Dr. Brooks began by noting that his talk would be based on the work he is doing with Dr. William Wohlforth for a forthcoming book. Some of the material has also been covered in articles Dr. Brooks wrote recently with William Wohlforth and John Ikenberry in *International Security* and *Foreign Affairs*. The book will have two parts that will discuss the biggest questions concerning the position of the US today:

1. What is the nature of the international system?
2. What is the place of the US in that system? How powerful will the US be in the future?

**Basic premise of the book and the talk**

- The world is changing as could be seen in:
  - The financial crisis of 2008
  - Discussions about the coming multi-polar world / post-American world
- Brooks agrees that the world is changing
  - Because of the rise of China
  - But US is and will remain the only country capable of deep engagement capable of shaping the behavior of other countries
- Second big question: What grand strategic choice should the US make?
  - If it is true that the US retains the capability to be deeply engaged, should it be?
  - May not be true in D.C. but in the academic world, the majority opinion is that the US should retrench – come home
    - Many major figures in the international relations field agree
    - However, Dr. Brooks disagrees
  - Retrenchment would be a very risky, unwise experiment
- Bottom line: US has no choice but to stay deeply engaged, it has the ability to do so, and abandoning that role would be unwise
Nature of the International System and America’s Place in It

- Look back 10 years to when people talked about the US as an empire
  - Not doing so anymore
  - More likely to call the US a weary Titan with rapidly waning power capabilities
- Pendulum appears to have swung too far in both directions
  - Opinions overestimated US capabilities as an empire – US never had that kind of influence
  - Now opinions are overly pessimistic about the US losing its capability to pursue global leadership as a part of deep engagement strategy
- Dramatic swings in opinion probably come from the lack of an effective conceptual framework for the current international system
  - Unipolarity was the most common system used to explain the US position
  - Brooks did use it but no longer does
  - Unipolarity has been corrupted with too many definitions leaving it no longer useful
  - Depending on the definition Unipolarity:
    - Never existed
    - Did exist but no longer does
    - Exists now but won’t soon
    - Exists and will likely continue to exist for quite some time

Understanding the Unipolarity Definition Problem

- Some definitions have said there never has been a period of unipolarity
  - The concept was that the sole pole can resolve all international situation alone
    - No combination of other states could prevent it from doing so
  - To meet this criteria, as a nuclear power, Washington would have to have more power in relation to the rest of the world than it does to the 50 states
    - No state could ever meet this standard
- Robert Pape’s concept states that the US can determine the outcome of most international disputes and control the actions of smaller states
  - Looked like this might be true right after Kosovo and the early, relatively easy victories in Iraq and Afghanistan – US seemed to have “magic bullets”
  - Now no one would say that the US measures up to this standard given current problems in Iraq and Afghanistan
- In the definition that the US has unipolarity now but will lose it soon because China will be matching the aggregate US economy
  - But this only spotlights aggregate GDP ignoring all the other elements of power that have always been used to score how states rank against each other
  - By this standard the UK would have been seen less powerful than India in the late 19th century
By this standard when the Soviet Union fell ending a bipolarity period, another bipolar period involving Japan would have begun

- Japan then had an economy 2/3’s the size of the US economy
- This highlights the need to look at strength overall, not just GDP

- Concept that the US has unipolar position now but will lose it uses the definition of unipolarity that Brooks used in his last book
  - Definition: a system where one state is in its own class given its share of material resources
    - Generally consists: economic, military, and technical capacities as well as size of population and territory
    - Taken all together is there one country leads in those categories? The US
  - Bottom line: This can be defended as a better definition than the others, but Brooks now believes that there needs to be a new framework
    - This was a useful concept when the US was close to reaching ideal standard
    - Now this concept is getting in the way of understanding what the international system is and how it is changing

Problem with polarity concepts: it encourages dichotomous thinking

- Is it unipolarity or bi-polarity or multi-polarity?
- A great deal has changed since the late 1990s and early 2000s due to the rise of Chinese power
- If China’s power has risen, what is the system now?
  - Not bipolarity, nor multi polarity, nor non-polarity
  - But certainly not the same as 1995 either
- Need new term – something more finely grained

A new system description: One Plus X

- Suggested by Professor Barry Bazan
- Current system is one Superpower with X number of Great Powers
  - There is only 1 Superpower with far greater share of overall resources
    - The only state capable of organizing military/political action anywhere in the system
  - X number of Great Powers are big but not super powers
  - Largely can ignore all the other countries for now
- Description does not include China which is in a class by itself
  - Greater than the other X-powers but not a peer to the Superpower
- Problem: Using this definition leaves us stuck – everything is changing or nothing is changing
- Solution: Need to think of a continuum from Great to Super powers – with 5 steps
  - #1 Great Power
  - #2 Moving from Great to Potential Superpower – not there yet, but gathering the latent material power to become a Superpower
#3 Potential or Latent Superpower – has the latent material power to become a Superpower if it tries
#4 Transitioning to become a Superpower – actualizing to become a Superpower
#5 Superpower

- Need this spectrum definition because the magnitude of the difference between Great and Superpowers is so large
  - In multi-polar system all the major powers are packed closely together
  - In bi-polar system the poles are also close
  - In unipolar system there is great differences between the Great and Super powers

If One Plus $X$ is accepted as a good system, then where is China today?

