INTRODUCTION

On the face of things, it has been a rough few years for the United States. America is only slowly winding down the second of two draining wars. Trying to avoid a third war, this time in Syria, has put the U.S. at odds with many of its allies in Europe and the Middle East, while Russian and Chinese intransigence has frustrated efforts to find a UN solution to that appalling civil war.[1] In the South and East China Seas, Chinese assertiveness appears not only to threaten America's long-time dominance in the region but also to risk a crisis with Japan.[2] America's European allies are mired in financial crisis and repeated recession. Global climate negotiations have repeatedly failed, in part because the emerging powers banded together to block agreement.[3] And all of this after the global financial crisis put a deep dent in America's treasury and reputation.

These events inform a narrative of the erosion of American leadership and a crisis in the international order. The underlying premise of that narrative is that a combination of declining American power and the "rise of the rest" (of the new economic powerhouses of China, India, and Brazil, in particular) is constraining America's leadership of the international system.[4] The narrative suggests that the power of the West to shape a secure and prosperous international system is in decay.[5] The result, it is argued, is that the United States faces a collapse in its ability to handle global crises and challenges and that global cooperation to solve problems is no longer possible.[6] The world might also face renewed cold war–style competition between the two great powers.[7]

Two corollary reactions to this narrative have emerged. Either America should ramp up its military and economic efforts to counter the rise of the new powers, China in particular.[8] Or America should turn inward, focus on its own economic troubles, and withdraw from a fracturing world.[9]

This book offers a very different narrative. It argues that while other powers have gained influence, the United States, buttressed by allies, is still the most influential actor on the world stage—and will be for some time to come. It also argues that the emerging powers are both a more diverse and a less threatening phenomenon than pictured, not least because they are sharply divided among themselves. And it argues that there are far more shared or overlapping interests between the established and the emerging powers than the narrative of disorder suggests.

I have spent much of the past decade watching the rising powers—principally China, India, and Brazil, but also Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, and others—engage the international system and struggle to alternately change it or adapt to it. Their first foray was at the United Nations, where, in the wake of the launch of the Iraq war, the emerging powers began to stake out a more determined claim for a greater share of influence in the international system—an effort I observed and tried to help shape as an adviser to Kofi Annan's effort to retool the UN to deal with modern security challenges. The emerging powers' play for influence in New York was paralleled by their ambitious initiative in Geneva, at the World Trade Organization, to rebalance the rules of free trade to accommodate their growing market power. I have tracked their campaign closely since, both in international bodies and in their capitals.

The renegotiation of power relations between the established and the emerging powers at the UN and the WTO was just prologue. As the emerging powers struggle to assert themselves and the United States struggles to recalibrate its leadership to new realities, bilateral and strategic relations are being renegotiated more broadly. This transition began to absorb U.S. policymakers when the global financial crisis thrust the emerging powers from the sidelines into the spotlight.

Tracking the efforts and strategies of the emerging powers over the past decade, and looking at the underlying dynamics, leads me to three conclusions.

One, America is an enduring, not a declining, power. Now and likely for some decades to come it is and will be the most influential actor on the world stage, buttressed by strong allies. The rhetoric of U.S. decline runs well ahead of the reality. There are newly important actors on the world stage to be sure, but some of them are U.S. allies, many of them are friendly to the United States, and even those whose drive is for autonomous power share core interests with the United States—and this includes China. Moreover, the rising powers are divided among themselves and often share as many interests with the Western powers as they do with each other. In short, the challenge these actors pose is less than has been asserted.

All the attention given to the economic rise of China has lessened the attention given to the important phenomenon of the economic rise of India and Brazil. Further, it has obscured the fact that other economies are rising too, among them Korea, Turkey, Indonesia, and Germany. And while some of America's long-standing allies (Japan, the United Kingdom, France) are experiencing a slump, so too is America's long-standing rival, Russia. The large majority of the most powerful economies remain U.S. allies. Thus the rise of the rest is a complex phenomenon and, correctly managed, offers U.S. leadership as many opportunities as challenges.

