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U.S. Role in the World: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Some observers perceive that after remaining generally stable for a period of about 70 years, the U.S. role in the world—meaning the overall character, purpose, or direction of U.S. participation in international affairs and the country's overall relationship to the rest of the world—is undergoing a potentially historic change. A change in the U.S. role in the world could have significant and even profound effects on U.S. security, freedom, and prosperity. It could significantly affect U.S. policy in areas such as relations with allies and other countries, defense plans and programs, trade and international finance, foreign assistance, and human rights.

The U.S. role in the world since the end of World War II in 1945 (i.e., over the past 70 years or so) is generally described as one of global leadership and significant engagement in international affairs. A key element of that role has been to defend and promote the liberal international order that the United States, with the support of its allies, created in the years after World War II. Other key elements have been to defend and promote freedom, democracy, and human rights as universal values, while criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government where possible; and to oppose the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia or a spheres-of-influence world.

The fact that the U.S. role in the world has been generally stable over the past 70 years does not necessarily mean that this role was the right one for the United States, or that it would be the right one in the future. Although the role the United States has played in the world since the end of World War II has many defenders, it also has critics, and the merits of that role have been a matter of long-standing debate among foreign policy specialists, strategists, policymakers, and the public, with critics offering potential alternative concepts for the U.S. role in the world. One major dimension of the debate is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing the active internationalist role that it has played for the past 70 years, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs. A number of critics of the U.S. role in the world over the past 70 years have offered multiple variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role.

The overall issue for Congress is how to respond to recent developments regarding the U.S. role in the world. Potential key issues for Congress include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Is the U.S. role changing, and if so, in what ways?
- Should the U.S. role change?
- Is a change of some kind in the U.S. role unavoidable?
- How are other countries responding to a possibly changed U.S. role?
- Is a changed U.S. role affecting world order?
- What implications might a changed U.S. role in the world have for Congress's role relative to that of the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking?
- How might the operation of democracy in the United States affect the U.S. role in the world, particularly in terms of defending and promoting democracy and criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government?
- Would a change in the U.S. role be reversible, and if so, to what degree?

Congress's decisions on this issue could have significant implications for numerous policies, plans, programs, and budgets, and for the role of Congress relative to that of the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking.

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Introduction

This report provides background information and issues for Congress regarding the U.S. role in the world, meaning the overall character, purpose, or direction of U.S. participation in international affairs and the country's overall relationship to the rest of the world. Some observers perceive that after remaining generally stable for a period of about 70 years, the U.S. role in the world is undergoing a potentially historic change. A change in the U.S. role in the world could have significant and even profound effects on U.S. security, freedom, and prosperity. It could significantly affect U.S. policy in areas such as relations with allies and other countries, defense plans and programs, trade and international finance, foreign assistance, and human rights. It could also have implications for future international order.

The overall issue for Congress is how to respond to recent developments regarding the U.S. role in the world. Congress's decisions on this issue could have significant implications for numerous policies, plans, programs, and budgets, and for the role of Congress relative to that of the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking.

A variety of other CRS reports address in greater depth specific policy areas mentioned in this report.

Appendix A provides a glossary of some key terms used in this report, including *role in the world*, *grand strategy*, *international order/world order*, *unipolar/bipolar/tripolar/multipolar*, *Eurasia*, *regional hegemon*, *spheres-of-influence world*, *geopolitics, hard power*, and *soft power*. In this report, the term *U.S. role in the world* is often shortened for convenience to *U.S. role*.

Footnotes in this report with citations taking up more than 10 lines of type have had their citations transferred to **Appendix B**.

Background on U.S. Role

Overview

The U.S. role in the world since the end of World War II in 1945 (i.e., over the past 70 years or so) is generally described as one of global leadership and significant engagement in international affairs. Observers over the years have referred to the U.S. role in the world since World War II using various terms and phrases that sometimes reflect varying degrees of approval or disapproval of that role. It has been variously described as that of global leader, leader of the free world, superpower, hyperpower, indispensable power, system administrator, world policeman, or world hegemon. Similarly, the United States has also been described as pursuing an internationalist foreign policy, a foreign policy of global engagement or deep engagement, a foreign policy that provides global public goods, a foreign policy of liberal order building, liberal internationalism, or liberal hegemony, an interventionist foreign policy, or a foreign policy of seeking primacy or world hegemony.

Key Elements

Creation and Defense of Liberal International Order

A key element of the U.S. role in the world since World War II has been to defend and promote the liberal international order that the United States, with the support of its allies, created in the

years after World War II.[1] Although definitions of the liberal international order vary, key elements are generally said to include the following:

- respect for the territorial integrity of countries, and the unacceptability of changing international borders by force or coercion;
- a preference for resolving disputes between countries peacefully, without the use or threat of use of force or coercion, and in a manner consistent with international law;
- respect for international law, global rules and norms, and universal values, including human rights;
- strong international institutions for supporting and implementing international law, global rules and norms, and universal values;
- the use of liberal (i.e., rules-based) international trading and investment systems to advance open, rules-based economic engagement, development, growth, and prosperity; and
- the treatment of international waters, international air space, outer space, and (more recently) cyberspace as international commons.

The liberal international order was created by the United States with the support of its allies in the years immediately after World War II. At that time, the United States was the only country with both the capacity and willingness to establish a new international order. U.S. willingness to establish and play a leading role in maintaining the liberal international order is generally viewed as reflecting a desire by U.S. policymakers to avoid repeating the major wars and widespread economic disruption and deprivation of the first half of the 20th century—a period that included World War I, the Great Depression, the rise of communism and fascism, the Ukrainian famine, the Holocaust, and World War II.

U.S. willingness to establish and play a leading role in maintaining the liberal international order is also generally viewed as an act of national self-interest, reflecting a belief among U.S. policymakers that it would strongly serve U.S. security, political, and economic objectives. Supporters of the liberal international order generally argue that in return for bearing the costs of creating and sustaining the liberal international order, the United States receives significant security, political, and economic benefits, including the maintenance of a favorable balance of power on both a global and regional level, and a leading or dominant role in establishing and operating global institutions and rules for international finance and trade. Indeed, some critics of the liberal international order argue that it is primarily a construct for serving U.S. interests and promoting U.S. world primacy or hegemony. As discussed later in this report, however, the costs and benefits for the United States of the liberal international order are a matter of debate.

Though often referred to as if it is a fully developed or universally established situation, the liberal international order, like other international orders that preceded it, is

- incomplete in geographic reach and in other ways;

[1] Other terms used to refer to the liberal international order include *U.S.-led international order*, *postwar international order*, *rules-based international order*, and *open international order*. Observers sometimes substitute *world* for *international*, or omit *international* or *world* and refer simply to the liberal order, the U.S.-led order, and so on. In the terms *liberal international order* and *liberal order*, the word *liberal* does not refer to the conservative-liberal construct often used in discussing contemporary politics in the United States or other countries. It is, instead, an older use of the term that refers to an order based on rule of law, as opposed to an order based on the arbitrary powers of hereditary monarchs.

- partly aspirational;
- not fixed in stone, but rather subject to evolution over time;
- sometimes violated by its supporters;
- resisted or rejected by certain states and nonstate actors; and
- subject to various stresses and challenges.[2]

Some observers, emphasizing points like those above, argue that the liberal international order is more of a myth than a reality.[3] Other observers, particularly supporters of the order, while acknowledging the limitations of the order, reject characterizations of it as a myth and emphasize its differences from international orders that preceded it.[4]

Defense and Promotion of Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights

A second element of the U.S. role in the world since World War II has been to defend and promote freedom, democracy, and human rights as universal values, while criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government where possible. This element of the U.S. role is viewed as consistent not only with core U.S. political values but also with the theory (sometimes called the democratic peace theory) that democratic countries are more responsive to the desires of their populations and consequently are less likely to wage wars of aggression or go to war with one another.[5]

Prevention of Regional Hegemons in Eurasia

A third element of the U.S. role in the world since World War II has been to oppose the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia or a spheres-of-influence world. This objective reflects a U.S. perspective on geopolitics and grand strategy developed during and in the years immediately after World War II, including in particular a judgment that—given the amount of people, resources, and economic activity in Eurasia—a regional hegemon in Eurasia would represent a concentration of power large enough to be able to threaten vital U.S. interests, and that Eurasia is not dependably self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemons.[6]

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[2] See, for example, Nick Danforth, "What's So Disordered About Your World Order?" *War on the Rocks*, June 20 2018.

[3] See, for example, Stephen M. Walt, "What Sort of World Are We Headed For?" *Foreign Policy*, October 2, 2018; George Friedman, "The Myth of the Liberal International Order; It's Dangerous to Pine for a Time That Never Really Was." *Geopolitical Futures*, September 19, 2018; Andrew J. Bacevich, "The 'Global Order' Myth; Teary-Eyed Nostalgia as Cover for U.S. Hegemony," *American Conservative*, June 15, 2017; Graham Allison, "The Myth of the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs*, June 14, 2018; Patrick Porter, "A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order," Cato Institute, June 5, 2018; Niall Ferguson, "The Myth of the Liberal International Order," *Global Times*, January 11, 2018.

[4] See, for example, Hal Brands, "America's Global Order Is Worth Fighting For; The Longest Period of Great-Power Peace in Modern History Is Not a 'Myth.'" *Bloomberg*, August 14, 2018; Michael J. Mazarr, "The Real History of the Liberal Order; Neither Myth Nor Accident," *Foreign Affairs*, August 7, 2018; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "The Liberal Order Is More Than a Myth; But It Must Adapt to the New Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs*, July 31, 2018; Emile Simpson, "There's Nothing Wrong With the Liberal Order That Can't Be Fixed by What's Right With It; Realists Need to Get a Lot More Realistic about the Global Legal System." *Foreign Policy*, August 7, 2018.

[5] For more on the democractic peace theory, see, for example, "Democratic Peace Theory," Oxford Bibliographies, accessed August 17, 2018, at http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0014.xml.

[6] For additional discussion, see CRS In Focus IF10485, *Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and U.S. Force Design*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

Changes over Time

Although the U.S. role in the world was generally stable over the past 70 years, the specifics of U.S. foreign policy for implementing that role have changed frequently for various reasons, including changes in administrations and changes in the international security environment. Definitions of the overall U.S. role have room within them to accommodate some flexibility in the specifics of U.S. foreign policy.

Long-standing Debate over Its Merits

The fact that the U.S. role in the world has been generally stable over the past 70 years does not necessarily mean that this role was the right one for the United States, or that it would be the right one in the future. Although the role the United States has played in the world since the end of World War II has many defenders, it also has critics, and the merits of that role have been a matter of long-standing debate among foreign policy specialists, strategists, policymakers, and the public, with critics offering potential alternative concepts for the U.S. role in the world.

One major dimension of the debate is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing the active internationalist role that it has played for the past 70 years, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs. A number of critics of the U.S. role in the world over the past 70 years have offered multiple variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role.

A second major dimension within the debate over the future U.S. role concerns how to balance or combine the pursuit of narrowly defined material U.S. interests with the goal of defending and promoting U.S. or universal values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. A third major dimension concerns the balance in U.S. foreign policy between the use of hard power and soft power. Observers debating these two dimensions of the future U.S. role in the world stake out varying positions on these questions.

The long-standing debate over the U.S. role in the world is discussed further below in the "Issues for Congress" section of this report, particularly the part entitled "Should the U.S. Role Change?"

Issues for Congress

Overview: Potential Key Questions

The overall issue for Congress is how to respond to recent developments regarding the U.S. role in the world. Potential key issues for Congress include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Is the U.S. role changing, and if so, in what ways?
- Should the U.S. role change?
- Is a change of some kind in the U.S. role unavoidable?
- How are other countries responding to a possibly changed U.S. role?
- Is a changed U.S. role affecting world order?
- What implications might a changed U.S. role in the world have for Congress's role relative to that of the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking?
- How might the operation of democracy in the United States affect the U.S. role in the world?

- Would a change in the U.S. role be reversible, and if so, to what degree?

Each of these issues is discussed briefly below.

Is the U.S. Role Changing, and If So, in What Ways?

Some Observers See a Potentially Historic Change

Some observers argue that under the Trump Administration, the U.S. role in the world is undergoing a potentially historic change. Although views among these observers vary in their specifics, a number of these observers argue that under the Trump Administration, the United States is voluntarily retreating from or abdicating the United States' post-World War II position of global leadership in favor of an approach to U.S. foreign policy that is more restrained, less engaged (or disengaged), more unilateralist, and/or less willing to work through international or multilateral institutions and agreements.[7] Within that general assessment, these observers argue that the United States more specifically is doing one or more of the following:

- becoming more skeptical of the value of allies, particularly those in Europe, and more transactional in managing U.S. alliance relationships;
- becoming less supportive of regional or multilateral trade agreements and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in favor an approach to trade policy that relies more on protectionist measures and on negotiations aimed at reaching new or revised bilateral trade agreements, and which links trade actions more directly to other policy objectives;[8]
- reducing, becoming more selective in, or becoming indifferent to efforts for defending and promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights as universal values, and for criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government; and
- relying less on soft power, and more heavily on hard power, particularly military power.[9]

In support of this assessment, these observers tend to cite various actions by the Trump Administration, including the following:

[7] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[8] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[9] See, for example, Alex Ward, "America's Declining Power, in One Quote; UN Chief Antonio Guterres Says the 'Attraction of American Society' Is Less Clear Today Than a Few Decades Ago," *Vox*, September 14, 2018; Peter Beinart, "Trump Is Preparing for a New Cold War," *Atlantic*, February 27, 2018; Joseph S. Nye, "Donald Trump and the Decline of US Soft Power," *Strategist (ASPI)*, February 12, 2018; Jennifer Wilson, "Trump's Air War, Far From Being an Isolationist, the President Is One of the Country's Most Hawkish in Modern History," *New Republic*, October 17, 2017; Christian Caryl, "Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Is Already Undercutting Human Rights Around the World," *Washington Post*, March 8, 2017.

- the Administration's emphasis on its "America First" theme[10] and the concept of national sovereignty applied to both the United States and other countries[11] as primary guideposts for U.S. foreign policy;
- actions (particularly in 2017) that these observers view as intended to weaken or "hollow out" the State Department—including a relatively slow rate for forwarding nominations to fill senior positions in the department, and budget proposals to substantially reduce overall staffing and funding levels for the department—as well as proposed reductions in funding for U.S. foreign assistance programs;[12]
- U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) regional trade agreement;[13] the Paris climate agreement;[14] the Iran nuclear agreement;[15] and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM);[16] a U.S. decision to not cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC);[17] and a U.S. decision to limit U.S. exposure to decisions by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by withdrawing from the

[10] See, for example, Walter Russell Mead, "Pompeo on What Trump Wants; An Interview with Trump's Top Diplomat on America First and 'The Need for a Reset,'" *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2018; Gary J. Schmitt, "Trump's UN Speech: What Makes America First," American Enterprise Institute, September 20, 2017; Amber Phillips, "How Trump's 'America first' Doctrine Drives Everything He Does—Including Getting Elected," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2017. For more on the America First theme as applied to the U.S. role in the world, see, for example, pages 33-34 (relating to the Department of State, USAID, and Treasury International Programs) and pages 15-16 (relating to the Department of Defense) of, Office of Management and Budget, *America First, A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*, undated, accessed August 17, 2018, at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2018_blueprint.pdf, and *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, pp. I-II, 1, 3-4, 37, 55.

[11] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[12] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[13] For more on the TPP, see, for example, CRS Insight IN10646, *The United States Withdraws from the TPP*, by Brock R. Williams and Ian F. Fergusson, and CRS Report R44278, *The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): In Brief*, by Ian F. Fergusson, Mark A. McMinimy, and Brock R. Williams.

[14] For more on the Paris climate accord, see, for example, CRS In Focus IF10668, *Potential Implications of U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, by Jane A. Leggett; CRS Insight IN10746, *Paris Agreement on Climate Change: U.S. Letter to United Nations*, by Jane A. Leggett; and CRS Report R44761, *Withdrawal from International Agreements: Legal Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Stephen P. Mulligan.

[15] See, for example, Robin Wright, "Trump's New, Confrontational Foreign Policy and the End of the Iran Deal," *New Yorker*, May 21, 2018; Anne Applebaum "Trump Has Put America in the Worst of All Possible Worlds," *Washington Post*, May 11, 2018; Peter Beinart, "The Iran Deal and the Dark Side of American Exceptionalism," *Atlantic*, May 9, 2018. For more on the Iran nuclear agreement, see for example, CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement and U.S. Exit*, by Paul K. Kerr and Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report R44942, *U.S. Decision to Cease Implementing the Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Kenneth Katzman, Paul K. Kerr, and Valerie Heitshusen; and CRS Report R44761, *Withdrawal from International Agreements: Legal Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the Iran Nuclear Agreement*, by Stephen P. Mulligan. See also Philip Bump, "Where the U.S. Has Considered Leaving or Left International Agreements Under Trump," *Washington Post*, June 29, 2018.

[16] See, for example, Rick Gladstone, "U.S. Quits Migration Pact, Saying It Infringes on Sovereignty," *New York Times*, December 3, 2017. For more on the GCM, see CRS In Focus IF11003, *The Global Compact on Migration (GCM) and U.S. Policy*, by Rhoda Margesson and Catherine L. Able-Thomas.

[17] See, for example, "John Bolton Says U.S. Will Not Cooperate with International Criminal Court," *CBS News*, September 10, 2018; Elise Labott and Hilary Clarke, "US Threatens Sanctions Against International Criminal Court, Will Close PLO Office in Washington," *CNN*, September 11, 2018; Matthew Lee, "Bolton: International Criminal Court 'Already Dead to Us,'" *Associated Press*, September 11, 2018; Dan Boylan, "Bolton Bolsters Trump's 'America First' Foreign Policy with Robust Defense of U.S. Sovereignty," *Washington Times*, September 10, 2018.

Optional Protocol Concerning the Compulsory Settlement of Disputes to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations;[18]

- mixed signals, including skeptical or critical comments by President Trump, regarding the value to the United States of allies, and particularly the NATO alliance, and a reported focus by President Trump, in assessing allies, on their defense spending levels and their trade imbalances with the United States;[19]
- an apparent reluctance by President Trump to criticize Russia or to impose certain sanctions on Russia, and an apparent determination by President Trump to seek improved relations with Russia, despite various Russian actions judged by U.S. intelligence agencies and other observers to have been directed against the United States and U.S. overseas interests, particularly in Europe;[20]
- a reduced U.S. level of involvement in, or U.S. disengagement from, the conflict in Syria, and U.S. acceptance of a reestablished Russian position as a major power broker in the Syrian situation and the Middle East in general;[21]
- the nonattendance by then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at the rollout of the 2017 edition of the State Department's annual country reports on human rights practices around the world;[22] infrequent or inconsistent statements by President Trump or other Administration officials in support of democracy and human rights, or criticizing human rights practices of authoritarian and illiberal governments;[23] U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council;[24] U.S. actions to reduce the number of international refugees entering the United States;[25] and what these observers view as President Trump's apparent

[18] See, for example, Roberta Rampton, Lesley Wroughton, and Stephanie van den Berg, "U.S. Withdraws from International Accords, Says U.N. World Court 'Politicized,'" *Reuters*, October 3, 2018. See also CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10206, *The United States and the "World Court"*, by Stephen P. Mulligan.

