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Same Game, Different Rules: Pointillist Imperialism and the New Cartography of Great Power Competition

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Same Game, Different Rules: Pointillist Imperialism and the New Cartography of Great
Power Competition

by

Andrew Jesse Shaughnessy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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Abstract

For centuries, “Great Powers” competed for global hegemony not only through building up military strength and amassing wealth, but through the formal acquisition of distant lands, conquered and folded into their borders. Today, core states continue to vie for global power, but no longer exert formal control or sovereignty over less powerful states. So how has the nature of great power competition in peripheral states changed? Most scholars studying Great power competition measure power in terms of military and economic resources, often failing to account for a third, crucial dimension in international power politics: the impact of distributed networks of geographical control on a state’s ability to wage war, expand economically, and fully utilize the coercive and co-optive potential of economic and military clout. Tracing this pattern of distributed geographical control through historical case studies and using a unique combination of data sets cataloguing the United States’ global network of military bases and China’s growing global network of infrastructure investments and loans, this thesis demonstrates that “pointillist imperialism” is the latest mechanism by which great and rising powers establish and grow their real and potential power across the globe. Much scholarship has been devoted to analyzing the United States’ basing network and China’s growing web of strategic global investments, but no one has previously looked at these two, separate power acquisition strategies as twin, parallel branches of the same process. Pointillism, distributed geographical control, serves as the connective tissue between the two. Both the U.S. and the China are playing the same old “great

power” games, but they employ distinctly different strategies in their quests for global hegemony.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

If one were to examine a political map of the world from the year 1913 (Figure 1), at the height of European imperial competition and just on the eve of the First World War, one would see an arrangement of colors and borders representing an historical and political reality far different from our own. Here, the blues of the French Empire stretch from West Africa to Indochina (Vietnam); there the Russian empire spans a continent, its borders creeping ever outward into Central Asia and Eastern Europe. And the sun never sets on the pink of the British Empire—from Capetown to Cairo, Lahore to Sydney.

Less than three decades previously, in 1884, European imperial powers had partitioned Africa at the Berlin Conference: dividing the continent between the Belgian, British, French, German, Italian, and Spanish empires in orderly fashion (Pakenham 2003). In just a few short years, the British, French, and Russian empires would divide the Middle East—spoils plundered from a defeated Ottoman Imperial foe—between them in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement: Syria and Lebanon would fall under French rule, Armenia to the Russians, and Iraq and Kuwait placed under British “protection.”

In the geopolitical landscape represented by this map, “great powers” competed for global hegemony not only through building up military strength and amassing wealth, but through the formal acquisition of distant lands, conquered and folded into their borders. The relationship between the great powers and the less powerful people groups, colonies, and lands on the periphery was one of formal territorial rule,

institutionalized hierarchy, and systemic political and economic exploitation.

Simultaneously, the game of great power competition was played—in part—in and over occupied peripheries across the globe, which provided imperial wealth and labor through self-contained supply chains and allowed for the construction of global networks of military bases and ports from which empires could project power and protect key economic assets.

If one were to examine a political map of the modern world (Figure 2), things would look quite different. Today, core states continue to vie for global power, but no longer exert formal control over less powerful states. Many lands previously under the control of the world's various empires are now independent countries, and the world seems less divided among a handful of global empires than distributed among hundreds of sovereign states. Unlike the map from 1913, this modern map tells the reader little about the comparative power of the United States, China, or Russia, for example. Does the United States exert some level of power or influence over parts of the Pacific or the Middle East? What about China's economic or political power over parts of Africa? Just by looking at this map, you would have no idea.

So how has the nature of great power competition in the peripheries of empire changed over time? How do the U.S., China, and semi-peripheral or rising states project and compete for power in and over smaller states today? Reckoning with this question requires a reimagining of our contemporary cartographies of power. I argue that contemporary Great Power Competition continues in the form of contested pointillist

imperialism—the latest mechanism by which great and rising powers establish, grow, and compete for real and potential power across the globe. Both China and the U.S.

Figure 1: Political Map of the World, 1913 (Rand McNally and Company, 1913)

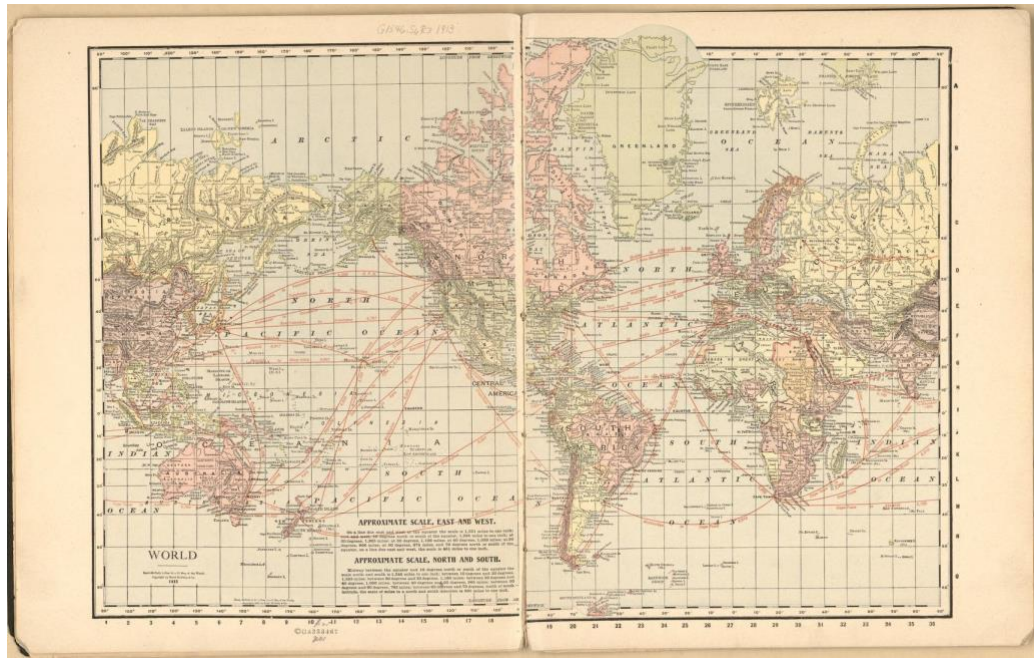


Figure 2: Political Map of the World, 2021 (CIA 2021)



are playing the same old game of competition for military and economic dominance, projected and realized through control over peripheral states, but they employ distinctly different strategies in their quests for global hegemony. American power is secured primarily through a global network of military bases, while Chinese power is advanced primarily through a growing global network of infrastructure investments and loans which grant significant economic and political leverage over recipient countries as well as access to and control over ports, raw materials, and value chains on which the global economy depends.

To briefly define some terms: “pointillism” typically refers to a painting technique developed in the late 19th century by the artist Georges Seurat, and commonly recognizable in some of the work of Vincent Van Gogh, in which tiny blotches of paint are used to build a picture that looks meaningless up close—simply a series of seemingly random blobs of color—but when viewed from a distance, it reveals a bigger picture in which the subject is evident (Lexico 2021). In pointillist imperialism, a term adopted from Daniel Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, the metaphorical individual globs of paint are tiny geographical points controlled by states all across the globe. Up close, each glob looks meaningless—an isolated American military base on the horn of Africa or a port run by a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) in Italy. It is only when the savvy researcher zooms out and looks at all those globs together that that a whole new picture, a whole new cartography of power, emerges (Immerwahr 2019).

Much scholarship has been devoted to analyzing the United States' basing network and Chinese global investments separately, but none has looked at the two strategies as twin, parallel branches of the same process. Pointillism, distributed geographical control, serves as the connective tissue between the two. Similarly, most scholars study Great power competition and hegemonic rivalry through measuring power in terms of material resources—the economic and military assets controlled by a state. Yet such accounts largely fail to account for this third, crucial dimension in international power politics: the impact of distributed geographical control on a state's ability to wage war, expand economically, and fully utilize the coercive and co-optive potential of economic and military clout. Large populations, rich mineral wealth, substantial industrial capacity, and formidable armies and navies may all serve as helpful measures of state power, but without a global network of bases, ports, and airfields, from which to project military power; and without a global web of investments, loans, trade agreements, and secured value chains from which to wield economic power, states' ability to fully utilize their power potential in a global context is severely limited. This is the crux of "pointillist imperialism" as a theoretical concept and tangible reality—the geopolitical and geoeconomic ecosystem has evolved from a world of formal territorialized empires to one of interconnected sovereign states, yet hegemonic competition still requires great powers to control physical geographical locations distributed across the globe. The rules have changed, but the game remains the same.

This thesis proceeds as follows. First, I will define terms and situate this thesis in international relations theory—briefly fleshing out "core-periphery" theory and

reviewing the academic literature on how different international relations theoretical frameworks have approached measuring state power in a global context. Next, I will provide historical background, walking readers through the history and evolution of global basing and commercial networks as they have been used over time for purposes of imperial expansion and competition. Having thus set the scene, I will analyze the United States' global military basing network as a case study in contemporary pointillist empire, arguing that the U.S. focuses on the military and geographic dimensions of global power acquisition. Next, I will analyze China's global infrastructure investment network as a case study in contemporary pointillist empire, arguing that China focuses on the economic and geographic dimensions of global power acquisition. Both case studies include a cataloguing of the state in question's "nodes of power," mapping data compiled from multiple sources to reveal a telling pattern that handily advances the narrative of pointillist imperial control. Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the limitations, theoretical implications, and questions raised by this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Definitions: Core-Periphery Theory

The concept of “core and periphery,” also variously referenced in the academic literature as “center and periphery” or “nucleus and periphery,” is central enough to this thesis to merit some basic definitions. “Core-Periphery Theory” describes the structural relationship and interaction between a more powerful, privileged, or advanced center and a less powerful, privileged, or advanced outer area or edge. Throughout the literature, this concept—functioning as a spatial metaphor—has been used to discuss cultural, political, and economic relationships between urban/metropolitan centers and suburban or rural provinces, developed and developing states, and (key to this thesis) large/great powers and weaker states, polities, groups, or cultures (Wallerstein 1979 162–164; Nguyen 2019, 55–56; Shils 1961, 117–130).

American sociologist and economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein’s particular concept of core-periphery theory—the one on which I lean most heavily—developed as a key interpretive lens through which to explore world-systems theory and broad political and economic patterns through history. In the view of Wallerstein and subsequent researchers, core and periphery delineations are not static, nor purely geospatial, definitions. Rather, they refer to a dynamic set of processes and relationships which change from region to region and group to group as power dynamics and political winds shift over time. In the model, core states tend to exploit, while peripheral states tend to be exploited; core processes tend to have relatively high wages, a more complex and diverse production portfolio, and utilize more advanced

technology, while peripheral states tend to have relatively low wages, a simpler and less diverse production portfolio, and utilize less advanced technology; core states tend to be more militarily and economically powerful, while peripheral states tend to be less militarily and economically powerful. Still other states are “semi-peripheral,” those which are neither core nor peripheral, but, occupying a relatively middling position of military and economic power, have aspects of both processes—often simultaneously being exploited by core states and exploiting peripheral states (Wallerstein 1979 162–164; Taylor 1984, 17–18).

Which states or geographical regions qualify as core, peripheral, or semi-peripheral changes over time, corresponding with the rise and fall of empires, hegemonies, and competing great powers. Thus, between the 13th–16th centuries, Mediterranean polities such as Venice, Genoa, and the Ottoman Empire operated at the core of the western world economy, expanding their borders and competing for military and economic hegemony. In the 16th–19th centuries, these polities faded to the semi-periphery as various western European empires rose to the fore, taking their place as the world economy’s “core” states. Simultaneously, these core states’ imperial possessions and colonies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia were, in this framework, peripheral states—plundered, conquered, and fought over by the core. Over the 19th and 20th centuries, the United States and unified, post-Bismarck Germany each rose first to semi-peripheral, and then to core status as their economic and military clout grew. After their defeat in two world wars, Germany was reduced again to semi-peripheral status, while the USSR and the United States emerged as the world’s two core states

over the course of the Cold War. As formerly core European empires collapsed and many former imperial possessions gained independence and autonomy, the core-periphery relationship shifted from one of imperial domination to an ideology-driven delineation marked by transfers of arms and capital in exchange for allegiance to either communism or capitalism and concurrent alignment with either the Soviet Union or the United States (Taylor 1984, 19–21).

In the post-Cold War era, this core-periphery dynamic continues. After a relatively brief unipolar period of American hegemony, the United States and China now exist at the core of the world economy and geopolitical ecosystem, and exhibit typical core processes. Less powerful, but still substantially economically and politically competitive states such as Britain, Russia, Germany, India, and Brazil now are semi-peripheral states; while less powerful states, such as many former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe and “developing” countries in Africa, South and Central America, and West, Central, and East Asia exist at the periphery of the world economy and geopolitical ecosystem, and exhibit typical peripheral processes.

2.2 Measuring Power

Throughout history, core states/great powers have played their brutal games for dominance in and over peripheral states, yet which states are core and which are peripheral change from age to age and century to century. In other words, while the players change, the game remains the same. Core states compete for hegemony—vying for power in an international system marked by anarchy. On this fact, realists and liberals alike can agree. Indeed, the concept of power, and the dynamics of the

perpetual contest for gaining and keeping it, lies at the very heart of international relations. Yet, for all its importance, how one defines, measures, and compares the power of one state versus another is a matter of much debate, and the very theoretical lens through which one views and interprets the international system plays an outsized role in how one makes sense of and measures power.

2.2.1 Realism and Power

Realists are pessimists at heart, and this pessimism impacts the perspective with which realists view, define, and measure power. According to the realist conception of global politics, states are locked in a constant, inescapable struggle with one another—competing for power, dominance, and ultimately survival in an international context of anarchy. In this Hobbesian world of all versus all, every state is out for themselves and themselves alone. They operate as rational actors—consistently making choices that will maximize their utility. Every state is a rival to every other state, and alliances are only ever temporary conveniences. Today’s friend may be tomorrow’s enemy, and thus, gaining power over and above other states—chiefly military power, but also economic, technological, and territorial—promises states the greatest chance of survival (Mearsheimer 2001, 362-363; Waltz 1979, 88–97; Fearon 1995, 379–414; Schweller 2016, 4–7; Rose 1998, 144–72). As John Mearsheimer writes in his classic work of realist theory, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*: “The overriding goal of each state is to maximize its share of world power, which means gaining power at the expense of other states. But great powers do not merely strive to be the strongest of all the great powers,

although that is a welcome outcome. Their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon—that is, the only great power in the system” (Mearsheimer 2001, 2).

