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Restraining Rome: Lessons in Grand Strategy from Emperor Hadrian

Christopher J. Fettweis

For many scholars of international relations, ancient wisdom seems to begin and end with Thucydides. His *History of the Peloponnesian War* is regularly read, dissected and plumbed for insights applicable to modern problems. Requiring aspiring strategists to study the contest between Athens and Sparta made sense during the Cold War, when it seemed to echo modern times. Once the USSR imploded, however, the quest to understand the geopolitics of the bipolar Greek city-state system lost a bit of its urgency. While few would suggest that scholars stop reading Thucydides, it may be time to expand the canon, to seek advice from other sources more relevant to the current era.[1] There is an obvious, under-appreciated, more appropriate analogue from the ancient Mediterranean. Today's strategists would be better served by studying the wisdom – and occasional lack thereof – of the Roman emperors, whose system and security environment more resembled our own.

It is probably safe to say that Donald Trump reminds precisely no one of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The 45th president of the United States and 14th Augustus appear to be as different as can be: the latter was a military leader of some consequence, an experienced politician and renowned poet; the former made his name in real estate, avoided public service for 70 years and brags about never reading books. The only thing they seem to have in common, aside from the desire for walls to keep out perceived barbarians, is the determination to change the course charted by their predecessors.

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The states led by these two men have more in common than a cursory reading might suggest, however. The United States of 2017 and Rome of 117 were both the strongest actors in their system, and faced neither peer competitors nor existential threats. Their leaders had to forge strategy in profoundly asymmetric environments where they were the dominant actors, which can be more challenging than it might seem. For a variety of reasons, concentrated power often serves as an impediment to strategic thought.[2] The decisions Hadrian made, many of which were profoundly unpopular at the time, contain a good deal of wisdom for those struggling to make strategy in an era containing some relevant similarities. At the very least, it might be helpful to understand how an earlier unipolar power identified and pursued its interests in a world of minimal existential threat.

The reign of Hadrian began at the peak of the empire's expansion in 117 and lasted for nearly 21 years. Throughout the era, Rome followed a clear strategic path, shaped by intuitive understandings of what are now recognised as the security dilemma and the offence–defence balance. Hadrian faced internal revolts by irregular forces and an ancient version of the so-called 'Lippmann gap', or an imbalance between national commitments and resources. The emperor made a series of strategic decisions that he knew would be unpopular – some on his very first day – but found ways to placate the troops and masses alike. Overall, Hadrian constructed a coherent grand strategy that helped the empire flourish and become stronger, safer and more prosperous, and could serve as a model for how to match means to ends in a unipolar system.

Rome and grand strategy

Analysis of Roman grand strategy began with Edward Luttwak's justly famous book, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*.[3] Luttwak described the evolution of Roman thinking about strategy across three broad eras, each largely determined by its prevailing attitude toward the frontier. In the early decades of the empire, Roman emperors relied upon permeable borders and client states in the periphery. Over time those borders hardened as the emperors searched for the optimal, rather than the most, territory to rule. In the third era, as Rome's fortunes began to change in the face of stronger

enemies, border defence was essentially abandoned in favour of a general defence-in-depth approach.

Luttwak's work sparked controversy among historians, many of whom rejected the notion that Rome had a central grand strategy at all. Roman foreign policy seemed more reactive than proactive, particularly to specialists in the study of its frontiers.[4] As Kimberly Kagan has pointed out, however, this disagreement largely stems from a misunderstanding about the concept of grand strategy.[5] While the Romans had no Clausewitz and did not use modern terms, they certainly thought strategically and marshalled resources in pursuit of their interests. A different group of historians recognised the essential strategic nature of Roman action and engaged Luttwak in a more productive manner, correcting what they see as his misinterpretations of, or mistakes regarding, Roman policy.[6]

For all its minor flaws, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* remains enormously useful for laying out the general outlines of its subject. In the process of simplifying centuries of history into manageable eras, however, it sacrifices nuance and misses the substantial variation across imperial administrations. Few earlier historians saw commonality between the grand strategy of Hadrian and that of his predecessor Trajan, for example, but the two are lumped together in Luttwak's narrative. Rome's successes and blunders within eras are explicable only by a closer examination of the decisions made by its leaders, who hardly chose identical paths. Emperors had neither checks nor balances, and as a result had the freedom to mould foreign policy as they saw fit. Concentrating on the choices made by individual emperors, assessing what they did well and where they went wrong, has considerable potential to provide insight for strategists of today.

That said, the bulk of scholarly and popular attention paid to Hadrian has been skewed towards a few features of his rule that are tangential from a strategic standpoint: the famous, eponymous wall in northern England; his Hellenophilia, which dominated his poetry and outlook, and can be seen on his busts (he was the first emperor to sport a beard, which was considered the Greek style); and his tragic relationship with the young Bithynian boy Antinous. Others have examined his restless and curious nature, which led to a great deal of travel throughout his two decades in power.[7] Of his

grand strategy, however, not much has been said. Surviving source material on Hadrian's reign is particularly thin. No contemporaneous analysis of his reign survives, in part because there was a semi-official but serious taboo on writing about an emperor while he was in office. The two main ancient sources are a chapter in the *Historia Augusta*, published today as the bulk of the *Lives of the Later Caesars*, which was written anonymously in the fourth century and is not widely respected by historians; and Cassius Dio's *History of Rome*, of which a 5,500-word summary of the Hadrian volume survives. Other, less direct sources exist, and archaeological evidence has helped historians fill some gaps. Accordingly, Hadrian's grand strategy, even more than that of other emperors, must be pieced together from his actions. Nevertheless, enough is known about them to make the inferences not merely supportable but strong.

Hadrian's grand strategy

When Publius Aelius Hadrianus became emperor in August 117, the Roman Empire had reached its greatest size. His predecessor, Trajan (98–117), had engaged in a series of campaigns that brought more territory under Roman control than ever before. Few emperors had showered as much glory upon the empire as did Trajan, and modern maps of the empire at its height invariably show the area under control in the last year of his reign. His successor, however, had other ideas.

