a country that as Diamond reiterates, "over the past dozen years, has experienced one of the biggest declines in political rights and civil liberties of any country measured by the Freedom House annual survey."¹⁰ As a result, the country is suffering an identity crisis, paralyzed from progress and cohesion at a time when it is most needed.

Thus, America like Britain before it faces terminal decline, a situation that Dalio details as a "phase that typically comes from internal economic weakness together with internal fighting."¹¹ Failing to evolve now means the U.S. will face a decision to relinquish its apex position and transfer to a balance of power world order or fight for it. Like the British, it is likely that the American decision will play out far from its borders. If it is to succeed strategically, every possible historic lesson will need to be learned and consolidated to craft the appropriate course of action, because the world needs America to prevail.

¹⁰ Diamond, "All Democracy Is Global," 184.

¹¹ Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order*, 49.

Chapter 3

Analysis

Political Paralysis and Polarization

“Partisans put, in the place of the delegate will of the nation, the will of the party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common counsels and modified by mutual interests.”¹

-President George Washington, “The Farewell Address”

As President Washington warned in his farewell address, and Dalio more recently agreed with, toxic and polarized political systems create enterprising factions within “governments that work with those who control most of the wealth.”² Consequently, politicians encourage or are culpable for economic speculation, or prioritize individual commercial or power interests, which leads to compromised foreign policy. This is as true today as it was in the 18th-century.

In Don Cook’s *The Long Fuse*, he describes a scenario in 1766, when “Townshend, the British Chancellor, set out to scuttle policy in the East India Company because he himself had invested in it.”³ Similarly, an analysis conducted by the New York Times in 2022 finds that “more than half of the House of Representatives sat on congressional committees that

¹ “Washington’s Farewell Address, 1796,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, accessed December 12, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/washington-s-farewell-address-1796/>.

² Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order*, 31.

³ Don Cook, *The Long Fuse: How England Lost the American Colonies, 1760 - 1785*, 3. print (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), 115.

gave them insight into the Companies whose shares they reported buying or selling.”⁴ For the U.S., these conflicts are occurring as it reels from what Richard Hass described in *Foreign Affairs*, as “economic malpractice that led to the 2008 global financial crisis, and more recent missteps that allowed inflation to skyrocket.”⁵ Compromised, politicians are incapacitated from collective responsibility and critical policy decisions are subsequently undermined by infighting and hostility, which carries grave consequences beyond governmental inertia.

For example, David Art suggests that polarization led to “caustic fights over the State Department’s budget and grandstanding spectacles, such as the heavily politicized hearings over the attacks that killed four Americans in Benghazi, Libya.”⁶ More recently, described by President Biden as an embarrassment to the country, the 118th Congress could not even begin conducting business due to the inability of representatives to agree on a speaker, only reinforcing the extreme polarization gripping U.S. politics.

George Romney, a “leading light of moderate Republicanism summarized the threat of polarization when he wrote that it “tends to splinter the political and social fabric of the nation, leads to governmental crises and deadlocks, and stymies the compromises so often necessary to preserve freedom and achieve progress.”⁷ Essentially, polarization distracts governments from what is important and prevents the basic functions of effective government. Subsequently, to gain any semblance of progress required to run basic overseas necessities, foreign policy decisions are baked into grandiose ideas without substance as the

⁴ Kate Kelly et al., “Stock Trades Reported by Nearly a Fifth of Congress Show Possible Conflicts,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2022, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/13/us/politics/congress-stock-trading-investigation.html>.

⁵ “The Dangerous Decade | Foreign Affairs,” 33, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/dangerous-decade-foreign-policy-world-crisis-richard-haass>.

⁶ “How to Save the State Department | Foreign Affairs,” accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/lost-art-american-diplomacy>.

⁷ Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized*, First Avid Reader Press hardcover edition (New York: Avid Reader Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2020), 7.

only way to achieve bipartisanship, such as great power competition. Inevitably, due to lack of consideration, execution has unforeseen negative ramifications, such as confusion in global military combatant commands as critical artifacts required to direct forces are delayed due to congressional inertia.

A more worrying example would be the dependency on the weaponization of the economy described next. These miscalculations widen political division as successors promise to reverse the disastrous policies of their predecessors to cater to an even more polarized public disenfranchised by political performance. The resultant leadership changes are thus characterized by veering policies that confuse partners and allies and entrench domestic paralysis. Inevitably, either from the prospect of increased power that polarization presents, or under the pretense of progress to circumnavigate governmental inertia, abuse of executive power becomes a feature of what Klein defines as the “toxic system.”⁸ Eventually, a strategic blunder occurs.

What follows is a comparative analysis of two toxic systems and the effects of paralysis and polarization that eventually cause strategic failure.

⁸ Klein, *Why We're Polarized*.