Viewing the international system, as they do, as one marked by competition and conflict, realists typically measure power primarily in terms of tangible assets that contribute to a state’s military capability and relative gains in ability to defeat its rivals in war. Here, reckoning the relative power of two states is simply a function of adding up and then comparing the tangible assets controlled by each (Mearsheimer 2001, 55; Schweller 2016, 4–7; Beckley 2018, 8). While raw military power (e.g., total military spending, the size of a state’s military forces, the number of aircraft carriers or nuclear warheads, etc.) is of primary importance, “latent power” also factors into the total measurement of state power. Latent power essentially refers to a state’s resources which have the potential to be converted to military power, primarily population, technology, and wealth. In other words, *potential* military clout: a population can be conscripted to bolster one’s armed forces or man the factories that build the deadly tools of conflict; money can buy influence, fund propaganda campaigns, and pay the costs of building up a military force or waging war; technology can be harnessed for military ends. For realists, the contest for survival and dominance can take place on many fronts—economic, technological, and more, all of which contribute towards how much a state weighs on the scales of power—but war is the ultimate judge (Mearsheimer 2001, 55-56; Beckley 2018, 11–14; Schweller 2016, 4–5).

2.2.2 Liberalism and Power

Compared to realism, the liberal framework is profoundly optimistic, and this optimism impacts the perspective with which liberals view, define, and measure power. While liberals acknowledge and grapple with the reality of competition and war between states over territory, resources, and dominance, they do not believe that conflict is inevitable. Despite maintaining a belief in an international system that, as in realism, is anarchic, liberalism asserts that cooperation can emerge between states when clusters of political actors initiate patterns of reciprocity—that is, political and economic cooperation and peace are responded to with cooperation and peace, to the mutual benefit of all (Axelrod 1981, 317). Thus, instead of being locked in incessant struggle for power, states are motivated by potential absolute gains (thus valuing gains in wealth, for example, regardless of whether their overall gains are comparatively less than that of other states) and can cooperate effectively based on shared interests (Keohane 1984, 9). Indeed, for liberals, medium and long-term cooperation is key to state success. Economy of scale empowers cooperating states to benefit from larger projects where they would have struggled alone and band together for mutual defense against common foes. Global free markets allow states to specialize and profit through global trade. As Robert Keohane writes in *After Hegemony*:

“[A]ttempts to separate a sphere of real activity, called ‘economics,’ from another sphere of real activity, called ‘politics,’ are doomed to frustration and failure. Very little of the polity in modern societies is untouched by the economy, and vice versa. ... In the real world of international relations, most

significant issues are simultaneously political and economic” (Keohane 1984, 21–22).

Thus, where realists attempting to gauge state power are largely concerned with military might, liberals place a much greater emphasis on economics, wealth, and material prosperity as driving forces in international politics—inextricably intertwined with global power competition, and fundamentally shaping states’ preferences and calculations of competition or cooperation. Where realists view wealth and economic prosperity as deriving geopolitical utility primarily from their potential ability to be converted to military power, liberals view wealth and economic prosperity as measurable tools of power in their own right. To liberals, power is not simply about whether one state can defeat another in armed conflict. It is more so about a state’s ability to shape the world according to its particular interests or goals. Winning the day in times of war is certainly one of a state’s interests, but so is winning mutually favorable trade deals, diplomatic outcomes, strategic alliances, or even the hearts and minds of foreign citizens. Wealth, material resources, and economic clout enable states to fund these sorts of interests and goals by, for example, investing in or sending aid to a peripheral state in exchange for trade or diplomatic concessions. Such actions can increase a state’s “soft power”—the ability for a state to get what they want through cooption rather than coercion (Nye 2004; Beckley 2018, 8–12).

2.2.3 Power as Outcomes vs. Power as Resources

To frame the issue from a different perspective than international relations theory, the academic literature is also divided on whether state power ought to be

defined, measured, and compared in terms of outcomes or resources. For an outcomes-oriented scholar, power in the international relations context may be broadly defined as “the ability of a country to shape world politics in line with its interests,” (Beckley 2018, 8). Robert Dahl, for example, defined power as “[When] A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl 1957, 202–203). Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye echo Dahl’s definition, elaborating that the nature of power in an international relations context boils down to a state or actor’s control over outcomes or potential to affect outcomes (Keohane and Nye 2001, 9–10). Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall similarly argue that the essence of power lies in the capacity of an actor to shape their fate and alter their circumstances, particularly producing such results through social relations (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 45).

Outcome-based measurements of power start from the result (who won?) and work backwards to trace a line of causality. They are thus highly contextual. After all, every conflict between states is composed of unique variables. States have many different interests, and the scope of possible actions states could take to pursue one interest or another, the challenges they might face in a particular context, and the various inputs and factors weighing for or against their chances of success vary widely. State A may have a greater ability to shape world politics in line with its interests in the particular context of Conflict X, while State B may have a greater ability to shape world politics in line with its interests in the particular context of Conflict Y.

The advantage of the power-as-outcomes approach is that it allows a researcher to analyze particular international relations conflicts with a higher degree of precision

than a more generalized approach allows. In a war or trade disputes, for example, they can identify the players' desired outcomes, identify the actual outcomes, and then form a causal explanation for what factors—both material and nonmaterial (strategy, luck, etc.)—enabled one side to win and another to lose. Unfortunately, the very precision and specificity which makes the power-as-outcomes approach helpful for analysis of particular past events also renders it unusable for measuring the balance of power between nations more broadly or when looking to gauge comparative power or potential outcomes between two states in the present or future (Beckley 2018, 12).

With these weaknesses in mind, most political scientists and other scholars measure power in terms of a material resources—the economic and military assets controlled by a state. The logic of the power-as-resources approach has already been alluded to in this thesis, albeit indirectly. In short: the more and better military assets a state has, the better able it is to win wars, woo allies, or coerce desired outcomes; the more wealth and economic assets a state, the better able it is to fund a military, buy influence, or expand production. When looking for generalizable measurements, more resources means more power (Beckley 2018, 8).

The majority of researchers use gross indicators to measure and compare national power. J. David Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckley, for example, use a formula of six indicators to measure a state's war-making power potential, factoring in a demographic dimension (a nation's total population and the number of people living in cities of 20,000 or larger), an industrial dimension (energy consumption and iron or steel production), and a military dimension (military expenditures and armed forces size)

(Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972, 25–26). Since Singer developed this framework, known as the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), for the “Correlates of War” project in 1967, the formula has been used to measure state power in more than 1000 studies (Beckley 2018, 10).

Gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP) are also extremely commonly used measures of national power, serving as a shorthand for a state’s total economic and military capacity (Beckley 2018, 15–17; Tellis et al. 2000, 1–38; Kennedy 1987). Others focus in on military spending or “war potential”—typically a calculation of the sum of a state’s economic output and military resources. John Mearsheimer, for example, argues that a state’s actual power rests in the size of its military, while its potential power boils down to the size of its population and the level of its wealth—viewing both chiefly as “building blocks of military power” (Mearsheimer 2001, 43, 55). Randall Schweller cites a number of variables that factor into determining a state’s capabilities, including geography, population, GNP, technological development, government revenue, and even political will—arguing that each only matters to the extent that it can contribute to a state’s capabilities in armed conflict (Schweller 2016, 4–5). Klaus Knorr devotes dozens of pages in his book *The War Potential of Nations* to analyzing the inputs at the heart of states’ economic capacity for war, factoring in natural resources (land, vegetation, water, mineral deposits), capital (railroads, highways, public utilities, stores of raw and industrial materials and goods), currencies and claims to foreign debt, and labor (and the impact of varying levels of skilled labor) (Knorr 1956, 163–169).

Hans Morgenthau's reckoning of national power tallied includes geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, technology, size of military forces, population, and even non-tangibles such as a nation's character, morale, and quality of government (Morgenthau 1967, 106–158). George Modelski and William Thompson focus in on the size and reach of a state's naval forces, emphasizing "oceanic supremacy" and sea power as prerequisites for achieving military and commercial dominance. By their reckoning, the last half-millennia of history has unfolded in a series of 100-year hegemonic cycles, each dominated by that state which wins control of the sea. In this framework, power is best and most easily measured by counting the total number of capital warships owned and operated by each state (Modelski and Thompson 1987; Modelski 1987, 41). More recently, researchers for the RAND Corporation developed a "Three-level framework" for measuring and describing national power, accounting for national resources (technology, enterprise, human resources, financial/capital resources, and natural resources), national performance (external constraints, infrastructural capacity, and ideational resources), and military capability (strategic resources, conversion capability, and combat proficiency) (Tellis et al. 2000, 1–38).

A minority of scholars criticize the gross resources approach to measuring state power, arguing that such calculations can yield flawed results because they only count output, failing to account for the cost of state expenditures. These researchers argue that the power of nations should be reckoned not from *gross resources* but from *net resources*—those resources left over in the state's metaphorical book of sums after production, welfare, and security costs are subtracted. In his article "The Power of

Nations: Measuring What Matters,” for example, Michael Beckley argues for an index of power calculated by multiplying GDP by GDP per capita, thus taking into account both gross resources and output per person (a helpful measure for a state’s efficiency and level of economic development) (Beckley 2010, 43–45; Beckley 2018, 14-18). Paul Kennedy, while using gross measurements extensively, also employs GNP per capita over time to compare the power of European Great Powers, taking explicit account of the increase costs of rising population alongside rising production potential (Kennedy 1987, 171).

2.2.4 A Third Dimension: Distributed Geographical Control

Clearly, scholars use *many* different metrics and methods to measure and compare the relative power of states—at least 69 unique measurement frameworks according to a 2011 study (Hohn 2011). While each of these perspectives makes compelling arguments, power-as-resource frameworks for measuring state power are the most compelling and broadly useful. Still, while some of the approaches reviewed above take into account such relevant factors as strategic geography (largely framed in terms of the defensibility of a homeland or its particular endowment of natural resources), transportation infrastructure (Morgenthau 1967; Schweller 2016; Tellis et al. 2000; Knorr 1956), or global military and commercial reach (Modelski and Thompson 1987; Modelski 1987, 41), they largely underplay the impact of distributed geographical control on a state’s ability to wage war, expand economically, and fully utilize the coercive and co-optive potential of economic and military clout.

Geographic control and expansion are treated extensively in histories of empires and accounts of the rise and fall of great powers, but given a short shrift when it comes to actually measuring and comparing state power, particularly in the modern context. Large populations, rich mineral wealth, substantial industrial capacity, and formidable armies and navies may all serve as helpful measures of state power, but without a global network of bases, ports, and airfields from which to project military power, without a global web of investments, loans, and trade agreements from which to wield economic power, states' ability to fully utilize their power potential in a global context is severely limited. The extent of a states' distributed geographical control thus functions as a crucial third dimension in states' global power acquisition strategies. Whichever of the other two resource-based power metrics they focus on—economic or military—they must also pursue distributed geographical control to have a hope of winning global hegemony.

Chapter Three: Historical Background

3.1 Global Basing Networks and the Bounds of Technology

Global or regional networks of military bases and multi-purpose (military and commercial) ports have long been tools of power projection, political competition, and economic expansion by competing empires and aspiring hegemons. The Athenian-led Delian League and the Spartan-led Peloponnesian league fought over base access during the Peloponnesian Wars of the 5th century BCE (Harkavy 2007); Rome paved the way for the Pax Romana with permanent fortresses to shelter their legions, the ruins of which still linger from Britain to Egypt and beyond (Vine 2021); the Mongols used captured bases in Korea and Vietnam as launching points for expansion in the 13th century; and the Chinese admiral Zheng He established control over the port of Malacca (in modern day Malaysia) as a staging ground for expeditions of exploration, conquest, and trade across the Indian Ocean and down the coast of East Africa (Harkavy 2007; Padfield 1979). Between the 13th and 16th centuries, the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas became a chessboard for naval and commercial competition for dominance as a series of rival powers (Venice vs. Genoa, followed by Venice vs. the Ottoman Empire, followed by the Ottomans vs. Spain) vied for control of bases and ports which served simultaneous military, diplomatic, and commercial purposes, securing trade routes, acting as footholds from which to exert diplomatic pressure or economic leverage on nearby states and actors, and serving as launching points for galley fleets (Padfield 1979; Harkavy 2007).

Great power competition over the centuries has typically required core states to adopt foreign policies aimed at both military dominance and global market acquisition. Acquiring wealth through maritime trade with or plunder of peripheral states and growing one's military might by patrolling the seas with warships went hand in hand. Such sea power required core states to carve out and establish extensive networks of bases and ports that served as nodes of power from which war could be waged, trade routes secured, and where fleets could come for respite and resupply. Often, bases were only the epicenters of imperial control, beyond and from which lands were conquered and ruled (Padfield 1979). While some scholars argue that sea power is a prerequisite to hegemony or even great power status (sea-based trade and transportation by sea being much faster and cheaper than land-based trade and thus yielding exponential economic and strategic returns), this same pattern fits land-based empires. For the Mughals ruling the Indian subcontinent (or, later, the British in the land-based components of their campaigns of imperial conquest deeper into modern day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), Tsarist Russia expanding through Central Asia, and the Ottomans seizing control of Western Asia and beyond, the march of conquering armies required similar chains of bases from which armies could launch campaigns, establish reliable supply routes, serve as hubs and markets for overland trade, and use their economic and military power to coerce compliance or secure alliances with neighboring states or regional actors (Vine 2021). In short, securing control over strategic geography and peripheral states by means of networked nodes of power is a tried-and-true pattern for core states looking to expand.

Simultaneously, core states' ability to expand economically and project hard military power and diplomatic/economic soft power over the periphery is bound by the limits of transportation, military, and communications technologies. For more than a thousand years, Mediterranean-based core states' oar-propulsion technology rendered their warships wonderfully maneuverable and well-suited for the infantry-like tactics of close quarters naval combat in the Mediterranean, Black, and Aegean Seas, but simultaneously restricted the fleets to a limited range and radius of action. Galleys could only venture so far from the safety of their well-provisioned and fortified ports and struggled to survive the stormy perils of the open Atlantic, meaning any efforts of imperial expansion or ensuring security over sea lanes required establishing and maintaining an expensive chain of outposts along the way. In short, the limitations of seagoing technology (and the high expense inherent to requisite base chain establishment and maintenance) for a time held back the expansion of imperial merchants, statesmen, colonists, and armies alike (Padfield 1979; Harkavy 2007).

By the time the 15th and 16th centuries inaugurated the "Age of Sail," ship construction, navigation, and weapons technology and techniques had all developed to the point where European vessels were able to venture past the Mediterranean's bounds. Shipwrights designed hardier craft armed with bigger and better guns and increasingly complex arrays of sails and rigging to propel them across the waves. States competing for power now employed a naval strategy in which ships were used like floating fortresses, securing trade routes and harrying foes from what were functionally moveable artillery batteries. While networks of bases were still necessary to resupply

and make repairs, ships could now venture further and stay at sea longer, meaning ports were still quite necessary, but they could be spaced farther and farther apart, increasing the potential range of expansion activities (Padfield 1979).

Portugal was (arguably) the first state to emerge as a global maritime and commercial hegemon. Beginning in the early 1400s and accelerating in the 1500s, Portuguese sailing fleets of caravels and naos established a chain of bases down the coasts of West and East Africa, Arabia, Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka) and throughout the Indian Ocean Rimland, into Southeast Asia, and across the Atlantic to South America. In addition to their military functions—facilitating the projection of naval power— these bases and ports served as points in a global trade network: resupplying and providing security for merchant conveyes; serving as nodes of power from which Portuguese forces could press inland to wage war, raid for slaves (in West Africa), or find new sources of trade goods such as gold, ivory, and spices; or operating as central hubs for diplomacy and trade with local elites (Harkavy 2007; Padfield 1979).