- Key point: It is harder to go from a Great to a Super power now than ever before because of complexity and time required to make significant moves
- Current system is One Plus $X$ with only China having broken away from the pack
- China will be stuck in the #2 position for some time – longer than most analysts think because:
  - China is at a relatively low level of technical development compared to the US
    - Not like US and Britain or US and Germany at earlier shift points
    - When there was a shift or a potential shift both sides were all at the same relative level of technological development
  - Will take longer for China to advance because barriers to becoming the top military power are now much higher
    - Because it is so hard to both make and use modern weapons
- Bottom line: Even after China achieves or approaches economic parity with the US, there will still be a long lag (perhaps decades) before it could move to potential Superpower status
  - That assumes that China will actually try to develop Superpower capabilities

**Summary conclusion of the first part of the book:** US has not and will not decline to the point where it can no longer sustain a Grand Strategy of deep engagement

- US retains this choice and will continue to do so
- Only the US has the capability to make that choice

**Part Two:** Why retrenchment is a risky and unwise experiment and why continuing with the current Grand Strategy is the way to go

Proponents of retrenchment often don’t focus on the defining elements of Grand Strategy which have been constant since the end of WWII

- Current elements of deep engagement are:
  - Not promotion of democracy
  - Not promotion of human rights
  - Not transforming other societies to look like the US
  - Not regular use of military power
- Barry Posen believes that the above are defining elements of Grand Strategy – but he is wrong
All of the above activities are optional choices that have varied from one Administration to another and sometimes during a given Administration.

US Grand Strategy overall involves the pursuit of 3 overlapping objectives:
- Managing the external environment to reduce near and long term pressures on US national security
- Promoting a liberal economic order to expand the global economy and ensure US economic prosperity
- Creating, sustaining, and revising the global institution order to secure interstate cooperation

These have been constants over the last 65 years:
- The pursuit of these underlies what is arguably America’s most consequential strategic choice – to maintain security commitments to partners and allies
  - In Europe, Middle East, and East Asia
- Academic debate over retrenchment is so consequential because it involves the basic elements of US Grand Strategy
  - Avoid confusing the debate by including considerations of how much the US should promote concepts such as democratization and human rights

Brooks’ analysis centers on three underlying questions:
1. Should the US pull back from its wide roster of security commitments?
2. Should the US maintain military forces overseas?
3. Should the US seek to lead the liberal international institutional order?

Outline of the rest of this talk and the related journal articles:
1. Discussion of why the proponents of retrenchment overstate their case
2. Discussion of the security costs of coming home
   - Why engagement has security benefits
   - Why retrenchment has security risks
3. Discussion of the wider benefits of deep engagement

Costs that retrenchment proponents point to for the deep engagement Grand Strategy:
- Many retrenchment advocates say that the US has no choice but to pull back
  - These arguments were mostly discussed / dismissed in the first part of the talk
- Budget issues were not discussed but are not strong arguments for retrenchment
  - Defense spending increased dramatically after 9/11 and is now heading downward toward less than 3% of GDP
    - Even when that happens the US will still be $100B above 1990s levels
  - This 3% level is just a little above the world average and is sustainable
    - The imperial overstretch argument does not work here
  - Research indicates that there is no evidence that reducing US military spending would improve overall economic growth
- Most academia retrenchment advocates agree that the US could sustain this Grand Strategy, but that the US still shouldn’t do so because of other costs:
  - Balancing
• **Entrapment**
  - Allies drag the US into wars not of our interests
    - Thucydides: “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”
    - Retrenchment advocates switch the concept: The weak do what they can and the strong suffer what they must
      - Meaning weak states lead and the US must follow
    - But there is no compelling evidence that this happens
      - Alliance agreements are designed to protect both sides
      - Meta-analysis of all alliances and wars in history shows that this has not happened
      - Looking at US experience shows there have been close calls but no entrapments
        - Mostly US, as the stronger partner, has used its influence to shape the actions of allies
• **Temptation**
  - since the US has such large forces out in the world it is easy for it to engage in wars
    - Arguments for this concept boil down to Iraq and Afghanistan
      - 90% of the costs and the bulk of the casualties since 9/11 came from those two wars
    - Interventions in Libya and elsewhere have not had great costs
    - Major point: the Grand Strategy of deep engagement did not require engagement at the scale of Iraq and Afghanistan
      - These were choices
        - After Vietnam the US did not engage in any large scale interventions for the rest of the Cold War – the lesson was learned
        - US may be in the same position again with a lesson learned
    - More important than whether a lesson has been learned: cutting back on US opportunity to intervene, would require defense spending to be cut much more
      - So far cuts have only made it more difficult to intervene
    - Bottom line: Brooks can’t totally refute this argument
      - But it is hard to tie US hands to avoid any interventions
      - Can say that it looks like the US learned the lesson of doing no more Iraqs
Security Costs Of Coming Home / Retrenchment