Trajan was far more aggressive than most emperors of the *principate*, or period of imperial rule that began with Augustus. The empire was built during the Republican period, when the Senate ordered generals to conquer first neighbouring and then far-flung polities.[8] Early emperors generally led what we would call today a status quo power, a state more interested in stability than expansion.[9] They had quite consciously followed the deathbed advice of Augustus, who supposedly told his chosen successor Tiberius to *consilium coercendi intra terminus imperii*, or 'confine the empire within its present limits'.[10] The days of conquest were all but over, and Rome was to spend most of the next five centuries seeking to maintain its status. There were exceptions – Emperor Claudius completed the conquest of Britain within a few decades of Augustus's death, for one, and Nero

ordered a punitive expedition into Armenia – but not until Trajan's time did Rome consistently march its legions outward, both to the north into Dacia (roughly modern-day Romania) and eastward into Persia, which was run by the Parthian dynasty. The victories were complete and, especially in the latter case, swift.

These were no ordinary wars of conquest. The invasion of Dacia was an enormous undertaking, involving the greatest concentration of Roman power since the civil wars that ended the republic. It necessitated tremendous feats of engineering, including the construction of canals along unnavigable sections of the Danube and roads through deep gorges. Other sections of the river were diverted entirely to facilitate the movement of Roman troops and supplies. Under Trajan's orders, the legions built a series of great bridges, one of which was larger than any seen in Europe for the next 1,000 years. All told, the pre-war build-up took nearly three years to complete.[11] Rome had invested a great deal of blood and treasure in this adventure, in other words, and by all accounts its society took a great deal of pride in its accomplishment. Some 123 days of celebrations followed. The famous column that still stands in Rome tells the story of the courageous emperor who finally shook Rome out of its centuries-long, inglorious slumber.

Conquest was always quite popular among the Roman elite and populace alike, and restraint generated discontent. Metaphors evoking the life of a person appear to have been common. 'From the time of Caesar Augustus down to our own age there has been a period of not much less than two hundred years,' wrote Florus during Trajan's reign.

> During that time, owing to the inactivity of the emperors, the Roman people grew old and impotent, except that under the rule of Trajan it again stirred its arms and, contrary to general expectation, again renewed its vigor with youth as if it were restored.[12]

Trajan was at least as important to Rome's pride and glory, then, as he was to its interests. Any reversals to this course would have met substantial opposition. In ancient Rome, that sometimes translated into palace coups and decapitated emperors.

Trajan died before he was able to complete his dream of following the path of Alexander the Great into India. As he was declining, he adhered to the long-established Roman pattern of adopting a son to succeed him. His choice was a controversial one, a successful general from Spain who, despite only being in his mid-thirties, had substantial political experience. It is doubtful that Trajan knew the plans young Hadrian had for the new territories.[13] Although Hadrian took over at a high point of both Roman territory and glory, he immediately set Rome on a new path.

Among his initial acts as emperor – orders that might have been issued on his very first day – was reversing the aggressive policies of his predecessor.[14] Rome abandoned all territory beyond the Tigris and Euphrates, returning Mesopotamia, Assyria and Greater Armenia to the Parthian king. Hadrian also ordered the evacuation of Roman soldiers from eastern Dacia, known at the time as 'Moesia Inferior'. He did not pull the legions out of southern Dacia, in large part because doing so would have meant abandoning Roman colonists who had been dispatched to settle in the region in the aftermath of Trajan's conquest. Hadrian did have his predecessor's enormous bridge dismantled, however, and put an end to all further talk of expansion in the region. Overall, although the Roman Empire reached its peak at the beginning of 117, by year's end it had shrunk by tens of thousands of square miles. Hadrian did not share his predecessor's admiration of Alexander and instead returned to the received wisdom of Augustus, on whom he was to pattern the rest of his reign.

Popular though they were, Trajan's conquests look more stable on twenty-first-century maps than they did in second-century practice. Many new provinces were in open revolt by summer 117. Hadrian inherited rebellious Moors and Samaritans, riots in Egypt, and restive populations in Libya and Palestine, which appeared to strike ancient sources as a particularly ominous development.[15] The new emperor decided that the costs of pacifying these provinces outweighed their benefits, especially with problems popping up elsewhere in the empire. He apparently made direct reference to Cato the Elder, who argued nearly three centuries before that troublesome peoples were not worth ruling.[16] Hadrian agreed, and pulled the legions back to their previous positions.

The politics of the empire supported the maintenance of Trajan's new status quo, which meant that Hadrian ran a great risk in conducting what must have seemed to be a retreat in the face of his enemies. Given the popularity of Trajan's conquests – then as now, nothing succeeds like success – it would have been far easier for the new emperor to succumb to the pressures of inertia and continue the policies of his predecessor. Hadrian's policies did not endear him to his fellow Romans, who were far more sympathetic to Trajan's aggression than to Hadrian's restraint. Elites were especially hawkish, often resembling the kind of armchair warriors ridiculed by Juvenal as men who study battles and dream of war from the safety of their marble villas.[17] Tacitus may well have been speaking indirectly of his own era when he lamented that

> I am not unaware that very many of the events I have described, and shall describe, may perhaps seem little things, trifles too slight for record; but no parallel can be drawn between these chronicles of mine and the work of the men who composed the ancient history of the Roman people. Gigantic wars, cities stormed, routed and captive kings, or, when they turned by choice to domestic affairs, the feuds of consul and tribune, land-laws and corn-laws, the duel of nobles and commons – such were the themes on which *they* dwelt, or digressed, at will. Mine is an inglorious labor in a narrow field; for this was an age of peace unbroken or half-heartedly challenged, of tragedy in the capital, of a *princeps* careless to extend the empire.[18]

Peace and stability can bore the historian eager to relate exciting stories of invasion and slaughter. Largely because of his refusal to indulge Rome's desire for excitement, according to the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian was 'hated by all'.[19] The Roman people were less interested in peace and prosperity than glory and conquest.