The expansion of the Spanish Empire's basing system initially followed a similar course as that of Portugal, with Spain first seizing control of strategic points and trade routes across the Mediterranean from the Ottoman Empire of in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, followed quickly by the rapid expansion and construction of naval bases, forts, and cities across the Caribbean, Central, and South America. Unlike the Portuguese, who were largely content to profit from the trade derived from their chain of bases and ports, Spain soon pushed inland, conquering and establishing permanent colonies. Where Portugal's base network was primarily built to facilitate trade, Spain's

network of New World bases served as a network of control, expansion, and security for a massive operation to extract silver from the colonies and transport it to the imperial homeland, where the precious metals were used to fund still more growth and expansion of the global Spanish empire (Harkavy 2007).

As the Portuguese maritime empire in West Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia began to wane in the 17th century, the Dutch stepped in to seize the reins, taking control of much of the old Portuguese basing network by force, even as they established new bases in Indonesia and the Caribbean. By the 1640s, the Dutch East Indies Company had established a globe-spanning network of coastal outposts, bases, and ports—as well as diplomatic agreements securing port usage and favorable trade relationships—from West Africa to Brazil, from the Indian Ocean to the Baltic, and from Java to Japan. For a century, this network served as the foundation for Dutch maritime and commercial dominance (Padfield 1979; Harkavy 2007). Their global reach, economic position, and commercial/financial edge were so great, that several international systems theorists have proclaimed the United Provinces in the mid-17th century to be one of only a very few (of three, according to Wallerstein; of nine, according to Modelski) instances of true global hegemony realized in world history (Wallerstein 1984, 39–40; Modelski 1987, 10).

Great Britain's steady imperial expansion towards eventual global hegemony began in the 17th century. Even as the (then) more powerful Spanish and Dutch fleets were carving up the world and establishing dominance over trade routes and sea lanes, British trading companies, naval officers, and colonists established bases, ports, and

settlements, beginning in the Caribbean, North America, West Africa, and South Asia. Over the next three centuries, Britain relied on the strength of its navy to steadily expand its access to and control over the ports of the world. In West Africa, India, and the Americas, bases served as launching points for both trade and conquest. In the Mediterranean, diplomatic agreements and security pacts secured strategic access for British naval vessels in friendly ports controlled by allies in the ever-shifting European political landscape.

As the years marched on and the winds of fortune shifted, often the waxing British Empire was there to snatch up territory lost by the unfortunate waning empires against which it competed. They seized control of Gibraltar in 1704, for example—a hugely important strategic point for controlling access to and from the Mediterranean. As the Dutch Empire contracted in the late 18th century, Britain stepped in to take control of key ports and bases in India and Indonesia. During and after the Seven Years War, and again in after the defeat of Napoleon, Britain took control of much of France and its allies' overseas imperial holdings, winning territory and control over key bases and ports in both North and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Baltic Sea. As maritime technology evolved from sail to steam—freeing navies and merchants from the limitations set by natural trade winds and allowing vessels to push upriver into Central Africa, East Asia, and beyond for further imperial conquest—the British basing network grew to include 157 coaling stations, storehouses of fuel strategically located across the globe to maximize British naval power projection and access (Padfield 1979; Harkavy 2007).

3.2 The Scramble for Empire

By the turn of the 20th century, the sun truly never set on the British Empire. From Halifax to Bombay, Freetown to the Falkland Islands, Alexandria to Auckland, Britain's many commercial depots, military bases, ports, and outposts served as nodes of power connected by steamship and submarine cable, geographical points by and through which control was exerted over colonial subjects and territory, security was ensured for commercial sea lanes, and military power was projected to the far corners of the globe (Kennedy 1987; Harkavy 2007). Yet though the worldwide reach of Britannia's imperial tentacles was not matched by any of its rivals, they were far from alone on the geopolitical stage.

Laying track for railroads and pushing upriver by steamship, the plunder-hungry great powers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—that fateful balance of power preceding the fateful collapse into the first world war—clawed tooth and nail to snatch up control over any peripheral state they could reach. Russia had been steadily expanding its imperial holdings and riches for centuries. Ivan III, Peter I, and Catherine II were each dubbed “the Great” in large part due to their martial conquests in Central Asia and Eastern Europe well into the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Kivelson 2017). Farther east, Imperial Japan pushed into the crumbling remains of the Chinese empire, seizing control of Korea and Manchuria, building up their navy and industrial economy as they rose to great power status (Kennedy 1987).

From its days of heady monarchy to Napoleonic Republic and beyond, France had built an overseas basing system beginning in the 16th century, establishing tentative

footholds in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and North America that grew into more firm imperial holdings by the mid 19th and early 20th centuries. As Europe's empires raced to control key pieces of the globe, France steadily used its basing access to solidify and expand colonial control at various times in North and West Africa, Canada, India (before losing control to the British), and Vietnam (Harkavy 2007; Kennedy 1987). No sooner had Germany—long wracked by war and factionalism—been finally united under Otto von Bismarck in the late 19th century than its leaders began to look for potential footholds for economic expansion and global conquest. Directly competing with its Western European rivals, Germany laid claim to significant territories in East and South Africa, various islands in the Pacific Ocean, and even gained temporary economic and political control of a small part of China (Kennedy 1987). Even Italy and Belgium got in on the action, seizing brutal control (however briefly) of Ethiopia and the Congo respectively (Pakenham 2003).

During this age of global imperial rivalry, reckoning state power was certainly a matter of measuring military and economic clout, yet it was also measured in terms of the expanse of one's geographical holdings. These three aspects—geographical control, economic power, and military power—were inextricably intertwined, both symbolically and literally. Late 19th and early 20th century Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Japan wanted to gain political and economic control over the periphery because by doing so they could exploit their colonies' and territories' natural resources, establish commercial systems of trade aimed at enriching the imperial homeland, benefit from cheap labor, station troops and stage fleets for strategic advantage in times of war, and

win prestige over their geopolitical rivals. Economic and military power were the central goals, but the means by which great powers achieved those goals were the pursuit of formal political control by way of imperial conquest, all riding on the coattails of a cresting wave of industrial and technological advancement.

Global imperial competition built on vast networks of interconnected ports, bases, fueling depots, and trading outposts continued through the late 19th century and into the early 20th century. During and after World War I, aircraft technology improved rapidly, quickly growing in importance as a major asset for travel, communication, and war. As a result, basing strategies for power projection and commercial expansion shifted from focusing primarily on maritime bases and ports to necessarily include global networks of air bases from which to launch bombing raids or stage aerial transport fleets. The first half of the 20th century also saw the advent and rapid development of long-range communications technologies, and soon infrastructure networks including underwater cables, radio towers, and radar stations were added to the growing map of crucial nodes required in the network of imperial control (Harkavy 2007, 72-73).

3.3 The United States

The United States entered the fray of global imperial competition following the Spanish-American War in 1898, winning control of the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Soon thereafter, the U.S. bought Alaska and the Aleutian Islands from Russia, the Virgin Islands from Denmark, and asserted control over the Panama Canal Zone. Through World War I and into the beginning of World War II, these meager holdings comprised the entirety of the United States' global basing network. Global

seaways and trade routes were still largely secured by the British navy, and (despite the best expansionist efforts of Teddy Roosevelt and others) many Americans remained content to leave the murky business of “real” empire building to the Europeans. World War II changed everything (Immerwahr 2019; Harkavy 2007, 80–82).

As the threat of German and Japanese aggression grew in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the United States began beefing up existing overseas bases. In September 1940, as part of the Lend-Lease Act, President Roosevelt gave 50 destroyers to Britain in exchange for control over numerous British air and naval bases across the Atlantic, including in Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad, British Guyana, Newfoundland, and Labrador, Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. The effort was, in part, aimed at allowing British military forces to concentrate their resources on Europe, but there was a clear self-interested motivation for the United States as well—ensuring hemispheric security, and (taking a cue from core states of ages past) setting the stage for a new era of expanding American power (Immerwahr 2019; Harkavy 2007; Vine 2021). Indeed, at the time, President Roosevelt is said to have described the “destroyer-for-bases” deal as the most important action of American military security “since the Louisiana Purchase” (Vine 2021).

Simultaneously, American diplomats were hard at work acquiring contingency rights for strategic airfields, fuel depots, and naval bases throughout Latin America (Immerwahr 2019; Harkavy 2007). By 1941, just before entering the war, the U.S. had acquired access to and use of existing air and naval facilities or, in a few cases, rights to build new bases of their own, in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Galapagos Islands,

Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela—linking the western hemisphere with a network of controllable access points—nodes in a growing web of influence and power. And they were just getting started (Immerwahr 2019; Harkavy 2007)

Once they entered the war, the U.S. enjoyed access to the global network of bases and ports owned and operated by its erstwhile hegemonic British allies. As they pushed back Axis forces in North Africa, Europe, and Asia, the United States seized more and more territory. By war's end, American forces occupied Japan and parts of Korea, Germany, and Austria. More importantly, the United States expanded its network of bases to span the globe, securing thousands of strategic facilities across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. At the war's zenith, the United States controlled more than 2,000 bases and 30,000 installations overseas. Where just a few years before, the United States had had little military presence beyond their borders, they now held the reins to the most expansive network of strategic military facilities of any empire to that point in history (Vine 2021, 36-37).

This new reality changed everything. The world had been turned upside down, and the United States came out on top. Gifted with such a boon, and in the wake of such a conflict, American statesmen, generals, and admirals began to think of American power and national defense not simply in terms of maintaining the ability to defend their borders, but rather in terms of maintaining and expanding the ability to project military (and soon economic) might to any corner of the globe (Vine 2021).

In the war's aftermath, rather than annexing conquered lands into a formal American Empire, the United States gave up the majority of its occupied territory, returning land to sovereign states in Germany, Japan, and Italy, even as they led the rebuilding of a new international order built on institutions, alliances, free trade, and international law. Yet, even as the United States eschewed the mass territorial acquisitions one might expect of a more traditionally imperialist Great Power, they held onto much of their wartime global basing network—using it as the foundation for a new era of hegemony-seeking power projection. These interconnected nodes of power became the hubs from which the United States waged (or threatened to wage) war, influenced other states, and attempted to secure global commerce for the rest of the 20th century (Immerwahr 2019, 17; Harkavy 2007, 82–85, 94).

3.4 Same Game, New Rules

World War II reshaped both the nature and geography of great power competition, marking the turning point from an era in which core powers pursued and competed for economic and political control over peripheral states primarily through formal political domination over vast territories to an era of pointillist imperialism. Core powers still competed for economic, military, and political power in and over the peripheries, but technology and the makeup of the geopolitical world order and global economy had evolved in such a way that power could be harnessed without the need for formal imperial domination. Instead, states began to compete for global power in and over peripheral states using a combination of political alliances; geo-economic tools

including investment, loans, and aid; and military power projected from global networks of bases and ports. They were playing the same game, but the rules had changed.

The United States' power projection capabilities had grown from a limited network of bases and ports centered around the American mainland into a worldwide web of interconnected nodes of military and commercial power. Nor was the United States the only country to see the geography of its fortunes transformed. While the United States had become the dominant power in the world, Britain, Germany, France, and Japan all lost their global power status. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union emerged as the immediate challenger to American global supremacy. Before World War II, the Soviet Union's network of bases and ports had been limited to the boundaries of its (admittedly quite large) land-based Eurasian Empire. By the end of the war, the USSR's campaign through Nazi Germany's eastern front had yielded base access throughout Eastern Europe, as well as in Mongolia in Russia's southeast (Modelski 1987; Harkavy 2007).

Meanwhile, even as the U.S. and USSR were rising as the world's newest core states, the former European great powers were rapidly losing grip on their global empires. Leading up to and over the course of the war, the majority of the developing world had remained under imperial control. Thus, the great powers' strategic control of nodes of power—such as military and naval bases, ports, control of key trade choke points, airfields, and communications lines—was inextricably intertwined with direct control of territory (Harkavy 2007, 93). After the war's end, the British, French, German, Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese empires began to crumble as, one by one, their

colonies, protectorates, and overseas holdings won their independence. And as the empires dissolved, the geopolitical landscape of the world transformed into a bipolar contest for power between the United States and the USSR (Harkavy 2007, 94–95).

3.5 The Cold War

Between the late 1940s and the fall of the USSR in 1989, the U.S. and USSR raced to secure influence and power over the emerging African, Middle Eastern, and Asian states. Finding themselves in a position of global leadership in war's wake, the U.S. was reluctant to return to the pre-war status quo. And as anti-imperial sentiment grew and European empires dissolved, the U.S. could no longer count on access to the global network of bases, ports, airfields, and communication infrastructure once owned and occupied by colonial powers. Instead, as the Cold War heated up in the 1950s, they forged a vast series of formal alliances with states across the developed and developing world, negotiating arms transfers, security agreements, and economic assistance in exchange for basing access to facilitate power projection and secure global assets.

Over the course of the Cold War, the United States held at least 1,600 military bases overseas, including 265 air, naval, ground, or missile bases in 58 different countries across the globe, along with 145 known communications or signals intelligence stations in 34 countries (Kennedy 1987; Harkavy 2007, 220–234; Vine 2021, 38–39). The Soviets too raced for global base access. From 1955 (when the first such deal was struck with Egypt) through 1990, the Soviet Union transferred weapons and aid to allied (mostly Marxist) regimes in exchange for basing rights in some 40 countries

across the globe, access permissions to ports and airfields, and/or signals intelligence and communications facilities (Harkavy 2007, 129–130, 235–241).

As technology continued to evolve over the 20th century, so too did the power projection capabilities and physical infrastructure needs of large states. Besides the standard array of commercial and naval ports, inland military bases, and airfields, states now added radar and communications stations, missile silos and ballistic missile defense arrays, space-related infrastructure, nuclear weapons and energy technology, maritime/nuclear/missile detection technology, and signals intelligence stations. Simultaneously, just as more technologically advanced sailing ships had allowed Europe's first global empires to extend their reach ever further, the development of long-range aircraft, in-flight refueling capabilities, nuclear powered ships and submarines, and increasingly powerful global communications and intelligence gathering technologies (signal, photoreconnaissance, etc.), allowed states to project power further with less need of dense physical basing and infrastructure networks.

In other words, the growing importance of new technologies increased the number and type of bases required for states to compete and project power and influence, while this same technology allowed states to project power further and faster without the need for direct control of territory. Where core powers of ages past could only gain and maintain control over peripheral states through conquest and occupation, by the latter half of the 20th century, evolving technology and a changing geopolitical landscape allowed core states to exert similar levels of control and influence over peripheral states—and enjoy the strategic military and economic benefits of that

control—through alliances and trade agreements, all secured by a growing global network of bases, ports, and energy and infrastructure investments and holdings (Harkavy 2007, 94–95).