- Revoking US security guarantees to allies would make the world and the US less secure
- Concerned about the increased insecurity, arms races, tensions if the US came home
  - In Asia: Japan and S. Korea would probably expand their security capabilities which could provoke a reaction from China
  - In the Middle East: security dilemmas would likely become more intense
  - In Europe: concerns are not so much about internal insecurities
    - But they might not be able to handle own area contingencies
    - Also would lack extra capacities to handle global security missions where their help would be desirable
- Concern about the potential for cascading proliferation
  - Egypt, Japan, S. Korea, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia might be pushed to increase their capabilities
    - That might increase the response of nuclear proliferation cascades in their regions
  - Many retrenchment advocates agree that this could happen but are not concerned
    - They are nuclear optimists – see proliferation as not that big a deal since nuclear weapons are stabilizing
  - Brooks and Wohlfarth are concerned
    - None of the potential new nuclear powers would have the nuclear forces adequate for establishing stable nuclear deterrence
    - The more nuclear states there are, the higher the chance that some nukes would leak out to undesirable non-state actors
- Deep engagement:
  - Keeps the world more secure
  - Reduces the potential of proliferation cascades
  - Provides the US some influence over its allies
    - Helps with restraining partners from acting provocatively and transferring weapons to potential adversaries
  - Bottom line on retrenching from deep engagement; fear that it would generate more military operations by other countries
    - Creating rapid diffusion of power away from the US
    - Exacerbating the problem of US decline because it would lead greater likelihood of military operations elsewhere

But US Grand Strategy is not just about these security issues which are the only ones acknowledged by retrenchment advocates, since must also consider
- Economic benefits of deep engagement
  - Dampening down military engagements helps to promote globalization which helps the US economy
  - Supports US efforts to keep open the sea/shipping lanes, which helps keep the costs of shipping from rising unpredictably
Supports macro-structuring of globalization
- US generally likes the economic status quo in the world – open trading, importance of the dollar, the World Bank, etc.
- US allies mostly support the same concepts but are more likely to do so because the US provides them security
  - Example: Japan and the US do not have matching economic interests but Japan does tend to agree with the US on the overall economic concepts above
- Institutional issues of deep engagement
  - To solve/mitigate many issues such as terrorism and climate change will require international cooperation
  - Inter-state cooperation necessary but hard to achieve
    - Helps to have a leader
    - Shown in studies that inter-state cooperation can happen without a leader but is more likely to happen with one
  - US Grand Strategy puts the US in a leadership position to help facilitate such cooperation
  - Severing security ties will mean less cooperation on other matters

Conclusion and Counter-arguments
- Complaint: Brooks calling for keeping all commitments forever – not true
  - Response: The US should be able to scrutinize US commitments especially those commitments that are costly
- Complaint: “Deep engagement is risky”
  - Example: Does the US really want to get involved in the current China/Japan dispute over small islands?
  - Response: retrenchment is riskier
- Complaint: Brooks says that deep engagement permits the US to help shape global situations but that does not seem to work
  - Example: Look what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan
  - Response: Much of US power is not directly employed and is, therefore, not directly observed
    - Power is often defined as the ability to get others to do what you want but US seems to lack that power
    - Power can also be defined as the ability of getting others to NOT do something they otherwise would have done
      - US has a lot of this blocking power but it is rarely seen
      - There are many ways others would like to change things in the world but can’t or don’t try because of US blocking power
      - This is important to the US because it likes much of the status quo

Bottom line: deep engagement augments US power to shape the global environment in favorable ways more often by preventing others from making changes we would not like
- Deep engagement gives the US levers of power
- Opponents say US should throw away these levers of power but that would be a big mistake

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**Re: Definitions of Retrenchment**

