



America, Lead; Airpower’s Enduring Utility; Tunisian Army and Uprisings; South-South Land Grabs; and Where Ambassadors Go

The international system is perpetually in motion, and qualifying today’s world appears highly debatable. Still, the real question underlying this debate is what tomorrow’s international system will look like. Furthermore—and perhaps more importantly—what strategies should countries adopt to influence that system’s structure in a way most favorable to them? Clearly, the main powers behind today’s international system are the United States and China, and the two countries’ relationship, therefore, is the subject of much study, according to Prof. Tanguy Struye de Swielande and Dorotheé Vandamme in “America, You Are a Leader—Lead.” Most works that attempt to predict the future US-China relationship have proposed various scenarios, including both hegemonic war and global governance. Tacitly, all such scenarios assume a systemic redistribution of power. However, few analyses have considered the potential for continuing American leadership. Nonetheless, this scenario is worthy of study, particularly in light of the Chinese “capacity-expectation gap” and the paradox of unrealized power. This is not to say that Beijing cannot compete with Washington in some domains, but America continues to dominate the international system. Such domination enables the United States to adapt its leadership so as to integrate China into the global order. The authors seek to understand the implications of roles and perceptions in the evolution of the international order and the types of leadership that the United States should put into practice to manage interrole conflicts with China, avoid Thucydides’ scenario of hegemonic war, and, ultimately, remain the global leader.

In “The Air Force, Grand Strategy, and National Security: Toward a Better Understanding of Airpower’s Enduring Utility,” Prof. Robert Ehlers addresses the waxing and waning for nearly 70 years of the calls for an end to the independent US Air Force and the absorption of its component parts into the other military services. During the past

15 years, however, attacks on the utility of the Air Force—and thus its retention as an independent service—have become increasingly strident. This article takes an opposing view based on the continuing utility of airpower across the entire range of American grand-strategic aims and supporting policy efforts. Although it discusses the importance of airpower as part of a balanced combined-arms force in conventional wars and its often overlooked effectiveness in other kinds of armed conflicts, the article focuses on how the Air Force and the many assets it employs have proven particularly effective in helping policy makers achieve strategic aims short of armed conflict. This relatively little discussed dimension of the service’s contributions to our country’s security and prosperity—and those of key allies and associates—takes center stage and gives the reader a different and better appreciation of the wide range of air (and space) capabilities that the independent Air Force brings to bear. By viewing these capabilities and their employment through a broader lens that includes but goes far beyond war, and in which war is properly situated as the very last policy option, we develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of both the Air Force and airpower as enduring assets of great importance. Granted, no service—including the Air Force—has approached perfection in either wartime operations or those short of war, but the Air Force has more than proven its worth along with the other services.

Prof. Landry Signé and Rémy Smida explain the 2011 Tunisian transition by analyzing how the army played a crucial role in the fall of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s regime in their article “Actions of the Tunisian Army in Gafsa in 2008 and during the Uprising of 2011.” What is the rationality behind the military’s decision to refuse Ben Ali’s order to open fire on the demonstrators? Why did the Tunisian army fire on protesters in the 2008 demonstrations in the city of Gafsa yet refused to do so in the decisive uprising of 2011? The authors maintain that the balance of power on the field was such that the army was better off backing the population and using a strategic entry point to bring a decisive “coup” against the regime. Their study offers the first analysis that applies game theory to explain the 2011 Tunisian transition and, more precisely, the interactions between Ben Ali’s regime and the army. Although several analyses examine the unprecedented popular mobilization to explain the president’s fall, only a few attempt to address the role of the militaries. However, even though they emphasize the “disdain” of the army towards the regime, the authors claim that the rationality of one of the most professional armies in the region explains why its soldiers refused to open fire at their own population in the 2011 national protests.

In “South-South Land Grabs: The Case of Korean Investments in the Greater Mekong Subregion,” Prof. Teresita Cruz-del Rosario posits that land grabs in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Greater Mekong Subregion, are happening with unprecedented speed and on a vast scale. Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are favored sites of transna-

tional capital to secure land rights. The global “race for arable lands” involves countries with rapid economic growth faced with increasing shortages of food for their expanding populations and shrinking land acreage for agriculture production. South Korea is a case in point. Land is substituting for capital resources, a phenomenon known as “land-capital switching.” Because land still forms an intrinsic, critical feature of socioeconomic security—especially in the absence of opportunities to acquire capital—the loss of land exacerbates existing insecurities and denies dislocated populations any access to socioeconomic measures that could alleviate these insecurities. The article further investigates this phenomenon in the Greater Mekong Subregion and establishes the “agro-food-feed-fuel” complex as the underlying logic for the large-scale acquisition of land.

Prof. Dennis Jett, a retired US ambassador, informs us in “Where Ambassadors Go” that one can be an American ambassador at any of about 165 different places in the world. Many factors drive the decision of who gets to go to a particular country, and how such matters come into play is not easily understood. The most important determinant is whether the person is a career officer or a political appointee. Other issues influence ambassadorial assignments, however, and characteristics as diverse as gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, and one’s position on abortion can prove influential. Professor Jett’s article discusses how these factors affect where a person is sent as ambassador and why no general theory provides an appropriate explanation.

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