3.6 Great Power Competition in the Post-Cold War Era

When the Soviet Union collapsed between 1989–1991, its global network of airfields, military bases, and ports in client states around the world quickly dissolved as well (Harkavy 2007, 147). What remained, however briefly, was a unipolar global political landscape, with the United States filling the role of hegemon. Yet in the three decades since the fall of the USSR, a new challenger has risen to vie for global hegemony. Once very much on the periphery, China has risen to become an industrial powerhouse, global superpower, and America’s primary geopolitical rival (Pan 2018).

In this new bipolar era, both the U.S. and China wield extraordinary amounts of military power (both actual and potential), economic clout, and diplomatic influence in and over the peripheral and semi-peripheral states of the world. Standard political maps of the world do not reflect this reality. Where the maps of the early 20th century revealed the expansive scope of territories, markets, and strategic geographical points controlled the various great powers vying for dominance—and by so doing communicated at least a some rough, though flawed, approximation of their comparative power—contemporary political maps reveal nothing about, for example, the geopolitical leverage wielded by the United States as a result of their military bases and assets distributed around the world. Nor would a modern map reveal Chinese

influence over small countries, markets, and economically strategic value chains across the globe.

The reason for this cartographical discrepancy, of course, is that in sharp contrast to ages of empire past, neither the U.S. nor China formally rules or oversees peripheral states. Instead, both the U.S. and China employ expansive networks of interconnected nodes of power—tangible assets from which economic or military power is projected. Yet the composition of these networks, the means by which contemporary hegemony-seekers compete for and project power, and the strategic approaches they employ vary considerably. In the following section, I will examine the varying approaches employed by core states (the U.S. and China) to compete for global hegemony and project power and influence over the periphery.

Chapter Four: Case Study 1 - The United States

4.1 Overview

If the great game for global power is reckoned in terms of military might, economic clout, and (as this thesis argues) networked geographical control, the United States' post-World War II power acquisition strategy has focused on the military and geographic dimensions—securing and maintaining global military dominance in large part through establishing a network of hundreds of military bases around the world. These bases, combined with high levels of American military spending, serve as nodes of power from which the United States can project military might—deploying soldiers, aircraft, fleets, or missiles to attack enemies—deter aggression, coerce desired outcomes, or protect economic or strategic assets such as waterways and choke points crucial to maintaining supply chains and the flow of international trade.

This final point is an important one. While the United States' strategy for power acquisition emphasizes and focuses on the military and geographic dimensions, it does not ignore the economic dimension of international power politics. Indeed, dominating the global economy is a key goal in American strategy, but its approach to doing so is grounded in a post-World War II Liberal worldview (or at least rhetoric espousing this worldview) emphasizing the widespread benefits of globalization, liberalization, and free trade. By this reckoning, the liberal economic order facilitates the establishment of networks of complex interdependence that decrease the risk of interstate conflict and increase wealth, technology transfers, and the standard of living across the globe. In

theory, everybody wins. And yet, as is so often the case with theories, reality is a bit more complicated.

In the centuries and decades before the Second World War and Britain's subsequent decline as a global core state, the United States' efforts to increase their power and prosperity leaned heavily on the global economic ecosystem being secured by the British empire via their substantial naval might (made possibly, as mentioned previously, by their global basing network). Under Pax Britannica, Britain served as a kind of "global policeman," keeping the peace and maintaining the safety of global waterways and trade routes with an iron fist, a world-spanning navy, and a behemoth industrial economy. Though they paid the lion's share of costs to maintain this global order, as the hegemon, Britain also reaped the king's share of benefits from liberal economic policies in global trade (Oatley 2018).

Once the British system of international security for global commerce began to crumble, the United States—freshly equipped with a booming economy and massive basing network—stepped into the gap. They led the way when Western Allied states signed the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1944 and in creating the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, forging and strengthening international ties of economic cooperation and setting rules that eliminated many cross-border barriers to trade. Hands firmly on the reins of global economic and military power, the U.S. steered the emerging new world order towards a system aimed at securing and fostering global peace, prosperity, and international cooperation—but on terms that favored and bolstered American economic hegemony (Blackwill and Harris 2016; Oatley 2018).

The United States' position as a (or, at times, *the*) core state in the world economic system allowed and allows it to enjoy outsized benefits from free trade and the Liberal international order. As a core state, the United States is a hub in a global hub-and-spoke network of economic and geo-political connections, carrying the most weight in an international imbalance of power. Peripheral states may benefit from globalization, free trade, and the Liberal international order, but they do so to a lesser degree than the United States and are vulnerable to American coercion (Farrell and Newman 2019; Blackwill and Harris 2016).

Operating in this larger context, U.S. policy makers have sought to promote and protect a liberal trading ecosystem in which the economic and the political spheres are kept purposefully and consciously separate. As Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris explain in their book *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, U.S. policy over the 20th and 21st centuries “reflect[s] a widely held worldview that markets are somehow apolitical, to be kept free from geopolitical encroachments, and in any case not a proper arena for state power politics” (Blackwill and Harris 2016, 153).

The American geo-strategic worldview is one in which the economic dimensions of great power competition are pursued indirectly. Unlike in China's foreign policy (which will be explored further in the next section), American foreign policy and efforts of expanding global control do not involve large-scale state investments in foreign businesses, energy or natural resource holdings, or infrastructure. The United States largely eschews geoeconomic strategies of power acquisition (with the notable exception of economic sanctions), leaving commercial pursuits to private enterprise and

instead focusing its robust energies on promoting and protecting the liberal global ecosystem that works in their favor. Like 19th–early 20th century Britain, they aim to keep the trade routes open and safe, minimize international conflict, maximize favorable terms in diplomatic and economic deals, and maintain their position as the world’s top dog (Blackwill and Harris 2016).

While this American policy emphasis on military and political statecraft over and above geoeconomic strategy is in part simply the result of a self-interested and realistic reckoning of the United States’ lofty place in the global economic pecking order, it is also rooted in history. During the Cold War, Great Power struggle was often framed in terms of a clash of worldviews: Communist state economy versus Western capitalism. Thus, even as the United States and the Soviet Union raced for military dominance, American strategies of containing the Soviet threat often included wooing peripheral states with funding or weapons, but with benefits contingent on the liberalization of the country in question’s trade policies. In the end, the shadow of international insecurity which loomed over the Cold War shaped an American economic ethos which cast democratic capitalism, liberal market reforms, and efficient, globally-integrated supply chains as morally superior to all alternatives and necessarily separate from the state (Blackwill and Harris 2016, 172-173).

By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, this security-and-free-trade approach to American foreign policy was sacrosanct. During the heady 1990s, the United States’ brief decade of optimistic peace and prosperity, U.S. National Security Strategies reflect this worldview, emphasizing free trade agreements, democratization efforts, and the

ever-increasing expansion of an American global military presence to ensure international security. In the Clinton administration's 1994 "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," the White House authors write:

"We believe that our goals of enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity, and promoting democracy are mutually supportive. Secure nations are more likely to support free trade and maintain democratic structures. Nations with growing economies and strong trade ties are more likely to feel secure and work toward freedom. And democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with the U.S. to meet security threats and promote sustainable development. ... Even with the Cold War over, our nation must maintain military forces that are sufficient to deter diverse threats and, when necessary, to fight and win against our adversaries. ... American leadership has never been more important. If we exert our leadership abroad, we can make America safer and more prosperous—by deterring aggression, by fostering the peaceful resolution of dangerous conflicts, by opening foreign markets, by helping democratic regimes and by tackling global problems. Without our active leadership and engagement abroad, threats will fester and our opportunities will narrow" (The White House 1994, i-1)

The document goes on to urge the American people and congress to stand ready to bear the "costs of leadership," not only in dollars but in American lives, and outlines a national security strategy centered on "enlarging the community of market democracies while deterring and containing a range of threats" (White House 1994, 2). The role of a

global basing network in this strategy is explicit, with the strategy emphasizing the need for the United States to “provide a credible overseas presence” in which U.S. military forces are deployed or stationed in key areas around the world to “deter aggression ... demonstrate our commitment to allies and friends, underwrite regional stability, gain familiarity with overseas operating environments ... and provide timely initial response capabilities (White House 1994, 7).

After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC on September 11, 2001, the United States’ foreign policy emphasis on overseas military capabilities for international security only intensified. No longer only or primarily concerned with rival great powers, in the wake of 9/11 the U.S. turned its ire on hostile non-state actors and set out harnessing the full power projection potential of its global basing network to wage the “War on Terror.” In the Bush Administration’s 2002 “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” the authors cast a narrative of the 20th century in which the righteous (American) forces of “freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” had defeated the evils of totalitarianism and, now enjoying a position of “unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence,” the United States aimed to use its clout to keep the world safe from terrorism and tyranny, and spread the gospel of free markets and democracy to the ends of the earth.

Tellingly, an entire chapter in the 2002 National Security Strategy is entitled “Ignite a New Era of Global Economic Growth Through Free Markets and Free Trade,” and begins: “A strong world economy enhances our national security” (The White House

2002, 17). Simultaneously, the document emphasizes the key role of the United States' forward military presence across the globe for its own ends and preserving the American-driven vision of the international order:

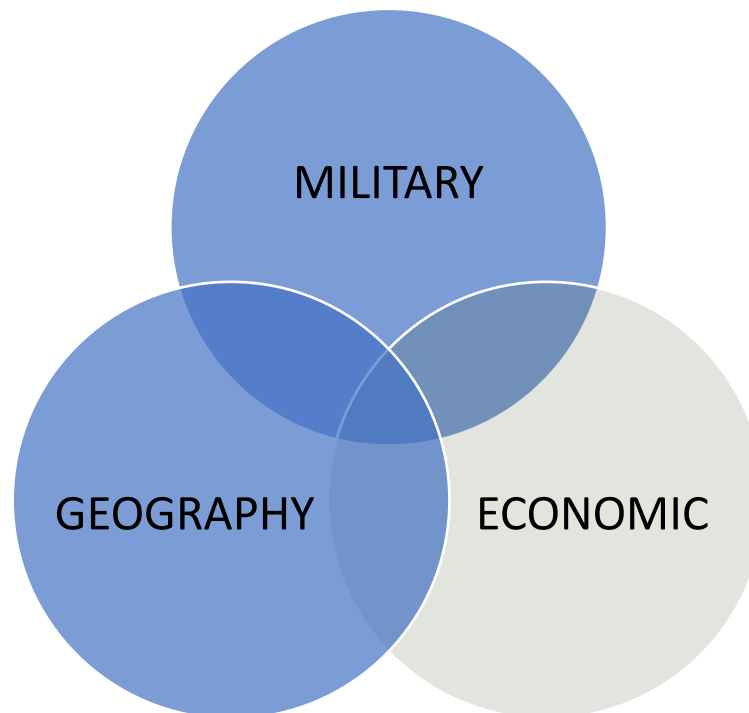
“The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitments to allies and friends. Through our willingness to use force in our own defense and in defense of others, the United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom. To contend with uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces” (The White House 2002, 29).

While the tone of National Security Strategy documents from the Trump and Biden administrations varies dramatically from the triumphant, expansionist rhetoric of the Clinton and Bush eras—and both include caveats alluding to the need to draw back commitments and forces from the Middle East and elsewhere—these more recent National Security documents continue to emphasize global military presence and basing as a core component of United States' international foreign policy and as part of the larger quest to advance and maintain American economic clout. The Trump administration's 2017 “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” for example, speaks of “maintain[ing] a forward military presence capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating any adversary” in the Indo-Pacific and “retain[ing] the necessary military presence in [the Middle East] to protect the United States and our allies from

terrorist attacks and preserve a favorable regional balance of power” (The White House 2017, 47–49).

Thus, to restate the assertion at the beginning of this section, the United States’ strategy in the game for global dominance emphasizes military might and securing a global basing network across the globe, with the economic dimension of power left largely in the hands of private enterprise as the American government uses its global military presence to ensure a favorable economic ecosystem. This strategy is illustrated in Figure 3 below, depicting a Venn diagram in which the Military and Geography dimensions of international power are given more weight than the economic dimension.

FIGURE 3: UNITED STATES’ GREAT POWER STRUGGLE STRATEGY



4.2 Visualizing the United States' Global Basing Network

As outlined earlier in this thesis, the United States global basing network grew from humble origins (only 60 overseas bases in 1939) to behemoth status with remarkable speed over the course of World War II, reaching its zenith (in terms of number of military installations) in 1945, when United States held approximately 32,000 base sites across the globe, the most of any nation in history. In the war's aftermath, the U.S. scaled back its basing network significantly, while still maintaining a global military presence with which to project power and compete with Soviet influence abroad. While the total number of American military and other strategic installations around the world has decreased even further since the Cold War's end, the coverage of the United States' basing network is still global, and still the largest in the world—far outstripping that of any of its competitors.

In fairness, the U.S. outweighs its competitors on the scales of global power, even when simply reckoned by commonly-utilized military and economic scores. In 2020, the United States spent around \$778 billion on defense (far more than any other country), around 11% of total federal spending and 3.7% of their total GDP (Peter G. Peterson Foundation 2021; World Bank 2020). China, by contrast, spent around \$252 billion on defense in 2020, just 1.7% of their total GDP (World Bank 2020). Despite widespread predictions that China's economy could overtake that of the U.S. by 2030, as of 2020, U.S. GDP still was the highest in the world at \$20.94 trillion, still outstripping China's \$14.72 trillion (World Bank 2020). In other words, when American power is

reckoned in terms of military and economic resources, their status as a core state and “great power” is clear.

Yet money and muscle mean little if hoarded at home. Whether considered a measure of power in its own right (as Liberals would do) or simply “potential/latent power” (as with the Realists) American wealth and economic clout is derived in large part from the advantages its giant status derives in rough-and-tumble global markets, and—massive advances in military technology and long-distance strike capabilities notwithstanding—the most powerful army in the world is only as effective as the enemies it can reach, and the most powerful navy in the world can only effectively control those seas which it sails.

In other words, it is the United States’ vast, global web of networked nodes of power that enables it to utilize its military and economic clout to their fullest potential. Networked geographical control *empowers* military and economic might. In the words of Daniel Immerwahr, the United States has become a “pointillist empire,” that is: an empire made up not of huge swathes of directly-controlled or -occupied territory, but rather by a vast web of control, interconnected by nodes of power scattered across the globe: islands, military bases, prisons, storage sites, science labs, antenna stations, oil rigs, underwater cables, airfields, and more. “These tiny specks,” Immerwahr writes, “are the foundations of U.S. world power” (Immerwahr 2019, 390).

Much of the work chronicling the history of military basing networks in general and U.S. military base expansion in particular was done by political scientist Robert Harkavy over the late 20th and early 21st centuries, who chronicles his extraordinarily

helpful analysis and data sets in, among other tomes, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers: 1200–2000* (Harkavy 2007), *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases: the Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy* (Harkavy 1982), and *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence* (Harkavy 1989). These works serve as invaluable resources for analyzing the economic, diplomatic, and military utility basing networks have served throughout history, and provide the most comprehensive data regarding U.S. military bases up through the end of the Cold War.