Such negative reactions are understandable, if irrational. Retrenchment invariably faces substantial psychological barriers. Prospect theory helps explain why voluntary, unforced steps backward are uncommon in history.[20] The Roman people reacted badly to Hadrian's abandonment of their hard-

won gains in part because it is difficult for human beings to accept loss, and to adjust to a new reality worse than that which they currently have, whether measured in money, living standards or status. Hadrian certainly anticipated a negative reaction to his strategic adjustments, and seems to have had a plan to deal with it.

Hadrian had options for dealing with his critics unavailable to US presidents. Within a few months of his ascension, the emperor had a group of four potential opponents tracked down and killed. Hadrian accused these senior senators of plotting against him, a claim of which ancient sources are sceptical.[21] Perhaps their main sin was that they were, in one historian's words, 'Trajan's men'.[22] Hadrian's relationship with the Roman elite never recovered from these extra-judicial killings, which were one of the reasons that the Senate refused to deify him after his death. Even the most powerful of Roman emperors could not kill all those who objected to their policies. Hadrian knew that he had some fence-mending to do with a variety of groups in Roman society if his reign was not to come to a premature end. The elites were fuming over the assassinations, and the masses were not ready to forgive his retreat.[23] He appears to have been well aware of the discontent, and responded as many before and after, with bread and circuses. This time it was quite literal: Hadrian ordered free distributions of grain for citizens of Rome, as well as regular salaries for those public officials, such as consuls and praetors, who up until then had no take-home pay. The emperor cancelled all unpaid public debts to the imperial treasury incurred in the previous 15 years. He also put on an enormous round of games, where untold numbers of gladiators, slaves and exotic animals gave their lives in an attempt to cheer up Romans otherwise dispirited by diminished glory.[24]

Hadrian also embarked upon a campaign to win over the troops, to assure that their loyalty – upon which, after all, his power rested – would not waiver in the face of restraint. He had led legions in the Dacian wars and distinguished himself in command, so he brought a veteran's credibility to the job. He also took pains to make clear to his soldiers that he considered himself one of them, spending a good deal of time in their camps during his travels and, if sources are to be believed, training with the men and eating what they ate. Bonuses and gifts did not hurt his efforts.[25] The emperor also

seems to have understood that idle military hands often lead to problems, and compensated for the absence of campaigning by compelling the legions to increase their training regimens. He kept the men busy with massive construction projects, including a 350-mile palisade throughout modern-day Germany and a series of famous walls elsewhere.[26] Unlike the projects of his predecessor, Hadrian's engineering marvels were inherently defensive, not a prelude to invasion.

In the end, no amount of opposition was going to reverse the course set by the emperor. Roman troops pulled back to most of their pre-117 borders, and Hadrian set about what we would acknowledge today as a grand strategy of strategic restraint. Borders hardened and offensive actions curtailed, and as a result the empire entered a time of great peace, security and prosperity.

Hadrianic restraint in practice

The actions of the first few days foreshadowed the foreign policy of Hadrian's reign. Under his leadership, the Romans adopted an essentially defensive posture. Despite the fact that he possessed the finest military of the era, the emperor was reluctant to use it. Dio writes that Hadrian 'did not stir up any war, and he terminated those already in progress'.[27] The military instrument of Roman power took a back seat to diplomacy and economics. Hadrian relied on negotiation rather than ultimatum, and entered into a series of new treaties with the small powers across the border. 'To petty rulers and kings he made offers of friendship,' notes the *Historia Augusta*, and he returned a princess of Parthia, captured during Trajan's conquest, to her father.[28] Hadrian was quite willing to make deals to please rivals and potential enemies, often giving more than he got. He summoned leaders to his court or even met them near the border when on one of his frequent extended travels throughout the empire. Prior experience with Roman diplomacy, which was what we would today call coercive, probably made some of the invitees rather dubious. 'When some of the kings came to him,' however, 'he treated them in such a way that those who had refused to come regretted it.'[29] Hadrian understood that it is cheaper, if less glorious, to pursue national interests at the negotiating table than on the battlefield. His

deals were often sweetened with gold from the imperial treasury or other monetary incentives.

Hadrian was not the first emperor to open Rome's purse in pursuit of its interests, even if he did so with increased alacrity. Domitian had paid off the Dacian king Decebalus in 88 as part of a peace agreement following an aborted campaign, and promised to keep the subsidies coming. This appears to have set a precedent, as there is evidence that Trajan had made some payments to the Roxolani, and many of Hadrian's successors were to do the same with other problematic peoples.[30] Using economic tools became a central part of later Roman strategy, especially in the rich east, where the empire's wealth helped fend off assault from barbarians like Attila and many similar nomadic invaders over the course of the millennium that followed the fall of the west.[31]

None of this is to imply that Hadrian's Rome let down its guard. Quite the opposite; Rome's legions increased the pace of their training, improving what we would today call readiness. 'So excellently, indeed, had his soldiery been trained,' writes Dio, that 'the barbarians stood in terror of the Romans.'[32] When external threats materialised – as when the Alani raided Asia Minor in 135 – the legions were prepared to deal with them swiftly. Hadrian was thus reluctant to use his sword but kept it sharp. The army was both a deterrent to invasion and the ultimate insurance policy for a defensive, restrained grand strategy. 'This best explains why he lived for the most part at peace with foreign nations,' says Dio, 'for as they saw his state of preparation and were themselves not only free from aggression but received money besides, they made no uprising.'[33]

Nor did Hadrian retrench because he was a pacifist. When crises arose, the emperor reacted with rather sensational violence. In 130, the empire faced a revolt by one of its most troublesome groups, the Jews. Due to grievances that were essentially religious in nature – relating to either a Roman ban on the practice of circumcision, or a perceived defilement of their holy city, or some combination of both – the Jewish people engaged in an irregular war that took nearly five years for Hadrian to crush. But crush it he did, and harshly. Dio suggests that nearly 1,000 Jewish villages were burned to the ground, and over a half-million Jewish men slain in the various battles

that took place during the campaigns. More believably, he wrote that 'the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out,' and 'nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate' as 'many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities.'[34] As had happened before, the Romans made an example of the Jewish people, and Hadrian faced no further rebellion. Restraint did not imply weakness.