Securing Defeat in the Aftermath of Success: A Broad Amorphous Failure of Foreign Policy

“never three Armys setting out from different and very distant Parts from each other, Joyned in the center, as was intended, better than we did, and it could not fail of having the effect of which [we] have just now seen the consequence.”⁹

-1st Baron Amherst, “Crucible of War”

Failure to recognize the power of alliances

As O’Shaughnessy describes in the *Men Who Lost America*, “from Blenheim in 1704 to Waterloo in 1815, Britain won the majority of its victories in alliance with other countries in Europe,” and they adopted the alliance principle to enormous successes during the Seven Year’s War.¹⁰ However, as evidenced by the ill-preparedness for the customary territorial exchanges upon victory, the War was ignorantly viewed as the successful execution of Blue Water policy, nested within the competition with France to achieve great power asymmetry, rather than the deliberate strategic expansion of the empire into the New World in concert with emerging allies and partners. In *An Empire on the Edge*, Bunker attributes the ignorance to the “failure to study or analyze the continent” they inherited.¹¹

Polarization and the absence of collective responsibility prevented objective assessment, which would have accredited victory to the cultivation of strategic alliances that,

⁹ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*, 1st Vintage books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 409.

¹⁰ Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire*, The Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth-Century Culture and History (New Haven London: Yale University press, 2013), 358.

¹¹ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 25.

as Murray and Sinnreich write, should have served as the blueprint for future foreign policy, as it had with the “grand alliance in the wars of Spanish Succession that became known as the British way of war.”¹²

Indeed, as O’Shaughnessy confirms, despite 1st Baron Jeffery Amherst himself reflecting on the dependency on allies for victory in Canada, his subsequent actions epitomized British international relations. “His severe mistreatment of Native American Indians, themselves a coup d’état for Britain, and the abject desire to impose serfdom on colonial forces reflected treatment of allies across the empire that led Britain to become a source of hostility and mistrust.”¹³ This operational example was merely a reflection of the strategic miscalculation of the British dependency on alliances, which O’Shaughnessy states extended to Europe, where “the old system of alliances broke down, as Britain alienated Frederick the Great by breaking the Prussian alliance through negotiating a separate peace with France,” a fateful act that would revisit the British in Yorktown years later.¹⁴

So, the British committed the first in a series of strategic howlers by “becoming more isolated than in any other time in its history.”¹⁵ From the jaws of victory, Britain snatched defeat in the years to come by misunderstanding its dependency on alliances which sparked the initial flames of rebellion.

Parallels to the U.S. and its dismantling of established alliances can easily be drawn. A feature of the Trump administration, that the Biden administration cemented in the calamitous withdrawal from Afghanistan, is the discarding of allies that served to legitimize

¹² Murray and Sinnreich, *Successful Strategies*, 123.

¹³ O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 13.

¹⁴ O’Shaughnessy, 358.

¹⁵ O’Shaughnessy, 13.

and bolster the U.S. hegemonic position in a mutually beneficial relationship. The Committee on Foreign Relations starkly summarized that American “foreign policy toward allies can be characterized by chaos, neglect and diplomatic failure.”¹⁶ In particular, Trump’s switch to a transactional relationship is a worrisome symptom of a nation that has grown complacent and doesn’t match actions with narrative. Indeed, its actions imply that, like 18th-century Britain, it does not truly believe that success in the evolving strategic environment will be dependent on strategic alliances.

Take, for example, South Korea. The Brookings institute estimates that the U.S. has “roughly 30,000 troops stationed on the peninsula,” plus support and equipment providing a strategic launchpad into the Pacific and a staging post guaranteeing access to choke points of the global commons.¹⁷ Clearly then, the U.S. benefits greatly from a host nation allowing them to locate military capability in its country to help the U.S. compete to dominate Asia. President Trump did not see it that way and threatened to withdraw U.S. forces if its financial overtures were not met. Consequently, South Korea has begun to look to other partners for security and economic ties, at a time when, Victor Cha states, that “the United States’ five treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand are at the heart of the government’s Indo-Pacific strategy.”¹⁸ Indeed, the tripartite relationship between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea will prove pivotal if the U.S. is to avoid the strategic catastrophe on its horizon.

¹⁶ “The Cost Of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage And Consequences For U.S. and Global Security,” accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-116SPRT44275/html/CPRT-116SPRT44275.htm>.

¹⁷ “What Is Going on with the United States Alliance with South Korea?,” accessed September 23, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/11/27/what-is-going-on-with-the-united-states-alliance-with-south-korea/>.

¹⁸ “Japan and South Korea Can No Longer Let History Thwart Cooperation | Foreign Affairs,” accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2022-07-14/japan-and-south-korea-can-no-longer-let-history-thwart-cooperation>.