Two, the interest of the non-Western rising powers is not to break the order but to shape it and to gain more space within it.[10] Countries like India and Brazil—and also U.S. allies like Korea and Turkey—have repeatedly demonstrated that they do not seek to break the international order but rather to profit from it and to take a turn at the helm of major international institutions. This fidelity to the existing order is based on a variety of factors, not least of which is that the emerging powers rose precisely by integrating themselves into the global economic system. Only China arguably seeks to curtail U.S. leadership in some domains, but Beijing's incentives are hardly straightforward: in many aspects of foreign policy, China has no choice but to cooperate with the United States and its allies. It can challenge American leadership only if others will follow, and so far it has found few takers.

To be sure, this is hardly the whole story. The emerging powers also have a strong impulse to rivalry, or at least to autonomy, an impulse

grounded in what I call the psychology of rise. This phenomenon comprises both their own first, devastating encounters with a globalizing West and the routine humiliations of their position in the postwar order. The psychology of rise is most evident in China's assertive stance in defense of its interests and influence in East Asia, but it is equally present in India's defense of its interests in the evolving climate change regime and in Brazil's aspiration for a bigger role in global security affairs.

But the emerging powers face a dilemma. They may have an impulse to rivalry and some interest in curtailing U.S. influence, but if they are too aggressive in their stance toward the United States they risk endangering their global interests. They have fundamental stakes in a stable global economy and in protecting the sea and air routes through which global trade and energy flow. This is particularly true of China, which needs to maintain very rapid growth both to sustain its domestic stability and to project international influence. But to grow, it needs to consume ever-larger quantities of energy (it has already surpassed the United States as the world's greatest carbon emitter). And to consume that much energy, it must import large quantities of it—along with food and other natural resources. These imperatives require three conditions: stability in the countries from which it can extract resources; stable markets, in which it can invest; and stable transmission routes, to bring resources into mainland China from its suppliers. And yet China's capacity to generate that stability and protect these investments is sharply limited and, in some cases (as in the Persian Gulf), is heavily dependent on American military power.

Thus while the rising powers strive for autonomy and demonstrate an impulse to rivalry, they also have incentives for restraint, even cooperation. This balance between the impulse to rivalry and the incentives for restraint is the most important dynamic in contemporary international affairs; and for now, the balance tips toward restraint.

The result of this is a continued ability to solve problems and to manage crises—at least, to do so at roughly the same rate as occurred when American dominance was unquestioned. Claims of an erosion in this ability, of the emergence of what has been called the G-Zero world (a world of no international leadership), are exaggerated. There is instead substantial cooperation on the global economy, if as yet inadequate to remove the risk of new crises, and on energy and the oceans (and even on the

management of climate change). In spite of intensifying competition in the U.S.-China relationship, the world is a long way from a new cold war, and in important facets of the relationship there are restraint and even joint leadership. The management of crises and armed intervention—the most sensitive tripwires in international politics—includes a mix of cooperation and tension, success and failure. This is roughly the same mix that characterized the post–cold war era, during the height of American power.

From these arguments I draw the third conclusion: that the United States still has ample ability and opportunity to lead the international system. By *lead* I do not mean dominate. One implication of the analysis is that America's coalitional power (its alliance system, its ability to work with countries from all walks of international life, its facility in forging tools for multinational action) will be key to American foreign policy. For too long the notion of leadership has been narrowly equated with the option of unilateral military action. The United States retains that option, and military power is indeed a lynchpin of American power; but leadership is a broader concept by far.

The United States will undoubtedly face new challenges: allies torn between the security embrace of the United States and economic ties to China; new powers seeking autonomy, not alliance, on the international stage; and complex global issues that will test American diplomacy. All of this means that America will have to adapt its leadership to new realities. But it just so happens that this challenge plays to America's single most important asset in navigating the landscape ahead: that it is uniquely well placed to pull together broad and disparate coalitions for action. There is no other actor on the international stage, nor will there be in the near or medium term, with anything remotely like the range of alliances and relationships—including with several of the rising powers—enjoyed by the United States.

