

Summary of GIARI Political Integration and Identity Seminar

“Grand Strategy of Restraint”

Presenter: Barry R. POSEN PhD

Date: Tuesday, October 20th, 2009

Time: 13:00 ~ 14:30

Venue: Waseda University, Building No. 19, 711

Moderator: Chikako (Kawakatsu) UEKI

In the U.S. national security establishment, there is a consensus on grand strategy which can be called “Liberal Hegemony.” This strategy requires a military force superior to almost any conceivable combination of other states, and in fact, the United States has regularly stationed its forces all over the world. Professor Barry R. POSEN, however, argues that Liberal Hegemony is unnecessary and that U.S. security is better served by a “Grand Strategy of Restraint.” In his presentation, he first explains the components of Liberal Hegemony and then describes his Strategy of Restraint, which would have the U.S. reduce costs by focusing its resources on key security problems.

Liberal Hegemony comprises eight main policies: (1) thwarting terrorism; (2) preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); (3) reconstructing failed states; (4) maintaining security in the Persian Gulf; (5) containing rogue states; (6) keeping a watchful eye on China; (7) retaining and extending Cold War alliances; and (8) spreading democracy and the free market. There is not much disagreement between the Democratic and Republican parties on these policies.

Disagreement between the two parties, Posen argues, is tactical and exists within the framework of this general consensus. He highlights three differences between them. First, Democrats believe international institutions are more useful than do Republicans. Second, Democrats are more patient in diplomacy. Third, Democrats want a new agreement on nuclear arms control whereas Republicans try to maintain flexibility on the issue.

After showing the differences between the two parties, Posen lists seven arguments missing from debate on the general consensus: (1) the Iraq war was a mistake; (2) national security is constrained by economic scarcity; (3) U.S. military operations, especially in unconventional war, are very costly; (4) U.S. activism

makes the United States a magnet for balancing by other countries; (5) taking the offensive in the war on terror might be self-defeating; (6) allies such as the Europeans and Japanese may be free-riding, while Taiwan, Israel, Georgia, Iraq, and Afghanistan might be driving recklessly..

Posen sees the Obama administration as not yet willing to confront these six problems fully, instead setting two tiers of priorities. The first tier includes: (1) economic recovery; (2) stability in the Middle East; and (3) non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The second tier includes: (1) dealing with humanitarian issues in failed states like Darfur; (2) keeping things calm in Asia, especially U.S.-China relations; (3) nursing the nuclear arrangement with North Korea back to life; (4) dealing with Japan's free riding; (5) pressuring the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to increase its efforts; (6) seeking cooperation with Russia, especially on nuclear arms control.

After explaining the consensus U.S. grand strategy, Posen suggests another path for U.S. national security, namely the Strategy of Restraint. The Strategy of Restraint stands on the premise that the United States is inherently strong militarily, economically and technologically and should husband this power by focusing on a small number of key security issues. The U.S. should maintain the balance of power in Eurasia, prevent the proliferation of WMDs, and bring the focus of its War on Terror back to Al Qaeda.

Posen ends his presentation by describing some objections to his Strategy of Restraint. Political scientists object that it is difficult for a great power to restrain itself because it is stronger than others. Free riders such as Japan and Europe will not let the United States restrain itself. Domestic opinion is another obstacle to the Strategy of Restraint – Americans appear to like thinking of the U.S. as the top country in the world. Finally some argue that the world has many potential problems, such as nuclear arms proliferation, the potential rise of great power competitors, global warming, and global financial crisis, that may not be solved if the United States plays a reduced role. "The question is," Posen concludes by asking, "are these objections large enough to outweigh the costs of not changing the current US strategy?"