The walls

Restraint abroad allowed Hadrian to concentrate on needs inside the empire, and embark on a series of well-known infrastructure projects. His famous walls are the source of much speculation and some controversy among historians. Northern England is the home to the most famous but perhaps least important of these. Hadrian's Wall played a symbolic role in the development of English nationhood, but its fame is out of proportion to its limited practical significance for the empire. In fact, the northern wall marked a far-flung, relatively unimportant border. The walls between the Rhine and the Danube (the *limes Germanicus*) as well as the intermittent structures south of Carthage (the *fossatum Africae*) delineated the edge of vital imperial provinces, and were of greater strategic interest.

As generations of historians have pointed out, these walls cannot have served much defensive purpose. They were not large, crenelated castle-esque walls that would allow defenders to hold out against sustained assault while awaiting reinforcements, but rather unmanned, two- to three-metre-high barriers with outposts every mile or so, easily overcome by even mildly determined attackers. The *limes Germanicus* were not constructed in a way that suggests a defensive purpose, since even its guard towers do not appear to have much protection.[35] Germanic barbarians would have had little trouble getting past them. The *fossatum Africae* were built at a time when there was no threat from nomadic peoples to the south.[36] The Picts and other peoples of Scotland posed virtually no danger to Britannia. Hadrian's Wall was not protecting against invasion, in other words, because such a threat did not exist.

If Hadrian's various walls were not meant to defend the empire, then what purpose did they serve? Opinions are split on what the emperor had in

mind when he ordered their construction. Brent Sterling has argued that the walls were essentially deterrents, with defensive importance only because they symbolised Roman power. To cross them, even if technically uncomplicated, was to engage the legions.[37] Other historians have suggested that the walls were constabulary rather than military, meant to control traffic and collect taxes on trade, as if they were essentially long tollbooths.[38] To Luttwak, the walls were built to encourage people on the other side to 'self-Romanize' by making it clear that life was better on the inside.[39]

None of these explanations is necessarily wrong; complex historical phenomena (and long walls were about as complex as it got in those days) have complex causes. But it is quite possible that the walls played another role in Hadrian's strategy. Historians have generally concentrated on the signals the walls sent outward in terms of potential deterrent or intimidation capabilities, rather than on the signals they sent inward. While Hadrian certainly wanted to keep the barbarians out, he also wanted to keep the Romans in. By delineating the frontiers of empire, the walls made it clear to those on both sides that expansion would not be taking place on Hadrian's watch. The walls were concrete and wooden manifestations of restraint, through which Hadrian hoped to encourage future emperors to adopt his grand strategy.[40] In the words of a modern historian, the walls were

> Hadrian's way of making plain that the policy of expansion really was at an end. The ideology of 'boundless empire,' immortalised in Virgil by the divine promise of an *imperium sine fine*, without an end in time or space, was thereby unmistakably buried. It was a clear signal to any surviving admirers of Trajan's expansionist policies that the empire was indeed precisely defined; thus far and no further.[41]

With construction of the walls, Hadrian promoted an offence–defence balance that favoured the latter. He was not only marking the limits of empire with the construction of *limes* but sending messages to the peoples beyond that they had little to fear from the superpower on the other side. By doing so, he decreased the threat that the unipolar power posed to its neighbours, and increased the chance for peaceful coexistence.

Glory and fear

Hadrian broke most dramatically with standard imperial practice regarding the psychological aspects of Roman foreign policy, which he seems to have interpreted in ways that not only differed from his predecessors and successors but that clashed with prevailing popular beliefs. Most importantly, he approached one of his era's cardinal virtues – glory – like no other emperor. Hadrian not only failed to associate glory with war, as so many did, but seemed relatively indifferent to the concept. While no Roman was immune to glory's appeal, Hadrian seems to have been uninterested in accolades won through conquest.[42] Today Hadrian would be considered a foreign-policy realist, focused more on Rome's interest than its mission, and unwilling to go abroad in search of barbarian monsters to destroy. Throughout his reign, Hadrian concentrated on Rome's tangible interests (security, prosperity) and minimised the importance of the intangibles (glory, honour, credibility), which was no mean feat in his time. That such an emphasis should lead to peace and stability should come as no surprise. As Thucydides wrote some seven centuries earlier, 'self-interest goes hand in hand with achievement of safety, whereas justice and honor are practiced with danger.'[43] Leaders interested in peace are well advised to focus on tangible goals, since interest and glory often inhabit opposite ends of the security spectrum. Hadrian chose the former, and his empire was better off as a result.

Perhaps Hadrian's greatest accomplishment was to keep the empire's threats in perspective. Roman emperors never shied away from challenge, and there is little reason to believe that Hadrian would have left a serious enemy alone in the hope that it would be pacified by Roman retrenchment. Indeed, the spectre of the external enemy was one of the main drivers of the empire's expansion from its earliest days. Rome's conquests were inspired by not only the desire for glory but also insecurity – that is, the sincere belief that untamed populations along its widening periphery represented threats to the core.[44] Cicero spoke for many of his countrymen when he explained that expansion was thrust upon Rome by the empire's various 'frightening neighbors'.[45] The fact that most of these neighbours were manifestly weaker did not matter; as its power grew, so too did Rome's insecurity. On this

notion, known to historians as defensive imperialism, Joseph Schumpeter is probably unsurpassable:

> There was no corner of the known world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack … Rome was always being attacked by evil-minded neighbors, always fighting for a breathing space. The whole world was pervaded by a host of enemies, and it was manifestly Rome's duty to guard against their indubitably aggressive designs. They were enemies only waiting to fall on the Roman people.[46]

The most powerful, and in many ways safest, society in the ancient world was never convinced that its security was assured as long as potential enemies existed anywhere.

Hadrian simultaneously resisted the desire for glory-through-conquest displayed by so many of his contemporaries and the fear of the other that motivated earlier ventures in defensive imperialism. He understood that the empire's threats did not necessitate aggressive action. The Roman Empire under Hadrian maintained a substantial insurance policy in the form of well-trained legions, but the emperor saw little reason to set them in motion. Instead he felt that Roman interests were best served by sagacious diplomacy and economic action, both of which were cheaper and delivered more stable outcomes. As a result, according to Dio, 'Hadrian was hated by the people, in spite of his generally excellent reign.'[47] He refused to indulge their fears, nor did he sate their desires for conquest and glory. It took courage for an emperor to restrain Rome, but Hadrian understood its interests better than those he led.