[19] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[20] See, for example, Daniel Sargent, "RIP American Exceptionalism, 1776-2018," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2018; Andrew Sullivan, "Why Trump Has Such a Soft Spot for Russia," *New York*, July 20, 2018; Evelyn Farkas, "Trump Still Doesn't Take Russia Seriously, Rather Than Speaking Out Against Putin, the U.S. President Is Playing into Moscow's Hands," *Foreign Policy*, April 11, 2018; Joshua Keating, "The Only Pro-Russia Figure in the Trump Administration is Donald Trump," *Slate*, April 6, 2018.

[21] For more on the situation in Syria, see, for example, CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Carla E. Humud, and CRS In Focus IF10849, *Flashpoints in Syria and Iraq Create Challenges for U.S. Policy*, by Clayton Thomas.

[22] For more on the annual country reports, see, for example, Carol Morello, "Rex Tillerson Skips State Department's Annual Announcement on Human Rights, Alarming Advocates," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2017; CRS In Focus IF10795, *Global Human Rights: The Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, by Michael A. Weber.

[23] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[24] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[25] See, for example, Denis McDonough and Ryan Crocker, "The World's System for Resettling Refugees Benefits the United States; By Dismantling It, Trump Would Leave the Country—and Refugees—Worse Off," *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2018.

Priscilla Alvarez, "The U.S. Sends an Unwelcoming Signal to Refugees," *Atlantic*, September 18, 2018; Priscilla Alvarez, "Canada May Soon Outpace the U.S. in Refugee Admissions," *Atlantic*, September 12, 2018; Priscilla Alvarez, "America's System for Resettling Refugees Is Collapsing," *Atlantic*, September 9, 2018. See also CRS In Focus IF10611, *Global Refugee Resettlement: Selected Issues and Questions*, by Rhoda Margesson.

affinity for, or admiration of, the leaders of authoritarian and illiberal governments.[26]

Some of the observers who argue that the U.S. role in the world is undergoing a potentially historic change under the Trump Administration oppose the change, while others support it, or at least certain aspects of it. Opponents tend to view the retreat from U.S. global leadership that they see as an unforced error of potentially immense proportions—as a needless and self-defeating squandering or throwing away of something of great value to the United States that the United States has worked to build and maintain for 70 years. Opponents argue that actions contributing to the U.S. retreat are weakening the United States and the U.S. position in the world by rupturing long-standing and valuable U.S. alliance relationships; isolating the United States on certain issues; devaluing or reducing U.S. soft power; making the United States appear less reliable as an ally or negotiating partner; creating vacuums in global leadership and regional power balances that other countries (including China, Russia, the European Union, individual European countries, Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) are acting to fill, sometimes at the expense of U.S. interests; and weakening and causing doubts about the future of the U.S.-led international order.[27]

Supporters tend to view the change they see in the U.S. role, or at least certain aspects of it, as needed and appropriate, if not overdue, for responding to changed U.S. and global circumstances and for defending U.S. interests. Supporters argue that actions being implemented by the Trump Administration reflect a principled realism about what the United States can accomplish in the world;[28] are reasserting the importance of U.S. sovereignty (and the concept of sovereignty in general as an organizing principle for international relations); are proving effective in standing up for U.S. interests in relations with China, as well as U.S. trade interests in general (including new trade agreements with South Korea, Mexico, and Canada); encouraging U.S. allies to make greater military and other contributions to their own security; enhancing deterrence of potential regional aggression by making potential U.S. actions less predictable to potential adversaries; avoiding potentially costly and unproductive commitments of U.S. lives and resources in places like Syria and Yemen; and are achieving progress or potential breakthroughs in terms of denuclearization negotiations with North Korea.[29]

Others See Less Change, and More Continuity

Other observers see less change in the U.S. role in the world under the Trump Administration. They argue that although statements from President Trump sometimes suggest or imply a large-scale change in the U.S. role, actions taken by the Administration actually reflect a smaller amount of change, and more continuity with the U.S. role of the past 70 years.[30] In support of this

[26] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[27] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[28] See, for example, Salvatore Babones, "Trump's Foreign Policy Successes Show Principled Realism in Action; Trump Has Overcome Internal Resistance and External Pressure to Deliver a Strong of Foreign Policy Successes," *National Interest*, September 26, 2018; Brett D. Schaefer, "President Trump at the UN: An Unapologetic Defense of 'Principled Realism'; Donald Trump's United Nations Speech Took Stock of the Results of Eighteen Months of 'Principled Realism' in American Foreign Policy. The Record of Achievement Is Surprisingly Strong." *National Interest*, September 26, 2018. For more on what the Trump Administration refers to as principled realism, see *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, pp. 1, 55. See also Gail Yoshitani, "Jeane Kirkpatrick and the Roots of Principled Realism," *War on the Rocks*, October 9, 2018.

[29] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[30] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

assessment, these supporters cite various actions by the Trump Administration, including the following:

- the Administration's December 2017 national security strategy (NSS) document, large portions of which reflect—through multiple mentions of U.S. leadership, a general emphasis on great power competition with China and Russia, and strong support for U.S. alliances—a perspective on the U.S. role in the world generally consistent with the U.S. role of the past 70 years, as well as actions the Trump Administration has taken in support of that perspective;[31]
- the Administration's January 2018 unclassified summary of its supporting national defense strategy (NDS) document, which similarly reflects a perspective on the U.S. role in the world generally consistent with the U.S. role of the past 70 years;[32]
- the Administration's October 2018 counterterrorism strategy document, which observers view as largely consistent with the counterterrorism strategies of previous administrations;[33]
- the continuation (as opposed to winding down) of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and the Middle East;[34]
- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's statement that he wants the State Department to "get its swagger back";[35]
- statements from senior U.S. officials reaffirming U.S. support for NATO; Administration actions to improve U.S. military capabilities in Europe for deterring potential Russian aggression in Europe; and U.S. actions to encourage NATO allies to spend more on defense and to take similar actions;
- the Administration's implementation of additional sanctions on Russia in response to Russian actions;[36]

[31] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[32] See, for example, Dingding Chen, "The Trump Administration's National Security and National Defense Strategies Reveal a Change in Mindset Toward China," *Diplomat*, January 26, 2018.

[33] See, for example, Joshua A. Geltzer, "Trump's Counterterrorism Strategy Is a Relief," *Atlantic*, October 4, 2018.

[34] See, for example, Stephen Walt, "This Is America's Middle East Strategy on Steroids; Donald Trump Isn't Just Maintaining an Alliance with Saudi Arabia—He's Choosing it Over the Rest of the World," *Foreign Policy*, October 15, 2018; Micah Zenko, "How Donald Trump Learned to Love War in 2017," *Foreign Policy*, December 29, 2017.

[35] See, for example, Gardiner Harris, "Pompeo Promises to Return 'Swagger' to the State Department," *New York Times*, May 1, 2018; John T. Bennet, "Pompeo Vows 'Tough Diplomacy,' Return of State's 'Swagger,'" *Roll Call*, May 2, 2018. See also Daniel R. DePetris, "'Swagger' Doesn't Make up for Bad American Foreign Policy; An Evaluation of Mike Pompeo's Four Months on the Job," *National Interest*, October 2, 2018.

[36] See, for example, Harry J. Kazianis, "Trump's Sanctions on Russia Show His Strategic Kindness Isn't Sign of Weakness," *Fox News*, August 9, 2018; James Jay Carafano, "Donald Trump and the Age of Unconventional Diplomacy; Despite Donald Trump's Inability to Commit to Tough Talk, the Policies Coming Out if His Administration Have Been the Toughest on Russia Since the Reagan Administration," *National Interest*, July 17, 2018; Jonah Goldberg, "Trump *Has* Been Tough on Russia (Except Rhetorically)," *National Review*, February 20, 2018. Regarding sanctions that the Administration has imposed on various countries, see, for example, Carol Morello, "Trump Administration's Use of Sanctions Draws Concern," *Washington Post*, August 5, 2018.

- the Administration's new, more confrontational policy toward China,[37] and the Administration's plan to increase funding for U.S. foreign assistance programs to compete against China for influence in Africa, Asia, and the Americas;[38]
- the Administration's articulation of the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) region as a framework for U.S. foreign policy directed toward that part of the world;[39]
- U.S. trade actions that, in the view of these observers, are intended to make free trade more sustainable over the long run by ensuring that it is fair to all parties, including the United States;[40] and
- statements regarding human rights from U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and other Administration officials, as well as the U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council, which in the view of these observers reflect U.S. support (rather than lack of support) for human rights.[41]

Among those who see less change in the U.S. role in the world under the Trump Administration, arguments as to whether that is a good or bad thing are to some degree the obverse of those outlined earlier regarding the views of those who argue that the U.S. role in the world is undergoing a potentially historic change under the Trump Administration. In general, supporters of the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years tend to support areas where they see less change under the Trump Administration, while those who advocate a more restrained U.S. role have expressed disappointment at what they view as insufficient movement by the Trump Administration in that direction.[42]

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[37] This policy might be viewed as a change from a less confrontational policy pursued during the Obama Administration, and/or as a policy consistent with a U.S. policy dating further back of resisting the rise of regional hegemons, and somewhat similar to the U.S. policy of resisting the Soviet Union during the Cold War. For press accounts of this policy, see, for example, Jun Mai, "Picking a Fight: Is Trump's Hawkish Behavior Towards China the Start of a New Cold War?; With Washington Taking a New, Profoundly Aggressive Tack in Its Dealings with Beijing, Analysts Speak of 'Active Competition with Occasional Confrontation' as the New Normal," *South China Morning Post*, October 17 (updated October 18), 2018; Michael C. Bender, Gordon Lubold, Kate O'Keeffe, and Jeremy Page, "U.S. Edges Toward New Cold-War Era With China; A More Hard-Nosed Stance with Beijing Is Emerging from the Trump Administration as China's Help with North Korea wanes and Trade Talks Stall," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 2018; Walter Russel Mead, "Mike Pence Announces Cold War II; The Administration Is Orchestrating a Far-Reaching Campaign Against China." *Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2018; Keith Johnson, "It's No Longer Just a Trade War Between the U.S. and China; Vice Persident Pence's Fierce Attack and Allegations of Tech Spying Escalate the Conflict." *Foreign Policy*, October 4, 2018; Josh Rogin, "The Trump Administration Just 'Reset' the U.S.-China Relationship," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2018.

[38] See, for example, Glenn Thrush, "Trump Embraces Foreign Aid to Counter China's Global Influence," *New York Times*, October 14, 2018; Keith Johnson, "Trump Reaches for Checkbook Diplomacy to Counter China; Washington Ramps Up Development Finance to Offer Countries an Alternative to Beijing's Deep Pockets," *Foreign Policy*, October 8, 2018.

[39] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[40] See, for example, Curt Mills, "Are Larry Kudlow and Donald Trump Secret Free Traders?" *National Interest*, August 17, 2018; Quinn Slobodian, "You Live in Robert Lighthizer's World Now; Trump Might Look Like He's Flailing on Trade—But It's All Going According to His Trade Czar's Plan, Which Has Been Years in the Making." *Foreign Policy*, August 6, 2018; Wilbur Ross, "Free-Trade is a Two-Way Street," *Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2017; James M. Roberts, "Trump's High Stakes G-7 Gamble to Remake the World As It Is," Heritage Foundation," June 11, 2018. See also Milton Ezrati, "Trump Didn't Kill the Old Trade Order, but What Kind Is He Trying to Build?" *National Interest*, July 23, 2018.

[41] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[42] See, for example, Curt Mills, "Can America's Foreign Policy Be Restrained?" *National Interest*, December 12, 2017; Curt Mills, "A Year on, Foreign Policy Restrainers Assess the Trump Administration," *National Interest*, November 7,

Some Assess That Change Began Prior to Trump Administration

Some observers argue that if the United States is shifting to a more restrained role in the world, this change began not with the Trump Administration, but during the Obama Administration. In support of this view, these observers point to the Obama Administration's focus on reducing the U.S. military presence and ending U.S. combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in favor of focusing more on domestic U.S. rebuilding initiatives, the Obama Administration's restrained response to the conflict in Syria and to Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, and the Obama Administration's policy toward Russia in general.[43] Other observers argue that a shift to a more restrained U.S. role in the world arguably began even sooner, under the George W. Bush Administration, when that Administration did not respond more strongly to Russia's 2008 invasion and occupation of part of Georgia.[44] For both groups of observers, a more restrained U.S. role in the world under the Trump Administration may represent not so much a shift in the U.S. role as a continuation or deepening of a change that began in a prior U.S. Administration.[45]

Others Say Degree of Change Is Currently Difficult to Assess

Some observers argue that the question of whether the U.S. role is changing, and if so, in what ways, is difficult to assess, due to what these observers view as recurring mixed, contradictory, or incoherent signals from the Trump Administration on issues such as policy toward Russia, the value of NATO, policy toward North Korea, and trade policy, among other matters. For some of these observers, these mixed signals appear to be rooted in what these observers see as basic differences between President Trump and certain senior Administration officials (or differences among those officials) on these matters, and in what these observers characterize as an unpredictable, impulsive, or volatile approach by President Trump to making and announcing foreign policy decisions.[46]

Regarding the final point above, supporters of the Trump Administration argue that U.S. foreign policy had become too predictable for its own good, and that adding an element of unpredictability to U.S. foreign policy is therefore advantageous.[47] The Administration's January 2018 unclassified summary of its supporting national defense strategy document, for example, states that U.S. military operations in the future will be "strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable," meaning predictable in terms of overall goals, but unpredictable in terms of specific tactics for achieving those goals.[48] Critics, while not necessarily objecting to the value of a certain degree of operational unpredictability, argue that the Trump Administration, through its recurring mixed signals and President Trump's approach to decisionmaking, has taken

2017.

[43] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[44] See, for example, Robert Kagan, "Believe It or Not, Trump's Following a Familiar Script on Russia," Washington Post, August 7, 2018. For a response, see Condoleezza Rice, "Russia Invaded Georgia 10 Years Ago. Don't Say America Didn't Respond." *Washington Post*, August 8, 2018.

[45] See, for example, Hal Brands, "Foreign Officials See Bush and Obama in Trump," *Foreign Policy*, February 23, 2018; David Rothkopf, "How Bush, Obama and Trump Ended Pax Americana," *Washington Post*, June 27, 2017.

[46] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[47] See, for example, Jerry Hendrix, "Donald Trump and the Art of Strategic Ambiguity; By Keeping Friends and Foes Alike Off Balance, He Upholds the United States' Interests." *National Review*, March 21, 2018.

[48] Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, undated, released January 19, 2018, p. 5.

the idea of unpredictability too far, raising potential doubts in other countries about U.S. policy goals, consistency, resolve, or reliability as an ally or negotiating partner.[49]

Some observers, viewing the difficulty of judging whether and how the U.S. role may have changed under the Trump Administration, have attempted to identify unifying characteristics of the Trump Administration's foreign policy or a so-called "Trump Doctrine." These observers have reached varying conclusions as to what those unifying characteristics or a Trump Doctrine might be.[50]

Potential Assessments Combining These Perspectives

The above four perspectives—that there is a potentially historic change in the U.S. role; that there is less change, and more continuity; that if there is a change, it began prior to the Trump Administration; and that the degree of change is difficult to assess—are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Assessments combining aspects of more than one of these four perspectives are possible.

Should the U.S. Role Change?

Overview

In addition to the question of whether the U.S. role in the world *is* changing, another key issue for Congress is whether the U.S. role *should* change. As mentioned in the background section, the fact that the U.S. role in the world has been generally stable over the past 70 years does not necessarily mean that this role was the right one for the United States, or that it would be the right one in the future. Although the role the United States has played in the world since the end of World War II has many defenders, it also has critics, and the merits of that role have been a matter of long-standing debate among foreign policy specialists, strategists, policymakers, and the public, with critics offering potential alternative concepts for the U.S. role in the world.

Debate over the merits of the U.S. role in the world since World War II has been fueled in recent years by factors such as changes in the international security environment,[51] projections of U.S. federal budget deficits and the U.S. debt (which can lead to constraints on funding available for pursuing U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy goals), and U.S. public opinion on matters relating to U.S. foreign policy. Developments during the Trump Administration regarding possible changes in the U.S. role in the world have further contributed to the debate.

[49] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[50] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[51] As discussed in another CRS report, world events have led some observers, starting in late 2013, to conclude that the international security environment has undergone a shift from the familiar post-Cold War era of the past 20 to 25 years, also sometimes known as the unipolar moment (with the United States as the unipolar power), to a new and different situation that features, among other things, renewed great power competition with China and Russia and challenges by these two countries and others to elements of the U.S.-led international order that has operated since World War II. See CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

Past Role vs. More Restrained Role

As mentioned earlier, a major dimension of the debate is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing the active internationalist role that it has played for the past 70 years, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs. Among U.S. strategists and foreign policy specialists, advocates of a more restrained U.S. role include (to cite a few examples) Andrew Bacevich, Doug Bandow, Ted Galen Carpenter, Christopher Preble, John Mearsheimer, Barry Posen, William Ruger, and Stephen Walt.[52] These and other authors have offered multiple variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role. Terms such as *offshore balancing*, *offshore control*, *realism*, *strategy of restraint*, or *retrenchment* have been used to describe some of these variations.[53] These variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role would not necessarily match in their details a changed U.S. role that might be pursued by the Trump Administration.[54]

Arguments in Favor of a More Restrained U.S. Role

Observers advocating a more restrained U.S. role in the world make various arguments regarding the United States and other countries. Arguments that they make relating to the United States include the following:

- **Costs and benefits.** In terms of human casualties, financial and economic impacts, diplomatic impacts, and impacts on domestic U.S. values, politics, and society, the costs to the United States of defending and promoting the liberal international order have been underestimated and the benefits have been overestimated. U.S. interventions in the security affairs of Eurasia have frequently been more costly and/or less successful than anticipated, making a strategy of intervening less cost-effective in practice than in theory. U.S. interventions can also draw the United States into conflicts involving other countries over issues that are not vital or important U.S. interests.
- **Capacity.** Given projections regarding future U.S. budget deficits and debt, the United States in coming years will no longer be able to afford to play as expansive a role in the world as it has played for the past 70 years. Overextending U.S. participation in international affairs could lead to excessive amounts of federal debt and inadequately addressed domestic problems, leaving

[52] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[53] The terms *offshore balancing* and *offshore control* refer in general to a policy in which the United States, in effect, stands off the shore of Eurasia and engages in the security affairs of Eurasia less frequently, less directly, or less expansively. The term *retrenchment* is more often used by critics of these proposed approaches.