Continuing, the Brookings institute assessed that the trump administration abandoned the Iran Nuclear agreement in March 2018, after “more than a decade of intense diplomacy and economic pressure” despite it undoubtedly stabilizing tripartite relations between Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and crucially, growing confidence in India, who rely on economic agreements with Iran for regional prosperity purposes.¹⁹ Destroying the agreement unilaterally sowed further mistrust of the U.S. in the region. Further, it may turn India away before the U.S. recognizes its dependency on it as a crucial partner in countering the PRC.

Perhaps most damaging to the perception of the U.S. and its relationship with allies though is the utterly calamitous and unilateral decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2021. Committed to ending the United States ‘forever wars’ the Biden administration informed allies of the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan but did not debate it. Not only does this bring into question American competence, but it demonstrates that the U.S. will act in its interests only, even if its British little brother is one of the allies affected.

Writing for the Brookings Institute, Ford and Goldgeier argue that the result of U.S. mistreatment of allies and partners is that it “is being left out of emerging alliances in Europe and in Asia.”²⁰ Self-harming, the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the most profitable and economically vital partnership of the future, has still yet to be reversed. Consequently, the U.S. is becoming more isolated than it has been since 1939, at a time when it will need alliances more than ever if it is to succeed against the PRC. The Brookings Institute agrees that “U.S. allies are not of one mind, nor in many cases are they

¹⁹ “After Dumping the Nuclear Deal, Trump Has No Strategy for Iran,” accessed September 23, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/09/after-dumping-the-nuclear-deal-trump-has-no-strategy-for-iran/>.

²⁰ “Retooling America’s Alliances to Manage the China Challenge,” n.d., <https://www.brookings.edu/research/retooling-americas-alliances-to-manage-the-china-challenge/>.

united with Washington about the best way to manage China's behavior."²¹ The circumstances are worryingly like Britain's circa 1776.

²¹ "Retooling America's Alliances to Manage the China Challenge."

Weaponizing the Economy In the Absence of Effective Policy

Richard Cooper would describe weaponizing the economy, as abusing “the capacity to punish another party.”²²

-Barry Einchengreen “The Limits of Economic Power”

Similar between Britain in the later 18th-century and America today is the attempts to recover unfavorable economic situations by what Rodrik and Walt describe as the “weaponization of economic relations for strategic ends,” perhaps the most demonstrable sign of government inertia.²³ Evidenced in Britain’s case by taxation of the Colonies in the guise of reforms to pay massive debt liabilities, and by America today and its economic war with China, the behavior is an effect of political paralysis. As Daniel Drezner wrote, “it is easier to impose sanctions than to do anything else.”²⁴ However, the response to economic coercion is predictably hostile with unpredictable consequences that are disruptive to the international order, which reinforces the projection of a decline corresponding to Dalio’s “big cycle of internal and external order and disorder.”²⁵

Britain’s decision to weaponize the economy began with what Bunker writes as a “levy on legal papers and other documents known as the Stamp Duty Act, which represented a total misunderstanding of the Colonies.”²⁶ The established norm in Britain was that comprehensive security is exchanged for taxation and representation in Parliament. In part to motivate settlers to move to the Colonies, and recognition of the inability to provide security,

²² “What Money Can’t Buy: The Limits of Economic Power,” accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-06-21/what-money-cant-buy-economic-power>.

²³ Dani Rodrik and Stephen M. Walt, “How to Build a Better Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 16, 2022, 144, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/build-better-order-great-power-rivalry-dani-rodrik-stephen-walt>.

²⁴ “The United States of Sanctions | *Foreign Affairs*,” accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-24/united-states-sanctions>.

²⁵ Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order*, 23.

²⁶ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 20.

the British waived almost all taxation measures for settlers. Although Congress later established colonial mechanisms, the situation was implicitly accepted in the Colonies in exchange for the freedoms espoused to them and based on the continuation that taxation common with Britain was not implemented in America. The taxation acts awakened the Colonies to a deteriorating relationship with Britain, summarized by Patrick Henry's concept of "no taxation without representation" set out in the Virginia resolves, which drew attention to the lack of official representatives sitting in Parliament, itself a remarkable error considering representation is the very concept formalized by the Magna Carta in Britain in 1225.²⁷

Parliament's disastrous economic reforms in America were inexcusable. Bunker describes them as "intended to make America resemble Ireland", despite clear warning signs from Benjamin Franklin, the representative of Congress in London, that the policies would fail.²⁸ His view was supported by the great William Pitt MP, whose impassioned parliamentary address "in defense of the colonies" clearly portrays.²⁹ Instead, taxation as a coercive weapon continued to be applied by what O'Shaughnessy describes as a "piecemeal measure that lacked the coordination necessary to create a coherent system."³⁰

Thus, it can be deduced that taxation policy toward the Colonies was partly a consequence of political paralysis and the absence of collective responsibility. The result, as

²⁷ "The Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions — 1765," accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/vsa65.html>.

²⁸ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 19.