The best *current* data set on the full scope of U.S. military bases abroad has been compiled by David Vine, author of *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. Vine’s work, which he acknowledges is almost certainly incomplete (the United States is sure to have numerous secret base sites which he has been unable to find) draws from numerous sources, including the work of Harkavy and other scholars, United States Department of Defense base structure reports (past and present), United States Senate documents on security agreements and commitments abroad, news articles from many different sources featuring on-the-ground reporting of U.S. bases and military presence abroad, and even emails and interviews between the author and U.S. government officials.

According to Vine’s frequently-updated data set, as of June 2021, the United States had 742 confirmed bases or “lily pads”¹ outside the 50 states, along with 53

¹ “Bases,” in Vine’s data, are specifically those military installations outside the 50 American states which are at least 10 acres in size, have a value of more than \$10 million, or host more than 200 U.S. military personnel. “Small bases” or “lily pads,” in Vine’s data, are those military installations outside the 50 American states which are less than 10 acres in size, have a value of less than \$10 million, or have fewer

additional base sites which were reported by at least one source but unconfirmed, and 50 U.S. funded military installations across the globe (Vine 2021). Figure 4, below, summarizes the growth and contraction of the U.S. overseas basing over the course of American history.

Figure 4: United States Bases Abroad Over Time

YEAR	NUMBER OF BASES (Vine 2021)
1776-1903	42 ²
1939	60
1945	32,000
1989	1,726
2021	742 ³

While these numbers are helpful starting places for understanding the growth of the U.S. global basing network, they do not fully nor sufficiently express the full extent of the reach of American military power. Here, maps become enormously helpful visual aids. The maps featured in the pages below, chronicling the expansion of the United States' basing network over history, are derived from Vine's book.

than 200 U.S. military personnel. Also included are cooperative security locations and forward operating locations/sites.

² This count includes all bases held at some point (not all at once) during this time period and only features bases located geographically outside the current lower 48 states. The United States variously established and held other military bases in areas that were not *then* part of the United States, but which are now part of the continental U.S. Such bases were excluded from this count.

³ This count excludes unconfirmed or U.S. funded installations

Figure 5: U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776–1903 (Vine 2021)

This map depicts all military bases controlled by the U.S. outside the modern lower 48 states at some point (not simultaneously) between 1776 and 1903. It does not include foreign military bases outside the United States' borders that fell within what is today the continental U.S.—for example, forts located west of American territory in the 18th and 19th centuries before the Louisiana Purchase and westward expansion.

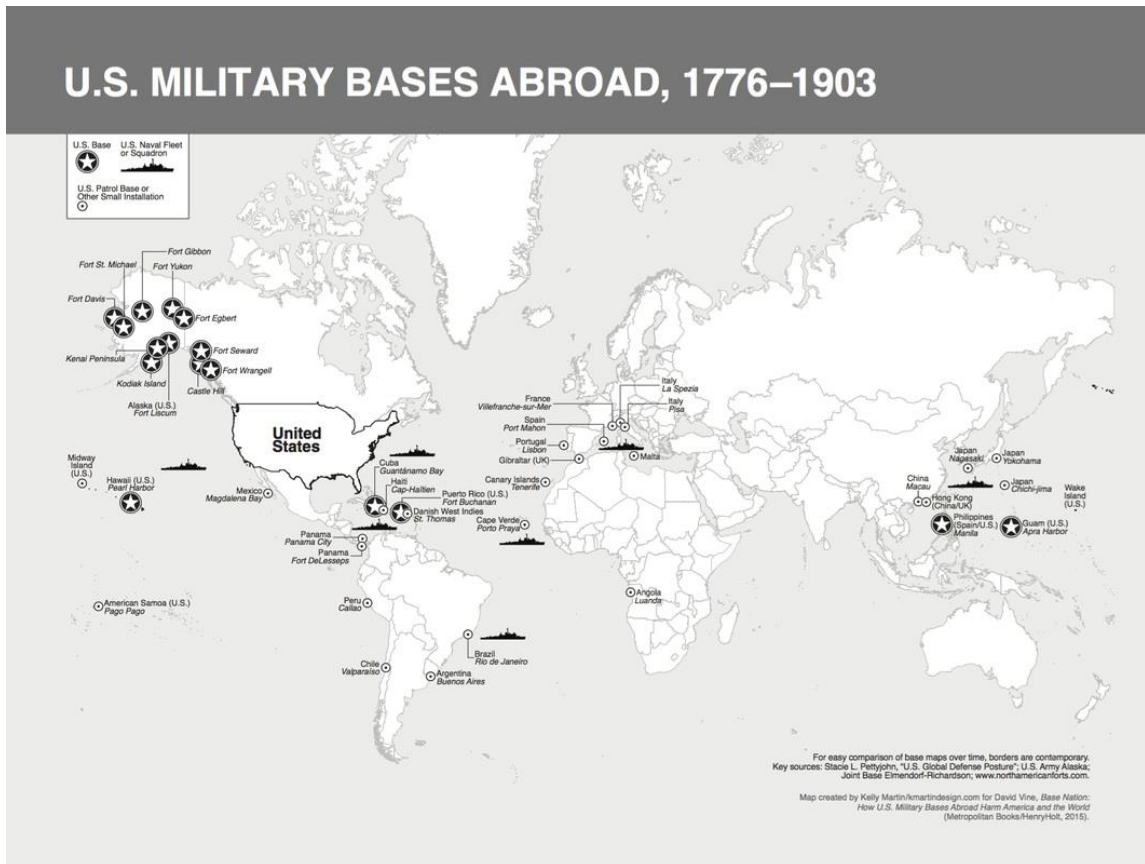


Figure 6: US Military Bases Abroad, 1939 (Vine 2019)

This map depicts all military bases controlled by the U.S. outside the modern lower 48 states in 1939, just before the Second World War. This marked the final year before the United States began building its global basing network, paving the way for its ascent to global great power status.

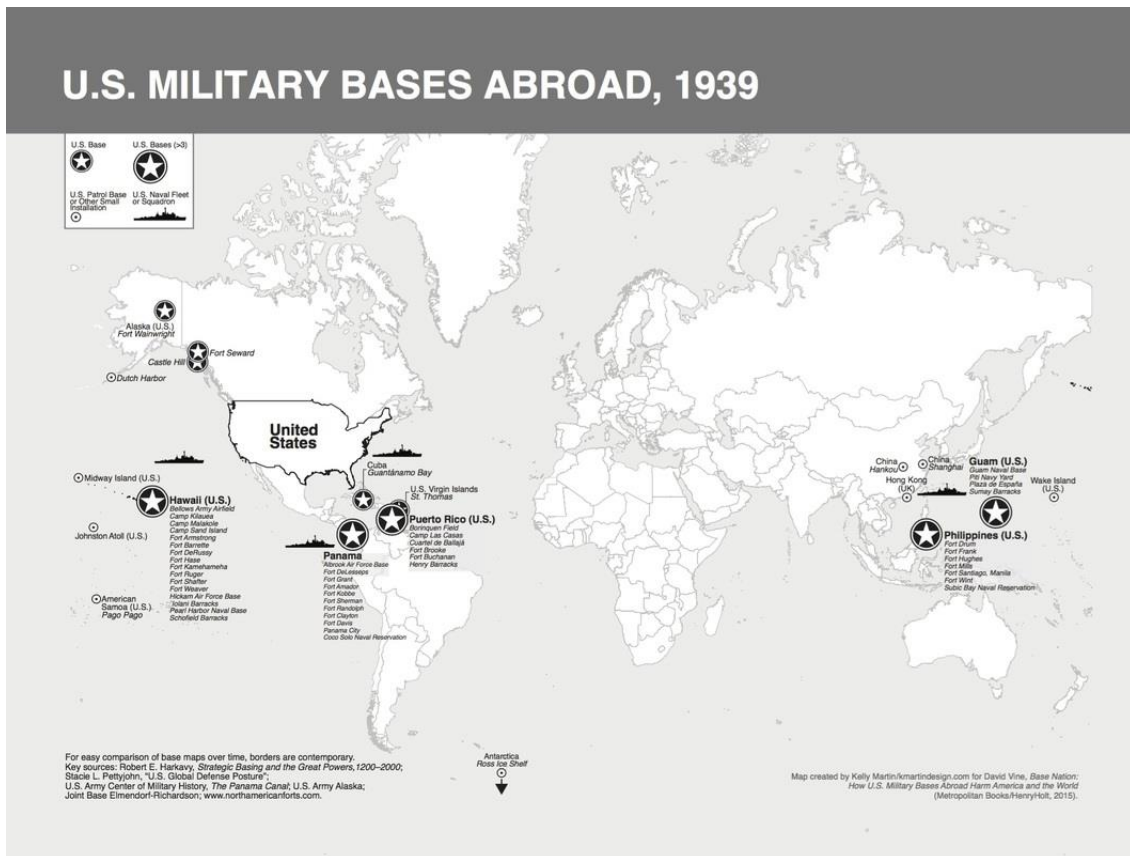


Figure 7: U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1945 (Vine 2019)

This map depicts all military bases controlled by the U.S. outside the modern lower 48 states in 1945, at the height of American involvement in the Second World War. This point marked, when the U.S. held approximately 32,000 base sites across the globe, the most of any nation in history, marked the high point of the American global basing network.

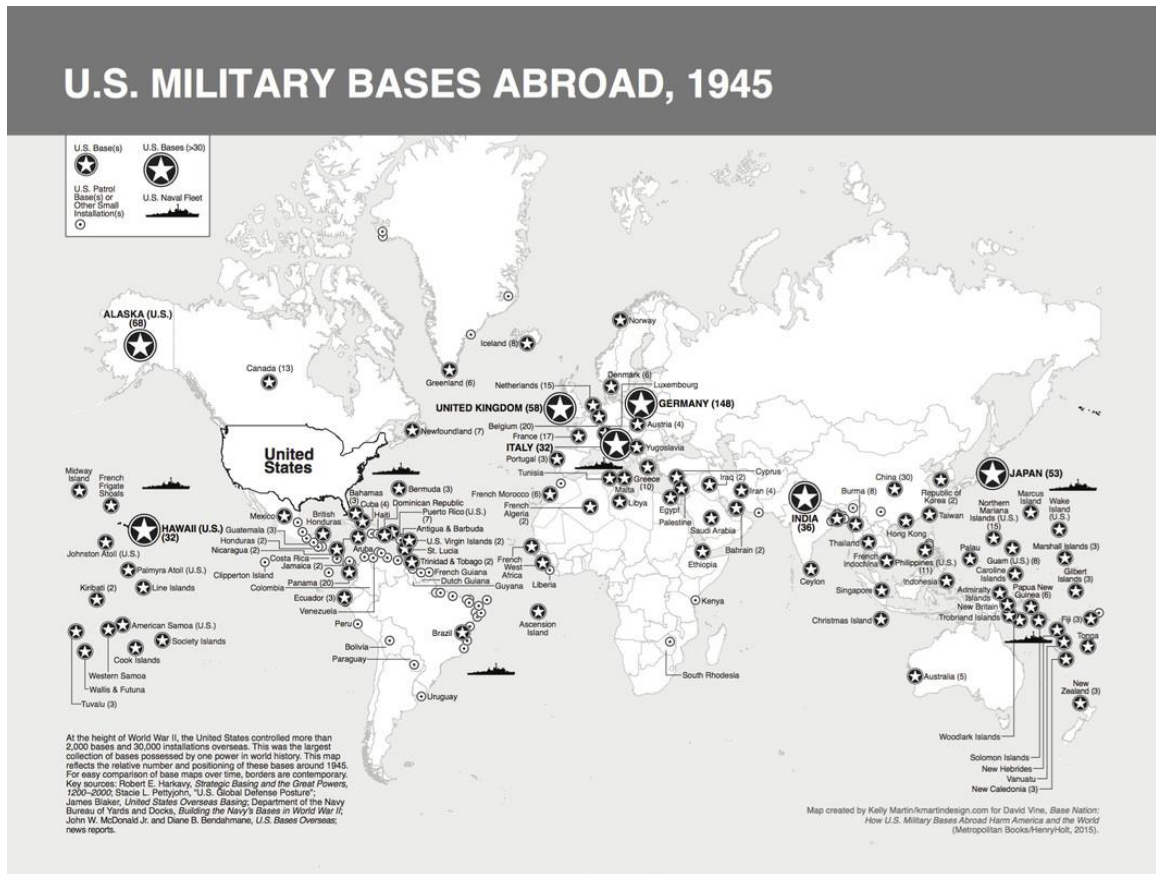


Figure 8: U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1989 (Vine 2019)

This map depicts all military bases controlled by the U.S. outside the modern lower 48 states in 1989, just as the Cold War was drawing to a close. After World War II, the U.S. significantly reduced their global military footprint, but maintained a basing network far larger than that they had controlled before the war in 1939. This basing network served, and serves, as the foundation for the United States' post-war pointillist empire.