Hence the title of this book, *Still Ours to Lead*. The title can be interpreted in three ways. First, most obviously, is the reference to American power. No other actor, established or rising, has anything like the tools, the allies, or the relationships, coalitions, and institutions that the United States has. The ability to pull together coalitions for action is perhaps the most enduring feature of American power. True, the United States no longer enjoys the status of unrivaled hyperpower that it maintained

after the end of the cold war. U.S. dominance is dulled. But it remains in a category of one in the international system.

Second, the stakeholders (the *Ours*) extend beyond Washington: there's a huge capacity in the international system to solve problems, to manage crises, and even to cooperate. Some of this is about the United States, but not all of it. *Ours* includes the emerging powers, even China, and actors capable of contributing to problem solving and crisis management. The United States should have the confidence of its position and welcome, not resist, other states' efforts to lead problem-solving efforts on specific issues.

Third, the phrase *Still Ours to Lead* deliberately echoes the phrase "still ours to lose." At an earlier stage I chose that as the title for this book—then rejected it as too defensive. But the concept of "still ours to lose" is an important one, because American leadership could still be squandered. Bad policy choices by the United States and by its allies could weaken its position, and miscalculation by the United States or by the rising powers could indeed propel the system toward more disorder.

One debate more than others has shaped the discourse over what lies ahead, a debate over the prospects for cooperation or conflict among the most powerful states. One argument emphasizes that the emerging powers' economic stakes in a stable order will drive restraint.[11] The counterargument is that a reading of the history of the rise and fall of great powers tells us that conflict, and even war, is inevitable.[12] Throughout this book, I argue that there is evidence to support the first claim but that it is incomplete; there is also an impulse to rivalry, and if it is underestimated, it risks being unleashed. At the same time, I point to evidence that suggests that the sense of the inevitability of war during periods of power transition is both too deterministic and misapplied.

The stakes are high. This debate is unfolding during the first period in contemporary history that is not predominantly shaped by tension between great powers.[13] Not accidentally, this era, following the end of the cold war, has seen astonishing economic advancement for hundreds of millions of people, a wave of progress against poverty. It is an era of sustained collaboration among states to tackle the great modern ill of civil war.[14] For most of the post–cold war era it has also been a time of growing freedoms, as dozens of countries moved toward democracy and

as citizens challenged the economic and political constraints under which they live.[15] This historic progress could be eroded or undermined if the emerging powers underestimate the costs of American retrenchment or reaction; if America prematurely withdraws from the international stage; or if America fails to adjust its leadership style and diplomatic tactics to the realities of new actors on the international stage.

Now, debates about the international order often fail to define what this order is supposed to accomplish, except in the minimalist sense of avoiding great-power war—no minor thing, of course, given the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century. In this book, the concept covers tiered goals. First and foremost, yes, it is about avoiding great-power war, or tensions between the powers that run deep enough to forestall broader problem solving. Second, it is about maintaining and spreading economic prosperity. Third, it is about reducing the scope of tyranny, in part by encouraging development and democracy and, equally important, by checking tyrannical actors with force when ultimately necessary. And the international order is more worth protecting if it also serves, as it has for the past quarter century, to reduce poverty and internal war. Looking ahead, there's a further challenge: balancing the emerging powers' need to consume ever-growing quantities of energy with the impacts on a changing climate.

In the coming world, the options for American leadership will be shaped by three forces: the strength and vitality of America's established alliances will amplify or constrict the impact of American power; the attributes and attitudes of the rising powers will shape American options; and American leadership will be tested in complex global issues, like global trade and finance and climate change. In issue after issue, the tension will be between two powerful pressures: that of an impulse to rivalry, rooted in the histories and attitudes of the rising powers and the temptations of transitions; and that of deep incentives for restraint, bolstered where there are institutions or arrangements designed to allow the major powers to resolve their differences or limit their competition.

We should not be Pollyannaish; if we neglect the real risks of rivalry, we could unleash them. But nor should we overestimate them, lest we fear them into life. There are challenges ahead, but we are a long way away from failure and disorder.

For now, and in the most credible scenarios of what lies ahead, both the impulse to rivalry and the incentives for restraint will be present, and shaping the balance between these dynamics will be a central challenge to American foreign policy. Choices made by the emerging powers will shape that balance, to be sure, but the single greatest factor will be America's choices in wielding its power. In this most fundamental sense, too, it is still ours to lead.