[54] Debate about this dimension of the U.S. role in the world is not limited to one between those who favor continued extensive engagement along the lines of the past 70 years and those who prefer some form of a more restrained role—other options are also being promoted. For example, one analyst and former White House aide advocates an approach that differs from both retrenchment and reassertion, an approach he labels "re-calibration" to the "geopolitical, economic, technological and other dynamics driving the 21st-century world." Such an approach, he argues, would entail a reappraisal of U.S. interests, a reassessment of U.S. power, and a repositioning of U.S. leadership. (See Bruce Jentleson, "Apart, Atop, Amidst: America in the World," *War on the Rocks*, January 2017.)

As another example, a different analyst argues in favor of a U.S. role based on "a better nationalism"—what he describes as a more benign and constructive form that "would not dismantle the post-war order and America's post war project, but would take a harder-edged and more disciplined approach to asserting U.S. interests." (Hal Brands, "U.S. Grand Strategy in an Age of Nationalism: Fortress American and it Alternatives," *Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2017: 73-93.)

the United States poorly positioned for sustaining any future desired level of international engagement.

- **Past 70 years as a historical aberration.** The U.S. role of the past 70 years is an aberration when viewed against the U.S. historical record dating back to 1776, which is a history characterized more by periods of restraint than by periods of high levels of international engagement. Returning to a more restrained U.S. role would thus return U.S. policy to what is, historically, a more traditional policy for the United States.
- **Moral standing.** The United States has not always lived up to its own ideals, and consequently lacks sufficient moral standing to pursue a role that involves imposing its values and will on other countries. Attempting to do that through an interventionist policy can also lead to an erosion of those values at home.
- **Public opinion.** It is not clear that U.S. public opinion supports the idea of attempting to maintain a U.S. role in the world as expansive as that of the past 70 years, particularly if it means making tradeoffs against devoting resources to domestic U.S. priorities. In public opinion polls, Americans often express support for a more restrained U.S. role, particularly on issues such as whether the United States should act as the world's police force, funding levels for U.S. foreign assistance programs, U.S. participation in (and financial support for) international organizations, and U.S. defense expenditures for defending allies.

Arguments that these observers make relating to other countries include the following:

- **Growing wealth and power.** Given the rapid growth in wealth and power in recent years of China and other countries, the United States is no longer as dominant globally as it once was, and is becoming less dominant over time, which will make it increasingly difficult or expensive and/or less appropriate for the United States to attempt to continue playing a role of global leadership.
- **Ideas about international order.** Other world powers, such as China, have their own ideas about international order, and these ideas do not match all aspects of the current liberal international order. The United States should acknowledge the changing global distribution of power and work with China and other countries to define a new international order that incorporates ideas from these other countries.
- **Eurasia as self-regulating.** Given the growth in the economies of U.S. allies and partners in Europe and Asia since World War II, these allies and partners are now more capable of looking after their own security needs, and Eurasia can now be more self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia. Consequently, the level of U.S. intervention in the affairs of Eurasia can be reduced without incurring undue risk that regional hegemons will emerge there. The current substantial level of U.S. intervention in the affairs of Eurasia discourages countries in Eurasia from acting more fully on their own to prevent the emergence of regional hegemons.
- **Hegemons and spheres of influence.** Even if one or more regional hegemons were to emerge in Eurasia, this would not pose an unacceptable situation for the United States—vital U.S. interests could still be defended. Similarly, the emergence of a spheres-of-influence world need not be unacceptable for the United States, because such a world would again not necessarily be incompatible with vital U.S. interests.

Arguments in Favor of Continuing the U.S. Role of the Past 70 Years

Observers who support a continuation of the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years generally reject the above arguments and argue the opposite. Arguments that these observers make relating to the United States include the following:

- **Costs and benefits.** Although the costs to the United States of its role in the world over the past 70 years have been substantial, the benefits have been greater. The benefits are so long-standing that they can easily be taken for granted or underestimated. U.S. interventions in the security affairs of Eurasia, though not without significant costs and errors, have been successful in preventing wars between major powers and defending and promoting vital U.S. interests and values. A more restrained U.S. role in the world might be less expensive for the United States in the short run, but would create a risk of damaging U.S. security, liberty, and prosperity over the longer run by risking the emergence of regional hegemons or a spheres-of-influence world.
- **Capacity.** Projections regarding future U.S. budget deficits and debt need to be taken into account, but even in a context of limits on U.S. resources, the United States is a wealthy country that can choose to play an expansive role in international affairs, and the costs to the United States of playing a more restrained role in world affairs may in the long run be much greater than the costs of playing a more expansive role. Projections regarding future U.S. budget deficits and debt are driven primarily by decisions on revenues and domestic mandatory expenditures rather than by decisions on defense and foreign-policy-related expenditures. Consequently, these projections are an argument for getting the country's fiscal house in order primarily in terms of revenues and domestic mandatory expenditures, rather than an argument for a more restrained U.S. role in the world.
- **Past 70 years as a historical aberration.** Although a restrained U.S. foreign policy may have been appropriate for the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, the world of the 18th and 19th centuries was quite different. For example, given changes in communication, transportation, and military technologies since the 18th and 19th centuries, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans are much less effective as geographic buffers between the United States and Eurasia today than they were in the 18th and 19th centuries. Experiences in more recent decades (including World Wars I and II and the Cold War) show that a more restrained U.S. foreign policy would now be riskier or more costly over the long run than an engaged U.S. foreign policy.
- **Moral standing.** The United States, though not perfect, retains ample moral authority—and responsibility—to act as a world leader, particularly in comparison to authoritarian countries such as China or Russia.
- **Public opinion.** Other public opinion poll results show that Americans support a U.S. global leadership role.

Arguments that these observers make relating to other countries include the following:

- **Growing wealth and power.** Although the wealth and power of countries such as China have grown considerably in recent years, future rates of growth for those countries are open to question. China faces the prospect of declining rates of economic growth and the aging of its population, while Russia has a relatively

small economy and is experiencing demographic decline. The United States has one of the most favorable demographic situations of any major power, and retains numerous advantages in terms of economic and financial strength, military power, technology, and capacity for innovation. Although the United States is no longer as dominant globally as it once was, it remains the world's most powerful country, particularly when all dimensions of power are taken into consideration.

- **Ideas about international order.** The liberal international order reflects U.S. interests and values; a renegotiated international order incorporating ideas from authoritarian countries such as China would produce a world less conducive to defending and promoting U.S. interests and values. Americans have long lived in a world reflecting U.S. interests and values and would not welcome a world incorporating Chinese values on issues such as the rule of law; the scope of civil society; political and human rights; freedom of speech, the press, and information; and privacy and surveillance.
- **Eurasia as self-regulating.** Eurasia historically has not been self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemons, and the idea that it will become self-regulating in the future is a risky and untested proposition.
- **Hegemons and spheres of influence.** A regional hegemon in Eurasia would have enough economic and other power to be able to threaten vital U.S. interests. In addition to threatening U.S. access to the economies of Eurasia, a spheres-of-influence world would be prone to war because regional hegemons historically are never satisfied with the extent of their hegemonic domains and eventually seek to expand them, coming into conflict with other hegemons. Leaders of regional hegemons are also prone to misjudgment and miscalculation regarding where their spheres collide.

Narrowly Defined Material U.S. Interests and U.S. and Universal Values

As also noted earlier, a second major dimension within the debate over the future U.S. role concerns how to balance or combine the pursuit of narrowly defined material U.S. interests with the goal of defending and promoting U.S. or universal values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. Supporters of focusing primarily on narrowly defined material U.S. interests argue, among other things, that deterring potential regional aggressors and resisting the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia can require working with allies and partner states that have objectionable records in terms of democracy, freedom, and human rights.[55] Supporters of maintaining a stronger focus on U.S. and universal values in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy argue, among other things, that these values help attract friends and allies in other countries, adding to U.S. leverage, and are a source of U.S. strength in ideological competitions with authoritarian competitor states.[56]

Balance of Hard and Soft Power

As noted earlier, a third major dimension within the debate over the future U.S. role concerns the balance in U.S. foreign policy between the use of hard power and soft power. Some observers argue that a reduced reliance on soft power would undervalue soft power as a relatively low-cost

[55] See, for example, Jeffrey Fields, "Op-ed: Saudi Arabia Is a Repressive Regime—and So Are a Lot of US Partners," Navy Times, October 22, 2018.

[56] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

tool for defending and promoting U.S. interests while making the United States more reliant on hard power, particularly military power, which might be a more expensive and/or less effective means for accomplishing certain goals.[57] Other observers argue that the value of soft power is overrated, and that a greater reliance on hard power would be an appropriate response to an era of renewed great power competition.[58]

Costs and Benefits of Allies

Within the overall debate over whether the U.S. role should change, one specific question relates to the costs and benefits of allies. As noted earlier, some observers believe that under the Trump Administration, the United States is becoming more skeptical of the value of allies, particularly those in Europe, and more transactional in managing U.S. alliance relationships.

The U.S. approach to allies and alliances of the past 70 years reflected a belief that allies and alliances are of value to the United States for defending and promoting U.S. interests and for preventing the emergence of regional hegemons. This approach led to a global network of U.S. alliance relationships involving countries in Europe and North America (through NATO), East Asia (through a series of mostly bilateral treaties), and Latin America (through the multilateral Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, known commonly as the Rio Treaty or Rio Pact).

Skeptics of allies and alliances generally argue that their value to the United States is overrated; that allies are capable of defending themselves without U.S. help; that U.S. allies frequently act as free riders in their alliance relationships with the United States by shifting costs to the United States; that in the absence of U.S. help, these allies would do more on their own to balance against potential regional hegemons; and that alliances create a risk of drawing the United States into conflicts involving allies over issues that are not vital to the United States.

Supporters of the current U.S. approach to allies and alliances, while acknowledging the free-rider issue as something that needs to be managed, generally argue that alliances are needed and valuable for deterring potential regional aggressors and balancing against would-be potential hegemonic powers in Eurasia; that although allies might be capable of defending themselves without U.S. help, they might also choose, in the absence of U.S. help, to bandwagon with would-be regional hegemons (rather than contribute to efforts to balance against them); that alliances form a significant advantage for the United States in its dealings with other major powers, such as Russia and China (both of which largely lack similar alliance networks); that in addition to mutual defense benefit, alliances offer other benefits, particularly in peacetime, including sharing of intelligence, information, and technology and the cultivation of soft-power forms of cooperation; and that a transactional approach to alliances, which encourages the merits of each bilateral alliance relationship to be measured in isolation, overlooks the collective benefits of maintaining alliances with multiple countries in a region.[59]

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[57] See, for example, Monica Duffy Toft, "The Dangerous Rise of Kinetic Diplomacy," *War on the Rocks*, May 14, 2018; Ian Hurd, "'Hawks As Far As the Eye Can See': America's Alarming Consensus on Foreign Intervention," *Vox*, April 25, 2018; Richard Fontaine, "Foreign Aid Has an Enormous ROI [return on investment] for the U.S. and Boosts Our National Security. Don't Cut It." *Independent Journal Review*, July 17, 2017; Dan Lamothe, "Retired Generals Cite Past Comments from Mattis While Opposing Trump's Proposed Foreign Aid Cuts," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2017; Michael Gerson and Raj Shah, "'America First' Shouldn't Mean Cutting Foreign Aid," *Washington Post*, February 24, 2017; Michael McFaul, "Dear Trump: Defending Democracy Is No Vice," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2017.

[58] See also Christopher Walker, Shanthi Kalathil, and Jessica Ludwig, "Forget Hearts and Minds; Soft Power is Out; Sharp Power Is In. Here's How to Win the New Influence Wars." *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2018.

[59] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

U.S. Public Opinion

U.S. public opinion can be an important factor in debates over the future U.S. role in the world. Among other things, public opinion can

- shape the political context (and provide the impulse) for negotiating the terms of, and for considering whether to become party to, international agreements;
- influence debates on whether and how to employ U.S. military force; and
- influence policymaker decisions on funding levels for defense, international affairs activities, and foreign assistance.

Foreign policy specialists, strategists, and policymakers sometimes invoke U.S. public opinion poll results in debates on the U.S. role in the world. At least one has argued that the American people "always have been the greatest constraint on America's role in the world."[60] One issue relating to U.S. public opinion that observers are discussing is the extent to which the U.S. public may now believe that U.S. leaders have broken a tacit social contract under which the U.S. public has supported the costs of U.S. global leadership in return for the promise of receiving certain benefits, particularly steady increases in real incomes and the standard of living. **Appendix F** provides additional background information on U.S. public opinion regarding the U.S. role in the world.

Additional Writings

The foregoing covers only some of the more prominent arguments and counterarguments in the debate over the future U.S. role in the world. In addition to writings cited in footnotes to the above section, see **Appendix C** for additional examples of recent writings by observers involved in the debate.

Is a Change of Some Kind in the U.S. Role Unavoidable?

Another issue for Congress—one that might be viewed as related to, or forming part of, the previous issue—is whether a change of some kind in the U.S. role, whether desirable or not, is unavoidable due to factors such as

- the growth in recent decades in the wealth and power of China and other countries, and the effect this has on reducing the U.S. position of dominance in world affairs;
- constraints on U.S. resources, particularly given projected U.S. budget deficits and debt and competing domestic priorities; and
- other factors, such as technological developments. that can
  - change power dynamics among nations,
  - influence international financial and economic flows and globalization in general,
  - affect social cohesion and relationships between governments and the governed,
  - affect the development and spread of political beliefs and ideologies, and

[60] Kori Schake, "National Security Challenges," *ORBIS*, Vol. 61 Issue 1, Winter 2017.

- empower nonstate organizations and individuals in ways not previously possible.

Some observers—particularly those who advocate a more restrained U.S. role in the world—might argue that factors such as those above make a change of some kind in the U.S. role unavoidable, regardless of whether such a change is deemed desirable. Others—particularly those who advocate a continuation of the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years—might argue that factors such as those above might call for adjustments in the U.S. role, but not necessarily for a larger-scale change, and might even underscore the need for continuing the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years.

In assessing the question of whether a change of some kind in the U.S. role is unavoidable, key factors that Congress may consider include projected rates of economic growth and demographic change in both the United States and other countries, and the potential impacts of technological developments such as those relating to the internet; social media; cyber operations; digital manipulation of videos, photos, and other information (including so-called "deep fake" videos); additive manufacturing (aka 3D printing); cryptocurrencies; artificial intelligence; quantum computing; robotics; energy production and use; nanotechnology; and gene editing, to name just a few examples.[61]

How Are Other Countries Responding to a Possibly Changed U.S. Role?

Another question for Congress concerns how other countries are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world. The sections below provide some brief discussions on this question.

Authoritarian and Illiberal Countries

Particularly given the shift in the international security environment to an era of renewed great power competition, principally with China and Russia, as well as renewed ideological competition against 21st-century forms of authoritarianism and illiberal democracy in Russia, China, and other countries,[62] the ways that China, Russia, and other authoritarian or illiberal governments respond to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world could have major implications for U.S. national security.

China

The question of how China may be responding to a possibly changed U.S. role is of particular potential significance because while certain countries, such as Russia, are viewed by some observers as wanting to erode or tear down the liberal international order, China is the only country (other than the United States) that is generally viewed as being potentially capable of acting on its own to build a successor world order.

Some observers believe that China has concluded, correctly or not, that the United States is retreating from or abandoning its role as global leader, and that China is responding to this assessment by expanding or accelerating its efforts to

[61] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[62] For more on this shift, see CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

- increase its economic and political role on the world stage, in part through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI);[63]
- separate the United States from its allies and raise doubts about the reliability of the United States as an ally or partner;
- work more closely with Russia with the aim of reducing U.S. influence in Eurasia;
- revise the liberal international order in ways that are conducive to Chinese values and interests; and
- perhaps eventually supplant the United States in the role of world leader.

Other observers perceive that some in China, viewing certain actions by the Trump Administration—including the Administration's "trade war" with China, the Administration's articulation of the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and actions aimed at countering China's growing control over the South China Sea—have concluded that the United States is seeking to contain China in a manner broadly consistent with how the United States pursued a policy of containment against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Still others argue that the Administration's trade actions are leading to closer relations between China and other countries (including U.S. allies in Europe) that do not support certain U.S. trade-related actions.[64]

Russia

Some observers believe that Russia, like China, has concluded, correctly or not, that the United States is retreating from or abandoning its role as global leader, and that Russia is responding to this assessment by continuing efforts aimed at

- establishing greater Russian influence over or control of countries on its periphery, and more generally, reestablishing Russia as a major world power;
- separating the United States from transatlantic allies and weakening the NATO alliance;
- working more closely with China with the aim of reducing U.S. influence in Eurasia; and
- raising doubts about the merits of liberal democracy while promoting illiberal and authoritarian approaches to government in Europe and elsewhere.

Although Russia, in the eyes of some of these observers, was originally hopeful about establishing better relations with the United States under the Trump Administration, these observers now perceive that Russia has largely given up on this possibility, and now sees a prospect of long-term confrontation with the United States.

While Russia is working more closely with China to reduce U.S. influence in Eurasia, observers also believe that Russia at the same time is wary of China's continued growth in wealth and power, and of how that might eventually lead to China becoming the dominant power in Eurasia,

[63] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), earlier known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), is China's major geopolitical initiative, first announced by China in 2013, to knit Eurasia and parts of Africa together in a Chinese-anchored or Chinese-led infrastructure and economic network. For more on the BRI, see CRS In Focus IF10273, *China's "One Belt, One Road"*, by Susan V. Lawrence and Gabriel M. Nelson.

[64] For examples of recent writings on how China is responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, see the China section of **Appendix D**.

with Russia being relegated to a secondary or subordinate status.[65] How that might affect Russia's response to a changed U.S. role in the world, particularly over the longer run, is not clear.[66]

Authoritarian and Illiberal Countries in General

Some observers argue that what they view as the Trump Administration's reduced or more selective emphasis on, or indifference to, defending and promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights as universal values, and on criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government, as well as President Trump's apparent affinity for, or admiration of, the leaders of authoritarian and illiberal governments, is emboldening the leaders of authoritarian and illiberal governments to take increased or accelerated actions—including actions for suppressing political opposition and dissent, and for reducing freedom of the press—that are aimed at consolidating or strengthening their authoritarian or illiberal forms of government and perhaps spreading them to other countries. Countries sometimes mentioned in connection with this point include China, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, the Philippines, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, to list some examples.

