Offshore Balancing Essay, Research Paper

In his article “…America’s Future Grand Strategy,” Layne pits the current US grand strategy of preponderance against his proposed US grand strategy of offshore balancing. Layne delineates the current US strategy of preponderance and what he sees as the problems inherent in the current method in the Post-Cold War era. Instead, he proposes the strategy of offshore balancing and explains why he believes it would be a more successful strategy for the twenty-first century. The strategy of preponderance is based on US preeminence in the global scene. The US tries to control the global scene and prevent the emergence of another rival hegemon in Europe or Asia. This control extends to economic, political, and military power. Since the 1940’s, the US has accepted the power of the Soviet bloc, but has prevented the rise of a third great power within its own sphere of influence. While helping its allies rebuild economically, the US has still maintained tight political control over them. Stemming the rise of a unified Germany or an independent Japan has been near the forefront of the US strategy. The US wanted Europe and Japan to be strong enough to counterbalance the Soviet Union, but not strong enough to challenge the leadership of the US. Now that the Soviet bloc has disintegrated, the bipolar environment of the Cold War has dissolved. In the “unipolar” environment created, the US is committed to both maintaining its hegemony and preventing the rise of any other possible hegemon. This has led to the US extending its commitments overseas. This has increased the amount of US military involvement, while the funding for overseas ventures has not increased. Insofar as economic control, the US strategy of preponderance hinges on the concept of economic interdependence. In the current policy, states that are economically interdependent are less likely to become aggressive with one another. This has led the US into guaranteeing the pacification of all international pathways of trade, again extending its commitment.The strategy of preponderance had led to the US maintaining a core interest in both Europe and Asia, because any possible rival hegemon would arise from these regions. Not only must the US commit itself to involving itself in the core area, Layne argues, but also in the peripheries. US involvement in the peripheral regions guarantees the credibility of US commitment to the core areas, both to its allies and its would-be rivals. Layne sees the extension of US resources as diminishing the security of the US. By involving itself in the peripheries, the US puts the credibility of its commitment on the line every time.

Layne believes that the strategy of offshore balancing is a better policy for the upcoming years than the current policies of the US. Offshore balancing would have the narrowly defined goals of maintaining US territorial integrity and prevention of the rise of a Eurasian hegemon. The geographical isolation and natural barriers of the US reduce any security risk that may arise from distant rivals. Layne’s proposal would decrease the amount of conventional land based troops, increase the amount of naval ships and personnel, and put more faith in nuclear deterrence. The US would not become involved in peripheral skirmishes and would let more of the responsibility of counterbalancing possible rivals to more proximate states. The only instance the US would step into international affairs would be if other states were not able to or willing to balance against a possible rising hegemon. Layne also believes that the amount of economic interdependence of the US to other states is negligible and therefore can be ignored. US exports only account for 6 percent of the GDP, as opposed to an average 24 percent for industrialized nations. He would have the US disconnect any reliance on world trade by minimizing its reliance on overseas raw materials by stockpiling, diversification, and product substitution. The strategy of offshore balancing would prevent the overextension of US resources and therefore the US would be more secure by having more resources to devote directly into the infrastructure of the state.