

2. Competitive, Competent, Conservative: Internationalism After Trump

By Michael Singh

As the Trump era comes to a close, the debate is just beginning over the administration's approach to the world and what it means for the future of conservative foreign policy in the United States. President Donald Trump himself was better known for his provocative and unpredictable pronouncements than statements of doctrine. Yet, once Trump assumed office it did not take U.S. partners and allies long to realize that they faced something altogether new in Washington: that old assumptions about American policy had to be set aside, and any and all contingencies — the renegotiation or dissolution of agreements or American withdrawal from treaties or geographies — seriously considered.

It was left to Trump officials and allies to impute to him a foreign policy philosophy, which they did variously. Nadia Schadlow, who served as deputy national security adviser for strategy, argued that Trump, unencumbered by the assumptions and nostalgias of the foreign policy community, saw the new reality of a world defined by competition and enacted policies to meet that challenge. She contended that he focused on states rather than international organizations as key actors, demanding reciprocity from allies and adversaries alike and rebuilding U.S. military strength.⁸ Rep. Matt Gaetz of the Florida panhandle, on the other hand, propounded a “Trump Doctrine” that emphasized intervening in international affairs only under the gravest circumstances and otherwise leaving other states to their own business — the polar opposite of competition.⁹

In *Battlegrounds*, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster consciously adopts a different approach to taking stock of the Trump administration, one that reflects his long service as an apolitical officer in the U.S. Army. As the highly regarded retired general himself warns in the book's

⁸ Nadia Schadlow, “The End of American Illusion: Trump and the World as It Is,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 5 (September/October 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2020-08-11/end-american-illusion>

⁹ <https://gaetz.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-matt-gaetz-delivers-major-foreign-policy-speech>

introduction, those looking for a critique, defense, or even explanation of Trumpism will be disappointed. McMaster is determined to look forward, drawing upon his experience not just at the White House but in the military. He offers issue-by-issue criticisms of past U.S. foreign policies and prescriptions for future policies, rather than any grand schema to tie the past and present together.

While no consensus doctrine emerges from these accounts, what comes across clearly is a sense of the conservative foreign policy pendulum in motion, its final destination to be determined. Whether it lands upon a wan realism of the Ford-Nixon era — when, in the estimation of scholar Paul Miller, “neither America’s material power nor its ideals were appreciably strengthened or expanded”¹⁰ — a strident and amoral nationalism, or, as McMaster implicitly but nonetheless clearly hopes, a more successful conservative internationalism depends on arriving at the correct evaluation of the foreign policy challenges facing the United States and the most effective ways to confront them.

Competition Rekindled

It has become widely accepted among conservative commentators that the world the United States faces is more competitive than in the past, affording U.S. foreign policy less room for error and excess. Competition requires two things: that other states be capable of mounting a challenge, and that they be willing to do so. An appraisal of the geopolitical landscape is bracing on both counts.

The gap in economic and material power between the United States and its rivals has inexorably shrunk since the end of the Cold War. It is not that U.S. power has declined. Indeed, America’s gross domestic product (GDP) has grown at a steady clip for decades, and the U.S. GDP remains the world’s highest in the nominal terms that matter geopolitically, even if China’s economy is larger when measured in terms of purchasing

¹⁰ Paul D. Miller, “Conservative Internationalism Out of Power,” *Orbis* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2018), 105–18, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2017.11.005>.

power parity.¹¹ The U.S. military remains the world’s most formidable and battle tested, and U.S. military spending is roughly three times that of China’s and indeed greater than the next 10 highest-spending countries combined.¹²

Yet, what was once a towering advantage in both economic and military terms is no longer, due both to the growth and diffusion of economic and military might around the world — enabled, ironically, by the very international order the United States has long upheld — as well as stagnation on certain key fronts in the United States. For example, U.S. productivity growth has slowed significantly since the mid-2000s, weighed down by flat or declining infrastructure and research and development spending, among other factors.¹³ Likewise, the U.S. military has fought to exhaustion in places like Iraq and Afghanistan while China has focused heavily on catching up to, and developing the capabilities needed to confront, the United States — a strategy McMaster describes in detail over the course of two chapters on China. The result, according to the Department of Defense’s latest “China Power Report,” is that China has neared parity with, or even exceeded, the United States in certain areas such as shipbuilding and the deployment of intermediate-range missiles.¹⁴

While the notion of symmetric threats to U.S. power is alarming enough, McMaster astutely observes that challenges to American power continue to come in asymmetric forms as well.