Actions by authoritarian and illiberal governments along these lines could contribute to a resurgent global challenge that some observers perceive to democracy as a form of government and to the idea that freedom, democracy, and human rights are universal values. The 2018 edition of Freedom House's annual report on freedom in the world, for example, states that

> Political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated to their lowest point in more than a decade in 2017, extending a period characterized by emboldened autocrats, beleaguered democracies, and the United States' withdrawal from its leadership role in the global struggle for human freedom.
>
> Democracy is in crisis. The values it embodies—particularly the right to choose leaders in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—are under assault and in retreat globally….
>
> For the 12th consecutive year, according to *Freedom in the World*, countries that suffered democratic setbacks outnumbered those that registered gains. States that a decade ago seemed like promising success stories—Turkey and Hungary, for example—are sliding into authoritarian rule….
>
> The challenges within democratic states have fueled the rise of populist leaders who appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment and give short shrift to fundamental civil and political liberties….
>
> The retreat of democracies is troubling enough. Yet at the same time, the world's leading autocracies, China and Russia, have seized the opportunity not only to step up internal repression but also to export their malign influence to other countries, which are increasingly copying their behavior and adopting their disdain for democracy. A confident Chinese president Xi Jinping recently proclaimed that China is "blazing a new trail" for developing countries to follow. It is a path that includes politicized courts, intolerance for dissent, and predetermined elections….
>
> A long list of troubling developments around the world contributed to the global decline in 2017, but perhaps most striking was the accelerating withdrawal of the United States from its historical commitment to promoting and supporting democracy. The potent challenge

[65] See, for example, Peter Zwack, "Three Questions from Last Month's Giant Vostok Exercise," *Defense One*, October 22, 2018.

[66] For examples of recent writings on how Russia is responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, see the Russia section of **Appendix D**.

> from authoritarian regimes made the United States' abdication of its traditional role all the more important….
>
> The Obama administration continued to defend democratic ideals in its foreign policy statements, but its actions often fell short, reflecting a reduced estimation of the United States' ability to influence world events and of the American public's willingness to back such efforts.
>
> In 2017, however, the Trump administration made explicit—in both words and actions—its intention to cast off principles that have guided U.S. policy and formed the basis for American leadership over the past seven decades….
>
> This marks a sharp break from other U.S. presidents in the postwar period, who cooperated with certain authoritarian regimes for strategic reasons but never wavered from a commitment to democracy as the best form of government and the animating force behind American foreign policy. It also reflects an inability—or unwillingness—by the United States to lead democracies in effectively confronting the growing threat from Russia and China, and from the other states that have come to emulate their authoritarian approach….
>
> While the United States and other democratic powers grappled with domestic problems and argued about foreign policy priorities, the world's leading autocracies—Russia and China—continued to make headway. Moscow and Beijing are single-minded in their identification of democracy as a threat to their oppressive regimes, and they work relentlessly, with increasing sophistication, to undermine its institutions and cripple its principal advocates.[67]

Other observers argue that what they view as the Trump Administration's reduced or more selective emphasis on, or indifference to, defending and promoting human rights may be tacitly encouraging violations by other governments around the world of basic human rights—including extrajudicial killings, mass atrocities, and forced relocations—by sending a signal to those governments that they can commit such acts without having to fear repercussions from the United States.[68] Still other observers, perhaps particularly supporters of the Trump Administration's foreign policy, might argue that violations of human rights predate the Trump Administration and are more of a consequence of changes in foreign governments and the international security environment.

U.S. Allies and Current or Emerging Partner Countries

Overview

Given the significant role of alliances and partner relationships in U.S. foreign policy and defense strategy, reactions by U.S. allies and current or emerging partner countries to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world could have major implications for U.S. national security. Among other things, they could affect specific U.S. foreign policy and defense initiatives that could depend on

[67] Michael J. Abramowitz, *Freedom in the World 2018, Democracy in Crisis*, Freedom House, undated but released January 2018, pp. 1-3, 5. For examples of recent writings on how authoritarian and illiberal countries in general are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, see the section on authoritarian and illiberal countries in general of **Appendix D**.

[68] See, for example, Max Boot, "Trump Has Given Every Despot on the Planet a License to Kill," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2018; Michael Gerson, "The Trump Era is Full of Cruelty Without Consequence," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2018; Anne Gearan, "'Don't Worry About Us': Critics Fault Trump's Hands-Off Response to Autocrat Abuses," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2018; Robert Kagan, "Welcome to the Jungle," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2018.

or benefit from allied or partner support. More generally, they could have implications for what are sometimes referred to as the balance-vs.-bandwagon and free-rider issues.

The balance-vs.-bandwagon issue refers to whether other countries choose to counter (i.e., balance against) potential regional hegemons, or instead become more accommodating or deferential toward (i.e., bandwagon with) those potential regional hegemons. For observers who assess that the United States has shifted to a more restrained U.S. role in the world, the situation provides a test—although not one with precisely the features they might have designed—of a question long argued by strategists, political scientists, and others involved in the debate over the merits of the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years: Would U.S. allies and partner countries respond to a more restrained U.S. role by taking stronger actions on their own to balance against potential regional hegemons in Eurasia (i.e., China and Russia), or would they instead respond by bandwagoning with those potential regional hegemons?

In discussions of the balance-vs.-bandwagon issue, supporters of continuing the U.S. role of the past 70 years tend to argue that a more restrained U.S. role in the world could encourage enough of these countries to bandwagon rather than balance that it would shift the global balance of power and regional balances of power against the United States. Those making this argument tend to believe that strong actions by the United States to balance against potential regional hegemons give other countries more confidence to do the same, encouraging what is (for these observers) a virtuous cycle in the direction of balancing against potential regional hegemons.

Supporters of a more restrained U.S. role in the world tend to argue the obverse—that a more restrained U.S. role would encourage more of these countries, out of a sense of self-preservation, to balance against rather than bandwagon with potential regional hegemons, helping to preserve global and regional balances of power that are favorable to the United States at lower cost to the United States. Those making this argument tend to believe that strong actions by the United States to balance against potential regional hegemons provide room for other countries to act as free riders under the U.S. security umbrella by reducing their own efforts to balance those potential regional hegemons, and that a more restrained U.S. role will help address a long-term challenge that some observers believe the United States has faced in reducing the free-rider effect among its allies.

Europe (Other Than Russia) and Canada

The transatlantic alliance—the alliance of the United States and Canada with the United Kingdom and other European countries, particularly under the NATO treaty—is generally viewed as a bedrock of post-World War II U.S. national security strategy and a key supporting element of the U.S. role in the world since World War II. Some observers are concerned that President Trump's skeptical or critical views about NATO and other actions by the Trump Administration are straining, weakening, or threatening to rupture the transatlantic alliance, perhaps permanently, with potentially significant or profound effects for U.S. security and diplomacy. Other observers argue that the transatlantic alliance has weathered strains in the past and is doing so again now.[69]

Within the general issue of the status of the transatlantic alliance, the free-rider issue and how to address it has been a recurring concern for the United States in its relationship with its NATO allies, where it forms part of a long-standing issue sometimes referred to as the burden-sharing issue. Recently, the Trump Administration and its supporters have argued that President Trump's skeptical and critical views about NATO, combined with sustained pressure on NATO from the President Trump and senior Administration officials for those countries to spend more on their

[69] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

own defense capabilities, have had the effect of extracting stronger commitments from the NATO allies about increasing their defense spending levels. Critics of the Trump Administration agree with a goal of reducing free riding within the alliance where possible, but argue that the commitments on increased defense spending recently articulated by NATO allies do not go substantially beyond commitments those allies made prior to the start of the Trump Administration.

A number of European countries appear to have responded to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world by announcing an intention to take actions to increase their ability to act autonomously and independently from the United States. Actions that European countries might take autonomously or independent of the United States might or might not be viewed by U.S. observers as being in the U.S. interest. The member states of the European Union (EU) have announced steps to increase the EU's ability to act on security issues, and the Baltic and Nordic states (i.e., countries in Europe that are among those relatively close to Russia) have announced actions to increase their defense capabilities and work more closely with one another on defense and other security issues. European countries have also announced or taken steps to defend existing international trade arrangements and the continued implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement. Some press reports suggest that the Trump Administration's policies toward U.S. allies in Europe may have raised doubts among those allies about the reliability of the United States as an ally, and may have encouraged Germany to work more closely with Russia, at least on trade issues.[70]

Asia and Indo-Pacific

In Asia and the Indo-Pacific, supporters of a more restrained U.S. role in the world might argue that Japan, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, and India are taking (or appear increasingly ready to take) greater actions to counter China in various parts of the Indo-Pacific region. Supporters of continuing the U.S. role in the world of the past 70 years, on the other hand, might argue that the Philippines under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has adopted a largely nonconfrontational policy toward China regarding China's actions in the South China Sea,[71] that the ASEAN countries as a group[72] are split on the question of how much to confront China regarding China's actions in the South China Sea, that the question of policy toward China has been a matter of debate in Australia, and that there may be limits to how far and how fast India is willing to go in terms of increasing its efforts to counter China and cooperate with the United States, Japan, and Australia in countering China.

Japan responded to the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP negotiations by leading an effort to finalize the agreement among the 11 remaining partners in the pact—an action that may help forestall the emergence of a more China-centric trading system in the Indo-Pacific region, but which also left the United States on the outside of a major regional trade pact. Japan also supports the concept of

[70] For examples of recent writings on how Europe (other than Russia) and Canada are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, see the section on Europe (other than Russia) and Canada of **Appendix D**.

[71] See, for example, Renato Cruz De Castro, "Duterte's China Policy Isn't Paying Off," *East Asia Forum*, September 18, 2018; JC Gotinga, "Philippines' Lacklustre Fight in the South China Sea," *Al Jazeera*, May 22, 2018. See also CRS In Focus IF10250, *The Philippines*, by Thomas Lum and Ben Dolven.

[72] ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is Southeast Asia's primary multilateral organization. The 10 members states of ASEAN are Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. For more on ASEAN, see CRS In Focus IF10348, *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*, by Ben Dolven, and CRS Report R40933, *United States Relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*, coordinated by Thomas Lum.

a free and open Indo-Pacific—indeed, officials in Japan (and India) articulated the Indo-Pacific concept before it was adopted as a policy initiative by the Trump Administration—and is taking a variety of actions to support the concept.[73]

Latin America and Africa

Some observers argue that certain Latin American and African countries have concluded, correctly or not, that the United States has reduced its engagement with them, and as a consequence have become more open to Chinese overtures for expanded economic and other ties.[74]

Countries in General

Observing the reactions of various countries around the world to the Trump Administration's foreign policy, two observers stated in March 2018 that President Trump "is reshaping the way other states interact with America and with one another," and that "as Trump shakes up American policy, he is also shaking up the policies of countries around the globe." They state that

> These global responses, however, are neither as uniform nor as straightforward as one might expect. Policy responses to Trump's America First agenda can be separated into two baskets: those by countries that mostly decry Trump's rhetoric and policies as a crisis of American global leadership, and those by countries that mostly welcome those rhetoric and policies as an opportunity. Within those baskets, there are a total of nine analytically distinct—yet not mutually exclusive—approaches.[75]
>
> These approaches run the gamut from resistance to appeasement to exploitation, and have varying prospects for the states pursuing them and varying implications for U.S. global interests. Some of these behaviors are relatively new; others existed prior to Trump and have simply been accentuated by his agenda. Yet all of these behaviors are shifting the relationship between the United States and the world, and all of them will affect the contours of the international environment. Both the prevalence and the effectiveness of these behaviors, in turn, will be affected by how Trump and his ever-shifting cast of advisers chart America's course during the remainder of his presidency, and by how permanent the changes Trump has already made turn out to be.

After surveying how various countries are responding, the authors conclude their discussion as follows:

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[73] For examples of recent writings on how Japan, Australia, India, and Asia and countries of Asia and the Indo-Pacific are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, see the corresponding sections of **Appendix D**.

[74] See, for example, Jackson Diehl, "Can Latin America handle Venezuela's collapse without the U.S.?" *Washington Post*, September 30, 2018; Josh Rogin, "China Is Challenging the U.S. in the Horn of Africa—and Washington Is Silent," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2018; Franco Ordonez, "Latin America Says U.S. Has Itself to Blame for Chinese Entry Into Region That It Opposes," *Miami Herald*, September 10, 2018; Ismail Einashe, "Trump's Insults Will Nudge African Nations Closer to China," *NPR*, January 16, 2018. See also Pablo Vivanco, "The Trump Doctrine? US Working Overtime to Box China Out of Latin America," *Asia Times*, August 21, 2018; John Campbell, "Trump's Dangerous Retreat from Africa," *Foreign Policy*, November 3, 2017. See also Evan Wllis, "Latin America and the Emerging Ideological Struggle of the 21st Century," *Global Americans*, June 17, 2018; Evan Ellis, "It's Time to Think Strategically About Coutnering Chinese Advances in Latin America," *Global Americans*, February 2, 2018.

[75] The articles states that the first basket of approaches includes five that treat America First as a crisis. These approaches are labeled as "replacing Atlas," "hugging and appeasing," "resisting the rogue superpower," "hedging their bets," and "riding out the storm." The second basket includes four approaches that treat America First as an opportunity. These approaches are labeled as "America First as a model," "exploiting the vacuum," "hijacking America First," and "defying America First."

> Over a year into Trump's presidency, the basic patterns of the world's response are coming into sharper focus. Some countries are seeking to minimize or compensate for the effects of an America First agenda; others are seeking to make the most of them. Yet governments around the world are adjusting in some way or another, which is itself a testament to just how disruptive Trump's presidency has already been.
>
> Some of the strategies that foreign actors are pursuing do have potential benefits for the United States, particularly insofar as they lead to greater and perhaps more equitable efforts to sustain the post-World War II international order. Yet there are inherent limits to allied efforts to pick up the geopolitical slack that the United States is creating, and America's own interests will not be as well served by those efforts as they would be by deeper U.S. engagement to shape key negotiations and outcomes. Other strategies, such as hijacking and exploiting the vacuum, are far more dangerous for the United States and the broader global order. Overall, it thus appears that the liabilities of these patterns of global adjustment significantly outweigh the benefits from a U.S. perspective. To put it more sharply, it is surely troubling that many democracies and longtime U.S. partners are scrambling to mitigate the effects of America First, while a number of revisionist or authoritarian powers look to take advantage.
>
> Global adjustment to America First is a process, however, and one that has not reached its conclusion. Rather, in a climate of great geopolitical uncertainty, most states appear to be feeling their way and hedging their bets across a range of responses because they are unsure of which is optimal. Germany, for example, has pursued all five of the responses undertaken by states that are mostly discomfited by Trump's approach. Many other states have pursued a similarly diverse range of options as they try to discern where, precisely, Trump's America is headed.
>
> This uncertainty leads to a further point, which is that the current instability in U.S. policy could easily shift the patterns of response we have described. Although the America First label and much of the president's rhetoric has remained relatively consistent, there have been significant debates within the administration on what it means in practice on any given policy dispute. The outcomes of those disputes, in turn, seem to be heavily dependent on the rising and declining influence of key personnel, which has itself been an especially fluid variable in this administration.… In short, if global reactions to Trump's presidency reflect global assessments of where that presidency is headed, then continued volatility in U.S. policy so far is likely to cause continued volatility in patterns of global response….
>
> … international responses to America First will depend heavily on how lasting other countries assume that shift to be. If international observers conclude that America First is here to stay, then some approaches—hedging, exploiting the vacuum, America First as a model—will become more appealing, while others—riding out the storm, hugging and appeasing—will seem less feasible. If, however, states conclude that America First is more the aberration than the norm, they will be cautious about pursuing strategies that carry great risk should U.S. policy "snap back" in the foreseeable future. In this, as in so many areas, the effects of the Trump era will be determined by how long that era ends up lasting.[76]

The discussion above is only one perspective on the issue of how other countries are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world. Other observers may differ regarding how to characterize the ways that certain countries are responding, or the resulting costs and benefits to the United States of those responses.[77]

[76] Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, "Living in Trump's World: The Global Reaction to 'America First,'" *War on the Rocks*, March 27, 2018.

[77] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

Is a Changed U.S. Role Affecting World Order?

Another issue for Congress is whether a changed U.S. role in the world is affecting world order in some way. As mentioned earlier, certain countries, such as Russia, are viewed by some observers as wanting to erode or tear down the liberal international order, while China is generally viewed as being potentially capable of acting on its own to build a successor world order. Whether caused primarily by a change in the U.S. role in the world or by one or more other factors, a collapse of the liberal international order could lead to the emergence of a less ordered world or a new international order based on a different set of characteristics and values—outcomes that could have significant and potentially profound implications for U.S. security, freedom, and prosperity.

Some observers—particularly those who believe that the U.S. role is undergoing a potentially historic change—argue that the change in the U.S. role is contributing, perhaps substantially, to a weakening, erosion, or potential collapse of the liberal international order. Other observers argue that a weakening or erosion of the liberal international order is less a consequence of a changed U.S. role in the world, and more a reflection of the growth in wealth and power of China and other countries and the effect this is having on reducing U.S. dominance in world affairs.

Still other observers argue that the weakening, erosion, or potential collapse of the liberal international order has been exaggerated. They might argue that the U.S. role in the world has not changed as much as others have argued, that the institutions undergirding the order are stronger or more resilient than others have argued, that China is more interested in revising than replacing the liberal international order, that China and Europe are taking steps to buttress the trade aspects of the order, or some combination of these points.[78]

What Implications Might a Changed U.S. Role Have for Congress?

Another issue for Congress is what implications a changed U.S. role might have for Congress, particularly regarding the preservation and use of congressional powers and prerogatives relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy, and more generally the role of Congress relative to that of the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking.

Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution vests Congress with several powers that can bear on the U.S. role in the world,[79] while Article II, Section 2, states that the President shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two-thirds of the

[78] For additional discussion of the question of whether a changed U.S. role in the world is affecting world order in some way, see **Appendix E**.

[79] These include the power to

- provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States;
- regulate commerce with foreign nations;
- define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations;
- declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;
- raise and support armies;
- provide and maintain a navy;
- provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions;
- provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia, and for governing such part of them that may be employed in the service of the United States; and
- make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution these and other powers granted in Article I, Section 8.

Senators present concur. Congress can also influence the U.S. role in the world through, among other things, its "power of the purse" (including its control over appropriations for the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and foreign assistance programs); authorizations for the use of military force; approval of trade agreements and other agreements; the Senate's power to confirm the President's nominees for certain executive branch positions (including the Secretaries and other high-ranking officials in the Departments of State and Defense, as well as U.S. ambassadors); and general oversight of executive branch operations.