²⁹ "In Defense of the Colonies by William Pitt January 14, 1766," accessed December 1, 2022, <https://www.revolutionary-war-and-beyond.com/in-defense-of-the-colonies-speech-by-william-pitt-january-14-1766.html>.

³⁰ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 50.

Cook states in the Long Fuse, “lit the tinderbox of rebellion that bubbled in every colony, including sanctification of open resistance if the English tried to enforce the policies.”³¹

Colonial resistance intensified polarization in Parliament. The King and some MPs were incredulous at their impudence, however, others, supported at the time by the British public, were relatively sympathetic to the colonial cause. Successive governments, desperate to appease the King, a polarized parliament elected to redraft coercive economic reforms, rather than properly form policy toward the colonies. Economic coercion continued with unintended consequences, such as the trade war that resulted in boycotting of English products and the sale and transport of a portion of reverse colonial trade, deepening the financial crisis. The reduced business increased unemployment in the Colonies but augmented the recruitment pool for rebellion leadership in numbers that swelled significantly past garrisoned troops in the Colonies.

Weaponizing the economy ignited the rebellion and layered strategic complexity to the alliance problem, as the Colonies began decoupling from Great Britain by securing other trade relationships and bilateral agreements with France and Spain, incurring grave consequences later, both in the Carolinas and Yorktown. The British example demonstrates that weaponizing the economy in exchange for considered policy is a catalyst for strategic failure and a violent response.

Likewise, as Jacob Lew and Richard Nephew described, “the United States is increasingly using its economic power in counterproductive ways”, exchanging effective

³¹ Cook, *The Long Fuse*, 79.

foreign policy for sanctions to bypass congressional paralysis.³² Take for example the Trump administration's coercive economic sanctions and weaponization of trade with China. Lew and Nephew agree that their efficacy is debatable but seems only to “antagonize adversaries” with unfavorable effects, as China passes on sanction tariffs to other sectors, specifically within dependent markets of countries aligned with the U.S.³³ Targeting China in this manner has diminished the coercive power of the U.S., as they decouple themselves in a disordered fashion that may increase the threat of military confrontation, and only accelerates China’s agenda to create an alternative form of ‘sticky power’ to the one that brought about apex power status for the U.S.

Furthermore, buoyant from the successes of the Belt and Road initiative that has secured strategic access to the global commons and entrenched strategically significant countries into its sphere of influence, carelessly weaponizing the economy reinforces China’s narrative of duplicitous U.S. behavior and bolsters its agenda to establish itself as a legitimate alternative hegemonic power.

The Brookings Institute develops this thought, stating that “Beijing has exploited fissures within and between allies repeatedly, driving a wedge between existing and potential allies” that the U.S. will be increasingly dependent on to maintain its status.³⁴ China is now less likely to conform to international norms, and they have forged bi and multilateral partnerships between countries that view America as the common enemy, complicating strategic options. Rodrik and Walt said that “until now, the United States has failed to

³² “The Use and Misuse of Economic Statecraft | Foreign Affairs,” accessed October 18, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-10-15/use-and-misuse-economic-statecraft>.

³³ “The United States of Sanctions | Foreign Affairs.”

³⁴ “Retooling America’s Alliances to Manage the China Challenge.”

articulate a China policy aimed at safeguarding vital U.S. security and economic interests that does not also aim at restoring U.S. primacy by undermining the Chinese economy.”³⁵

Moreover, China has learned to cleverly avoid U.S. economic coercion. Further, haphazard piecemeal economic policy measures reinforce a narrative to neutral states that America abuses its leadership of the world order. Robert Lighthizer said that weaponizing the economy instead of “strategically decoupling” economically from China, may put it into a corner as it summits its economic power trajectory.³⁶ It is already suffering from a series of strategic shocks that threaten its economy and therefore the integrity of the Party, meaning it will become more dangerous than ever.

Noting U.S. economic coercive power is waning, as China’s policy shift to parity between economic and security power takes effect, they are less likely to be deterred by the threat of American power or prestige. Unless the U.S. moves to a considered, uncompromised, bi-partisan policy toward China, its response is likely to end up violent, and in its backyard, it will be a formidable foe.

³⁵ Rodrik and Walt, “How to Build a Better Order,” 154.

³⁶ Robert E. Lighthizer, “Opinion | The U.S. Needs to Change the Way It Does Business With China,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2022, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/18/opinion/united-states-china-economics-tariffs.html>.

Abuse of Executive Power

“a sad chronicle of neglect, ignorance, bad law, and worse policy.”³⁷

Nick Bunker, “An Empire on the Edge”

Returning to Walpole’s example, and later with The Earl of Chatham, it is possible for strong leaders to sustain progress despite their surrounding cast. However, inevitably, as paralysis and reinforced polarization compromise foreign policy, leadership is weakened and at risk of abuse of executive power, something representative of King George III’s reign and a feature of the Trump presidency.