¹¹ For a discussion of this distinction, see Jeffrey Frenkel, “Is China Overtaking the US as a Financial and Economic Power,” *The Guardian*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/29/is-china-overtaking-the-us-as-a-financial-and-economic-power>.

¹² “Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2019>.

¹³ For further discussion, see, for example, Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn, and Jay Shambaugh, “The Slowdown in Productivity Growth and the Policies that Can Restore It,” The Brookings Institution, June 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Productivity_Framing_LO_6.16_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁴ *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020*, U.S. Department of Defense, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

He describes in length “Putin’s playbook” of disinformation, used to divisive effect in advance of and following the 2016 elections, as well as, in a telegraphic final chapter on cross-cutting threats, the risks the United States faces in cyberspace, in outer space, and from new weapons and technologies. And unlike so many analysts who wish to brush aside the threat of terrorism after two decades of unsatisfying and arduous focus on it, McMaster reminds readers that it remains a serious short-term threat, even if near-peer rivals loom larger in the long term.

Of course, if the United States were concerned by other states’ economic power and military potential alone, it might regard the European Union and India as its foremost rivals rather than the partners they are. What makes states like Russia and China threatening is not simply their power — which, in Russia’s case, is in fact meager — but their mounting willingness to challenge the United States and the international order itself. These challenges have played out on a grand scale in places like Ukraine, Syria, and the South China Sea and on a smaller, but more frequent and no less dangerous, scale in the air and on the seas, where U.S., Russian, and Chinese vessels come into regular contact.¹⁵ They have also played out in diplomatic conference rooms, where U.S. rivals seek to gain the upper hand in setting international norms and standards and foster alternative multilateral institutions that exclude or marginalize the United States.¹⁶

Order Unravelling

Many commentators attribute this new competitive reality to a failure of the “liberal convergence” that many policymakers expected to materialize after the end of the Cold War. In their seminal article recounting what went wrong in U.S. policy toward China in recent decades, Ely Ratner and Kurt Campbell, for example, assert that “the liberal

¹⁵ “Chinese and American Warships Nearly Collide,” *The Economist*, Oct. 4, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/10/04/chinese-and-american-warships-nearly-collide>.

¹⁶ Jonathan E. Hillman, “A ‘China Model?’ Beijing’s Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards,” Congressional Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 13, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-model-beijings-promotion-alternative-global-norms-and-standards>.

international order has failed to lure or bind China as powerfully as expected.”¹⁷ McMaster approaches the matter from a complementary angle, harshly criticizing what he describes as American “strategic narcissism,” a term inspired by Hans Morgenthau’s late-career work on the intersection of emotion and power.¹⁸ McMaster might have instead termed the problem “strategic solipsism” for, while Morgenthau was focused on what he considered the ills of self-actualization (criticizing, among other things, plastic surgery and jogging), McMaster is warning against the all-too-common predilection among U.S. analysts and officials to view world events as functions of American policy, insufficiently cognizant that “rivals and enemies will influence the future course of events” based in part on “their own interpretation of history.”¹⁹ At the same time, he tacitly acknowledges that American assumptions sometimes require revision not because they were naively conceived but because circumstances have changed (for example, Xi Jinping’s ascendancy in China).²⁰