While the Constitution enumerates certain specific powers for Congress and the executive branch that bear on U.S. foreign policy, various observers over the years have argued that the Constitution in effect sets the stage for a perpetual debate regarding the relative roles of Congress and the executive branch in U.S. foreign policymaking. From a congressional perspective, questions in this debate in recent years have included

- whether Congress over the years has ceded too much authority to the executive branch in the area of war powers—and what the meaning of the war powers function might be in today's world, given ongoing counterterrorist operations, so-called hybrid warfare and gray-zone operations, and cyberwarfare;
- whether Congress over the years has ceded too much authority to the executive branch in the area of tariffs and trade negotiations;[80]
- whether the executive branch is following congressional direction for spending funds and implementing programs bearing on U.S. foreign policy;[81] and
- whether the executive branch is keeping Congress adequately informed regarding U.S. diplomacy with other countries[82] and U.S. government operations in other countries bearing on the U.S. role in the world, including those carried out by U.S. intelligence agencies or U.S. special operations forces.

In a context of a potentially historic change in the U.S. role in the world, a key issue for Congress is whether the general pattern of presidential and congressional activities in foreign policy-related areas that developed over the past 70 years would continue to be appropriate in a situation of a changed U.S. role. Regarding this issue, one observer states

> Like other wide congressional grants of authority to the executive branch—the power to levy "emergency" tariffs comes to mind—the vast discretion over immigration Trump has inherited was a product of a different time.
>
> Lawmakers during the post-World War II era assumed presidents of both parties agreed on certain broad lessons of prewar history, such as the need to remain widely engaged through

[80] See also Ellyn Ferguson, "Trump's Threat to Leave the WTO Alarms Many, Even in Congress," *Roll Call*, August 3, 2018.

[81] See, for example, Robbie Gramer, "Trump Stealthily Seeks to Choke Off Funding to U.N. Programs; Leaked Emails and Behind-the-Scenes Battles Show How the Administration, After Failing to Slash Congressional Aid, Used Bureaucratic Levers to Stifle Money Flows," *Foreign Policy*, October 2, 2018; Carol Morello and Karoun Demirjan, "Trump Administration Is Considering Pulling Back $3 Billion in Foreign Aid," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2018; Rachel Oswald, "Lawmakers Wary of Potential Trump Cuts to Foreign Aid," *Roll Call*, August 17, 2018; Fred Kaplan, "Maximum Override," *Slate*, August 15, 2018.

[82] See, for example, Zachary Cohen, "Congress Still Doesn't Know What Trump Said to Putin in Helsinki," *CNN*, August 21, 2018; David Frum, "The Worst Security Risk in U.S. History; No One Knows What President Trump Told Vladimir Putin in Helsinki—Or Why Even His Own National-Security Advisor Was Excluded from the Room," *Atlantic*, July 19, 2018.

> trade and collective security, and the importance of humanitarian values—"soft power"—in U.S. foreign policy.
>
> They did not anticipate today's breakdown in national consensus, much less that heirs to the America Firsters who had failed to attain national power before World War II could ever attain it afterward.[83]

Congressional decisions on issues relating to the U.S. role in the world could include measures affecting areas such as war powers, tariffs and trade negotiations, use of appropriated funds for foreign policy-related programs, and executive branch actions to keep Congress informed of U.S. government operations in other countries.[84]

A related potential issue for Congress is whether a change in the U.S. role would have any implications for congressional organization, capacity, and operations relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy. Congress's current organization, capacity, and pattern of operations for working on these issues evolved during a long period of general stability in the U.S. role, and may or may not be optimal for carrying out Congress's role in U.S. foreign policy given a changed U.S. role.[85]

How Might the Operation of Democracy in the United States Affect the U.S. Role?

Another potential issue for Congress is how the operation of democracy in the United States might affect the U.S. role in the world, particularly in terms of defending and promoting democracy and criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government. During the Cold War—a period that featured an ongoing ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union regarding the relative merits of Western-style democracy and Soviet-style governance—the effective operation of U.S. democracy at the federal level and lower levels was viewed as helpful for arguing on the world stage that Western-style democracy was superior, for encouraging other countries to adopt that model, and for inspiring people in the Soviet Union and other authoritarian countries to resist authoritarianism and seek change in the direction of more democratic forms of government. The ability of the United State to demonstrate the

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[83] Charles Lane, "Sorry, Trump's Refugee Order Is Probably Legal," *Washington Post*, February 1, 2017.

[84] For additional discussion, see, for example, John M. Donnelly, "GOP Congress Tries to Rein In Trump on Foreign Policy," *Roll Call*, August 6, 2018; Kathleen Claussen, "Trade War Battles: Congress Reconsiders Its Role," *Lawfare*, August 5, 2018; Ellyn Ferguson, "Trump's Threat to Leave the WTO Alarms Many, Even in Congress," *Roll Call*, August 3, 2018; Tommy Ross, "At A Crossroads, Part III: Reasserting Congress' Oversight Role in Foreign Policy," *War on the Rocks*, June 19, 2018; Tommy Ross, "At A Crossroads, Part II: No More Shadows: The Future of Intelligence Oversight in Congress," *War on the Rocks*, May 16, 2018; Tom Malinowski, "Congress Has Willfully Abdicated Its Responsibility Over War; It's Time for Legislators to Share in the Authority They Claim to Want," *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2018; Tressa Guenov and Tommy Ross, "At A Crossroads, Part I: How Congress Can Find Its Way Back to Effective Defense Oversight," *War on the Rocks*, March 9, 2018.

[85] For a general discussion of congressional staffing and how it has evolved over time, see Congressional Research Service, *Congressional Staffing: The Continuity of Change and Reform*, by Ida A. Brudnick, in CRS Committee Print CP10000, The Evolving Congress: A Committee Print Prepared for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, coordinated by Walter J. Oleszek, Michael L. Koempel, and Robert Jay Dilger. See also Kathy Goldschmidt, *State of the Congress: Staff Perspectives on Institutional Capacity in the House and Senate*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2017, 38 pp.

For an example of a study effort focused on the issue of congressional capacity for dealing with various issues (foreign policy or otherwise), see the Legislative Branch Capacity Working Group (www.LegBranch.com) and the associated Congressional Capacity Project (https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/congressional-capacity-project/) of New America (aka New America Foundation) (https://www.newamerica.org/our-story/).

effectiveness of democracy as a form of government was something that in today's parlance would be termed an element of U.S. soft power.

The end of the Cold War in 1989-1991 and the start of the post-Cold War era in the early 1990s led to a diminution in the ideological debate about the relative merits of democracy versus authoritarianism as forms of government. As a possible consequence, there may have been less of a perceived need during this period for focusing on the question of whether the operation of U.S. democracy was being viewed positively or otherwise by observers in other countries.[86]

As discussed in another CRS report, the shift in the international environment over the past few years from the post-Cold War era to a new situation featuring renewed great power competition has led to a renewed ideological debate about the relative merits of Western-style democracy versus 21st-century forms of authoritarian and illiberal government.[87] Articles in China's state-controlled media, for example, sometimes criticize the operation of U.S. democracy and argue that China's form of governance is more advantageous.[88] The potential issue for Congress is whether, in a period of renewed ideological competition, there is now once again a need for focusing more on the question of whether the operation of U.S. democracy is being viewed positively or otherwise by observers in other countries.[89]

Would a Change in the U.S. Role Be Reversible?

Another potential issue for Congress is whether a change in the U.S. role in the world would at some point in the future be reversible, should U.S. policymakers in the future desire to return to a U.S. role in the world more like that of the past 70 years. Potential questions for Congress include the following:

- What elements of change in the U.S. role might be more reversible, less reversible, or irreversible? What elements might be less reversible due to technological developments, changes in international power dynamics, or changes in U.S. public opinion?
- How much time and effort would be required to implement a return to a U.S. role like that of the past 70 years?
- How might the issue of reversibility be affected by the amount of time that a change in the U.S. role remains in place before an attempt might be made to reverse it?
- How might decisions that Congress and the executive branch make in the near term affect the question of potential downstream reversibility? What actions, if any, should be taken now with an eye toward preserving an option for reversing nearer-term changes in the U.S. role?

[86] See, for example, Jeffrey Mankoff, "American Ideals Beat the USSR. Why Aren't We Using Them Against Russia?" *Defense One*, January 4, 2018.

[87] See CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

[88] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

[89] For additional discussion, see, for example, Daniel L. Davis, "Reagan's Powerful Legacy Is Being Squandered," *National Interest*, September 15, 2018; David Frum, "If America's Democracy Fails, Can Other Ones Survive?" *Atlantic*, March 4, 2018; Zack Beauchamp, "How the Government Shutdown Debacle Looked to the Rest of the World," *Vox*, January 22, 2018.

- What are the views of other countries regarding the potential reversibility of a change in the U.S. role, and how might those views affect the foreign policies of those countries?[90]

[90] For the citations at this footnote, see **Appendix B**.

Appendix A. Glossary of Selected Terms

Some key terms used in this report include the following:

Role in the world

The term *role in the world* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to the overall character, purpose, or direction of a country's participation in international affairs or the country's overall relationship to the rest of the world. A country's role in the world can be taken as a visible expression of its grand strategy (see next item). In this report, the term *U.S. role in the world* is often shortened for convenience to *U.S. role*.

Grand strategy

The term *grand strategy* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to a country's overall approach for securing its interests and making its way in the world, using all the national instruments at its disposal, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools (sometimes abbreviated in U.S. government parlance as DIME). A country's leaders might deem elements of a country's grand strategy to be secret, so that assessments, assumptions, or risks included in the strategy are not revealed to potential adversaries. Consequently, a country's leaders might say relatively little in public about the country's grand strategy. As mentioned above, however, a country's role in the world can be taken as a visible expression of its grand strategy. For the United States, grand strategy can be viewed as strategy at a global or interregional level, as opposed to U.S. strategies for individual regions, countries, or issues.[91]

[91] One strategist, reviewing a recent book about grand strategy (Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2016), states

> The notion of grand strategy, albeit terribly hubristic sounding, is a decidedly practical art and a necessity for powers great and small. Such strategies are applied by accident or by deliberate rationalization in the pursuit of a country's best interests. Yet, there are few agreements about what constitutes a grand strategy and even what the best definition is....
>
> ... Ironically, I am partial to the definition postulated by Dr. Colin Gray, who defined it in *The Strategy Bridge* as "the direction and use made of any or all the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purposes of policy as decided by politics." This definition is not limited to states per se, is mute on its relevance to peacetime competition or wartime, and explicitly refers to all of the power assets of a community, rather than just its military services.
>
> [Milevski's] book is a wonderful and concise treatise that in some ways will remind readers of Edward Mead Earle's original *Makers of Modern Strategy*, which was published at the end of World War II.... While Earle focused on the key figures of strategy, Milevski's focus is narrower, uncovering the context and tracing the historiography of the term "grand strategy" over the past two centuries.
>
> [Milevski] captures the varied insights among the giants (Mahan, Corbett, Edward M. Earle, Kahn, and Brodie) that have enriched our understanding of the apex of strategy. At the end of his journey, he incorporates the insights of major recent contributors to the literature and our basis for theory today: Edward Luttwak, Barry Posen, John Collins, Paul Kennedy, John Lewis Gaddis, and Hal Brands.
>
> (Frank Hoffman, "The Consistent Incoherence of Grand Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, September 1, 2016.)

International order/world order

The term *international order* or *world order* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to the collection of organizations, institutions, treaties, rules, norms, and practices that are intended to organize, structure, and regulate international relations during a given historical period. International orders tend to be established by major world powers, particularly in the years following wars between major powers, though they can also emerge at other times. Though often referred to as if they are fully developed or firmly established situations, international orders are usually incomplete, partly aspirational, sometimes violated by their supporters, rejected (or at least not supported) by certain states and nonstate actors, and subject to various stresses and challenges.

Unipolar/bipolar/tripolar/multipolar

In foreign policy discussions, terms like *unipolar*, *bipolar*, *tripolar*, and *multipolar* are sometimes used to refer to the number of top-tier world powers whose actions tend to characterize or give structure to a given historical period's international security situation. The Cold War that lasted from the late 1940s to the late 1980s or early 1990s is usually described as a bipolar situation featuring a competition between two superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) and their allies. The post-Cold War era, which followed the Cold War, is sometimes described as the unipolar moment, with the United States being the unipolar power, meaning the world's sole superpower.

As discussed in another CRS report,[92] observers have concluded that in recent years, there has been a shift from the post-Cold War era to a new international security situation characterized by renewed great power competition between the United States, China, and Russia, leading observers to refer to the new situation as a tripolar or multipolar world. Observers who might list additional countries (or groups of countries, such as the European Union) as additional top-tier world powers, along with the United States, China, and Russia, might also use the term multipolar.

Eurasia

The term Eurasia is used in this report to refer to the entire land mass that encompasses both Europe and Asia, including its fringing islands, extending from Portugal on its western end to Japan on its eastern end, and from Russia's Arctic coast on its northern edge to India on its southern edge, and encompassing all the lands and countries in between, including those of Central Asia, Southwest Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Eurasia's fringing islands include, among others, the United Kingdom and Ireland in Europe, Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, the archipelagic countries of Southeast Asia, and Japan. There are also other definitions of Eurasia, some of which are more specialized and refer to subsets of the broad area described above.

Regional hegemon

The term *regional hegemon* generally refers to a country so powerful relative to the other countries in its region that it can dominate the affairs of that region and compel other countries in that region to support (or at least not oppose) the hegemon's key policy goals. The United States

[92] CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

is generally considered to have established itself in the 19th century as the hegemon of the Western Hemisphere.

Spheres-of-influence world

The term *spheres-of-influence world* generally refers to a world that, in terms of its structure of international relations, is divided into multiple regions (i.e., spheres), each with its own hegemon. A spheres-of-influence world, like a multipolar world, is characterized by having multiple top-tier powers. In a spheres-of-influence world, however, at least some of those top-tier powers have achieved a status of regional hegemon, while in a multipolar world, few or none of those major world powers (other than the United States, the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere) have achieved a status of regional hegemon. As a result, in a spheres-of-influence world, international relations are more highly segmented on a regional basis than they are in a multipolar world.

Geopolitics

The term *geopolitics* is often used as a synonym for international politics or for strategy relating to international politics. More specifically, it refers to the influence of basic geographic features on international relations, and to the analysis of international relations from a perspective that places a strong emphasis on the influence of such geographic features. Basic geographic features involved in geopolitical analysis include things such as the relative sizes and locations of countries or land masses; the locations of key resources such as oil or water; geographic barriers such as oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges; and key transportation links such as roads, railways, and waterways.[93]

Hard power and soft power

In foreign policy discussions, the term *hard power* generally refers to coercive power, particularly military and economic power, while the term *soft power* generally refers to the ability to persuade or attract support, particularly through diplomacy, development assistance, support for international organizations, education and cultural exchanges, and the international popularity of cultural elements such as music, movies, television shows, and literature.

[93] For recent examples of articles discussing geopolitics as defined in the more specific sense, see Olivia Garard, "Geopolitical Gerrymandering and the Importance of Key Maritime Terrain," *War on the Rocks*, October 3, 2018; Robert D. Kaplan, "The Return of Marco Polo's World and the U.S. Military Response," Center for a New American Security, undated but posted at the CNAS website ca. May 12, 2017; Robert C. Rubel, "Exporting Security: China, the United States, and the Innovator's Dilemma," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2017: 11-29; Robert Kaplan, "America Is a Maritime Nation," *Real Clear World*, January 24, 2017; John Hillen, "Foreign Policy By Map," *National Review*, February 23, 2015: 32-34; Alfred McCoy, "The Geopolitics of American Global Decline," *Real Clear World*, June 8, 2015; and Walter Russell Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2014.

Appendix B. Citations for Certain Footnotes

This appendix provides the citations to certain footnotes in the report. Citations for each footnote are generally listed with the most recent on top.

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Appendix C. Recent Writings on Whether U.S. Role Should Change

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Appendix D. Recent Writings on How Other Countries Are Responding

This appendix lists recent examples of writings on the question of how other countries are responding to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world, with the most recent on top.

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Appendix F. Background Information on U.S. Public Opinion About U.S. Role

This appendix presents background information on U.S. public opinion relating to the U.S. role in the world.

October 2018 Chicago Council on Global Affairs Report

A 2018 Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on U.S. public opinion data regarding U.S. foreign policy that was released in October 2018 stated:

> In the wake of the 2016 US presidential election, political analysts warned of a dark era ahead. Newly elected President Donald Trump had long expressed opposition to US security alliances, skepticism of free trade, and support for authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin. Since the American public generally relies on their political leaders for foreign policy decisions, many policy watchers cautioned that the country was headed for a populist, unilateralist, and protectionist retreat from global leadership.
>
> While the Trump administration has taken action along this path—unilaterally withdrawing from the Paris and Iran agreements, pulling the United States out from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, and questioning the value of long-time alliances like NATO—the majority of the American public has not followed this lead.
>
> To the contrary, most Americans have moved in the opposite direction. The largest majority since 1974—except for just after the September 11 attacks—now support active US engagement in world affairs. A solid majority supports multilateral diplomacy, underscored by public willingness to accept international decisions that are not the first choice for the United States. A record number of Americans now acknowledge the benefits of international trade. Even though the United States withdrew from both the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, public support for these agreements has actually increased. And as the ultimate indicator of commitment to allies, increased majorities express support for sending US troops to defend both NATO and Asian allies if they are attacked.
>
> **Americans Want the United States to Remain Engaged**
>
> Despite attempts by the White House to pull the United States back from global engagement, seven in 10 Americans… favor the United States taking an active part in world affairs (70%). This reading is a 7 percentage point increase from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey and is the highest recorded level of support since 1974 except for 2002, the first Chicago Council Survey conducted after the September 11 attacks….
>
> **A Majority Wants Shared Action on Global Issues**
>
> The American public does not envision the United States working alone when playing an active role on the world stage. Rather, a striking majority (91%) say that it is more effective for the United States to work with allies and other countries to achieve its foreign policy goals. Just 8 percent say that it is more effective for the United States to tackle world problems on its own.
>
> Sharing leadership on global issues may mean that the United States does not always achieve its preferred policy outcomes. Yet a majority support the United States making decisions with its allies even if it means the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice (66% agree, 32% disagree). Similarly, two-thirds of Americans believe that the United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if it means that the United States will sometimes have to go along

with a policy that is not its first choice (64% agree, 34% disagree)—the highest level of support on this question since it was first asked in 2004, when 66 percent agreed.

