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Restraint: The Best Form of Strength

The United States' active global military presence has made it strong, influential, and powerful overseas but the focus and level of attention that has been placed on it has also prevented America from reaching greater heights. Although there was once a need for an active global military presence due to the state of the world post-Cold War with the fear of a revival of the Soviet Union, there is no longer that threat. The authors Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky illustrate what restraint means and the benefits it yields in their article "*Come Home America*". America's goals and priorities span from human rights, and anti-terrorism, to physical security and prosperity with the latter two being the most overlooked, despite their relevance. Contrary to popular beliefs, showing restraint is not a sign of weakness, but of strength and is beneficial, supporting the goal of improving our country's prosperity.

The United States does not need to use as many resources to defend our geographical area on the continent because of its physical location on the map. Due to the geographical location, the country is not an easy target, being neighbored by two relatively weaker ally countries. Additionally, being surrounded by large bodies of water: the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans, the U.S. does not have nearly as much to

fear as other European or Asian countries. Not being close to any hostile aggressors, America does not need to demand nearly as much defense spending.¹ While not having to worry about an invasion or an attack by land or sea, it can be argued that the threat from missiles remains. However, in the current time period with our alliances and capability to detect organized threats, our distance from any reasonable possible aggressor is enough that it should not be among the first on our list of concerns.

In 1995, compared to the next highest rival country, the United States spent roughly \$275 billion compared to Russia's \$80 billion on military defense, nearly 3.5 times as much even though Russia's physical location is more prone to hostility and threats.¹ During times of enormous tension, certain measures needed to be taken. University of Chicago professor and sociologist Morris Janowitz made the case that a reduction in America's military defense spending and an increase in Japanese defense spending would result in a balance.² Taking this information into account, I believe that the United States could better divert those resources and spending to other pressing issues and needs pertaining to domestic matters such as health care, taxes, education, unemployment, and, social security. Because restraint does not consist of entirely pulling all military forces from foreign areas, a common argument can be made that restraint still requires spending nearly the same amount of money on military defenses.

¹ Gholz, Press, Sapolsky 1997, 8.

¹ Gholz, Press, Sapolsky 1997, 8.

² Etzioni 1971, 639.

“Don’t Come Home America” argues, “If the alternative strategy requires keeping a similarly sized force in the United States, then the expected savings are modest given that host governments generally cover many infrastructure costs of U.S. forces and bases.”³ However cutting these costs would still bring some savings and would in addition lower the number of American casualties that inevitably result when deployment occurs, where hospitalizing wounded costs money as well.⁴

There are other arguments against the case for restraint, many of which use the claim that America weakens itself by disengaging. Some believe that the strategy of restraint will weaken America due to the amount of leverage and influence the U.S. has in the world, especially with allies. Being integrated into the defense strategies of other countries’ affairs allows the U.S. to monitor and oversee negotiations and peace talks. The argument is that with restraint, “U.S. leverage for leadership on both security and nonsecurity issues declines”.⁵ In this case, leverage is seen as a necessity for prosperity.

However, it is not America’s job to be the moderators and the overseers of the world. “On the rare occasions that America’s allies do act alone, they act with less caution than they ought to.”⁶ This was reflected in the Bosnian crisis, one of the events leading to World War I, where the German government accepted the Yugoslavian Republic’s secession, and took no action to prevent it which could have risked a German

³ Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth 2012, 16.

⁴ Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth 2012, 17.

⁵ Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth 2012, 5.

⁶ Gholz, Press, Sapolsky 1997, 16.

civil war.⁷ Because of the history of active involvement with Germany, once America slightly stepped back, the German government's actions were hazardous, lacked strategic imperative, and gave rise to consequential possibilities. This illustrates why America should not be the moderators of the world because our constant involvement causes other countries to be reliant on our input and involvement so that when we do step back, due to changes in administration policy or domestic problems, their actions can be very short sighted and desperate. For cases like this where in a sense, the damage has already been done, America should refrain from getting too involved with other countries' affairs and gradually step back from those where it is already too deeply immersed. While some may read this, and make the point that America taking a step back could have led to conflict, I would argue that America's presence primarily overseeing and moderating the decisions Germany made resulted in this predicament. If we initially remained separate from their affairs, Germany's decisions may have been wiser and more rational. Knowing what could've occurred, it should be in no one's best interest to continue similar levels of involvement. This doesn't apply to every situation but rather applies to instances where America has the role of playing "Big Brother" to other countries. In some cases, America's involvement has resulted in very negative consequences. The terrorist group, al Qaeda, was formed because Osama bin Laden wanted Western troops and influence out of the middle east.⁸ With all of this to take

⁷ Crawford 1996, 495.

⁸ Bergen 2011, xvi.

into account, America taking a step back and letting our allies handle their own affairs, would benefit both the United States and other countries.

Showing restraint is important for the future of foreign and domestic policy and the world as a whole. It is beneficial to avoid the same mistakes that were made in the past by our actions in getting involved in other countries' matters in order to avoid similar or worse consequences and outcomes. Learning from both the direct and indirect effects of America's past engagement, and taking action from them will help the country prosper and continue to be focused on itself, leading through influence, and continuing to be remarkable and a role model for the rest of the world.

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