Making matters worse, the guardians of the international order have arguably been complicit in its demise to the benefit of adversaries who are glad enough to see that order crumble. Democracy has faced challenges both at the free world’s periphery — where states such as Turkey and Hungary have seen the democratic gains of recent decades sharply reversed — and at its heart. In the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, only 39 and 31 percent of respondents, respectively, indicated to Pew Research in February 2020 that they were satisfied with the state of their country’s democracy — in contrast to 70

¹⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March/April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

¹⁸ Hans Morgenthau and Ethel Person, “The Roots of Narcissism,” *Partisan Review* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 337-47, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, <http://archives.bu.edu/collections/partisan-review/search/detail?id=331504>. See also Hans Morgenthau, “Love and Power,” *Commentary*, March 1962, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/hans-morgenthau/love-and-power/>.

¹⁹ H.R. McMaster, *Battlefields: The Fight to Defend the Free World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 19.

²⁰ McMaster, *Battlefields*, 100.

percent of Indians and 55 percent of Israelis, despite the unending cascade of indeterminate elections that the latter have endured.²¹

If conservative internationalists criticize their liberal counterparts for placing too much faith, and investing too much hope, in international institutions and not enough in American leadership, then they must acknowledge that Trump's erratic fusillades against allies, his tendency to withdraw from international commitments and organizations without an alternative plan, and his unprecedented effort to reverse the results of the 2020 presidential election have diminished America's standing and boosted that of its rivals, while hastening the decay of the U.S.-led international order. McMaster, to his credit, explicitly recognizes problems such as these. He notes both how Trump's groundless accusations of election fraud played into Russian disinformation efforts in 2016 and 2017, and the damaging effects of America's declining reliability as an ally.²²

Thriving in a Tougher World: Five Principles

The United States cannot turn back the clock. Just as the effects of past errors and excesses cannot be reversed, nor will the relative advantage in economic and military power America enjoyed at the end of the Cold War be regained. Striving for an idealized future heedless of the aims and plans of one's rivals is a fool's errand, but pining for the return of a mythologized past is just as fruitless. Yet, there is every reason to believe that the United States can continue to enjoy security, prosperity, and international preeminence with the adoption of a strategy that is informed by the lessons of the past several decades and tailored for today's constrained and competitive geopolitical environment. Such a strategy should be based on five principles.²³

²¹ Richard Wike and Shannon Schumacher, "Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong," *Pew Research Center*, Feb. 27, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/27/democratic-rights-popular-globally-but-commitment-to-them-not-always-strong/>.

²² McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 50, 270.

²³ These principles are drawn from those offered by Henry R. Nau in *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

Support Diplomacy with Force, Force with Diplomacy

First, diplomacy is most effective when backed by force, and vice versa. The former is an article of faith among conservatives — economic and military force should not be considered a last-resort alternative to diplomacy but should be wielded in concert with diplomacy to achieve the best outcomes for American interests. To ensure that U.S. threats of force are deemed credible, the country must build and preserve its military strength, allowing it neither to become outmoded by rivals’ technological advances nor exhausted by peripheral conflicts.

However, the converse is also true — coercion must be undertaken with realistic objectives in mind and with an understanding of the perspective of the target. This is where McMaster’s frequent exhortations to “strategic empathy” are valuable. Conflicts the United States, as a superpower, regards as limited tend to be considered high-existential by smaller adversaries. This makes those adversaries unexpectedly defiant, even under severe coercive pressure, often leading either to stalemate or outright military conflict.²⁴ Avoiding such outcomes requires, first and foremost, setting realistic objectives when first crafting a policy, which is less politically costly than scaling back one’s objectives once failure appears inevitable. McMaster applies this logic to Iran, decrying the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement as an exercise in diplomacy not backed by the credible threat of force, and the 2018 decision to withdraw from the deal as the resort to pressure without a clear diplomatic strategy.²⁵

Respect the Role of States

Second, the United States should give proper due to strong states as key actors in international affairs. As much as analysts and policymakers tend to invoke the

Press) and summarized by Charlie Laderman, “Conservative Internationalism: An Overview,” *Orbis* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 6–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2017.11.009>.