Support Is Up for the Iran Deal and the Paris Agreement

President Trump has broken away from several international agreements since taking office, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal. But the American public has not followed the president's cues. Majorities of the public say that the United States should participate in the Iran deal (66%) and the Paris Agreement (68%). In fact, support for US participation in both of these high-profile international agreements has risen 6 percentage points over the past year….

It's More Important to be Admired than Feared

The administration has attempted to change the nature of US influence around the world by using coercive rhetoric toward both allies and hostile actors. Perhaps reflective of this approach, more Americans think that the United States is now more feared (39%) than admired (20%) around the world today, though many volunteer an alternative response, ranging from "a joke" to "weak" to "falling apart." But almost three times as many Americans think admiration (73%) of the United States is more important than fear (26%) of the United States to achieve US foreign policy goals.

As interactions with US allies have strained over the course of the past year, majorities of Americans say that relations with other countries are worsening (56%) and that the United States is losing allies (57%). Just 12 percent of the public says that the United States is gaining allies and 31 percent state there has been no change.

US Public Wants to Maintain or Increase Commitment to NATO

While some administration officials have praised NATO, the president has repeatedly criticized European allies for not spending enough on defense. Yet his attacks do not seem to have dented public support for the transatlantic alliance. A majority of Americans continue to favor maintaining (57%) or increasing (18%) US commitment to NATO; in fact, a higher percentage of Americans now favor increasing the US commitment to NATO than ever before….

Support for Using US Troops to Defend Key Allies Has Grown

Americans continue to favor contributing to allies' security through bases and security commitments, and their willingness to do so has increased since last year. Majorities of Americans support maintaining long-term military bases in South Korea (74%) and Japan (65%); both responses are at record levels since the question was first asked in the 2002 Chicago Council Survey. As in past surveys, a majority continue to support maintaining US bases in Germany (60%). Further, two-thirds of Americans support sending US troops to defend South Korea (64%) and Japan (64%) if attacked by North Korea, and 54 percent support defending Baltic NATO allies with US troops if Russia invades. Each of these measures is at a peak since the Council began asking these questions.

Americans Are High on Trade

The White House is waging trade battles on multiple fronts, but the American public is more positive about the benefits of trade than ever before, surpassing even the previous record ratings of 2017…. Large majorities of Americans now say that trade is good for consumers like you (85%), the US economy (82%), and creating jobs in the United States (67%)….

While the president has criticized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and withdrawn from the TPP trade agreement, 63 percent of Americans now say NAFTA is good for the US economy, up from 53 percent in 2017, and another record level in Chicago Council surveys. A majority of Americans (61%) also believe the United States should participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific

Partnership, or the CPTPP, a trade agreement formed by the 11 signatories to the original TPP after US withdrawal.

Americans face the possibility of serious trade disruptions, as the United States and China are currently exchanging several rounds of tariffs. While only four in 10 Americans consider a possible trade war with China a critical threat (42%), a combined seven in 10 Americans are very (31%) or somewhat (41%) concerned that a trade war with China will hurt their local economy.5 Trade disputes with Mexico, America's third-largest trading partner, are somewhat less concerning to the US public: just over half of the public are very (19%) or somewhat (33%) concerned about the impact of a trade war with Mexico on their local economy.

Conclusion

The Trump administration's bold attempts to reshape US foreign policy have not convinced many Americans to join the bandwagon. The past two years have given the American public a glimpse of President Trump's alternative vision for the role of the United States in the world. And while Trump's base continues to share his vision, the majority of Americans do not.

Instead, most Americans are more convinced about the benefits of active US engagement and the need to work with allies. They see US soft power as more effective than muscular intimidation in accomplishing US foreign policy goals and believe the United States is losing allies and world respect. On those specific issues where the White House has taken action—withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris Agreement, and the TPP agreement—Americans are less likely to see them as "wins" and more likely to endorse participating in these agreements. On traditional approaches to US foreign policy, including maintaining military bases abroad, defending key allies if attacked, and supporting trade, Americans have doubled down. The bottom line is that two years into the Trump administration, solid majorities of the American public have rejected the "America First" platform.[94]

June 2018 Chicago Council on Global Affairs Report

A 2018 Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on U.S. public opinion data regarding generational differences in U.S. public opinion regarding U.S. foreign policy stated that was released in June 2018 stated:

> Since World War II the United States has maintained an active foreign policy agenda, deeply engaged in both the economic and military domains. Many observers over the past few years, however, have begun to voice doubts about public support for the critical pillars of American internationalism. Some have argued that the American public has lost its appetite for military intervention after more than 15 years at war in the greater Middle East. Others have suggested that Donald Trump's election revealed weakening support for free trade and for the global alliance system the United States built after World War II.
>
> Many observers have worried, in particular, about whether younger Americans will be willing to take up the mantle of global leadership. This question matters a good deal in light of the fact that the Millennial Generation, those born between 1981 and 1996, is now the largest generation of Americans. Like the Baby Boomers before them, Millennials have already had an outsized impact on American culture. As they age and begin to take leadership positions in business, government, and across society, their views – not those of their parents and grandparents – will be decisive.

[94] Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, Craig Kafura, and Lily Wojtowicz, *America Engaged, American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2018, pp. 2-6.

Those worried about Millennials' willingness to embrace the traditional liberal internationalism of the post-World War II era may find some evidence for their concerns in survey data. As the 2012 Chicago Council Survey report noted, "Millennials…are much less alarmed about major threats facing the country, particularly international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the development of China as a world power, and are less supportive of an activist approach to foreign affairs than older Americans."

In order to understand where foreign policy attitudes are headed, we employ a generational perspective to analyze a wide range of survey data collected by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs since 1974. The findings reveal that generations share many opinions about international threats, foreign policy goals, and the best approaches to engaging the world. Yet, each generation from the Silent Generation onward entered adulthood somewhat less supportive of expansive American internationalism, with more recent generations expressing lower support for militarized approaches to achieve foreign policy goals.

Today, each successor generation is less likely than the previous to prioritize maintaining superior military power worldwide as a goal of US foreign policy, to see US military superiority as a very effective way of achieving US foreign policy goals, and to support expanding defense spending. At the same time, support for international cooperation and free trade remains high across the generations. In fact, younger Americans are more inclined to support cooperative approaches to US foreign policy and more likely to feel favorably towards trade and globalization.

Key Findings

- Each generation since the Silent Generation reports less support than its predecessors for taking an active part in world affairs, as measured by responses to the standard Chicago Council Survey question: "Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs?"
- Sometimes, this difference split Millennials from older Americans; at other times, Millennials and Gen Xers both differ from prior generations.
- Long-term shifts in ideology and party identification mean that younger Americans today are more liberal than their elders, less likely to identify as Republican, but also more likely not to identify with either party.
- Because ideology and partisanship exert such powerful influences on public opinion, these trends play a significant role in explaining the size and direction of generation gaps on foreign policy issues.
- Yet even when the pull of partisanship and party loyalty is greatest, the differences across generations remain visible and large enough to be politically significant.

It is difficult to predict how much these generation gaps will influence the direction of US foreign policy. As younger Americans continue to replace older Americans, especially at the voting booth, shifting demographics and attitudes are likely to influence debates about how the United States should engage the world. As younger Americans move through the stages of life it will be interesting to see if these generational differences result in a permanent break from previous patterns of foreign policy attitudes.[95]

[95] Trevor Thrall, Dina Smeltz, Erik Goepner, Will Ruger, and Craig Kafura, *The Clash of Generations? Intergenerational Change and American Foreign Policy Views*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, June 2018, pp. 1-2. See also Sophia Larson, "Polls Show Millennials Are More Skeptical of Foreign Wars," *National Interest*, August 14, 2018; Bruce Jentleson, "Millennials Are So Over US Domination of World Affairs," *The Conversation*, July 26, 2018; Christopher A. Preble, "A Clash of Generations over American Leadership? America's Generational Gap has the Potential to Redefine the Role That the United States Plays in the World," *National Interest*, June 27, 2018.

2017 Chicago Council on Global Affairs Report

A 2017 Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on U.S. public opinion data regarding the Trump Administration's theme of America First stated

> President Trump's inaugural address, like his campaign, signaled a major departure from the past seven decades of American foreign policy and engagement with the rest of the world. While never fully parsed, the slogans "Make America Great Again," "America First," and "Americanism, not Globalism," along with the president's speeches and tweets, prescribed greater protectionism in trade, a new financial reckoning with our security allies, and a withdrawal from major international agreements.
>
> The 2017 Chicago Council Survey, conducted roughly six months into the Trump administration, tested the appeal of these ideas among the American public. The results suggest their attraction remains limited. For now, public criticism of trade deals, support for withholding US security guarantees from allies, and calls for restricting immigration mainly appeal to a core group of Trump supporters (defined in this report as those Americans with a very favorable view of President Trump). Yet, aside from the president's core supporters, most Americans prefer the type of foreign policy that has been typical of US administrations, be they Republican or Democrat, since World War II.
>
> Majorities continue to endorse sustaining American engagement abroad... as well as maintaining alliances, supporting trade, and participating in international agreements. Indeed, in key instances, Americans have doubled down on these beliefs. Public support has risen to new highs when it comes to willingness to defend allies, the perceived benefits of trade, and a desire to grant undocumented workers a path to citizenship.
>
> **Americans Value Allies and Are More Willing Than Ever to Defend Them**
>
> During the 2016 campaign and into his presidency, Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized allies of freeriding on America's security guarantee and argued that US alliances were not serving American interests. But the US public disagrees. Americans have repeatedly rated alliances as one of the most effective ways for the United States to achieve its foreign policy goals since the question was first asked in 2014. Today, the US public is more convinced than ever of their importance. Americans rate maintaining existing alliances as the most effective foreign policy tool, with 49 percent responding "very effective".... followed by maintaining US military superiority (47%) and building new alliances with other countries (36%)....
>
> Americans also express confidence in Asian and European allies to deal responsibly with world problems, and solid majorities favor maintaining or increasing the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific (78%), Europe (73%), and the Middle East (70%). A slightly larger majority now (69%) compared with a year ago (65%) say NATO is essential to US security. And for the first time, majorities of Americans are willing to use US troops to defend South Korea if it is invaded by North Korea (62%) or if NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia are invaded by Russia (52%).
>
> The most specific wish that President Trump has for NATO is for allied countries to contribute more to collective defense; he and other administration officials have advocated for withholding US commitment to defend allies until they have paid more. But a majority of Americans think that NATO allies should be convinced to do their part through persuasion and diplomatic channels (59%) rather than threatening to withhold the US security guarantee to NATO allies to get them to pay more for defense (38%).
>
> Given these views, it is clear that Americans appreciate the advantages that alliances bring. Majorities say that alliances with Europe and East Asia (60% each) are either mutually beneficial or mostly benefit the United States, and 48 percent say the same about alliances in the Middle East.

Core Trump supporters are the most skeptical of the benefits regarding alliances for the United States. Perhaps taking their lead from the president, a majority favor withholding US security guarantee from NATO allies until they pay more (60%); 51 percent of overall Republicans agree. But even core Trump supporters do not seem to believe the alliance is "obsolete," given that a majority (54%) think NATO is still essential to US security.

A Record Percentage of Americans Recognize Benefits of Trade

Americans are feeling more optimistic about the positive impact of trade. Compared with a year ago, record numbers of Americans now say that international trade is good for US consumers (78%), for the US economy (72%), and for job creation (57%)..... Additionally, the perceived benefits of trade are up across all party affiliations....

A majority of Americans believe that trade deals between the United States and other countries benefit both countries (50%) or mostly benefit the United States (7%). But a substantial percentage of Americans—including a majority of core Trump supporters and a plurality of Republicans overall—think other countries mostly benefit (34%) or neither country benefits (6%).

President Trump has blamed poor trade deals for the loss of American jobs, and on this point, Americans agree. A majority say that manufacturing job losses are due to outsourcing (56%) rather than increased automation (42%). Yet, more Americans say that the current administration's policies will harm (41%) rather than help (32%) US workers, and 24 percent say they will make no difference.

There are clear partisan divides on expectations for the new administration. Solid majorities of core Trump supporters (82%) and Republicans (64%) expect this administration's policies will do more to protect US workers, which may help explain why they are more optimistic about the overall benefits of international trade to the US economy, consumers, and job creation. For their part, Democrats may feel the need to underscore their support for international trade as a reaction against the trade-bashing rhetoric from both Republican and Democratic candidates in 2016.

Concern over Immigration at Lowest Point Yet

Immigration was a central issue during the 2016 presidential campaign, and it remains a key pillar in Donald Trump's America First platform. But the American public is less alarmed than last year by the potential threat of large numbers of immigrants and refugees entering the United States. Just 37 percent of Americans characterize immigration as a critical threat, down from 43 percent in 2016, marking a new low in concern for this issue.... There are, however, still large differences between Democrats (20%) and Republicans (61%), with core Trump supporters the most likely of all to consider immigration a critical threat (80%)....

As the overall perceived threat from immigration has gone down, support for providing an opportunity for illegal workers in the United States to become citizens has gone up. Among all Americans, two-thirds (65%) support providing illegal immigrants a path to citizenship either immediately or with a waiting period and a financial penalty—an increase of 7 percentage points since last year. Conversely, fewer Americans now say that illegal immigrants should be required to leave their jobs and the United States (22%, down from 28% in 2016).

A clear majority of Democrats (77%, up from 71% in 2016) favor a pathway to citizenship either immediately or with conditions. A smaller majority of Republicans now also favor the same solution as Democrats (52%, up from 44%), although 36 percent of Republicans favor deportation (down from 42% in 2016). Even core Trump supporters are divided in their views, with equal numbers supporting deportation (45%) and a path to citizenship (45%) for illegal immigrants.

Majority Continue to Support Paris Agreement

Conducted just weeks after President Trump kept his campaign promise to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2017 Chicago Council Survey reveals that 6 in 10 Americans (62%) continue to favor US participation in the agreement. However, overall public support of the Paris Agreement has declined since 2016 (when 71% favored participation) largely because of a 20-point drop in Republican support (37%, down from 57% in 2016), perhaps following the president's lead on this issue. Just 24 percent of core Trump supporters want the United States to participate in the agreement. In contrast, majorities of Democrats (83%) and Independents (60%) continue to support the Paris Accord, though also at slightly lower levels than in 2016 (when it was backed by 87% of Democrats and 68% of Independents).

Overall, 46 percent of Americans say that climate change is now a critical threat facing the United States; while still not a majority, this view reflects the highest point of concern recorded by the Chicago Council Survey. Yet, Republicans and Democrats markedly disagree on the gravity of this issue. Seven in 10 Democrats think that climate change is a critical threat, compared with just 16 percent of Republicans and 12 percent of core Trump supporters....

Fractures within the Republican Party Base

Headlines over the past year have proclaimed an internal battle within the Republican Party between President Trump's supporters and those who oppose his policies. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey data illustrate these fissures between self-described Republicans who have a very favorable view of President Trump ("Trump Republicans") and those who do not ("non-Trump Republicans").

Non-Trump Republicans align more with average US public opinion than they do with Trump Republicans. Non-Trump Republicans are closer to the overall public than to Trump Republicans in their views on NAFTA (53% overall public, 49% non-Trump Republicans, 20% Trump Republicans believe the agreement is good for the US economy). Non-Trump Republicans are also closer to the overall public when asked the best way to get US allies to pay more for their defense (61% Trump Republicans, 40% non-Trump Republicans, and 38% overall favor withholding the US security guarantee). And on immigration, the overall public (65%) and non-Trump Republicans (62%) are more aligned in supporting a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants than Trump Republicans (43%). Specific examples of other differences among Republicans are included in each chapter of this report....

Conclusion

Despite the politically charged environment over the past year, Americans express remarkably enduring support for an active US role in world affairs, for security alliances, and for trade relationships. They also favor offering illegal immigrants an opportunity to earn citizenship, either immediately or with conditions—a fact often overlooked by political leaders. Even though a portion of Americans have some questions about how much the United States gets out of security alliances and trade agreements, the American public as a whole seems to recognize clear value in maintaining them.

President Trump appears to have noticed, and he has begun to adjust some of his campaign positions since moving into the Oval Office. He has declared that NATO is no longer obsolete and has taken some steps to reassure allies that the United States will honor its defense commitments. Officials in Trump's administration, including the vice president and the secretaries of state and defense, hold more mainstream views on defense issues, and they have repeatedly traveled to allied nations to smooth ruffled feathers. President Trump has also moderated some of his anti-trade rhetoric, backing away from accusations of Chinese currency manipulation and seeking to renegotiate rather than abandon NAFTA.

> These moderated positions are closer to mainstream American views; they are also closer to the views of those Republicans who are not core supporters of Donald Trump.[96]

2016 Pew Research Center Survey

A May 2016 article by the Pew Research Center regarding a survey of U.S. foreign policy attitudes conducted in April 2016 states

> The public views America's role in the world with considerable apprehension and concern. In fact, most Americans say it would be better if the U.S. just dealt with its own problems and let other countries deal with their own problems as best they can.
>
> With the United States facing an array of global threats, public support for increased defense spending has climbed to its highest level since a month after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when 50% favored more defense spending.
>
> Currently, 35% say the U.S. should increase spending on national defense, 24% say it should be cut back and 40% say it should be kept about the same as today. The share favoring more defense spending has increased 12 percentage points (from 23%) since 2013....
>
> The new survey, conducted April 12 to 19 among 2,008 U.S. adults, finds the public remains wary of global involvement, although on some measures, support for U.S. internationalism has increased modestly from the historically low levels found in the 2013 study.
>
> Still, 57% of Americans want the U.S. to deal with its own problems, while letting other countries get along as best they can. Just 37% say the U.S. should help other countries deal with their problems. And more Americans say the U.S. does too much (41%), rather than too little (27%), to solve world problems, with 28% saying it is doing about the right amount.
>
> The public's wariness toward global engagement extends to U.S. participation in the global economy. Nearly half of Americans (49%) say U.S. involvement in the global economy is a bad thing because it lowers wages and costs jobs; fewer (44%) see this as a good thing because it provides the U.S. with new markets and opportunities for growth....
>
> While Americans remain skeptical of U.S. international involvement, many also view the United States as a less powerful and important world leader than it was a decade ago. Nearly half (46%) say the United States is a less powerful and important world leader than it was 10 years ago, while 21% say it is more powerful, and 31% say it is about as powerful as it was then.
>
> U.S. seen as leading economic, military power. The share saying the U.S. has become less powerful has declined since 2013, from 53% to 46%, but is among the highest numbers expressing this view in the past four decades. These attitudes also are divided along partisan lines: Republicans (67%) remain more likely than independents (48%) or Democrats (26%) to say that the U.S. has become less powerful and important.
>
> However, although many Americans believe the U.S. has become less powerful than it was in the past, the predominant view among the public is that the United States is the world's leading economic and military power.