Results of restraint

While restraint may have angered the Roman people, its material results were clear: the empire flourished. Hadrian's grand strategy yielded peace and prosperity, maximising security at a minimum cost. He abandoned quarrelsome areas that were not worth pacifying; he embarked on no new, expensive campaigns; he opened the Roman purse to buy peace, which was immeasurably less costly, in terms of blood and treasure, than conquest

would have been; and he shared the imperial largesse with the people. Despite the hand-wringing and disquiet generated by Hadrian's policies, the decades that followed the abandonment of Trajan's conquests were in many ways Rome's greatest, when the empire faced no major, and very few minor, threats. Hadrian handed a far more stable, secure and prosperous empire to his successor than Trajan bequeathed to him.

Hadrian is supposed to have bragged on occasion that he 'achieved more by peace, than others have by war'.[48] Most observers who have examined his boast seem to agree. Some 16 centuries later, English historian Edward Gibbon famously praised the era. 'If a man were called upon to fix that period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous,' he wrote, 'he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.'[49] That period, roughly 96–180, was the peak of Pax Romana and the time of the 'five good emperors', of which Hadrian was the middle one. During this time, and for centuries to come, the greatest threats to Rome were internal. Civil war followed Commodus's assassination in 192, and five decades of near-constant internecine fighting marked the middle of the third century, but the Western Roman Empire survived for nearly 340 years after Hadrian's retrenchment. Premonitions of catastrophe that must have accompanied the emperor's grand-strategic decisions were not borne out by events. Restraint worked.

Hadrian's lessons

Presidents of the United States exist in a very different world than did the emperors of Rome, and there is little need to rehash the familiar arguments about the perils of analogical reasoning.[50] Ancient Rome is more than just a foreign country.[51] No one would suggest that its experience holds the answers to all current US challenges, or that a close study of Hadrian's grand strategy would reveal precisely what the United States should do today. History can suggest how to think about grand strategy, however, if not what exactly to think about. Surely it is worth contemplating the experience of other unipolar powers, to try to understand how their leaders made strategy in asymmetric security environments.[52] Hadrian's experi-

ence can offer food for a few categories of thought, because he did some things very well. He assessed the dangers that Rome faced in a reasonable, rational manner; he dealt with overstretch in a way that relieved the burden on the imperial treasury, resisting calls for conquest from glory-seeking corners; and he mitigated the risks that accompany retrenchment. Perhaps most fundamentally, Hadrian chose to emphasise Rome's tangible interests over the intangible concerns that his critics focused on, and the empire benefited.

Security environment

The threats of the twenty-first century are not the same as those of the second, but the danger they pose to unipolar powers is comparable. Hadrian had rogue states as well as non-state actors to worry about, and much stronger ones, relatively speaking, than those bedevilling the United States. The Alani, who lurked just beyond Asia Minor, were one such group, as were the Brigantes and other tribes of lower Scotland, who were causing problems as Trajan's rule came to an end. The Jewish revolt of 130 was a more serious threat to systemic stability than any posed by the various Islamist groups that harass the modern West. It involved far more people, including tens of thousands of warriors, and was closely watched by other would-be revolutionaries across the empire.

Still, these were relatively minor actors who did not pose existential threats to the empire. The Jews were not going to sack Rome. In fact, Rome faced no such dangers in the second century. The Parthian Empire, centred in modern-day Iran and Iraq, was more a target than a threat. Roman troops marched into its capital, Ctesiphon, on five separate occasions. The various Germanic tribes who would come to cause so much havoc in future centuries were still rather small and unorganised.[53] The peoples of northern Europe had few permanent settlements and lacked both written language and currency. Towns established in the empire during this era, even those near the imperial boundaries, often were not accompanied by circumvallating walls because they faced no real threats. Hadrian recognised that Rome needed a grand strategy for a safe era, one focused on stability and prosperity rather than security, since the latter was essentially assured.

Like second-century Rome, the United States faces a low level of threat. Security is, it is worth recalling, relative: no state is ever fully safe, just as no individual is ever completely free from danger. As long as ideology, religion or psychopathology are available to inspire non-state actors, there will be threats from within; as long as other states maintain some level of military power, there will be threats from without. The United States will always face danger, which is good news for its politicians and news media, neither of which ever tire of highlighting the various bogeymen lurking in the shadows.

When US security is viewed comparatively, in relation to that of other states, one is hard-pressed to conclude that the United States faces much serious danger. The United States has always been blessed by vast oceans and weak neighbours, and today its power dwarfs not only all potential competitors but most realistic hostile coalitions. If there is any state in an anarchic system that should not fear for its security, it is a unipolar power. By any reasonable measure, the post-Cold War system is much safer for the US than the one that preceded it.[54] Over the past 25 years, the world has experienced a steady decline in all types of warfare, from major wars to small ethno-nationalist conflicts.[55] At the beginning of 2018, for the first time in eight decades, there were no known active nuclear-weapons development programmes whereby states were pursuing their first nuclear bomb – an under-appreciated phenomenon. Nuclear testing has effectively ground to a halt, at least outside of the Korean Peninsula, where Pyongyang is no more (or less, unfortunately) irrational in its behaviour than it was prior to its nuclearisation.[56] Terrorism remains a problem, but hardly an existential threat. The number of failed states is not increasing, and the threat posed by them remains minimal.[57] Since the end of the Cold War, no UN members have disappeared against their will; a few, such as Yugoslavia and Ukraine, have been dismembered, but for the most part conquest is dead. Overall, the era of the 'New Peace', to use Steven Pinker's memorable phrase, is one in which states are essentially safe.[58] The strongest is the safest.