²⁴ For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Michael Singh, “Conflict with Small Powers Derails US Foreign Policy: The Case for Strategic Discipline,” *Foreign Affairs*, Aug. 12, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2020-08-12/conflict-small-powers-derails-us-foreign-policy>.

²⁵ McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 297.

“international community” or call for the United Nations or another international body to act, the true burden of action lies with individual states and coalitions of states. International institutions should not be dismissed lightly — they are important tools in international affairs, lending legitimacy, setting norms and imposing constraints, helping to allocate the costs of global public goods, and providing forums for the debate and resolution of problems. They are also arenas for competition, and American withdrawal from, or neglect of, those institutions benefits rivals, as McMaster notes.

However, success or failure in foreign policy nevertheless depends foremost on the will and capacity of states. Sanctions on Iran are a case in point. While the legitimacy of those sanctions in the eyes of much of the world flowed from the U.N. resolutions that endorsed them, their power derived from America’s preponderance in, and thus influence over, the international financial system. As the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign has demonstrated, the absence of significant international support has not reduced the power of U.S. sanctions. It has merely offset it modestly by offering Iran the meager consolation prize of international support for its position. When a U.N. imprimatur is present but no state is willing or able to act in support of that mandate — for example, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701’s call for the disarmament of Hezbollah²⁶ — the result is underwhelming.

With this in mind, the United States should devote considerable effort to increasing the capabilities and resilience of its partners, especially those that demonstrate the political will to act in furtherance of mutual interests. It should also organize those partners into cooperative coalitions and networks so that they complement and amplify one another’s capabilities. As Kori Schake, former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, Jim Ellis, and Joe Felter have noted, allies help to constrain rivals and magnify, or substitute for, the exercise of American power. The neglect of alliances encourages rival networks to flourish.²⁷ Investing in alliances and enduring partnerships, as opposed to treating cooperation as

²⁶ “Security Council Calls for End to Hostilities Between Hizbollah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701 (2006),” United Nations, Aug. 11, 2006, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>.

²⁷ Kori Schake, Jim Mattis, Jim Ellis, and Joe Felter, “Defense in Depth,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 23, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2020-11-23/defense-depth>.

purely transactional, also generates positive externalities, as existing allies are more likely to give new requests from Washington a more sympathetic hearing in the future and may even search out new areas for cooperation themselves. But nurturing alliances need not mean fostering or encouraging dependency — indeed, as strength and dependency are at odds, Washington should not shy away from pushing its partners to shoulder ever greater shares of collective burdens as their capabilities grow.

In these respects, McMaster correctly notes that the Trump administration deserves credit for building and improving upon the work of previous administrations: It increased American defense investments in Europe, even as it has pushed NATO partners to spend more on their own defense, and strengthened partnerships, such as the “Quad” in the Indo-Pacific and Israel’s nascent partnership with the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the Middle East. Although he does also note that the administration deserves admonition for its “expressions of doubt about the value of allies when Russia and China are doing their best to break alliances apart.”²⁸

Capitalize on Shared Values

Third, the United States should concern itself not only with power but with values. As American Enterprise Institute scholar Zack Cooper has noted, “the competitions with China and Russia are only partially about power ... U.S. worries about China and Russia are founded as much in clashing values and visions as in clashing power.”²⁹ While America’s competition with its present-day rivals centers far less on ideology than during the Cold War, the threat the United States and its partners perceive from Moscow and Beijing are heightened by the way both operate — through repression and control at home and coercion and subversion abroad.

Furthermore, U.S. values confer an important advantage to Washington in its competition with its rivals that far outweighs whatever vulnerabilities these values give rise to. Free markets and a vibrant democratic civil society help to foster growth and innovation,

²⁸ McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 442.