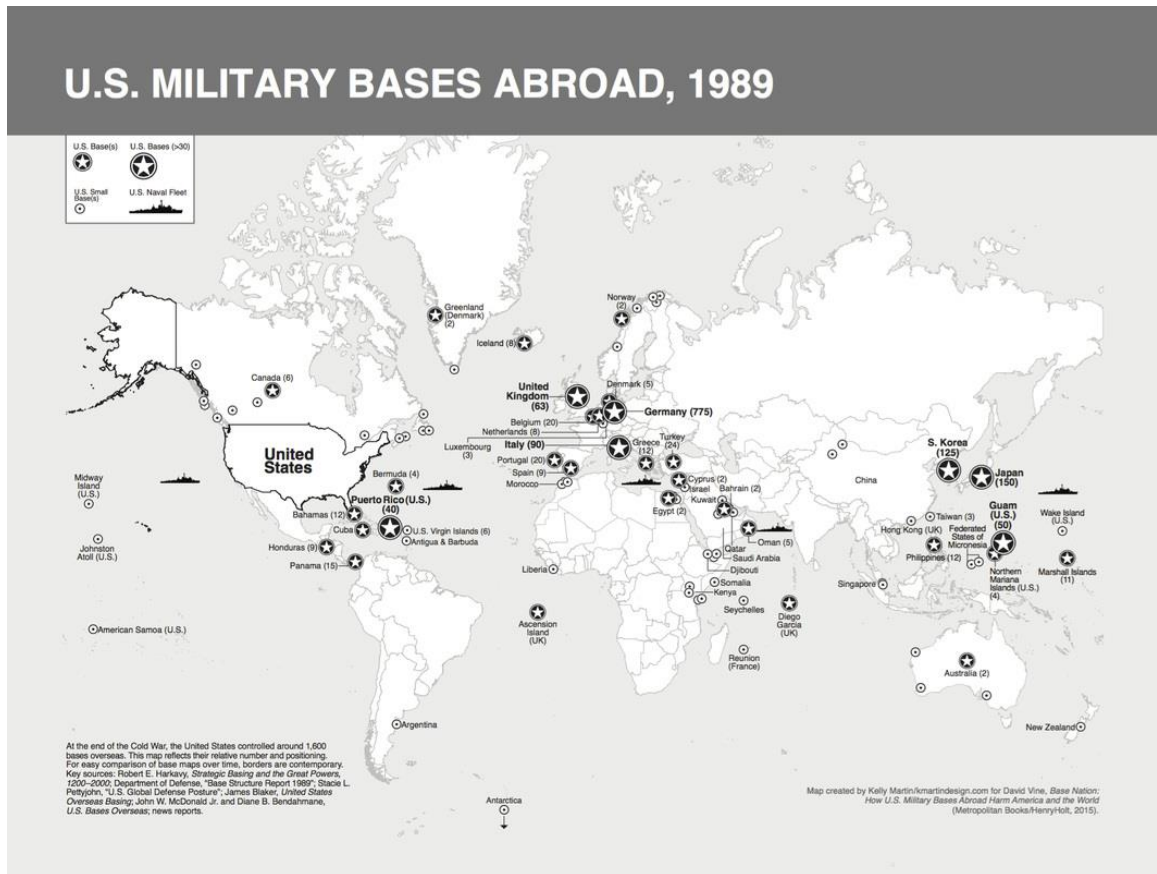
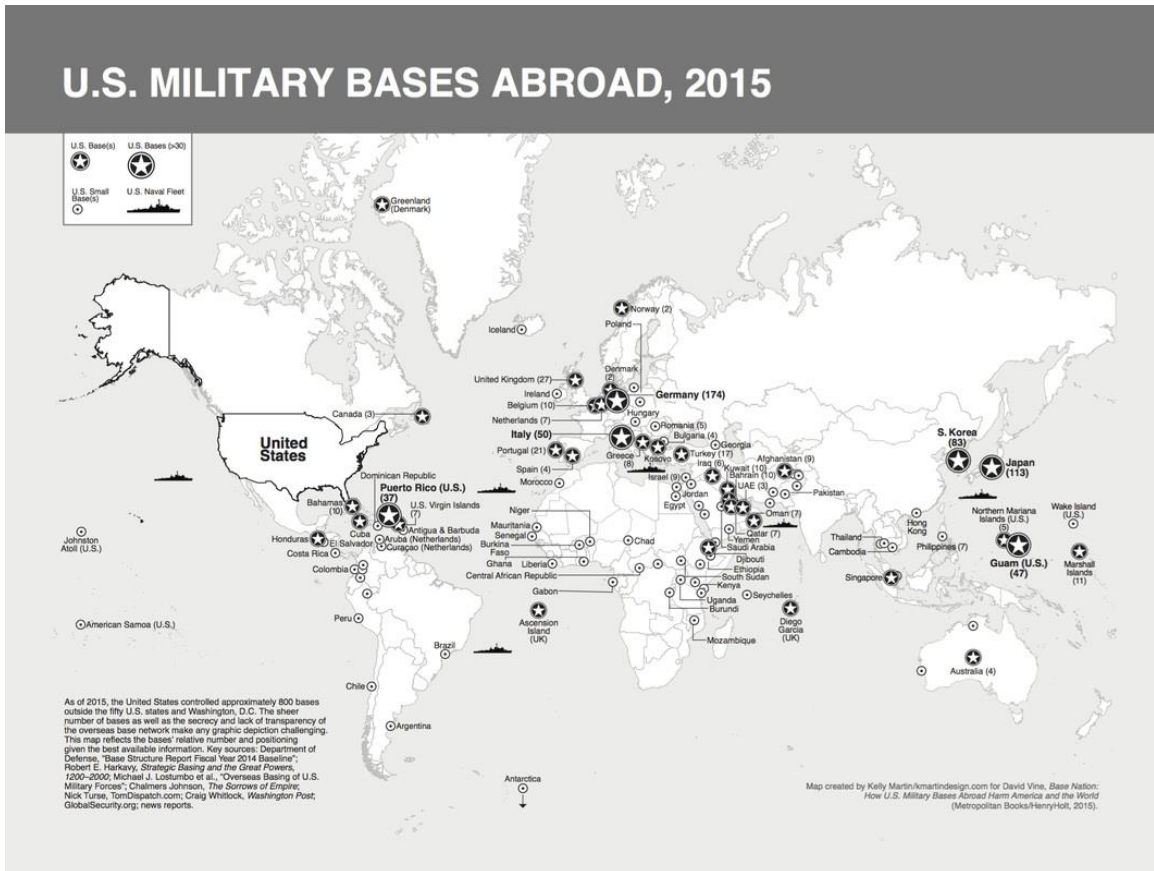


Figure 9: U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 2015 (Vine 2019)

This map depicts all military bases controlled by the U.S. outside the modern lower 48 states in 2015. While Vine’s data set has been continuously updated, with the most recent updates coming in June 2021, this is the most recent map he has put together based on his data and is a helpful (though slightly out of date) approximation of the United States’ current global basing network and the reach of the modern American pointillist empire.



While Vine's publicly available data set is up to date, his most recent map (Figure 9, above) is from 2015. Figure 10 (below) represents Vine's June 2021 data, charted using ArcGIS by the author of this thesis, with larger circles representing a higher number of bases in a particular country. Base locations have been marked as precisely as possible according to the specificity of available location information. Where a close approximation was not possible, base points were placed in the geographical center of the country in question.

Figure 10: U.S. Military Bases Around the World – 2021



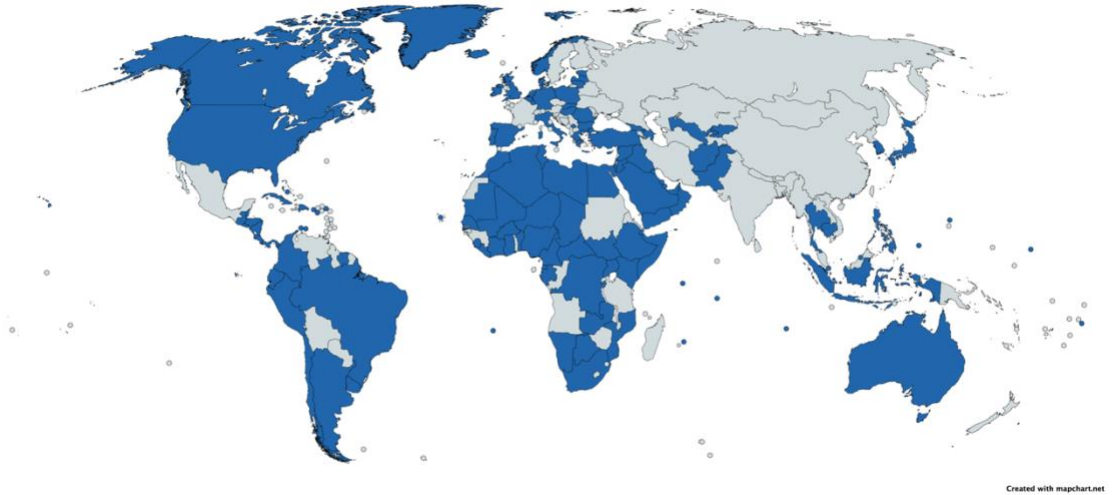
The maps above are helpful in showing the pointillist nature of American military power abroad. Unlike 19th century empires, the United States does not exercise formal control over the states in which it has its many military bases and other nodes in its global security network. Rather, it occupies tiny points of territory from which it can

project power and influence. The drawback of visualizing American power as a series of points is that it can downplay the extent of the power and influence the United States wields through its global basing network. Indeed, this is the whole point of pointillism.

Zoomed in on a particular base, airfield, or fuel depot—or even zoomed in on a single country—one can reckon the nitty gritty realities of American power abroad in a particular case: the political leveraged gained through overseas military presence in Eastern Europe, for example, or the localized economic security impact of American warships patrolling international waterways off the Horn of Africa. Yet at this level of detail, one fails to see the truly global extent of the American pointillist empire. Zoomed out, one can see that the impact of that base, airfield, or fuel depot is multiplied by hundreds, strategically scattered across the face of the map like a bag of marbles. Yet even here, one can take in the fact that there are many dots, many nodes of power, but it is still difficult to fully visualize the power and influence over the globe this network of nodes provides—either on its own or as compared to other countries. The map below (Figure 11), while still insufficient to the task, attempts to visualize the projection of American pointillist power by showing every country in which the United States has had a basing unit at some point between 2014–2021.⁴

⁴ Here, of course, the map's configuration is still weak in that, while it conveys a sense of the scope of American military power, it could also lead the unwary observer astray into over-exaggerated conclusions about the United States' control over sovereign states. Still, despite its flaws, lack of nuance, and need for explication, the map serves as a helpful illustration, especially when compared and contrasted with similar maps compiled for rival states.

Figure 11: U.S. Military Base Presence 2014–2021



Visualized in the familiar manner of maps depicting empires of old, the extent of the United States’ global basing network appears powerful indeed—and no other nation comes close. While China, the United States’ primary great power rival, has built up its military strength at home and begun to flex expansionist muscles in its near abroad on the South China Sea, it has only one confirmed military base abroad—a naval “support base” on the coast of Djibouti (Gao 2017). While Chinese commercial assets abroad serve as potential nodes of power for future military power projection (more on this in the next section), when it comes to actually operating military bases and projecting tangible military muscle abroad, China’s global reach pales in comparison (see Figure 12, below).

Figure 12: China Military Base Presence 2022



The United States' power as a core state is not simply a factor of the power of its military or the size of its economy. Rather, a truer gauge of American strength can only be reckoned in the framework of pointillist empire. Its power is not condensed within its formal borders, but rather distributed across the globe in a web of interconnected nodes—bases, airfields, fueling depots, and more—little Americas from which the homeland can pour out its wrath or its favor. These points on the map empower the United States to flex their military muscle whenever and wherever they please. They are the tools with which the United States carves the world in its image and for its interests.

Chapter Five: Case Study 2 – China

5.1 Overview

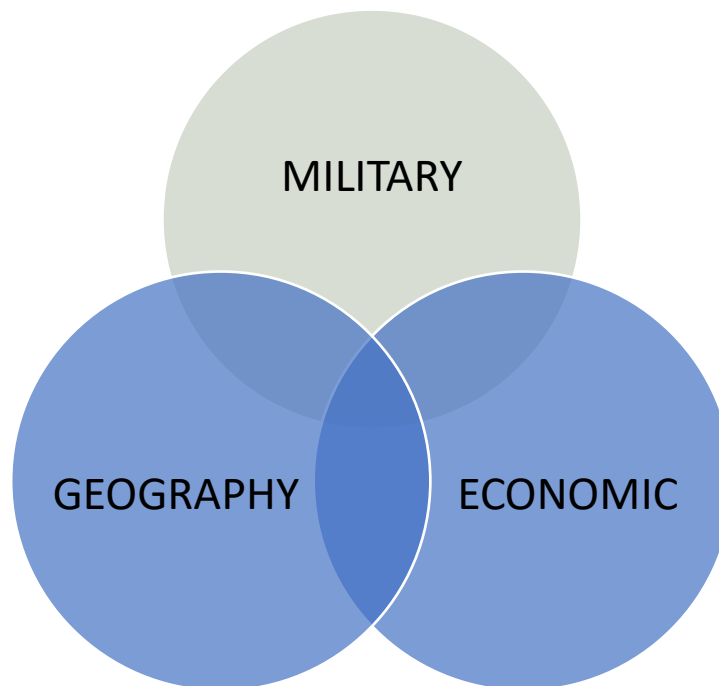
For all the United States' global military might, they are far from the only major player on the contemporary world stage. Despite its comparatively much smaller global basing footprint, China is by no means a weak competitor to American power. On the contrary, in the wake of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, China has emerged as the primary challenger to the United States' brief hegemony. Yet their strategy for projecting power and winning regional and global dominance differs significantly from that of the United States. Instead of scattering the world with military bases, China bides their time, content to build up their military power at home while focusing their efforts abroad on the economic and geographic dimensions of power—specifically, on growing a vast network of resource and infrastructure investments across the globe.

The primary means by which modern China is carving its pathway of fortune onto the pages of history is known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a sweeping global infrastructure development and investment strategy begun by the Chinese government in 2013, which aims to establish world-spanning economic corridors across land and sea—spokes in a wheel of trade and power with China firmly at the center (Mações 2018, 51–52; Perlez and Huang, 2017). Through the BRI, China has put its increasingly strong economy, financial clout, and surplus of steel, cement, machinery, and manpower to work, pouring money into infrastructure projects across the globe through state development banks and state-owned enterprises. Each of the highways,

ports, power plants, gas and oil pipelines, and special economic zones funded, built, operated, or majority-share controlled by Chinese state-owned enterprises serves as node of power from which they can coerce or coopt desired diplomatic outcomes, negotiate favorable trade deals, ensure energy security, control global value chains, and ultimately shape the global economic order in their favor over the long run. Importantly, many of these nodes also serve as footholds for the projection of *potential* (though largely not yet actual) military power in the future (Maçães 2018; Perlez and Huang, 2017; United States Senate 2021).

This strategy is illustrated in Figure 13 below, depicting a Venn diagram in which the Economic and Geography dimensions of international power are given more weight than the Military dimension.

Figure 13: China's Great Power Struggle Strategy



Where the post-World War II international economic and political order, dominated by the West, has been built on formal institutions, organizations, and law, China's project of economic and geopolitical dominance is built on informal hierarchy. Rather than promoting an international order in which independent states are bound by fixed rules and formal agreements, China fosters a system in which peripheral states participating in the BRI legally retain their full sovereignty and political independence, but whose economic and political fortunes are inextricably tied and inevitably subordinate to China's dominant, centralizing economic power (Maçães 2018, 34–35). The project is, in a very real sense, an attempt to quietly reshape the world into a form better suited to China's interests. As President of the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) and Commissioner of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Roy Kamphausen explained: "The Belt and Road Initiative is a strategic undertaking by the People's Republic of China ... to recast the international order in ways compatible and aligned with Chinese objectives and values" (United States Senate 2021, 8–9).

Between 2013 and 2021, China spent a total of \$2.14 trillion on construction projects and investments around the world, of which \$795.14 billion was for explicitly BRI projects.⁵ Nearly 39% of BRI investments (\$308.99 billion) have been made in the energy sector, followed by \$193.02 billion (24.3%) in the transport sector, \$74 billion (9.3%) in real estate, and \$65.42 billion (8.2%) in metals (China Global Investment

⁵ While many investments made abroad by Chinese state-owned enterprises or loans made by Chinese state development banks are officially designated as part of the BRI, many others are not. However, many of investments and projects that do not bear the official BRI label still function as part of China's same overall strategy. In other words, investments or projects not labeled as BRI may still be or function as nodes in the BRI network.

Tracker 2021). Typically, a Chinese SOE will foot a portion of the bill for a proposed infrastructure project, with the target country taking responsibility for the remaining costs. More often than not, at this juncture Chinese development banks will provide financial capital (with packages ranging from interest free loans to grants to high interest commercial loans) to the target country to help them fund their share of the project's costs. Unlike many Western development bank loans, Chinese financing is not conditional on institutional or market reforms, yet they frequently *are* conditional on the target country hiring Chinese firms (who bring in their own Chinese workers and supplies) to actually to the construction of the project in question. (Kaplan 2016; Chin and Gallagher 2019).