Advocates of retrenchment call for many different levels of withdrawal

- Some call for keeping commitments but bringing home the troops
  - Some want to do that for specific regions
  - Some want complete retrenchment from all regions and commitments
- Best developed arguments come from advocates for a general, overall pullback
  - Best article on this is from 1997 called “Come Home, America” in *National Security*
  - Most others just say US should “pull back” or just not do what it did before
    - Hard to respond to
- Deep engagement means keeping troops abroad and keeping commitments while retrenchment calls for the opposite
  - There may be a melding of the two between the extremes but those positions are not well set out yet
  - “Don’t Come Home” was meant to get people to start that process and that seems to be happening but nothing is published yet

**RE: Afghanistan and Iraq**

Saying that the US Grand Strategy commitments had not changed over 65 years, did not take into account Iraq or Afghanistan

- US has not had commitments to them for very long so they are not part of the deep engagement/retrenchment debate
  - Would not automatically say that the US should have troops/commitments there
  - Both fall into the category of commitments that should be scrutinized
- Brooks is uncomfortable about pulling out of where the US has been for decades but Iraq and Afghanistan are special cases
  - Question is to what degree US presence there is organic to the overall strategy
  - What would presence there do to promote
    - Security in core regions?
    - Globalization?
    - Institutional architecture?
- Not clear that Afghanistan is central to any of these missions
- US focuses on the security in 3 core regions (Europe, East Asia, Middle East)
  - Iraq is involved in maintaining the stability of the Middle East
  - But it would be possible to have stability there without troops presence
**Re: Superpower and Pole States**
- Brooks focuses on the internal characteristics of what makes a superpower or a pole state
  - Because this is what has always been done in international relations studies so this method maintains consistency
  - Because these are elements that can be measured, i.e. How big is the US military compared to China’s
    - How much soft power does the US have is hard to measure
- Also concerned that retrenchment is a risky experiment
  - Big potential that others will see the US as diminished
  - But it is also possible that some countries/people would think better of the US for retrenchment
- If did come home and then discovered it was a bad idea, would not be able to go back
  - Can't run experiments in international relations

**Re: Having Others Take Up The Slack**
Some believe that important missions the US is currently doing which would be dropped in retrenchment would be picked up by other states
- Can’t be sure that would actually happen
  - Some small missions would likely be filled
  - However, probably not all missions would be done or would be done well enough
- Might expect cooperative efforts with others sharing formerly US missions
  - Often in such endeavors countries might shirk or cheat on their responsibilities
- US does missions like protecting the sea lanes which it recognizes that no other country could/would do as well
- US would have no problem if others did step up to take on missions and carry them out adequately if done without coercion
  - Example: Libya – many thought the US was not involved enough
  - Problem: There aren’t that many situations where other countries have the motive and the capability to do what needs to be done

**Re: Where Else The US Should Project Power**
Brooks is only looking at retrenchment as concept to be avoided, not at other opportunities
- There could be other places where the US should be projecting power
  - Has not been part of their analysis so far
- Saying don't pull back is the departure

**Re: Determining Where To Pull Back**
The need to stay engaged may vary by region depending on things like the probability of a proliferation cascade or the likelihood of a security dilemmas
- More optimistic about a post-US Europe – more stabilizers exist there
• Post-US Middle East and Asia lack those stabilizers and institutions
  o Many countries aren't democratic / lack strong economic ties
  o Have less long-standing cooperative efforts
  o US presence may be more important here because potentials problems are more dire

• It is possible that if the US pulls out that European countries would increase their defense budgets and take up the slack for missions inside Europe
  o They would also have excess capacity to help elsewhere in the world
  o But, if they don't increase their budgets they will not have that capacity and eventually there would be some problem that they could not handle at home

• Bottom line: It is not risky for the US to stay in Europe; is a little expensive but worth it

Re: Balancing and Counter-balancing
Expectation: There will be no effort to create a counterbalance to the diminished US – either from an internal build-up by one state or an alliance of several states
• Alliances are difficult to set up and this would be especially hard to do against the US
• US still has about 41% of world defense expenditures
  o China roughly at 8% with Russia at 4%
  o Would need many more countries to get involved
  o Which others would join? Japan? Europe as a single state?
• Balancing against the US is not impossible but it would be hard
• Can come up with scenarios where China suddenly decides to spend 30% on defense but this seems highly unlikely
• If the US appears to be provoking China in China's view, China could work at establishing a counterbalancing alliance, but that does not seem to be likely

Re: Why China Will Be Stuck at The Second Stage of Development for a Long Time
• There are many skills required to become a Superpower:
  o How to use weapons systems
  o How to produce complex weapons systems
• These skills take a long time to develop and require a great deal of trial and error efforts
  o US has the skills and infrastructure needed to do this
  o US must make sure that it does not lose these skills in any cutback
    ▪ Must not cut back so much that lose the people with the skills
  o US must also invest in developing new systems and the engineering talent to keep going