In Britain, as leadership and bipartisanship unraveled, King George III’s interference in parliamentary affairs resulted in seven Prime Ministers with polarizing political outlooks in ten years, more than the previous five decades combined. The King’s meddling prompted an undoing of established norms, including checks and balances, leadership contests, and foreign policy processes, until he had what Don Cook references in his book *The Long Fuse*, as “the King’s government.”³⁸ His interference betrayed the principle of constitutional monarchy in a blatant autocratic grab that only expedited Britain’s road to strategic catastrophe.

Anderson describes another example when, in 1766, the King’s interference in parliament, who were considering a replacement PM in the wake of PM Cumberland's death, “that would, at any rate, have required the cessation of policy-making until the relations of power and patronage could be sorted out, triggered a political crisis.”³⁹ Already impaled in

³⁷ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 107.

³⁸ Cook, *The Long Fuse*, 147.

³⁹ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 692.

domestic and international predicaments related to leading an empire, the King's intrusions led to a leader that "lacked confidence in his political judgment and loved his popular acclaim infinitely more than the grubby business of managing parliament."⁴⁰ Backfiring immediately, the domestic and foreign policy situation worsened. In response, the King continued to manipulate parliament until he had his man.

That man was Lord North, a wealthy, lifelong pillar of the political establishment who was, as Cook described, in most "cases a puppet who executed the King's foreign policy agenda, even when he disagreed with it."⁴¹ Not only was he compromised by monarchal overextension, but he also misunderstood the colonial problem, summarized perfectly by his statement that he wouldn't repeal previous foreign policy mistakes "until he saw America prostrate at his feet."⁴² O'Shaughnessy states that abuse of executive power shattered "an already antiquated system of fractious infighting," which worsened conditions in the Colonies substantially.⁴³ Thomas Jefferson may have failed to capture fully the problem, but his statement that King George III was "personally responsible for the American Revolution," certainly has elements of truth. The lesson for today is that in circumstances of abuse of executive power, the risk of strategic failure is exacerbated substantially.

Similarities with the contemporary U.S. are stark, where conditions are ripe for abuse of executive power. Diamond agrees, describing "President Donald Trump's abuse of presidential power to be on a scale unprecedented in U.S history."⁴⁴ In likeness with

⁴⁰ Anderson, 693.

⁴¹ Cook, *The Long Fuse*, 147.

⁴² O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 50.

⁴³ O'Shaughnessy, 11.

⁴⁴ Diamond, "All Democracy Is Global," 184.

Jefferson's assessment of King George III, a recent act introduced to congress concurs that the U.S. has traversed a period where "American interests were overshadowed by the President's own."⁴⁵ Regardless of political position, the Trump presidency and the pivot to nationalism have only entrenched the partisanship that has paralyzed politics from collective responsibility. It has reinforced a polarized national identity and exacerbated America's risk of strategic failure.

However, noting that deplorable leadership is of course a critical factor, it is the failure of the system to ensure checks and balances as a pillar of democracy that is the enabler of abuse of executive power. In his book, *Midnight in Washington*, Adam Schiff agrees, describing a failure of Congress to "check the executive branch, as it was subordinating itself to the President."⁴⁶ In both the constitutional monarchy system of 18th-century Britain and the Democratic Republic of America today, Parliament and Congress' duty is to prevent the abuse of executive power by embracing collective responsibility.

Moreover, a leader of a democratic country has the responsibility to unite through leadership, as they seek out the center ground to stimulate progress, even if it requires concession to achieve. President Biden is right to revisit history, as examples of great premierships are abundant and can help correct course, such as those of General Washington and President Lincoln, who faced challenges as difficult as those today.

It is important to understand that abuse of executive power not only ingrains polarization but also degrades the domestic environment, which is interwoven with international prestige. International prestige is vital to the success of integrated deterrence

⁴⁵ "The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy: Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security."

⁴⁶ Schiff, *Midnight in Washington*, 161.

because if the PRC believes that the U.S. is compromised domestically, its policies may become more imperial.

Through a restrained approach to foreign policy, the U.S. can gain a resource dividend to address its domestic problems. Robert Kaplan agrees, describing in *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, that achieving the domestic compact depends on “restraint internationally.”⁴⁷ David Art adds that “renewing American diplomacy will be impossible without a new domestic compact—a broadly shared sense of the United States’ purpose in the world and of the relationship between leadership abroad and middle-class interests at home.”⁴⁸

The U.S. is indeed at an inflection point, domestically and internationally.

⁴⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century*, First edition (New York: Random House, 2018).

⁴⁸ “How to Save the State Department | Foreign Affairs.”

Chapter 4

So, what next?

Recommendations intended to contribute to strategic design.