Most members of the US security community do not interpret the steadily accumulating data as evidence of essential American safety. Trump-administration officials in particular inhabit the far end of the threat-perception spectrum. They see danger lurking everywhere, and trust no

other states. 'The United States faces an extraordinarily dangerous world,' according to the December 2017 National Security Strategy, which then goes on to paint a rather terrifying picture of threats and evil that can only be met by a strong United States.[59] The president, like the people around him, interprets twenty-first-century danger much more like Trajan than Hadrian, and as a result risks putting his country on a counterproductive path.

The unipolar state is simultaneously the safest and most fearful of all modern great powers.[60] This is not a coincidence. As it turns out, perception and misperception are, in large part, functions of relative power.[61] Asymmetry has important, at times counter-intuitive effects on the formation of images. Threats are more likely to be identified, by core and peripheral states alike, when one power effectively dominates the rest. Misperception is always common in international politics, but in unipolar orders it is the rule. And given the asymmetry of power that such orders contain, such misperception often leads to tragedy. Restraint, in turn, is the antidote to the mistakes fuelled by fear.

Lippmann gaps

The first challenge Hadrian faced was imperial overextension. Rather than make the easy and popular choice to reinforce his predecessor's conquests, to 'double-down' in an attempt to stabilise the new provinces, he pulled the troops back. By doing so, he brought the empire's commitments and resources into balance, and set the foundation for a much more manageable reign. He addressed what two millennia later would be called a 'Lippmann gap' in a way that would be equally prudent today. 'In foreign relations,' wrote columnist Walter Lippmann in 1943, 'a policy has been formed only when commitments and power have been brought into balance.'[62] The art of policymaking, according to this way of thinking, is maintaining a balance, making sure that commitments do not extend beyond that which power can support. Samuel Huntington appears to have been the first to label a disparity between resources and commitments a Lippmann gap, incorporating the term into the lexicon of foreign affairs.[63]

To many observers, the United States operates today inside a Lippmann gap. Its myriad commitments in every corner of the world, from Afghanistan

to Yemen, are underfunded and deteriorating. Its defence spending, although enormous, is insufficient to accomplish the expansive goals promoted by its internationalist foreign-policy community. Indications of under-spending seem to be everywhere. Military training and readiness are suffering, rendering the US Navy incapable of navigating in the open water without colliding with civilian vessels. US Secretary of Defense James Mattis told the House Armed Services Committee in June 2017 that he was 'shocked by what I've seen with our readiness to fight … It took us years to get into this situation. It will require years of stable budgets and increased funding to get out of it.'[64] Readers of the Heritage Foundation's *2018 Index of Military Strength* would think that the United States is in imminent danger of being overrun by twenty-first-century barbarians, rather than a unipolar power that spends more on its security than the next eight to ten countries combined.[65] Inside the security community there is a widespread, if hardly universal, impression that the commitments of the United States cannot be fulfilled with its current level of expenditure. The resources the United States devotes to its defence, though substantial relative to that of other states, are insufficient to achieve its goals.

Lippmann gaps can be addressed in other ways. Most obviously, states can bring this hypothetical equation into balance by reducing commitments, and by making foreign policy less costly so the current level of expenditure is sufficient to address security needs. Rarely do modern analysts consider seriously the possibility that US under-spending is not the problem, but rather that US commitments are unsustainably broad and in need of adjustment. Hadrian identified a proto-Lippmann gap and immediately contracted the empire's commitments and cut down its obligations. Such a move by the United States would require a revolution in its grand strategy, one for which Hadrian also provides a precedent.

Restraint and risk

Hadrian implemented a restrained grand strategy, one that relied more on the non-military components of national power to address national goals, without ever neglecting the legions. His actions made it clear that Rome would not pose an offensive threat to its neighbours while he was in charge.

Once that change was made, the basic behavioural norms of the system also changed. The strongest member of any system plays the largest role in determining its character; when Hadrian decided upon restraint, peace and security came not just to the empire, but to the entire region.

A similar option is open to the United States today. The strongest country of the twenty-first century's globalised system will also determine its character, for better or for worse. By keeping its threats in proper perspective, the United States could recognise that its security does not demand robust international military action. By restraining itself, the United States could demonstrate to the world that force should be a last resort, even for the strongest, most capable state in history, and thus do more to promote peace than all its misguided attempts at global policing. And it would waste far less blood and treasure in the process.

The most useful description of restraint remains that of Eric Nordlinger, who more than 20 years ago recommended US grand strategy be built on three pillars: 'minimally effortful national strategy in the security realm; moderately activist policies to advance our liberal ideas among and within states; and a fully activist economic diplomacy on behalf of free trade'.[66] Restraint is thus hardly isolationism. No serious analyst of foreign affairs thinks that states should wall themselves off from the rest of the world, à la Tokugawa Japan. A restrained United States would continue to trade, participate in international organisations and play a role in humanitarian-relief efforts. It would merely define threats, interests and obligations narrowly, and arrange security commitments and military spending accordingly.

Hadrian was able to adjust Roman grand strategy away from Trajanic excess because Rome was the strongest power in its neighbourhood, which gave it a substantial margin for error. Hadrian did not take safety for granted, however, and instituted policies that mitigated the risks inherent in restraint. He kept the legions prepared and their readiness high to assure that the peoples of the periphery did not mistake restraint for weakness. He made examples of transgressors when necessary, although it rarely was. Overall, Roman restraint was not challenged.

Retrenchment need not result in national catastrophe.[67] History is fairly clear on this point. Imperial Spain was the closest thing to a world-spanning

empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its slow-motion collapse dealt a serious blow to Spanish glory, but not necessarily to its interests. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Spain had become a much less significant player in European politics, but its people had been relieved of the burden of paying for an empire. The string of bankruptcies that had been a recurring feature of the monarchy ended, and its young men no longer risked death from Dutch bullets or Peruvian yellow fever. The Spanish were much better off in 1850, by which time Madrid's empire had drastically contracted, than they were two centuries earlier at its height. By almost any reasonable measure, decline was actually good for Spain's tangible, material interests.[68]

The British experience offers much the same lesson: the people of Great Britain are hardly worse off without their empire. Their pride may have suffered during the era of imperial decline, but their interests – their security and prosperity – were unaffected.[69] The cost of lost glory was most acutely paid by elites. Historian Bernard Porter points out that the working classes in England, the masses that constitute the 'silent majority', were mostly indifferent to the loss of the dominions.[70] As it turns out, England was able to adjust rather quickly to the prospect of being a normal state rather than an empire.