To be sure, state-driven international investment is on the rise across the globe through both sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) and SOEs, yet all state investment is not created equal. In contrast to the profit-seeking “financial strategy” favored by state entities such as Norway’s sovereign wealth fund, or even the blurred domestic security plus financial returns-oriented strategy favored by French SOEs, analysis of Chinese SOE’s portfolio investment patterns reveals a decided orientation towards a “control strategy,” in which return on investment is valued, but the focus is on acquiring controlling stakes (more than 50.01% ownership) for geo-economic and geopolitical purposes (Babib, Garcia-Bernardo, and Heemskerk 2020, 441).

A narrative of self-interest for all parties involved is at the core of China’s overseas investment efforts. BRI infrastructure investments and lending for construction projects typically help build up the economic potential of recipient countries, while

simultaneously cultivating a favorable diplomatic and trade context for the Chinese government and immediate profits for Chinese companies deployed to undertake infrastructure projects in target countries. At the same time, such loans and investments give China economic and political leverage over participating states. By securing controlling stakes in crucial infrastructure projects, SOEs beholden to the Chinese government wield considerable control over the decisions made by or about ports, power plants, and mines at the center of target states' economic and political fortunes. In addition, some researchers fear that, once projects are underway or loans granted, China could threaten or demand early loan repayment to coerce desired political or economic outcomes. When enough investments are in place and enough infrastructure under Chinese control, this could theoretically result in China effectively controlling peripheral countries' trade policy or foreign relations (United States Senate, 2021; Mações 2018, 36–47).

When it comes to reckoning the soft, hard, or potential power gained by China through BRI projects, the size of the total investment matters less on its own than does the size of total Chinese investment as compared to the country in question's total GDP. For example, while Chinese firms have invested by far the most money in the United States compared to other countries (to the tune of \$191 billion since 2013), that total investment over nearly a decade amounts to less than 1% of U.S. GDP for a single year. By contrast, though China has invested less than a billion dollars in Sao Tome and Principe between 2013 and 2021, that total nine-year investment represented 202% of the tiny island nation's GDP for a single year (see Figure 14, below). This measure of

total investment as a percentage of annual GDP yield similarly staggering results in many peripheral states receiving large amounts of Chinese funding and loans, including many resource-rich countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Sierra Leone (where Chinese investment between 2013–2021 comes to 148% of annual GDP), Congo (108%), and Zambia (108%) (China Global Investment Tracker 2021; World Bank 2021). In short, the greater the dollar amount of Chinese investment in proportion to a recipient state’s economic power, the greater the leverage China holds over that state.

Figure 14: Chinese Investment, Top 10 as Ranked by Relative % of Target Country’s GDP (China Global Investment Tracker 2021; World Bank 2021)

Country	Total Investment, 2013–2021 (\$ Billions)	2020 GDP (\$ Billions)	Investment as % of GDP
Sao Tome and Principe	0.95	0.47	202%
Laos	29.81	19.13	156%
Sierra Leone	5.99	4.06	148%
Congo	10.99	10.19	108%
Zambia	16.62	18.11	92%
Guinea	12.81	15.68	82%
Djibouti	2.6	3.38	77%
Chad	8.28	10.83	76%
Mozambique	10.41	14.02	74%
Antigua and Barbuda	1	1.37	73%

For some states, growing Chinese investment has corresponded with increased public debt. In Zambia, where Chinese firms have invested \$16.62 billion since 2013, public external debt stocks (PPG) as a percent of GDP have grown from 12% in 2013 to 68% in 2020. In Djibouti, where Chinese firms have invested \$2.04 billion since 2013, PPG as a percent of GDP has grown from 33% in 2013 to 70% in 2020—the highest

among peripheral states (China Global Investment Tracker 2021; World Bank 2021). In such cases, high levels of public debt can function as political leverage, with China threatening to or actually wringing economic or political concessions out of states that fail to repay their debts (Maçães 2018, 46–47; Davidson 2008).

In one oft-cited case, in 2007 a Chinese state-owned bank loaned \$307 million at 6.3% interest to Sri Lanka for a \$1.3 billion infrastructure investment project aimed at turning the Hambantota fishing town into a major commercial port. When Sri Lanka defaulted on the loan in 2017, China allegedly pressured the Sri Lankan government to agree to a \$1.1 billion deal in exchange for 70% ownership of the port along with a 99-year lease to operate it. The move raised alarm bells for India (among others)—displeased at China’s new potential ability to dock naval vessels on their doorstep. In other words, savvy financial statecraft yielded a node of power to China’s burgeoning pointillist empire (Maçães 2018, 46–47; Davidson 2008; United States Senate 2021).

While Sri Lanka’s example is extreme, this sort of scenario is exactly what many researchers and analysts fear will or could be the template for Chinese pointillist imperial expansion abroad in the future. In 2018, Li Ruogo, former president of the Export-Import Bank of China—the state-owned bank holding much of BRI-related foreign debt—admitted in a public speech that the majority of states receiving loans and participating in the Belt and Road initiative did not have the money to pay for the infrastructure projects underway in their borders (Huifeng 2018; Maçães 2018, 46–57). China’s BRI-grounded global network of investments and loans—particularly those

made in economically fragile states on the periphery—essentially functions as a global web of footholds for potential power.

Key to this framework is the fact that Chinese SOE's and development banks, by virtue of being state owned, have mixed motives for their global acquisitions and investments. Chinese companies, state-owned or no, *do* want to make a profit, and BRI investments are not all intended to function as debt traps. Yet simultaneously, because Chinese SOE's are state owned, their commercial motivations blur with their geopolitical motivations (Babic, Bernardo, and Heemskerk 2020; United States Senate 2021; Chin and Gallagher 2019; Mações 2018; Kaplan 2016). Thus, the decision-making calculus behind an investment in a deep-water port in West Africa or a powerplant in South Asia may be simultaneously motivated by profit and geopolitics. They may hope they make money, but also factor in the political leverage or strategic utility yielded by running a port (and thus having the ability to dock naval vessels or refuse trade from unfriendly nations), controlling each component of a global value chain (and thus both shielding it from potential adversarial interference/sanctions and holding the ability to block an adversaries' access to resources from particular suppliers or supply chains), or financing and building an oil or gas pipeline (thus diversifying China's fragile energy supply and increasing energy security).

Similarly, a Chinese development bank's decision-making calculus for offering a loan to a peripheral state for infrastructure investment may be simultaneously motivated by the bank wanting to help create profitable business opportunities for Chinese construction companies abroad, to help the target country develop

economically (thus cultivating a more predictable, stable, lucrative business environment), and to pull the target country deeper into China's sphere of influence. If a target country is able to repay BRI-related loans, everybody wins. If the target country defaults on the loan (as with Sri Lanka), China has a chance to extract even more strategically-pointed concessions.

A look at the various dots in China's pointillist imperial map bears out this pattern of blurred commercial/strategic interests over and over again. In Laos, China invested nearly \$30 billion between 2013–2021 (156% of the tiny country's annual GDP in 2021), building a railway that aims to connect eight Asian countries and link together states that China hopes to bring into its economic and political orbit (China Global Investment Tracker 2021; World Bank 2021). The labor force blasting the tunnels, building the bridges, and laying the tracks—around 100,000 strong—is composed nearly entirely of Chinese workers. The building materials are imported from China by Chinese construction firms. In other words, though the railway is projected to lose money for more than a decade after its completion, Chinese firms are still profiting. Meanwhile, Laos has continually struggled to pay for its portion of the building costs, and has sunk deeper and deeper into debt to Chinese development banks. The railway could do wonders to promote Laotian economic development and global integration, but it may do so at the cost of Laos falling farther into China's geopolitical and geoeconomics orbit, its fortunes inextricably tied to China's whims and wishes (Perlez and Huang 2017).

Pakistan too has seen both staggering levels of Chinese investment (around \$65 billion since 2013) and increases in public debt levels, with PPG as a percent of GDP

growing from 19% in 2013 to 30% in 2020 (China Global Investment Tracker 2021; World Bank 2021). Around \$46 billion of China's total investment in Pakistan has gone towards funding highways, power plants, ports and more to forge the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Perlez and Huang 2017). One of the biggest ticket items on the menu is the Chinese SOE-owned-and-operated Gwadar deep-water port, located on the geographically strategic Strait of Hormuz. With highways, railroads, and pipelines—all part of the BRI's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor—running from Western China to Gwadar, the port functionally serves as the economic gateway linking Western China to the Indian Ocean, the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, and ultimately the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. It thus allows Chinese supply chains to neatly bypass India—a longtime political rival of both China and Pakistan—and access markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The combination of the port's strategically crucial location and China and Pakistan's substantial and growing economic ties have caused many analysts to predict that Gwadar will be the next location to which China expands its global military presence, potentially stationing naval vessels and personnel at the port to protect sea lanes and its substantial economic interests in the region (Kardon 2020).

Such a move by China to expand their global military presence and basing network would be significant and provocative—marking a step towards a more militaristic, aggressive vision for global power acquisition—but not entirely unprecedented. As mentioned previously in this thesis, China's focus abroad is primarily on the economic and geographic dimensions of power abroad. In contrast to the United States' vast basing network, China has very little actual, current global military presence.

Yet little is not zero, and China's appetite for aggressive expansion appears to be slowly growing.

In 2017, China built its first ever overseas (beyond the South China Sea) military base in Djibouti (located on the Horn of Africa at a crucial chokepoint for global shipping passing through the Red Sea) citing the need to protect its investments in the region and country, much as some fear they will do with Pakistan's Gwadar Deepwater Port (U.S. Senate 2021). The move sent alarm bells ringing across the global security community. Recall from earlier in this section that, following a multi-billion-dollar investment and loan package from China, Djibouti's PPG as a percent of GDP grew from 33% in 2013 to 70% in 2020—the highest among peripheral states. Many analysts reckon that this movement from growing indebtedness to China to hosting a Chinese military base is not a coincidence, but rather an opening salvo in what may mark a new era of China leveraging its BRI-generated power for not only economic, but military and political concessions and expansion across the globe. After all, if China can justify putting a military base here, why not elsewhere?

Worried researchers, analysts, and national security professionals need only look at China's near abroad for ammunition to stoke their great-power conflict nightmares. Here, in the South China Sea, China has adopted a significantly more aggressive military policy expansionist stance. China claims sovereignty over the South China Sea and in recent years has undertaken significant construction efforts to physically grow the landmass of islands they control—moving sand onto reefs, installing ports, airbases, radar and intelligence-gathering facilities, and cruise missile-equipped outposts across

the Spratly Islands and elsewhere, and even building artificial islands on top of reef and rocks formations and declaring Chinese sovereignty over them. These remote outposts, often hundreds of miles from the mainland Chinese coast, serve as nodes of military power in China's near abroad, allowing them to expand and project power over territory and sea lanes they deem rightfully theirs, increasing their potential ability to control fishing operations, as well as oil and gas exploration and exploitation, coerce neighboring countries, declare the South China Sea an air defense identification zone (ADIZ), or blockade Taiwan (Poling 2020; Congressional Research Service 2022). In short, while China's pointillist imperial strategy focuses on the economic and geographic dimensions in the farther flung reaches of the world, closer to home it embraces a wholistic hegemonic strategy.

Still, despite China's behavior in its near-abroad, the example of Djibouti appears, for the moment, to be simply a cautionary tale. In the great power contest for global dominance, China appears content to limit their overt military expansion abroad, gathering new nodes of power to grow their primarily-economic empire, and avoiding overly-antagonizing the United States' global security apparatus. In other words, they focus on the Economic and Geographic dimensions of power, building up strength such that they have the ability to one day convert many of their nodes of potential power into military assets.

5.2 Visualizing China's Global Economic Network

Tracking the full extent of China's BRI investments is difficult, because China does not publish full BRI reports or even lists of the total number of participating

countries. Instead, mapping the extent of Chinese ambitions and actual achievements to date must be compiled piecemeal from official statements from Chinese government officials, newspaper reporting from across the globe, and data sets compiled by economic and political analysts or think tanks on Chinese investment around the world. Even within these data sets, it is often impossible to clearly delineate what Chinese investments abroad are officially part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which are simply investments made by Chinese firms, and whether—given the high level of state control over Chinese enterprise—such a designation even makes a difference in China’s ability to use such investment for geopolitical strategic purposes.

According to a 2021 report issued by the Council for Foreign Relations’ (CFR) Independent Task Force on a U.S. Response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, a total of 139 countries have joined the BRI, including 39 states in sub-Saharan Africa, 34 in Europe and Central Asia, 25 in East Asia and the Pacific, 18 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 17 in the MENA region, and six in South Asia. All told, nearly two-thirds (63%) of the world’s population live in countries participating in the BRI, and these countries make up 40% of the world’s GDP. Put differently, 63% of the world’s population and 40% of global GDP are under some level of influence of China’s pointillist empire (CFR 2021). To be sure, participation does not reveal the extent of Chinese leverage in a particular country, yet Chinese SOEs also control almost 20% of transnational state capital. In short, when properly tallied and mapped, it quickly becomes clear that the reach of Chinese state-driven international economic power is vast (Babic, Garcia-Bernardo, and Heemskerk 2020).

The map below (Figure 15) represents my mapping of these countries—with each state that has joined the BRI colored red. As with the map from the previous section showing all countries in which the U.S. has at least one military base, by visualizing the BRI in the manner of imperial maps of old, readers may be able to better reckon the true extent of China’s global economic reach and power. Similarly, as with the previous map of U.S. bases, this map has its limitations. For example, while participation in the BRI indicates that a country has received some level of partnership or investment from China for infrastructure projects, and thus that China has planted a node of power as a foothold for influence in that country, the level of influence or leverage China holds varies greatly location by location. As discussed previously, China’s political and economic influence is generally higher in weaker, smaller, more peripheral states, and lower in stronger, larger states on the semi-periphery.

Figure 15: The Global Reach of the Belt and Road Initiative, 2021



While the map above is useful in its broad strokes, it is also helpful to visualize the pointillist nature of expanding Chinese power by mapping individual nodes of power. The map below (Figure 16) represents my effort to do just that. Created in ARCGISOnline, it is a compilation of many different data sets, including data from think tanks, government agencies, and newspaper and magazine articles, mapping ports, railroads, gas and oil pipelines, nuclear power investments, and special economic zones (SEZs) substantially funded, built, operated, or with majority share ownership by Chinese state-owned enterprises. This, in other words, is a working map of China's global pointillist empire.

Figure 16: Belt and Road Infrastructure Investments Across the Globe^{6 7}



⁶ Sources: Merics 2018; CSIS 2019; CFR 2021; Standish 2019; Brendan 2021; Malo 2019; Observer Research Foundation 2017; Chaziza 2016; Miriri 2017; Safi and Perera 2018; Kakassis 2018; Manuel 2017.

⁷ Interactive Map with additional information for each point can be found online at: <https://arcg.is/1CP5iW3>

This map is necessarily incomplete. Each of the points mapped above represents a project listed as explicitly tied to BRI investment and with a specific location attached—thus enabling me to log an estimated latitude and longitude. Yet there are clearly far more BRI-investments, projects, and nodes of power established and controlled by China overseas than are represented here. For example, while Figure 16 shows “Gas Pipeline” points in East Africa, representing the Hoima-Tanga oil pipeline in Uganda and Tanzania, it does not show numerous other BRI-funded or -built oil and gas pipelines for which I found evidence, but was not able to discern their locations with a high enough degree of certainty to confidently place them on the map. Substantial evidence and references exist for the planned Power of Siberia pipeline from Russia to China, as well as Central Asia gas pipelines A, B, C, and D running through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, just to name a few—yet the exact routes of these pipelines prove elusive (MERICS 2018).