In Britain after the American Revolution, Prime Minister William Pitt ‘the Younger’, “took immediate steps to address the threat of terminal decline, by seizing the political and public will to reform an imperial system that seemed to be disintegrating.”¹ He skillfully integrated measured and timely steps toward collective responsibility and implemented economic policies that unleashed trade potential, and reinvented its strategic alliances, meaning Britain almost immediately recovered. Moreover, he seized the opportunity to limit the potential for abuse of executive power, as King George III's illness and age reduced his capacity to interfere. This example is what Lieber meant by “prudent, which is to say power-maximizing, states are aware of the limitations of their power.”² Queen Elizabeth II summarized the point when she eloquently attributed the transition to power maximization as “Britain keeping more closely to the principles of the Magna Carta, therefore transforming the Empire.”³ Learning from the past and embracing collective responsibility secured Britain the greatest empire the World has ever seen.

America today stands at the precipice of terminal decline and impending strategic catastrophe, and its foes will come to exploit the situation. For example, Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nixon wrote that China’s agenda extends far beyond simply blocking U.S. initiatives “within existing international economic and security organizations and establishing alternatives from which the U.S. are excluded,” it is designed to bring about its

¹ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 107.

² Keir A. Lieber, “The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 32, no. 2 (2007): 155–91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30133878>.

³ Cook, *The Long Fuse*, 1.

downfall.⁴ The immediate concern then is that, as Tom McTague described in the Atlantic, “Washington’s ability to deter rivals will diminish as its foes come to see the U.S. is too divided or reluctant to act.”⁵ Essentially, a polarized and paralyzed political situation can and will be exploited, which increases the likelihood of strategic catastrophe and reinforces the narrative of terminal decline.

Therefore, the U.S. should follow the President’s lead and look to the abundance of past examples of compromise and unity to defeat modern polarization. Klein is wrong to suggest in ‘Why we’re polarized’ that “polarization cannot be reversed” due to a deep-rooted mega-identity issue that is inherent within how the U.S. democratic system functions. To accept that polarization is an ineradicable and omnipotent pillar of U.S. strategic culture is to ignore history and the power of leadership and the people. Indeed, America was fairly polarized in 1863, had President Lincoln accepted polarization as preeminent, who knows what America would resemble today? That said, if the country does not address its polarization issue, “America’s fraying polity can lose its willingness to lead globally, with potentially very serious consequences for global order.”⁶

As Lincoln recognized, addressing polarization in America starts with Presidential leadership and statesmanship, in recognition that it is the President’s responsibility to find the center ground, and, where appropriate, compromise to secure it.⁷ President Biden acknowledged in his most recent National Security Strategy that collective responsibility and

⁴ “How Hegemony Ends: The Unraveling of American Power,” accessed September 21, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/how-hegemony-ends>.

⁵ Tom McTague, “What America’s Great Unwinding Would Mean for the World,” The Atlantic, August 8, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/08/europe-america-military-empire-decline/670960/>.

⁶ Michael E. O’Hanlon, *The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 55.

⁷ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, 1. Simon & Schuster paperback ed (New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

cohesion “are being eroded from the American psyche” and is taking steps to address them.⁸ Having said that, the election cycle and desire for power mean that, particularly over the last half-century, Presidents have cowered from introducing political structural reforms that encourage bipartisanship because administrations are more fearful of losing power, which in turn has eroded the social contract. Therefore, addressing polarization is a process that will need to tackle serious structural problems, some of which require developed thought beyond scope of the essay.

Within the scope, if President Biden is reelected, he should seize the opportunity to begin congressional reform. He should double down on the power of democracy by eradicating voting barriers, such as limitations on postal voting processes, and exploiting the existing technological innovations that would sizably increase electoral turnout. Furthermore, party duopoly stifles representation. Klein look to history, drawing the conclusion that “a proportional representation system functions more smoothly,” as it did post the American Revolution in Britain, evidenced by its remarkable recovery and imperial expansion.⁹

At the Congressional level, Klein is once more right to suggest that reform might begin with the most “obvious candidate, which is eradicating the fiscal debt ceiling” that inexplicably is used as a domestic political weapon, distracts politicians from what is vitally imperative, and most importantly, harms the population. Moreover, it is problematic for the leadership of oversight or auditory groups, such as the reform and economic oversight committees, to be exposed to party loyalties and be overhauled if the power in congress is reversed at mid-term elections. These positions should be viewed as senior military appointments; non-partisan, that are made outside of the electorate cycle, and from a

⁸ House, “FACT SHEET.”

⁹ Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, 255.

qualified pool of credible applicants. Finally, leadership will be required to prevent the turnover of political power in Congress from derailing continued support overseas, such as the military and financial assistance provided to Ukraine.

Furthermore, to respond to current and future global security challenges, reform in acknowledgment of the interconnectedness and interdependency across the national instruments of power should be achieved through a Goldwater-Nichols approach of a radical structural overhaul. The whole of government power principle means organizing, training, equipping, and fighting as one, in a common lexicon with a common goal, meaning the levers of power should be fully integrated. Removing unnecessary barriers and isolated environments will enhance cooperation into a unified ecosystem of domains. In sum, the reconstitution of the instruments of power should be prioritized in recognition of the cross-department cohesion and dependencies required to win the next fight.