Still, as Hadrian understood, insurance is a wise accompaniment to restraint. Fortunately, the United States has plenty. The extraordinary capacity of the United States to respond to emergencies is one of the most important and overlooked lessons from twentieth-century history. Prior to both world wars, Washington maintained a small standing military; by their end, it had produced the best the world had to offer. Surging today might be a bit more difficult, since modern weapons systems are more complex and production chains more globalised. At the end of the 1930s, many under-used production lines stood ready to be transformed toward war production, and a large labour pool was available to fill them. But the capacity of the United States to respond to threats – and the ingenuity of the entrepreneur – should not be underestimated. The United States retains a considerable surge potential at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one that surely could be improved as a hedge against future crises. Richard Betts advocates relying on what he calls a 'mobilization strategy', which would insure against the rise of a peer competitor by 'developing plans and organ-

izing resources now so that military capabilities can be expanded quickly later if necessary'.[71] By concentrating on the maintenance and improvement of its surge capacity, the United States could mitigate risk without spending itself into oblivion addressing threats that currently do not exist.

Internationalists seem curiously unwilling to place trust in the ability of the United States to respond rapidly to future threats, should they arise, acting instead as if restraint would permanently neuter the country and leave it vulnerable to any number of dangers. This need not be the case. We ought not treat retrenchment as if it would herald the end of the second American Century. As Roman experience suggests, it can be a necessary step toward a far greater era, one in which interests and expenditures are aligned to maximise security, prosperity and stability. In the era of the New Peace, when borders have essentially hardened, the United States can pull back without fear. There are no barbarians at the gates.

* * *

What would a Hadrianic grand strategy look like today? Addressing the Lippmann gap through contraction would invite a fundamental re-examination of foreign entanglements, including everything from alliances to aid to forward deployments. What good do they serve? Do their costs outweigh their benefits? Most importantly, how much are our policies in place because they serve our pride – the twenty-first-century version of what the Romans called *superbia* – rather than our interests? How much are intangible factors clouding our judgement?

The Romans might have had no concept of the physical laws of inertia, but Hadrian innately understood its political effects. Policies persist unless acted upon by a force. Hadrian must have realised that using political force to alter popular policies entails a cost, but he considered it one worth paying. It is not clear that our modern leaders would be sufficiently courageous to make similar decisions. Only by putting reason ahead of fear, and interest ahead of glory, can the United States hope to scale the heights that Rome reached following Emperor Hadrian's sagacious decisions to make a drastic break with the grand strategy of his predecessors.

Notes

1 David A. Welch is an exception. See his 'Why International Relations Theorists Should Stop Reading Thucydides', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, July 2003, pp. 301–19.

2 Christopher J. Fettweis, *Psychology of a Superpower: Security and Dominance in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

3 Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

4 This specific charge is made by J.C. Mann, 'Power, Force and the Frontiers of the Empire', *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 69, 1979, pp. 175–83. See also Fergus Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378', *Britannia*, vol. 13, 1982, pp. 1–23; Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), ch. 9; and C.R. Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2004), esp. pp. 28–49.

5 Kimberly Kagan, 'Redefining Roman Grand Strategy', *Journal of Military History*, vol. 70, no. 2, April 2006, pp. 333–62, esp. pp. 334–5. One of the best definitions of grand strategy describes it as a guide for national action that encompasses all aspects of national power (military, political, economic, cultural, etc.) both in times of war and peace. Paul Kennedy, 'Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition', in Paul Kennedy (ed.), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 4.

6 In addition to Kagan, see Everett L. Wheeler, 'Methodological Limits and the Mirage of Roman Strategy', *Journal of Military History*, vol. 57, no. 1, January 1993, pp. 7–41 [part 1] and vol. 57, no. 2, April 1993, pp. 215–40 [part 2]; and Arther Ferrill, *Roman Imperial Grand Strategy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

7 See Elizabeth Speller, *Following Hadrian: A Second-Century Journey through the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

8 Arthur Eckstein argues that the Republic was not exceptionally imperial or warlike, but was rather shaped by the rules of its time. Arthur M. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

9 For discussions of revisionist and status quo states, see Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 125–6; and Randall L. Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 1, Summer 1994, pp. 72–107.

10 Tacitus, *Annals*, 1:11.

11 Anthony Everett, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 107–8. He notes that the nine legions Trajan assembled for the invasion may have been 'the largest army a Roman general had ever commanded'.

12 Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, 1:8. Anthropomorphic metaphors in Roman sources are discussed by Greg Woolf in *Rome: An Empire's Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 201.

13 Hadrian apparently tried to convince people that Trajan secretly endorsed a course change, a claim widely doubted by his contemporaries. 'These measures, unpopular enough in themselves, were still more displeasing to the public because of his pretense that all acts which he thought would be offensive had been secretly enjoined upon him by Trajan.' *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 9:2. Indeed, history contains few examples of a dying leader imploring a successor to reverse his life's work.

14 For speculation about this occurring on Hadrian's first day in the purple, see Anthony R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 78.

15 *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 5:37–42.

16 Cato was speaking specifically about the Macedonians, who, 'because they could not be held as subjects, should be declared free and independent'. *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 5:42.

17 Juvenal, *Satire IV*, 111–12. See also Everett, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*, p. 55.

18 Tacitus, *Annals*, Book IV, 32:1. See also Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 116.

19 *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 11:7 and 25:7; see also 27:1.

20 Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk', *Econometrica*, vol. 47, no. 2, March 1979, pp. 263–91. See also Robert Jervis, 'Political Implications of Loss Aversion', *Political Psychology*, vol. 13, no. 2, June 1992, pp. 17–204.

21 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 2:5.

22 Speller, *Following Hadrian*, p. 30. Some historians have suggested that the four men were leading figures in a faction dedicated to Trajan's expansionist policies, making their killing an act of foreign policy. See Michel Christol and Daniel Nony, *Rome et son Empire* (Paris: Hachette, 2003), p. 158. This is possible, but has no support from the ancient sources.