Similarly, a 2016 report claimed that 18 border cooperation zones and 52 industrial parks—all part of the BRI—were already operational in 18 countries (Maçães 2018, 55). In addition, as of 2019, China reportedly has plans to build more 50 special economic development zones across the globe, each aimed at providing focused infrastructure to foster industry and commercial development (Mauk 2019). Each of these industrial zones serves as a hub for China’s growing economic influence—key nodes in China’s growing network of economic power—and yet, the sources cited in English-language reports on these zones’ existence are often in Mandarin. As I cannot speak or read Mandarin, I can note the existence of these sorts of data points, but I

cannot dig deeper to find their exact or estimated locations such that they can be confidently mapped.

Still, for all its limitations and incomplete nature, the map above is more extensive than any other map of BRI investments that I have found in all of my substantial research on the subject. In addition, it does well in serving its purpose to illustrate the pointillist nature of China's growing economic empire. Working through SOEs and state development banks, China has embarked on a quest to place infrastructure investments, construction projects, and loans in geographically-distributed, strategic locations around the world. All told, it is a power acquisition effort that blurs the lines between economic, political, and military strategies. Here, Daniel Immerwahr's passage about the growth of the United States' global pointillist empire rings equally true for the trajectory of China as "great power" on the world stage: "[they] put down the imperialist paint roller and picked up the pointillist's brush" (Immerwahr 2019, 344).

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

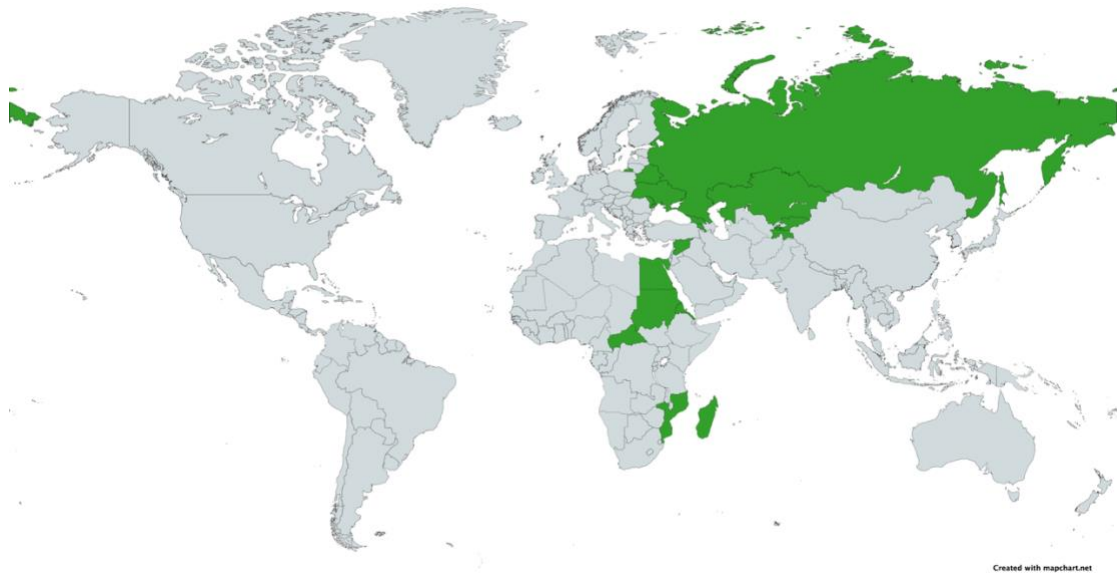
6.1 Beyond the Core States

This thesis has focused on the U.S. and China because they are currently the two most powerful states on the global stage, not only in terms of military and economic clout, but also in terms of the comparative size of their networks of distributed geographic control. In other words, this thesis focuses on the U.S. and China because they are the core states in the current world system. Yet, while the American and Chinese pointillist empires are the most vast and dramatic, they are far from the only states seeking to establish and expand pointillist networks of military and economic nodes of power. All around the world, semi-peripheral states utilize similar power acquisition strategies to expand their global influence.

For example, under the expansionist and revisionist geopolitical vision of Vladimir Putin, Russia has progressively expanded its military presence abroad over the last two decades in an aggressive attempt to reinsert itself as a major player in world politics. Russian military nodes of power are most prominent in their “near abroad,” with bases held and troops stationed in former Soviet satellite states including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova (CSIS 2020; Batashvili 2018), but Russia has also reportedly expanded their military and economic footprint in Africa and the Middle East, including establishing bases or lily pads—sometimes via the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary organization with close ties to the government—in Sudan (Osborn 2020), Syria (Batashvili 2018), the Central African Republic, Egypt, Madagascar, and Mozambique (Dalaa and Aksoy 2021). Meanwhile, as

climate change melts ice in the Russia's far polar north, once frozen waterways are becoming navigable and increasingly revealing energy assets that Russia is jumping to exploit. In short, post-Soviet Russia is actively expanding its influence north, south, east, and west (Macaes 2018, 2-4). Yet, while Russia's revisionist military presence is significant and growing, it fails to come close to matching the scope of the United States' global basing network (see Figure 17, below).

Figure 17: Russia Military Base Presence 2022



Meanwhile, India is gradually expanding its economic and military footprint across the Indian Ocean, while Japan has invested billions in infrastructure investments in the same region. Farther west, Iranian finance aims to secure a land route to Mediterranean markets and Turkey increasingly both invests and establishes military bases across in the Middle East (Macaes 2018). Simultaneously, while China and Russia are far and away the biggest offenders when it comes to a control strategy for global investments, many states use SOEs or SWFs to invest in tangible assets abroad.

Germany, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, China, and France all invest with a control or control-dominant strategy (primarily aiming to secure a controlling stake in global investment targets, often for geopolitical leverage), the U.S., Norway, Canada, and Singapore all invest with a financial or financial-dominant strategy (prioritizing return on investment over securing controlling shares and geopolitical gains), and Qatar's state investment strategy rest squarely in the middle (Babic, Garcia-Bernardo, and Heemsekerk 2020).

While states investment strategies exist on a broad strategic spectrum, the size of such investments can still lend some level of political leverage to investor states. All in all, 56.4% of global transnational state capital is captured by companies that are majority state-owned. Norway's sovereign wealth fund (SWF) alone controls nearly 21% of total transnational state capital—more than any other state in the world, including China. Because they employ a near-total financial strategy, and are solidly part of the western world order, Norway's actions raise far fewer red flags than do China's global economic expansion efforts, yet this too could be viewed as a major pointillist imperial strategy as employed by a semi-peripheral state and focusing on the economic and geographic dimensions of power (Babic, Garcia-Bernardo, and Heemsekerk 2020). In short, pointillism as a new cartography of power is not just for the core states or great powers, but for semi-peripheral and rising states all across the globe. Their nodes may be fewer and their networks smaller, but the framework holds fast.

These examples also point to possibilities for future research. This thesis offers a big picture framework for reckoning with and mapping the nature of contemporary great power competition, but it is only the beginning. Not only are there almost surely

more data points to be discovered and added to the maps of the American global basing network and Chinese global economic networks, similar information collection efforts, case study analyses, and mapping of data sets could be undertaken for additional states, with particular value to be derived from mapping the economic and military pointillist empires of semi-peripheral or rising powers such as Russia, India, Brazil, the UAE, France, Britain, or Saudi Arabia. There is much more work to be done.

6.2 Putting the Pieces Together

For all the dramatic transformations the geopolitical and geoeconomic ecosystem has undergone over the course of the 20th century, for all the redrawing of lines on maps and reshuffling of conceptions of sovereignty and power, great power competition still requires core states to control physical geographical locations distributed across the globe. If the formula for global power comes down military might + economic clout + distributed geographic control, the modern world's twin behemoths have each focused their efforts on a particular slice of the pie: the US has its bases; China has its global investments; both have widely distributed global networks of points from which power can be projected. This pointillist imperialism represents a new cartography of power.

That reality, of course, is not reflected on modern political maps, which trace only the formal borders of sovereign states, not the invisible networks of power that truly carve the path of the world economy and shape the political order. This may seem both obvious and inconsequential, and yet maps are one of the primary heuristics which shortcuts and shapes the ways we imagine and conceive of global power. For millennia,

imperial power was determined by formalized domination of territory by powerful states. For all that time (in varying levels of symbolism and scientific accuracy, as determined by the stage of development of cartography in a given period of history), maps reflected this territorialized framework: Rome controlled these kingdoms, the Spanish Empire those territories, the British Empire those lands over there. In the post-colonial era of the latter 20th and early 21st centuries, such territorialized imperial machinations are frowned upon, and our maps instead demarcate the borders of the world into numerous smaller, sovereign states. The economic and military power and control exerted by core states over those on the periphery remains enormous, yet our imaginations, shaped by our maps, struggle to grasp this truth. According to the map, the great game for empires is finished. According to the data, the game may yet remain, albeit in a different form and with different rules.

The pointillist imperial framework remains elusive to those looking only at individual nodes of power, or even when one focuses on the overall strategies and global power acquisition activities of individual states. Rather, like the impressionist paintings of Seurat and Van Gogh, in order to make sense of what is going on one must step back and focus not on the individual data points, but at the picture as a whole. Zoomed out, all those catalogued and charted points of power paint a picture that looks a lot more like a political map of the world from 1913 than most of us are comfortable with (see Figures 18 and 19 side by side below, previously seen in this work's case studies for the U.S. and China).

Figure 18: The U.S. Global Basing Network

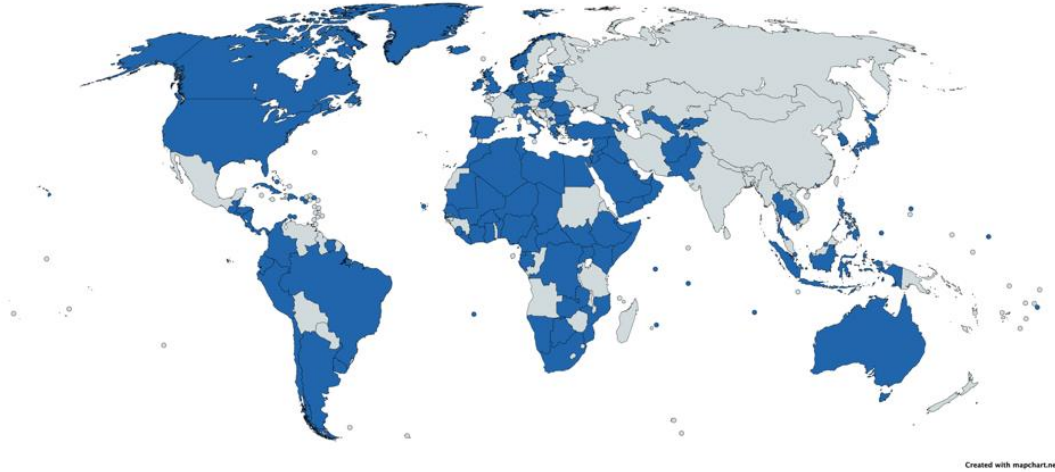


Figure 19: China's Global Economic Network



This thesis does not attempt to make moral judgments about these twin global power acquisition strategies, and nothing in these pages should be taken as an argument that the United States, China, or any other country are either heroes or villains, “good guys” or “bad guys.” Indeed, there are very good arguments that the United States’ global basing network and military presence secures global peace and

ever-growing prosperity, not only for themselves but for all countries in the global economy, even the poorest and least developed. There are also very good arguments that the United States' global basing network functions as a tool of oppression and exploitation, a club in the hands of a violent, global bully. Similarly, there are very good arguments that China's Belt and Road Initiative is not only benign, but an incredibly effective tool for growing economies and improving quality of life and opportunities for everyday people in the developing world. There are also very good arguments that China's global investments are exploitative, provide financial support and political cover for authoritarian governments, do little to nothing to actually increase the human development index in target countries, and are simply stepping stones in their nefarious plan for global conquest.

Who is the hero? Who is the villain? Or are both countries villains to others, while heroes in their own national stories? Such questions are worth asking, but beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this thesis aims to simply find data, identify patterns in that data, and use those patterns to tell a story that sheds some light on the way the world works.

The implications of this data-driven story are significant. For one thing, the pointillist imperial framework means that scholars, analysts, and policymakers attempting to measure and compare global state power ought to include networks of distributed geographical control into their calculus. As stated elsewhere in this thesis, military and economic resources are important, but it is geographically distributed networks composed of interconnected nodes of power that enable those military and

economic resources to be utilized to their fullest geopolitical and geoeconomics power potential.

Further, pointillist imperialism blurs the lines between existing International Relations theoretical approaches to understanding Great Power competition. On the one hand, Realists may resonate with a framework that emphasizes the competitive growth of states' real and latent military power and an overall orientation towards achieving dominance and relative gains in a world of all versus all. Simultaneously, Liberals may recognize vestiges of what they have been saying about economic power for years—that it is of extreme importance and inextricable from other forms of power. They may also find theoretical resonance with the distinct approaches taken by different domestic stakeholders in different states, all operating in the same framework of global competition, and appreciate analyses indicating the mutual and absolute gains of the global community derived by security provided by the United States' global basing network or China's outpouring of capital for crucial infrastructure investments. In the end, both Realists and Liberals may find both fit and friction in the pointillist imperial framework, and the story residing in the case studies and data outlined in this thesis may challenge both schools to think outside their typical boxes and adapt to the ever-changing realities of the 21st century global political order.

Finally, the history of imperial competition, combined with modern case studies, should make clear that evolving military, communications, and transportation technology enables great power competition to become continually more pointillist over time. Venice, Genoa, and the Ottomans fighting for hegemony in the 14th–16th

century Mediterranean required a relatively dense cluster of bases from which to launch their limited-range galley fleets. Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands were able to harness the power potential of more technologically complex caravels and galleons, as well as advances in navigation, to increase the range of power projection and establish global empires. Britain in the 19th century ventured still farther, linking the far corners of the British Empire and establishing “Pax Britannica” first with sailing vessels, then with steam ships, all enabled through a vast, interconnected network of naval bases, fueling stations, and coal depots.

In every case, improving transportation technology allowed navies, armies, and merchant vessels to venture farther and farther from their nodes of power (bases, ports, etc.), requiring additional layers of support infrastructure but also requiring bases and ports to be spaced farther and farther apart. Today, satellites, nuclear submarines, long-range aircraft, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and an increasingly digital world of finance and business have allowed both economic and military power to be projected from even smaller points of control. Making the shift in our cartographical and political imaginations to grapple with modern pointillist imperialism is a great beginning, but history also offers a warning: while powerful states will never stop vying for global dominance, the fabric of the world, the nature of power, and the rules of imperial competition will continue to change, and political scientists and statesmen alike would do well to keep up. The rules have changed, but the game remains the same.

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