However, not all reforms are the responsibility of politicians, the electorate has accountability in understanding that polarization is inherent in its identity. As Pamela Johnston and Patrick Miller said in the *Red and Blue States of Mind*, “the behavior of partisans resembles that of sports team members acting to preserve the status of their teams rather than thoughtful citizens participating in the political process for the broader good.”¹⁰ Disenfranchisement means that, at the federal level, instead of voting for political representatives based on policy and the considered review of a candidate’s agenda, it appears the public is voting based on polarized emotion. Grumbach verifies that “at the state level,

¹⁰ Patrick R. Miller and Pamela Johnston Conover, “Red and Blue States of Mind: Partisan Hostility and Voting in the United States,” *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 225–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912915577208>.

voters are arguably not paying any attention at all.”¹¹ Hobbes’ social contract is a two-way phenomenon that requires both parties to recognize and commit to their societal roles, which extends to educators and media influencers, who should recognize the significance of their power to reshape the narrative and draw attention to the problems that extreme polarization causes.

Internationally, the U.S. policy of integrated deterrence should be aligned with Mearsheimer’s principles of offshore balancing, detailed by Kaplan in *The Return of Marco Polo’s World* as “recognizing that no other hegemon should be allowed to dominate Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Northeast Asia.”¹² Integrated deterrence, a military strategy to overcome the pacing challenge of China could work but is executed in isolation. For example, recent economic negotiations at the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework reinforced the hedging positions of some pacific nations, undermining the collective security and partner integration strategy of the U.S. military.

Deterrence can be achieved by synchronizing the instruments of national power. For example, the U.S. can begin by repairing the damage done by the Trump administration in the Far East by rejoining the TPP with immediate effect, and simultaneously, by investing in Taiwan’s asymmetric capabilities and turning the island into what Michael Brown describes as a “Strategic porcupine,” shape the environment to force the PRC to think twice before using its increasing military capabilities.¹³

¹¹ “Book Review: ‘Laboratories Against Democracy’ by Jacob Grumbach | Foreign Affairs,” accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/laboratories-against-democracy-how-national-parties-transformed-state-politics>.

¹² Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo’s World*, 202.

¹³ “Taiwan’s Urgent Task: A Radical New Strategy to Keep China Away,” accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-urgent-task-new-strategy-to-keep-china-away>.

Further, the U.S. should recognize that allies and partners offset the dichotomy of deterring somewhere meaning reduced deterrence elsewhere. For example, a developed tripartite alliance with South Korea and Japan may provide the power projection necessary to check any Chinese physical aggression in Taiwan. Strong economic and military multilateral arrangements could lead to a regional Quick Reaction Force (QRF), improving regional security. The three countries could focus on specialist Anti Access Anti Denial capabilities, particularly those of anti-amphibious nature. Rapid reaction forces could be built to respond to any mobilization or build of Chinese maritime and amphibious assault forces on the coast or at sea in the feign of military exercise. This QRF would be limited and declared for its purpose, to buy the U.S. time to respond with its core military capabilities.

Without these reforms, strategic catastrophe awaits and may feature conflict in Taiwan. Consequently, the U.S. should continue to reinforce the policy that they are committed to the peaceful resolution of the one-China principle and their resolute commitment to respond militarily if physical aggression is initiated in Taiwan. Meanwhile, exploiting the existing close relationship with Taiwan to accelerate U.S. chip manufacturing to a single generation from Taiwanese capabilities can simultaneously assure continued economic growth of Taiwan, but reduce the dependency and single point of failure that Chinese annexation of Taiwan would threaten.

Noteworthy, China has a lot to gain from an invasion of Taiwan, particularly if you subscribe to the notion that whoever wins the AI war wins the world. If that is true, the Chinese will depend on Taiwanese chip manufacturing and advanced technologies to prevent an asymmetrical advantage for the United States. Moving to prevent physical annexation

could happen imminently, as their economic situation hangs by a thread, which could be the catalyst for forcible measures.

The problems are vast in scale and action begins with leadership. The U.S. should not lose hope that leaders like Washington and Lincoln are extinct. Indeed, in crises today, as in history, leaders emerge. Ask Ukraine.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Conclusion

Strategic blunders can result from faulty intuition, egotism, arrogance, hubris, grand but flawed strategic ideas, underestimating the enemy and the difficulties and duration of conflict, overconfidence in war plans, ignoring what could go wrong, stifling debate, shunning independent advice, and penalizing dissent.¹

-Rand National Security Division

When reflecting on Britain's strategic blunder in America, it is remarkable that both sides of the Atlantic shared a common emotional commitment shared, that the rights of parliament sovereignty is, as O'Shaughnessy states, "more than doctrine, it is essential for the protection of liberty in general."² How or why the British parliament was unable to understand that the Colonies wanted the same thing is a reflection of what Bunker described as "a total want of plan or system in the British government."³ That lack of plan cost Britain colonial America and was a direct consequence of entrenched political paralysis, polarization, and the abuse of executive power.