[96] Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, and Craig Kafura, *What Americans Think about America First, Results of the 2017 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2017, pp. 2-7. See also Jenna Johnson, "What Does 'America First' Really Mean?" Washington Post, April 27, 2018.

> In a separate Pew Research Center survey conducted April 4 to 24 among 1,003 U.S. adults, a majority of Americans (54%) say the United States is the world's leading economic power, with China a distant second at 34%. This is the first time, in surveys dating back to 2008, that more than half of the public has named the United States as the leading economic power.[97]

2016 Chicago Council on Global Affairs Report

A 2016 Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on U.S. public opinion data regarding U.S. foreign policy stated

> Over the past year, Donald Trump has been able to channel the anxieties of a significant segment of the American public into a powerful political force, taking him to the doorstep of the White House. These public anxieties stem from growing concerns about the effects of globalization on the American economy and about the changing demographics of the United States.
>
> Although Trump has been able to mobilize many of those who are most concerned about these developments, their motivating concerns are not new. They existed before Donald Trump entered the race, and they are likely to persist even if he loses the election in November 2016. Yet, uniquely among the candidates running for president this cycle, Trump has given voice to this group of Americans, notably through his tough stances on immigration and trade.
>
> At the same time, while this segment of the American public has given Donald Trump traction in the presidential race, his views on important issues garner only minority support from the overall American public. While they are divided on expanding a wall on the US border with Mexico, Americans overall support continued immigration into the United States and favor reform to address the large population of unauthorized immigrants already in the country. Americans overall think globalization is mostly good for the United States, and they see many benefits to free trade. And the American public as a whole—including the core supporters of Donald Trump—still favors the country's traditional alliances, a shared leadership role for the United States abroad, and the preservation of US military superiority....
>
> While Trump's views on immigration and trade clearly resonate with his core supporters, some of his other criticisms of US foreign policy are less popular among his base. For example, core Trump supporters are somewhat more cautious than other Americans of alliances and an active US role in world affairs, but in most cases they continue to favor international engagement. This serves as a reminder that despite divides on issues such as immigration and trade, the American public finds a great deal of common ground on American leadership in the world and how to achieve American goals....[98]

2016 Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest Survey

The Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest stated the following regarding the results of a December 2016 survey of U.S. public opinion regarding U.S. foreign policy:

[97] Pew Research Center, "Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World," May 5, 2016.

[98] Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, and Craig Kafura, *America in the Age of Uncertainty, American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy*, 2016 Chicago Council Survey, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016, pp. 2, 6.

The Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest today released a poll of 1,000 Americans that shows voters believe focusing on diplomacy and trade are better methods of improving U.S. security than military intervention.

"More than half of Americans think that U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years has made us less safe," said William Ruger, vice president for research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute. "Americans want the next administration to take a different approach, with many favoring more caution about committing military forces abroad while preferring greater burden sharing by our wealthy allies and diplomacy over regime change. This poll is the second since October where the Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest have identified Americans' disenchantment with the status quo. The public's call for peace and change reflect the same views they held before the election. It's time that Washington listens to a public expressing greater prudence."

"Americans see trade and diplomacy as contributing more to U.S. national security than regime change in foreign lands," said Paul J. Saunders, executive director of the Center for the National Interest. "Voters also support a strong military and more balanced alliances—though many have reservations about unconditional commitments, particularly to some new U.S. allies. The incoming administration and Congress have an important opportunity to define a new model of American leadership that moves beyond the mistakes of the last two decades."

Poll results show:

Americans Still Believe Recent U.S. Foreign Policy Has Made Them Less Safe:

• When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made Americans more or less safe, a majority (52%) said less safe. Just 12% said more, while one quarter said U.S. foreign policy had no impact on their level of safety.

• When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made the world more or less safe, 51% said less safe, 11% said more, and 24% said safety levels had stayed the same.

• These findings are largely the same as results from a joint CKI-CFTNI October [2016] poll.

Americans Favor Peaceful Engagement Over Military Intervention:

• More than two-thirds of respondents (70%) agreed with the statement, "The U.S. should work with existing governments and heads of state to try to promote peace" rather than seeking to oust government by force.

• When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, 49% said prioritizing diplomacy over military intervention while just 26% said prioritizing military power over diplomacy. Another 25% were not sure.

• When asked whether the U.S. government should increase U.S. military spending, decrease it, or keep spending the same, a plurality (40%) wanted to increase spending, while nearly half either wanted to keep it the same (32%) or cut it (17%). Another 12% were not sure.

• When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, only 20% said making more attempts at regime change would improve safety, while 45% said cutting the number of U.S. attempts at regime change would improve safety. 35% were not sure.

• More than half (54%) said working more through the United Nations would improve U.S. safety, while only 26% thought working less through the United Nations would be better. 24% were not sure.

• When asked broadly about what would make the United States safer, respondents preferred expanding U.S. alliance commitments (50%) to reducing U.S. alliance commitments (27%). However, Americans did not see U.S. commitments as necessarily

unconditional. Only 26% of the respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement, "In a military conflict between Russia and Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia, the United States should automatically defend that country with American military forces." Thirty-two percent either somewhat or strongly disagreed.

• Increased trade should be part of the United States' diplomatic efforts. More than half of respondents (55%) said increasing trade would improve U.S. safety. Only 22% said decreasing trade would make the country safer. Another 23% were not sure.

• Notwithstanding significant reservations about Russia, over half of voters see that country as a potential partner. When asked whether the United States should view Russia an adversary or as a potential partner, more than half either said Russia should be viewed as both (38%) or should be viewed as a potential partner (17%). Only 33% said Russia definitely should be viewed solely as an adversary. Another 12% said they were unsure.

• American voters are unsure about the U.S. relationship with China. When asked whether they viewed China as an ally, 93% of respondents said no. However, 89% also indicated they would not characterize China as an enemy. The most accepted term for China was "competitor"—42% of respondents said they agreed with that characterization.

Americans Want Washington to Exercise Restraint Abroad:

• When asked whether Congress should impeach a president who does not get congressional approval before committing the United States to military action abroad, a plurality (39%) said yes, while just 27% said no. Another 34% were not sure.

• When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, 45% of respondents said reducing U.S. military presence abroad, 31% said increasing it, and 24% said they did not know.

• When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, 40% of respondents said decreasing the use of U.S. military force for democracy promotion internationally, 31% said increasing it, and 29% were not sure.

• When asked about troop levels in Europe, three quarters said the United States should either keep levels the same as they are today (46%) or bring home at least some of the troops (28%). Only 12% said troop levels in Europe should be expanded. A plurality (44%) said the media had not provided enough information about recent U.S. troop deployments in Europe.

• When a sked whether the United States should deploy ground troops to Syria, 55% of Americans said no, 23% said yes, and 23% were not sure. Those opposing ground troops in Syria increased by 4 percentage points since the October survey.

• When asked whether the United States should increase its military presence in the Middle East, only 22% of respondents said yes, while 35% said they would reduce U.S. presence in the Middle East. Another 29% said they wouldn't change troop levels.

Voters Want President-Elect Donald Trump to Exercise Restraint and Audit the Military:

• When asked whether President-elect Trump should audit the Pentagon, 57% said yes, 28% weren't sure, and 15% said no.

• Americans think our allies should shoulder more of the burden. When asked whether President-elect Trump should encourage NATO countries to increase or decrease their defense spending, only 8% said decrease while 41% said increase, and another 33% said President-elect Trump should encourage NATO countries to keep spending levels stable.

• When asked whether the Trump administration should strengthen the U.S. military's relationship with Saudi Arabia, only 20% said it should while 23% suggested the United

States should loosen its ties with Saudi Arabia. One third (33%) said the relationship should be kept as is, while another 24% were not sure.

• When asked whether President-elect Trump should respect, renegotiate, or walk away from the Iran deal that lifted international sanctions on Iran in exchange for more scrutiny of their nuclear facilities, 32% said renegotiate, 28% said respect, 17% said walk away, and 23% were not sure.[99]

Comments from Observers

In September 2018, one observer stated:

> President Trump may not enjoy majority support these days, but there's good reason to believe that his "America First" approach to the world does. There has been no popular outcry against Mr. Trump's trade battles with Canada, Mexico and the European allies. Experts suggest we are in for a long international trade war, no matter who the next president may be. After all, even Hillary Clinton had to disown her support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership in the last election. The old free-trade consensus is gone.
>
> Mr. Trump's immigration policies may be more popular with Republicans than with Democrats, but few Democratic politicians are running on a promise to bring more immigrants into the country. And just as in the 1920s, isolationism joins anti-immigration sentiment and protectionism as a pillar of America Firstism.
>
> The old consensus about America's role as upholder of global security has collapsed in both parties. Russia may have committed territorial aggression against Ukraine. But Republican voters follow Mr. Trump in seeking better ties, accepting Moscow's forcible annexation of Crimea and expanding influence in the Middle East (even if some of the president's subordinates do not). They applaud Mr. Trump for seeking a dubious deal with North Korea just as they once condemned Democratic presidents for doing the same thing. They favor a trade war with China but have not consistently favored military spending increases to deter a real war.
>
> Democrats might seem to be rallying behind the liberal order, but much of this is just opposition to Mr. Trump's denigration of it. Are today's rank-and-file Democrats really more committed to defending allies and deterring challengers to the liberal world order? Most Democratic politicians railing against Mr. Trump's "appeasement" of Moscow hailed Obama's "reset" a few years ago and chastised Republicans for seeking a new Cold War. Most Democratic voters want lower military spending and a much smaller United States military presence overseas, which hardly comports with getting tougher on Russia, Korea or China — except on trade.
>
> Most Americans in both parties also agree with Mr. Trump that America's old allies need to look out for themselves and stop relying on the United States to protect them. Few really disagreed with the president's stated reluctance to commit American lives to the defense of Montenegro. Britons in the 1930s did not want to "die for Danzig," and Americans today don't want to die for Taipei or Riga, never mind Kiev or Tbilisi. President Obama was less hostile to the allies than Mr. Trump, but even he complained about "free riders."
>
> In retrospect it's pretty clear that Mr. Obama was too internationalist for his party base. He expanded NATO, intervened in Libya, imposed sanctions on Russia and presided over the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Democrats may miss Mr. Obama for many reasons, but there's little evidence that the rank-and-file miss those policies. Mr. Trump's

[99] Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest, "Poll: This Holiday, Americans Wish For A More Peaceful Approach to Foreign Policy, Results show voters favor an emphasis on diplomacy and trade and are skeptical of military intervention abroad," December 22, 2016, accessed June 21, 2017, at https://187ock2y3ejr34z8752m6ize-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/12.22.16-Charles-Koch-TNI.pdf.

> narrower, more unilateralist and nationalist approach to the world is probably closer to where the general public is than Mr. Obama's more cosmopolitan sensibility.
>
> It would be comforting to blame America's current posture on Mr. Trump. But while he may be a special kind of president, even he can't create a public mood out of nothing. Now as always, presidents reflect public opinion at least as much as they shape it. Between the two world wars, and especially from 1921 through 1936, an American public disillusioned by World War I was averse to further overseas involvement, and it didn't matter whether the presidents were supposed "isolationists" like Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge or supposed "internationalists" like Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. It took a lot more than fireside chats to turn public opinion around. It took Hitler's conquest of Europe, near-conquest of Britain and, finally, Pearl Harbor to onvince a majority of Americans that America First was a mistake.
>
> In our own time, the trend toward an America First approach has been growing since the end of the Cold War. George H.W. Bush, the hero of the Gulf War, had to play down foreign policy in 1992 and lost to a candidate promising to focus on domestic issues. George W. Bush won in 2000 promising to reduce United States global involvement, defeating an opponent, Al Gore, who was still talking about America's indispensability. In 2008, Mr. Obama won while promising to get out of foreign conflicts for good. In 2016, Republican internationalists like Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio were trounced in the primaries. Hillary Clinton struggled to hold off Bernie Sanders, a progressive isolationist, and it was certainly not because of her foreign policy views.
>
> Now we have Mr. Trump. Is he an aberration or a culmination? Many foreign policy experts, and most of the foreign leaders pouring into New York this week for the United Nation's General Assembly, have been counting on the former. They place their hopes on the 2020 elections to get America back on its old path. But they may have to start facing the fact that what we're seeing today is not a spasm but a new direction in American foreign policy, or rather a return to older traditions — the kind that kept us on the sidelines while fascism and militarism almost conquered the world.[100]

In a May 2017 blog post, one foreign policy specialist stated:

> Over a period of decades, the American people and their elected representatives funded defense expenditures far greater than what would have been necessary simply to protect the continental United States. They faced up to the idea that American troops might fight and die to defend faraway frontiers. And they accepted—often reluctantly—the notion that Washington should take primary responsibility for leading the global economy, U.S. alliances, and international institutions, despite the myriad costs and frustrations involved.
>
> Americans accepted these costs not out of any special altruism, of course, but because they believed the benefits of living in—and leading—a stable, prosperous, and liberal world order were ultimately greater. But if the postwar era was thus characterized, as G. John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney write, by a "bipartisan consensus…on the paramount importance of American leadership," then the 2016 presidential election and its results surely called into question whether that consensus still exists....
>
> So, was the 2016 election merely an aberration within the long history of American internationalism? Or does Trump's victory indicate deeper and perhaps more irrevocable changes in American attitudes on foreign affairs? As it turns out, there are two plausible interpretations of this issue, and they point in very different directions....
>
> If political support for American internationalism was plummeting, one would expect to see unambiguous downturns in public opinion toward U.S. alliances, international trade,

[100] Robert Kagan, "'America First' Has Won; The Three Pillars of the Ideology—Isolationism, Protectionism and Restricting Immigration—Were Gaining Popularity Before Donald Trump Became President and May Outlast His Tenure," *New York Times*, September 23, 2018.

and other key initiatives. Yet while there certainly are signs of public alienation from American internationalism – as discussed subsequently – most recent polling data tells a different story.

According to public opinion surveys taken in the heat of the 2016 campaign, for instance, 65 percent of Americans saw globalization as "mostly good" for the United States, and 64 percent saw international trade as "good for their own standard of living." Even the Trans-Pacific Partnership – which Clinton disowned under pressure from Sanders, and which Trump used as a political punching bag – enjoyed 60 percent support. Reaching back slightly further to 2013, an overwhelming majority – 77 percent – of Americans believed that trade and business ties to other countries were either "somewhat good" or "very good" for the United States. In other words, if Americans are in wholesale revolt against globalization, most public opinion polls are not capturing that discontent.

Nor are they registering a broad popular backlash against other aspects of American internationalism. Although Trump delighted in disparaging U.S. alliances during the campaign, some 77 percent of Americans still saw being a member of NATO as a good thing. A remarkable 89 percent believed that maintaining U.S. alliances was "very or somewhat effective at achieving U.S. foreign policy goals."

Similarly, recent opinion polls have revealed little evidence that the American public is demanding significant military retrenchment. In 2016, three-quarters of respondents believed that defense spending should rise or stay the same. The proposition favoring more defense spending had actually increased significantly (from 23 percent to 35 percent) since 2013. Support for maintaining overseas bases and forward deployments of U.S. troops was also strong. And regarding military intervention, recent polls have indeed shown a widespread belief that the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not worth the cost, but these sentiments do not seem to have translated into a broader skepticism regarding the utility of military force. In 2016, for instance, 62 percent of Americans approved of the military campaign against the Islamic State, demonstrating broad agreement that the United States should be willing to use the sword – even in faraway places – when threats emerge.

Polling on other issues reveals still more of the same. For all of Trump's critiques of international institutions, international law, and multilateralism, nearly two-third of Americans (64 percent) viewed the United Nations favorably in 2016 and 71 percent supported U.S. participation in the Paris Agreement on combating climate change. And, although polls indicating that over 50 percent of Americans now prefer to let other countries "get along as best they can" on their own are far more troubling, here too the overall picture painted by recent survey data is somewhat brighter. As of 2016, more than half – 55 percent – of Americans believed that the United States either did too little or the right amount in confronting global problems. When asked if the United States should continue playing an active role in world affairs, nearly two-thirds answered affirmatively.

As one comprehensive analysis of the survey data thus concluded,[101] at present there is just not overwhelming evidence—in the polls, at least—to suggest a broad-gauged public rejection of internationalism: "The American public as a whole still thinks that the United States is the greatest and most influential country in the world, and bipartisan support remains strong for the country to take an active part in world affairs."...

... there is also a far more pessimistic – and equally plausible – way of reading the national mood. From this perspective, Trump's rise is not an aberration or a glitch. It is, rather, the culmination of a quiet crisis that has gradually but unmistakably been weakening the political foundations of American internationalism. That crisis may not yet be manifesting in dramatic, across-the-board changes in how Americans view particular foreign policy

[101] The blog post at this point includes a hyperlink to the 2016 Chicago Council Survey report cited in footnote 97.

issues. But as Trump's election indicates, its political effects are nonetheless becoming profound....

After all, it was not Trump but Obama who first called for the country to shift from nation-building abroad to nation-building at home. Whatever their views on other parts of American internationalism, many Americans apparently agreed. Whereas 29 percent of Americans believed that promoting democracy abroad should be a key diplomatic priority in 2001, by 2013 the number was only 18 percent. When Trump slammed these aspects of American internationalism, he was pushing on an open door....

What Trump intuitively understood, however, was that the credibility of the experts had been badly tarnished in recent years.

As Tom Nichols has observed, the deference that experts command from the U.S. public has been declining for some time, and this is certainly the case in foreign policy....

These issues related to another, more fundamental contributor to the crisis of American internationalism: the rupturing of the basic political-economic bargain that had long undergirded that tradition. From its inception, internationalism entailed significant and tangible costs, both financial and otherwise, and the pursuit of free trade in particular inevitably disadvantaged workers and industries that suffered from greater global competition. As a result, the rise of American internationalism during and after World War II went hand-in-hand with measures designed to offset these costs by ensuring upward social mobility and rising economic fortunes for the voters—particularly working- and middle-class voters—being asked to bear them.... This bargain has gradually been fraying since as far back as the late 1970s, however, and in recent years it increasingly seems to have broken.

For the fact is that many Americans—particularly less-educated Americans—are not seeing their economic fortunes and mobility improve over time. Rather, their prospects have worsened significantly in recent decades....

Indeed, although there is plenty of public opinion polling that paints a reassuring picture of American views on trade and globalization, there are also clear indications that such a backlash is occurring. In 2016, a plurality of Americans (49 percent) argued that "U.S. involvement in the global economy is a bad thing because it lowers wages and costs jobs," a sentiment perfectly tailored to Trump's protectionist message....

