

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Barry R. Posen, *Restraint A New Foundation For U.S. Grand Strategy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014) 234.**

The main thesis of the book *Restraint A New Foundation For U.S. Grand Strategy* is that the US pursuit of its current grand strategy is unable to achieve its objectives in the contemporary international political environment. Since the end of Cold War it has pursued a grand strategy which the author calls 'liberal hegemony'. The author believes that the US' grand strategy is hard to practice, counterproductive and needs more resources. The author comes up with a number of reasons against the prevailing grand strategy of liberal hegemony and offers an alternate – a grand strategy of *Restraint*.

The author, Barry R. Posen, is Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT and Director of the MIT Security Studies Program. He has written two books earlier *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* and *The Sources of Military Doctrine*. He has been a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow; Rockefeller Foundation International Affairs Fellow; Guest Scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Woodrow Wilson Center Fellow; Smithsonian Institution; Transatlantic Fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and most recently Visiting Fellow at the John Sloan Dickey Center at Dartmouth College.

The author's thesis of restraint has been put forward after the publication of three most consequential books at the end of the Cold War: Fukuyama's *The End of History*, Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, suggesting in nutshell Endism, Clashism, and Offensive Realism. The author has offered a new paradigm to US policy makers that, according to him, will ensure better security and global primacy of the US in a cost-effective way. He first identifies the problem and also offers a solution to it. The problem according to him is that, since the end of the Cold War, the US' strenuous efforts to apply liberal hegemony have failed.

The book begins with tracing the origin of debate about evolution of the US grand strategy in the post-Cold War world. According to the author four factors helped

liberal hegemony approach as a preferred strategy as compared to other strategies.

First, the collapse of Soviet Union left the international system with a unipolar moment where the US was the only global power. Second, it was the triumph of the Western liberal model which appeared vindicated by history, and for the US it was the only viable model for the rest of the world. Thirdly, the author points out that during the Cold War the US forces were “manning the ramparts” around the world. Uncertainty and disorder in the immediate post USSR era, beyond the ramparts, created demands from within and without to spread them outward to bring order and balance. Fourth factor was the existence of powerful organizations inside US, like the military, intelligence agencies, which the US had built to fight the Cold War. These organizations wielded considerable influence in decision making and had their own organizational interests.

These reasons laid the foundation of a more ambitious strategy and 9/11 worked as a catalyst, which supercharged the supporters of the grand strategy concept. The author concludes that this strategy is not working because of a number of reasons. He views that security is equally important to all states but the US has not practiced it cost-effectively. Some states are encouraged to compete with the US more intensely. Some accept its assistance only because they are stingy with their own defense spending. The author calls them ‘cheap riders’ and some are ‘reckless drivers’ who are sure that the US will rescue them in a worst case scenario. Their policies have been to the political disadvantage of the US, and sometime precipitate heavy military costs.

Another point he makes is that many other states are making economic progress at a fast rate. Increasing share of these states in global distribution of power will cost the US’ liberal hegemony more extensively in future. Estimates made by the US government’s National Intelligence Council for several years also support the author’s conclusion. Moreover, the author views that, perhaps, since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethno-nationalist movements, religious orientations, and class identities have become heavily objectified and politicized. Globalization and modernity have, paradoxically, intensified these identities. The ease of socio-political mobilization especially against ‘directions from outsiders,’ are leading to civil and regional wars. Barry Posen says that prevailing liberal hegemony approach has placed the US in a position that it cannot keep itself aloof from the

instability caused by these wars. Lastly, he sees modern military technology useful as 'a scalpel that can be used to excise diseased politics, which in the end mainly allows us to beat problems into grudging submission at best, remission at worse'. He gives examples of the Iraq-War and the War on Terror in Afghanistan, and the Middle East crisis, where outsized US ambition galvanized opposition for standing up against liberal societies within illiberal, underdeveloped venues.

Barry Posen offers an outline of the alternative to the grand strategy, which he calls 'restraint'. He identifies three core areas where the US should focus. Firstly the US should prefer to maintain balance of power among Eurasian powers. It should pass the buck to free-riders like Japan and India – a quick rising power against threat from China. On western end of Eurasia, a coalition of any two states, Germany France and Britain could easily balance Russia. Hence there is no threat of the rise of a continental hegemon. The author suggests a 'phased reduction in US political commitments and military deployments'.

Secondly, the management of nuclear proliferation among states and non-state actors. The US can avoid nuclear threat, technically by establishing a balance of terror as a nuclear deterrent forces which it already possesses and politically by leaving other nuclear states to balance against themselves unless US security is threatened. As far as non-state actors (NSA) are concerned, US should make it clear to states with nuclear materials to understand that retaliation will be directed against the source in case of a nuclear attack on the US. The US should also use institutions and non-proliferation regimes to ensure best security practices to avoid theft and scenarios in which NSA could potentially affect US security.

Last important area, the author mentions is the suppression of international terrorist organizations that choose the US as a target.

Barry Posen also offers military strategy and a force structure that a grand strategy of restraint requires. He outlines a maritime strategy, calling it a 'command of the commons', suggests that the US should reduce size and location of its regular military presence and budget, and give up the policies like coercive political reforms and nation building of other states.

The author has presented his thesis supporting restraint supported by cogent arguments and explicit examples. The 'free-riders' can share the burden as security of the US and Japan are important to both and they are faced with identical threats. 'Reckless drivers' like Israel which, is engaged in what much of the world sees as a brutal occupation and expansion of its settlements, creates difficulties for the US to achieve its objectives. It has given a *raison d'être* to Iran to militarize itself and has led to the formation of Al-Qaeda, that is why Osama bin Laden claimed 9/11 as a response to an 'American/Israeli coalition against Palestine and Lebanon'.

Barry makes a convincing argument that the US' effort to spread liberal values in the Middle East, saving Iraq from Saddam Hussein, removing Muammar Gaddafi, partnering numerous nation building efforts, specifically support of the Maliki and Karzai governments, proved disastrous.

The author briefly reviews the criticism from both the proponents of liberal hegemony and the realists – the advocates of the US primacy.

'Restraint' according to the author is a more advisable strategy as it not only would consume lesser resources but also allow policy makers to concentrate on domestic economic and social issues confronting the US presently. A strong America at home, in the view of Barry, would be in a better position to achieve its foreign policy objective too.

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