That said, the problem can be addressed. Jones and Matthijs note that "collective action problems can only be overcome if sufficient amounts of solidarity are present."⁴ Solidarity and cohesion begin with leadership and the center ground. Ray Dalio agrees, stating that "democracy requires consensus decision-making and compromise, which requires

¹ "Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn | RAND," accessed October 5, 2022, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR768.html.

² O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 52.

³ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*, 107.

⁴ Erik Jones and Matthias Matthijs, "Democracy without Solidarity: Political Dysfunction in Hard Times – Introduction to Special Issue," *Government and Opposition* 52, no. 2 (April 2017): 185–210, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2016.47>.

a lot of people who have opposing views to work well with each other within the system.”⁵

Arguably, notwithstanding President Biden’s efforts, America today typifies the antithesis of that statement. To encapsulate the size of the problem, no event characterizes it better than the politically encouraged assault on Capitol Hill on Jan 6, 2021.

Indeed, it is the absence of cohesion that creates the opening for abuses of executive power that ultimately serve to exacerbate polarization. The concomitant pivot to nationalism following President Trump’s election in 2017, intended to restore or create favorable circumstances toward a personal agenda, has only worsened the situation. Troublingly, a look at U.S. history demonstrates that pivots to nationalism preceded both World Wars. In the *Art of War in an Age of Peace*, O’Hanlon confirms that nationalism or isolationism in “multipolar worlds have historically proven catastrophic.”⁶ China and Russia have arguably succeeded in creating exactly that. O’Hanlon goes further, arguing that nationalism may have “galvanized Russia to correctly assert that the U.S. would not intervene in Ukraine now, nor in 2014,” a worrisome omen for today’s United States if Russia and China, and later India, arrive at parity in a multipolar world order.⁷

Jones and Matthijs state, “American democracy is dysfunctional because any sense of solidarity has broken down in American society.”⁸ Like Britain before it, the only way to achieve unity of purpose in the United States is to wrap policy in the threat to survival, now from Great Power competition with China. However, Jessica Weiss describes this as folly. “U.S. politicians and policymakers are becoming so focused on countering China that they

⁵ Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order*, 181.

⁶ O’Hanlon, *The Art of War in an Age of Peace*, 44.

⁷ O’Hanlon, 38.

⁸ Jones and Matthijs, “Democracy without Solidarity.”

risk losing sight of the affirmative interests and values that should underpin U.S. strategy.”⁹ They do this because it is the only way to achieve bipartisan consensus on foreign policy, much like Britain’s example with France.

Polarization and paralysis prevent effectual foreign policy debate on vital interests, such as U.S. policy toward Taiwan. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs appears at odds with his 4* colleague, General Minihan, publicly offering differing narratives on what the American military strategy toward Taiwan should be. Both are at odds with the President. Further evidence of confusion can be identified in the lack of preparedness in the system for strategic shocks, such as the response to COVID-19, which was compromised by entanglement and dependency on Chinese medical equipment.

Rising polarization is exposing these acute flaws in the American system. Unattended, Diamond says the resulting dysfunction “will weaken the United States’ leverage in the global struggle for democracy.”¹⁰

To combat polarization, effective structural reform should begin at the top, as it did in Britain in the aftermath of the American Revolution, where they adopted a roadmap of achievable steps to reform what Bunker described as “the old, privatized model that had seemed to serve so well.”¹¹ Under strong, center-ground leadership, economic strength returned to the focus, supported by credible military power. President Biden is trying to guide the U.S. to achieve the same but foreign policy execution continues to undermine him.

America faces the end of the era of unipolarity. Perhaps the most challenging problem is that apex power hasn’t been relinquished in anybody’s living life-time. Larry Diamond

⁹ “The China Trap: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Perilous Logic of Zero-Sum Competition,” accessed December 30, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/china-trap-us-foreign-policy-zero-sum-competition>.

¹⁰ Diamond, “All Democracy Is Global,” 185.

¹¹ Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge*.

suggests that, at best, they face an immediate future of “radical polarization” that unless addressed, will result in strategic failure.¹² However, if “the thin but resilient membrane that protects the spinal cord of American democracy – the embrace of mutual tolerance and restraint” is not yet severed, then learning and applying lessons from the past could mean that the U.S. is to survive, as the world needs it to.¹³

Britain need not have lost America. America need not lose itself.

¹² “A New Administration Won’t Heal American Democracy | Foreign Affairs,” accessed September 22, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/new-administration-wont-heal-american-democracy>.

¹³ “A New Administration Won’t Heal American Democracy | Foreign Affairs.”

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