More broadly, it is hard not to see concerns about economic insecurity looming large in the growing proportion of Americans who believe that the United States is overinvested internationally—and who therefore prefer for the "U.S. to deal with its own problems, while letting other countries get along as best they can." In 2013, 52 percent of Americans—the highest number in decades—agreed with a version of this statement. In 2016, the number was even higher at 57 percent.

In sum, American voters may still express fairly strong support for free trade and other longstanding policies in public opinion surveys. But it is simply impossible to ignore the fact that, among significant swaths of the population, there is nonetheless an unmistakable and politically potent sense that American foreign policy has become decoupled from the interests of those it is meant to serve.

And this point, in turn, illuminates a final strain that Trump's rise so clearly highlighted: the growing sense that American internationalism has become unmoored from American nationalism. American internationalism was always conceived as an enlightened expression of American nationalism, an approach premised on the idea that the wellbeing of the United States was inextricably interwoven with that of the outside world. But the inequities of globalization have promoted a tangible feeling among many voters that American elites are now privileging an internationalist agenda (one that may suit cosmopolitan elites just fine) at the expense of the wellbeing of "ordinary Americans."

> Likewise, insofar as immigration from Mexico and Central America has depressed wages for low-skilled workers and fueled concerns that the white working class is being displaced by other demographic groups, it has fostered beliefs that the openness at the heart of the internationalist project is benefitting the wrong people. "Many Jacksonians," writes Walter Russell Mead of the coalition that brought Trump to power, "came to believe that the American establishment was no longer reliably patriotic."
>
> What does all this tell us about the future of American internationalism? The answer involves elements of both interpretations offered here. It is premature to say that a "new isolationism" is taking hold, or that Americans are systematically turning away from internationalism, in light of the idiosyncrasies of Trump's victory and the fact that so many key aspects of internationalism still poll fairly well. Yet no serious observer can contend that American internationalism is truly healthy given Trump's triumph, and the 2016 election clearly revealed the assorted maladies that had been quietly eroding its political vitality. American internationalism may not be slipping into history just yet, but its long-term trajectory seems problematic indeed.[102]

Later in May 2017, this same foreign policy specialist stated in a different blog post that

> On the one hand, it is easy to make the case that Trump's election was more of a black-swan, anomalous event than something that tells us much about the state of public opinion on foreign policy. The election campaign was dominated not by deeply substantive foreign policy debates, in this interpretation, but by the historic unpopularity of both candidates. And of course, Trump was decisively defeated in the popular vote by a card-carrying member of the U.S. foreign policy establishment—and he might well have lost decisively in the electoral college, too, if not for then-FBI Director James Comey's intervention and a series of other lucky breaks late in the campaign.
>
> There is, moreover, substantial polling data to suggest that American internationalism is doing just fine. According to surveys taken during the 2016 campaign, 65 percent of Americans believed that globalization was "mostly good" for the United States, and 89 percent believed that maintaining U.S. alliances was "very or somewhat effective at achieving U.S. foreign policy goals." Support for U.S. military primacy and intervention against threats such as the Islamic State also remained strong, as did domestic backing for the United Nations and the Paris climate change accords.
>
> As an extensive analysis of this polling data by the Chicago Council concluded, there does not seem to be any wholesale public rejection of American internationalism underway: "The American public as a whole still thinks that the United States is the greatest and most influential country in the world, and bipartisan support remains strong for the country to take an active part in world affairs." And indeed, insofar as Trump has had to roll back some of the more radical aspects of his "America first" agenda since becoming president—tearing up the North American Free Trade Agreement, declaring NATO obsolete, launching a trade war with China—he seems to be adjusting to this reality.
>
> That's the good news. But on the other hand, American internationalism simply cannot be all that healthy, because Trump did win the presidency by running on the most anti-internationalist platform seen in decades. American voters may not have been voting for that platform itself, but at the very least they did not see Trump's radical views on foreign policy as disqualifying. And as one digs deeper into the state of American internationalism today, it becomes clear that there are indeed real problems with that tradition—problems that Trump exploited on his road to the White House, and that are likely to confront his successors as well.

[102] Hal Brands, "Is American Internationalism Dead?" *War on the Rocks*, May 16, 2017.

Trump's rise has highlighted five key strains that have been weakening the political foundations of American internationalism for years now.

First, since the end of the Cold War, it has become harder for Americans to identify precisely why the United States must undertake such extraordinary exertions to shape the global order. Without a pressing, easily identifiable global threat, in other words, it is harder to intuitively understand what American alliances, forward force deployments, and other internationalist initiatives are for.

Second, although U.S. internationalism has proven very valuable in shaping a congenial international system, it is undeniable that aspects of that tradition—such as nation building missions in Afghanistan and Iraq—have proven costly and unrewarding in recent years. Not surprisingly, many Americans are thus questioning if the resources that the country devotes to foreign policy are being used effectively. This disillusion has shown up in public opinion polling: Whereas 29 percent of Americans believed that promoting democracy should be a key foreign policy objective in 2001, only 18 percent thought so in 2013.

Third, the credibility of the U.S. foreign policy establishment has also been weakened over the past 15 years. This is because policy elites in both parties pursued policies—the Iraq War under President George W. Bush, the subsequent withdrawal from Iraq and creation of a security vacuum in that country under President Barack Obama—that led to high-profile disasters. As a result, when Trump—who actually supported the invasion of Iraq before later opposing it—answered establishment criticism by pointing out that the establishment had brought the United States the Iraq War and the Islamic State, his rejoinder probably made a good deal of sense to many voters.

Fourth, U.S. internationalism has been weakened by the declining economic fortunes of the working and middle classes—a phenomenon that has made those groups less enthusiastic about bearing the costs and burdens associated with U.S. foreign policy. The pursuit of globalization and free trade has not been the primary culprit here—issues like automation and the transition to a postindustrial economy have been more important. But it is undeniable that globalization has exacerbated economic insecurity for the working class in particular, and China's integration into the global economy has taken a significant toll on manufacturing and related employment in the United States. During the Republican primaries, in fact, 65 percent of Trump voters believed that U.S. involvement in the international economy was a bad thing. During the general election, Trump overperformed in areas hardest hit by competition from international trade.

Fifth, and finally, one can discern among many voters an amorphous but powerful sense that U.S. internationalism has become unmoored from U.S. nationalism—that America's governing classes have pursued an agenda that has worked nicely for the well-to-do, but brought fewer benefits to the ordinary Americans whom U.S. foreign policy is meant to serve. This dynamic is evident in the 57 percent of the population who believed in 2016 that the United States was focusing too much on other countries' problems and not enough on its own. Cracks are growing in the political consensus that has traditionally undergirded American internationalism—cracks through which Trump was able emerge in 2016.

The bottom line is that American internationalism is not dead yet, but that it faces serious longterm maladies that could, perhaps, ultimately prove fatal.[103]

[103] Hal Brands, "Can U.S. Internationalism Survive Trump?" *Foreign Policy*, May 25, 2017. Similarly, this same foreign policy specialist, along with a co-author, state in a June 21, 2017, that

> making such a commitment [i.e., a commitment to actively influence global affairs] requires confronting the question of whether the American public is willing to sustain such a role. There are many reasons it should be willing to do so; U.S. engagement has been vital to shaping an international order in which America has been relatively secure and enormously prosperous. Yet

Also in May 2017, a different foreign policy specialist stated:

> When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the bipartisan foreign-policy establishment was united in seeing a historic opportunity to deepen the liberal order and extend it into the rest of the world. Yet the public had always been skeptical about this project. Jacksonians in particular believed that American global policy was a response to the Soviet threat, and that once the threat had disappeared, the U.S. should retrench.
>
> After World War I, and again at the start of the Cold War, Americans had held great debates over whether and how to engage with the world. But that debate didn't happen after the Soviet collapse. Elites felt confident that the end of history had arrived, that expanding the world order would be so easy and cheap it could be done without much public support. Washington thus embarked on a series of consequential foreign-policy endeavors: enlarging the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include much of Central and Eastern Europe, establishing the World Trade Organization in the mid-'90s, promoting a global democracy agenda whenever possible.
>
> American voters have never shared the establishment's enthusiasm for a foreign policy aimed at transforming the post-Cold War world. When given the choice at the ballot box, they consistently dismiss experienced foreign-policy hands who call for deep global engagement. Instead they install untried outsiders who want increased focus on issues at home. Thus Clinton over Bush in 1992, Bush over Gore in 2000, Obama over McCain in 2008, and Trump over Clinton in 2016.
>
> Today the core problem in American foreign policy remains the disconnect between the establishment's ambitious global agenda and the limited engagement that voters appear to support. As Washington's challenges abroad become more urgent and more dangerous, the divide between elite and public opinion grows more serious by the day.
>
> The establishment is now beginning to discover what many voters intuitively believed back in the 1990s. Building a liberal world order is much more expensive and difficult than it appeared in a quarter-century ago, when America was king. Further, Washington's foreign-policy establishment is neither as wise nor as competent as it believes itself to be.
>
> Meantime, the world is only becoming more dangerous.... And the U.S. still lacks a strong consensus on what its foreign policy should be.
>
> Washington's foreign policy needs more than grudging acquiescence from the American people if it is to succeed. How to build broad support? First, the Trump administration should embrace a new national strategy that is more realistic than the end-of-history fantasies that came at the Cold War's conclusion. The case for international engagement should be grounded in the actual priorities of American citizens. Second, Mr. Trump and other political leaders must make the case for strategic global engagement to a rightfully skeptical public.
>
> For much of the establishment, focusing on the Trump administration's shortcomings is a way to avoid a painful inquest into the failures and follies of 25 years of post-Cold War foreign policy. But Mr. Trump's presidency is the result of establishment failure rather than

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the public mood is nonetheless ambivalent. Whether a consensus in support of a robust American internationalism can be resolidified remains to be seen. What is clear is that supporters of that tradition will have to go back to first principles if they are to make a compelling case; they must once again articulate the basic logic of policies that American internationalists have long taken for granted.

(Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, "America and the Geopolitics of Upheaval," *National Interest*, June 21, 2017.)

> the cause of it. Until the national leadership absorbs this lesson, the internal American crisis will deepen as the world crisis grows more acute.[104]

In an April 2017 blog post, one foreign policy specialist stated:

> Every 20 years or so—the regularity is a little astonishing—Americans hold a serious debate about their place in the world. What, they ask, is going wrong? And how can it be fixed? The discussion, moreover, almost always starts the same way. Having extricated itself with some success from a costly war, the United States then embraces a scaled-down foreign policy, the better to avoid overcommitment. But when unexpected challenges arise, people start asking whether the new, more limited strategy is robust enough. Politicians and policy makers, scholars and experts, journalists and pundits, the public at large, even representatives of other governments (both friendly and less friendly) all take part in the back-and-forth. They want to know whether America, despite its decision to do less, should go back to doing more—and whether it can.
>
> The reasons for doubt are remarkably similar from one period of discussion to the next. Some argue that the U.S. economy is no longer big enough to sustain a global role of the old kind, or that domestic problems should take priority. Others ask whether the public is ready for new exertions. The foreign-policy establishment may seem too divided, and a viable consensus too hard to reestablish. Many insist that big international problems no longer lend themselves to Washington's solutions, least of all to military ones. American "leadership," it is said, won't work so well in our brave new world....
>
> Polls suggested [in 2016] that [the public], too, was open to new approaches—but unsure how to choose among them. In May 2016, the Pew Research Center reported that 70 percent of voters wanted the next president to focus on domestic affairs rather than foreign policy. In the same poll, Pew found that majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents favored policies that would keep the United States "the only military superpower." Not for the first time, it seemed that Americans wanted to have it all....
>
> ... the two halves of Trump's formula worked together better than critics appreciated. He sensed that the public wanted relief from the burdens of global leadership without losing the thrill of nationalist self-assertion. America could cut back its investment in world order with no whiff of retreat. It would still boss others around, even bend them to its will. Trump embraced Bernie Sanders's economics without George McGovern's geopolitics. Of self-identified conservative Republicans, 70 percent told Pew last year that they wanted the U.S. to retain its global military dominance. "Make America Great Again" was a slogan aimed right at them.
>
> Trump's more-and-less strategy also helped him with those who wanted a bristly, muscular America but did not want endless military involvements. Rejecting "nation building" abroad so as to focus on the home front was Trump's way of assuring voters that he knew how to avoid imperial overstretch. He offered supporters the glow of a Ronald Reagan experience—without the George W. Bush tab.[105]

Commenting on the 2016 Charles Koch Institute-Center for the National Interest poll discussed earlier, a December 2016 blog post from staff of *The National Interest* stated

> With the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, the American public opted for change. A new poll from the Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest on America and foreign affairs indicates that the desire for a fresh start may be particularly pronounced in the foreign policy sphere. In many areas the responses align with what Donald Trump was saying during the presidential campaign—and in other areas, there are

[104] Walter Russell Mead, "A Debate on America's Role—25 Years Late," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2017.

[105] Stephen Sestanovich, "The President Is Preventing the Foreign-Policy Debate America Needs To have," *Defense One*, April 13, 2017.

> a number of Americans who don't have strong views. There may be a real opportunity for Trump to redefine the foreign policy debate. He may have a ready-made base of support and find that other Americans are persuadable.
>
> Two key questions centering on whether U.S. foreign policy has made Americans more or less safe and whether U.S. foreign policy has made the rest of the world more or less safe show that a majority of the public is convinced that—in both cases—the answer is that it has not. 51.9 percent say that American foreign policy has not enhanced our security; 51.1 percent say that it has also had a deleterious effect abroad. The responses indicate that the successive wars in the Middle East, ranging from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya, have not promoted but, rather, undermined a sense of security among Americans.
>
> The poll results indicate that this sentiment has translated into nearly 35 percent of respondents wanted a decreased military footprint in the Middle East, with about 30 percent simply wanting to keep things where they stand. When it comes to America's key relationship with Saudi Arabia, 23.2 percent indicate that they would favor weaker military ties, while 24 percent say they are simply unsure. Over half of Americans do not want to deploy ground troops to Syria. Overall, 45.4 percent say that they believe that it would enhance American security to reduce our military presence abroad, while 30.9 percent say that it should be increased.
>
> That Americans are adopting a more equivocal approach overall towards other countries seems clear. When provided with a list of adjectives to describe relationship, very few Americans were prepared to choose the extremes of friend or foe. The most popular term was the fairly neutral term "competitor." The mood appears to be similarly ambivalent about NATO. When asked whether the U.S. should automatically defend Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia in a military conflict with Russia, 26.1 percent say that they neither agree nor disagree. 22 percent say that they disagree and a mere 16.8 percent say that they agree. Similarly, when queried about whether the inclusion of Montenegro makes America safer, no less than 63.6 percent say that they don't know or are not sure. About Russia itself, 37.8 percent indicate they see it as both an adversary and a potential partner. That they still see it as a potential partner is remarkable given the tenor of the current media climate.
>
> The poll results underscore that Americans are uneasy with the status quo. U.S. foreign policy in particular is perceived as a failure and Americans want to see a change, endorsing views and stands that might previously have been seen as existing on the fringe of debate about America's proper role abroad. Instead of militarism and adventurism, Americans are more keen on a cooperative world, in which trade and diplomacy are the principal means of engaging other nations. 49 percent of the respondents indicate that they would prioritize diplomacy over military power, while 26.3 percent argue for the reverse. 54 percent argue that the U.S. should work more through the United Nations to improve its security. Moreover, a clear majority of those polled stated that they believed that increasing trade would help to make the United States safer. In a year that has been anything but normal, perhaps Trump is onto something with his talk of burden sharing and a more critical look at the regnant establishment foreign policy that has prevailed until now.[106]

In December 2016, two Australian foreign policy analysts stated:

> The 2016 presidential election demonstrated the rise of a "restraint constituency" in American politics that openly questions Washington's bipartisan post-Cold War pursuit of a grand strategy of primacy or liberal hegemony. This constituency has been animated by the return of the Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy, most notably in the candidacy of Donald Trump, which directly questions the benefits of alliance relationships

[106] TNI [The National Interest] Staff, "Is Trump's Foreign Policy the New Mainstream?" *National Interest*, December 22, 2016.

> as well as U.S. underwriting of an open global economic system. It also stresses the need for the United States to act unilaterally in defense of its core foreign policy interests. The resurgence of the Jacksonian tradition will make it difficult for the next President to reestablish a foreign policy consensus and combat perceptions of American decline."[107]

In a June 2016 blog post, one foreign policy specialist (the same one quoted above for the April 2017 blog post) stated:

> Few things make professors happier than thinking that the public has finally begun to agree with them. No surprise, then, that John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard open their article in Foreign Affairs[108]—in which they propose a new "grand strategy" for the United States—by observing that "[f]or the first time in recent memory, a large number of Americans" are saying they want the same thing. The ideas Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt propose—big cuts in defense spending, withdrawals from Europe and the Middle East, a focus on China as our only real rival—deserve the discussion they will surely get. But let's put the policy merits to one side. Are the professors right to say they've now got the people behind them?
>
> The data say no. Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt rely on an April Pew poll that found that 57% of Americans want the U.S. "to deal with its own problems." But this is what most Americans always say, no matter what "grand strategy" their leaders follow. In 2013, 80% of Pew respondents wanted to "concentrate more on our own national problems." Twenty years earlier, 78% said the same thing. And 20 years before that, 73%. On this particular question, the number today (it's dropped to 69% since 2013) is lower than it has been "in recent memory," but it's always high....
>
> Pew's pollsters, of course, ask many different questions, and the results don't always seem entirely consistent. Still, one trend is very clear: Fewer Americans are saying they want a less activist foreign policy. Three years ago, 51% said the U.S. did "too much in helping solve world problems." This year, 41% did. This pattern—a 10-point drop in three years—holds among Democrats, Republicans, and independents.
>
> Ask questions with a sharper policy focus, and the result is steady—sometimes growing—support for a strong U.S. global role. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents favor policies that would keep the U.S. "the only military superpower." Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt, by contrast, want to cut defense spending. Only 24% of Americans agree. (That share, also, is down from five years ago, and support for an increase has almost tripled, from 13% to 35%.) The professors want to pull all U.S. forces out of Europe and let our allies handle Russia on their own. Fine, but 77% of the American public thinks that NATO is good for the United States, and almost as many Americans (42%) view Russia as a "major threat" as see China that way (50%).[109]

[107] Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, "Understanding the Return of the Jacksonian Tradition," *ORBIS*, Vol. 61, Issue 1, Winter 2017: 13-26. (The quotation is from the article's abstract.)

[108] This blog post at this point includes a link to John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2016.

[109] Stephen Sestanovich, "Do Americans Want a New 'Grand Strategy' or Less Overseas Engagement?" *Wall Street Journal (Washington Wire/Think Tank)*, June 16, 2016.

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