²⁹ Zack Cooper, “Bad Idea: Great Power Competition Terminology,” *Defense360*, Dec. 1, 2020, <https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-great-power-competition-terminology/>.

promote political resilience, and even speak to the aspirations of the citizens of U.S. rivals. While McMaster is rightly skeptical of the power of economic openness to liberalize authoritarian states like China — an assessment now widely accepted — he defends the promotion of democracy and economic liberalization as a means to counter and deter America’s rivals, even as he notes that the Trump administration unevenly applied this logic.³⁰

Shared values also underpin America’s strongest alliances, as does a shared concern over the threats posed by the values of U.S. rivals. Relationships such as that between the United States and Saudi Arabia are frequently offered as a counterpoint to this assertion. In fact, however, they demonstrate its validity. As Democrats’ calls for the incoming Biden administration to take a tougher line with Riyadh attest, relationships that are exclusively interest-based and not buttressed by shared values are those most vulnerable in political shifts — or shifts in how interests are perceived — on either side. This is why, when foreign leaders pen op-eds in American newspapers, they tend to appeal to shared values rather than simply to shared interests.³¹ Doing so suggests a bond that goes deeper than a mere transaction.

During the Cold War, there was not one international order, but three : There were those that governed relations between the United States and its allies, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and their clients on the other. There was also the order that implicitly governed relations between the blocs. As many analysts have noted,³² the mistake Western policymakers made in their exuberance at the end of the Cold War was assuming that the liberal order led by the United States would subsume the other two. This proved only partially true. While many ex-Eastern Bloc states gladly joined the U.S.-led international order, Russia and China proved more interested in contesting American leadership.

³⁰ McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 140.

³¹ See, for example, Yousef al-Otaiba, “The Moderate Middle East Must Act,” *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 9, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yousef-al-otaiba-the-moderate-middle-east-must-act-1410304537>.

³² See for example Campbell and Ratner, “The China Reckoning.”

The answer to this problem, however, is not to scrap the U.S.-led order as a relic of the past, but to reform it by building, as Miller has suggested, a “smaller, deeper liberal order” based on shared values and interests that can magnify U.S. efforts to counter its rivals.³³ Miller proposes building a separate structure for engaging with those rivals through diplomacy, arms control agreements, and the like, and, yes, even cooperating with them where doing so is possible and advantageous. The point of building an order among U.S. allies would not be to cut them off from U.S. rivals — playing such a zero-sum game would be risky for the United States, as Schake, Mattis, Ellis, and Felter note.³⁴ Rather, it is to permit them to engage with those rivals collectively and with confidence. Both “orders” should leverage the advantages conferred on the United States by the democratic values it shares with its allies, as well as the weaknesses inherent in the authoritarian values held by America’s rivals.³⁵

Set Priorities, Match Ends and Means

Fourth, as important as they are, America’s democratic values should be advanced conservatively, keeping in mind the vital importance of maintaining domestic support for U.S. foreign policy. McMaster is right to assert that “strengthening democratic institutions and processes in target nations may be the strongest remedy” to the aggression of America’s adversaries, and he advocates for doing so across the board — whether by supporting activists in Russia, China, and Iran, or by helping to promote democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁶ Yet, he does not explicitly address the need to prioritize among these issues. Such prioritization has taken on greater urgency given that American resources and power are increasingly at a premium in a more competitive world.

³³ Paul Miller, “Make the Free World Free Again,” *The Dispatch*, June 9, 2020, <https://thedispatch.com/p/make-the-free-world-free-again>.

³⁴ Schake, Mattis, Ellis, and Felter, “Defense in Depth.”

³⁵ For further discussion, see *Linking Values and Strategy: How Democracies Can Offset Autocratic Advances, A Task Force Report*, Alliance for Securing Democracy, October 2020, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Linking-Values-and-Strategy.pdf>.

³⁶ McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 140.