23 Everett describes the popular attitude toward Trajan's conquests as 'delight'. *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*, p. 117.

24 For an analysis of the various breads and circuses, see Everett, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*, pp. 188–90.

25 *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 10:1–8.

26 Everett, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*, p. 211.

27 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 5:1. 'There were no campaigns of importance during his reign', concurs the *Historia Augusta* (Vol. I, 21:8), 'and the wars that he did wage were brought to a close almost without arousing comment.'

28 *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 13:8.

29 *Historia Augusta*, Vol. I, 13:9.

30 See Susan P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 121 and 159.

31 See Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), *passim*.

32 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 9:6.

33 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 9:5.

34 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 14:1–2.

35 Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, p. 415.

36 This is the conclusion reached by Isaac in *The Limits of Empire*, pp. 414–15.

37 Brent L. Sterling, *Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? What History Teaches Us about Strategic Barriers and International Security* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), pp. 76–7.

38 David J. Breeze and Brian Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (London: Allen Lane, 1976); and Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, p. 414. See also Adrian Goldsworthy, *Hadrian's Wall* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018).

39 Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, pp. 88–9.

40 Sterling also speculates about the possibility that the walls were built to make restraint permanent. *Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors?*, p. 77.

41 Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 116.

42 For the influence of glory on foreign-policy decisions, see Christopher J. Fettweis, *The Pathologies of Power: Fear, Honor, Glory, and Hubris in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 3.

43 The Athenians remind the Melians of this during their famous dialogue. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book V, 107.

44 For good reviews, see Robert M. Errington, *The Dawn of Empire: Rome's Rise to Power* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1971); Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); and P.A. Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. p. 102.

45 Quoted by William V. Harris in *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327–70 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 164.

46 Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 65.

47 Dio, *The History of Rome*, Vol. VIII, 23:2.

48 The only source we have for this oft-quoted boast (in Hadrian circles, at least) – *plus se otio adeptum quam armis ceteros* – is a booklet about the manners of the Caesars sometimes attributed to the unknown Sextus Aurelius Victor called *Epitome De Caesaribus*, 14:10, written at the end of the fourth century.

49 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2000), p. 83.

50 The arguments are sufficiently hashed out by Ernest May, *'Lessons' of the Past: The Uses and Misuses of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Policymakers* (New York: Free Press, 1986); and Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

51 The reference here is to David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

52 It will be easier to convince the modern reader that the ancient Mediterranean was more unipolar than the international system of 2017.

Many observers, especially in the age of Trump-induced pessimism, doubt that the United States asserts the influence it once did in the international system. See Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow, *Good-Bye Hegemony! Power and Influence in the Global System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). While this may be true, it also conflates influence with power. In terms of raw, measurable national capability, there is little doubt that one state towers over all others. 'The question [of polarity] is an empirical one,' wrote Kenneth Waltz, 'and common sense can answer it.' Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), p. 131. Despite scepticism in some quarters, common sense – and the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence – suggests that the world remains unambiguously unipolar. The classification and defence of unipolarity is discussed at length by Fettweis in *Psychology of a Superpower*, ch. 1.

53 For a great discussion of the evolution of these groups and their implications for the empire, see Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

54 See the essays in Christopher A. Preble and John Mueller (eds), *A Dangerous World? Threat Perception and U.S. National Security* (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2014).

55 For the data, see the Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2013: The Decline in Global Violence* (Vancouver: Human Security Press, 2013); Monty G. Marshall and Benjamin R. Cole, *Global Report 2014: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility* (Vienna, VA: Center for Systemic Peace, 2014); and David A. Backer, Ravi Bhavnani and Paul K. Huth (eds), *Peace and Conflict 2016* (New York: Routledge, 2016). The most comprehensive analysis is Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011), but see also Robert Jervis, 'Theories of War in an Era of Leading Power Peace', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 96, no. 1, March 2002, pp. 1–14; John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Christopher J. Fettweis, *Dangerous Times? The International Politics of Great Power Peace* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010); Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Joshua Goldstein, *Winning the War on War* (New York: Dutton, 2011).

56 On North Korea's essential rationality, see Dennis Roy, 'North Korea and the "Madman Theory"', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 1994, pp. 307–16; Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); David C. Kang, 'International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3, September 2003, pp. 301–24; and Victor D. Cha, 'Five Myths about North Korea', *Washington Post*, 10 December 2010.

57 Michael J. Mazarr in 'The Rise and Fall of the Failed-State Paradigm: Requiem

for a Decade of Distraction', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 1, January/February 2014, pp. 113–21.

58 Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, pp. 295–377.

59 The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, December 2017), p. 1.

60 For an elaboration of this point, see Fettweis, *Pathologies of Power*, esp. ch. 1, 'Fear'.

61 See Fettweis, *Psychology of a Superpower*, *passim*.

62 Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), p. 7.

63 Samuel P. Huntington, 'Coping with the Lippmann Gap', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 66, no. 3, 1987/88, pp. 453–77.

64 Sandra Erwin, 'Mattis is "Shocked" by U.S. Military Readiness Crisis', National Interest Online, 13 June 2017, available at http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/mattis-shocked-by-us-military-readiness-crisis-21132.

65 Heritage Foundation, *2018 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, October 2017, available at http://www.heritage.org/military-strength.

66 Eric A. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 4. See also Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press and Harvey M. Sapolsky, 'Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation', *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 4, Spring 1997, pp. 5–48; Christopher A. Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous and Less Free* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

67 Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph A. Parent, 'Graceful Decline: The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment', *International Security*, vol. 35, no. 4, Spring 2011, pp. 7–44.

68 William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Decline of the Spanish Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 191–2.

69 George L. Bernstein, *The Myth of Decline: The Rise of Britain Since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2004).

70 Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1995* (New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 290–2 and 346–7. See also Bernstein, *The Myth of Decline*, pp. 9–10.

71 Richard K. Betts, 'A Disciplined Defense: How to Regain Strategic Solvency', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 6, November/December 2007, pp. 67–80.