The Trump administration's 2018 *National Defense Strategy* sets out its priorities with laudable clarity:

Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department, and require both increased and sustained investment, because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and prosperity today, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.³⁷

Far less clear, however, are the policy implications for this prioritization elsewhere, such as in the Middle East. As the defense strategy makes clear, it almost certainly means operating more through partners. But it should also mean recognizing that a dollar spent maintaining or expanding the strength, stability, and prosperity of a willing partner — those on the boundaries of the free world — will almost certainly yield more than that same dollar spent seeking to foster accountable governance or promote economic liberalization where they do not already exist.

The need to set priorities and follow them when allocating resources is reinforced by the need to maintain domestic support for foreign policy. Strategists should consider not just what ought to be done but what can be done given material, as well as political and social, constraints. The election of successive presidents who have decried American interventions in the Middle East and pledged to reduce U.S. commitments overseas should be evidence enough of the American people's conflict fatigue. While McMaster often attributes this phenomenon to a failure by consecutive administrations to explain the importance of conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan to the American populace, survey data does not bear this out. For example, Pew Research found in mid-2019 that veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — who are presumably well-informed about those conflicts — overwhelmingly believe that the costs of those conflicts exceeded their benefits. These polls also show that veterans' views closely track with those of the general public.³⁸

³⁷ *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States*, Department of Defense, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

³⁸ Ruth Ignielnik and Kim Parker, "Majorities of U.S. Veterans, Public Say the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Were Not Worth Fighting," Pew Research Center, July 10, 2019,

Such evidence suggests that the problem is not one of communication but of failing to match realistic ends with available means — means which are increasingly needed elsewhere. If internationalists fail to learn from such feedback and from the results of past policies, public skepticism of their proposals is likely to deepen and calls for more wholesale retrenchment and restraint will mount.

Husband America's Strength

Finally, the United States needs to rejuvenate the wellsprings of its power and influence: its military and economic strength and its democratic health. While these topics are largely beyond *Battlegrounds'* remit, McMaster touches upon each briefly. He notes, for example, that “partisan vitriol” in the United States gives its rivals the impression that it is incapable of competing effectively,³⁹ or that “decisions involving technological and infrastructure development must consider how the proposed technology and infrastructure would interact with geopolitical competitions,”⁴⁰ or that competing in cyberspace requires cooperation between the public and private sector.⁴¹

The upshot is that no clever strategy for deploying American power will succeed in countering the threats it faces if that power itself is permitted to atrophy. To succeed in a more competitive world, the United States will need to move more quickly to modernize and make more resilient a military that is increasingly vulnerable to the capabilities of its adversaries, enact economic policies to boost productivity and protect against national security threats, and restore the health of its democratic institutions and ability to craft foreign policy on a bipartisan basis (seemingly the hardest of all given the country’s experience in 2020). McMaster’s successors in the West Wing will need to grapple with these problems that lie at the intersection of domestic and foreign policy, perhaps taking comfort that the United States has managed to do so in the past. In 1978, for example, Michael Mandelbaum and William Schneider lamented that the “Cold War consensus is

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/majorities-of-u-s-veterans-public-say-the-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-were-not-worth-fighting/>.

³⁹ McMaster, *Battlegrounds* 443.

⁴⁰ McMaster, *Battlegrounds* 411.

⁴¹ McMaster, *Battlegrounds* 406.

gone,” and asserted that the incoming Carter administration’s most pressing need was for “a domestic consensus for foreign policy.”⁴²

Conclusion

In *Battlegrounds*, McMaster has offered a useful *tour d’horizon* of the threats facing the United States, as well as an entry into a pressing debate over the proper role of the United States in the world. For internationalists of all stripes, the stakes of that debate are high. Radicalism is resurgent in international relations. The notion that the international system the United States has defended and in which it has prospered for decades must not be preserved, but rather transformed, has gained traction not only in Moscow and Beijing but on the hustings throughout the Western world. The time to make the case for what focused, pragmatic, and competent American leadership and engagement looks like, and what it has to offer the United States and the world, is now or never.

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⁴² Michael Mandelbaum and William Scheider, “The New Internationalisms,” *International Security* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 81–93, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/446200>.