THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONALISM

Volume II

A Collection of Essays from the Reagan Institute Strategy Group

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REAGAN INSTITUTE
STRATEGY GROUP

The Reagan Institute Strategy Group is committed to a core set of beliefs based on the timeless vision and principles of President Reagan: that American leadership, including military strength and economic engagement, is the best guarantor of peace, security, and prosperity; that America's national success is inextricably linked to the that of the free world; and that American values are universal, as freedom and human dignity are the birthright of all peoples regardless of their country of birth.

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"I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.

"And how stands the city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was 8 years ago. But more than that: After 200 years, two centuries, she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home."

- President Ronald Reagan's 1989 Farewell Address

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Introduction

Roger Zakheim & Rachel Hoff

Founded in 2019, the core principle of the Reagan Institute Strategy Group (RISG) is that America's role in the world is indispensable to preserving the free, open, and peaceful political and economic system that provides the foundation for how countries interact. Conversations about U.S. national security and foreign policy often become esoteric, and RISG is committed to stepping back to assess what is really at stake. In the context of rising threats from authoritarian competitors, the question of America's global leadership is crucial to the survival of the free world itself.

The Reagan Institute is dedicated to promoting President Reagan's timeless principles as a lens through which to view the challenges we face today. That is why the Institute gathered a group of leading foreign policy and national security thinkers and practitioners to discuss and debate the way forward. The essays collected here reflect the discussions that took place at the second RISG retreat in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 2021.

A shared set of beliefs guides deliberation among members of the Reagan Institute Strategy Group: that American leadership, including military strength and economic engagement, is the best guarantor of peace, security, and prosperity; that America's national success is inextricably linked to the that of the free world; and that American values are universal, as freedom and human dignity are the birthright of all peoples regardless of their country of birth.

The goal of RISG is to chart a course for reviving a Reaganesque approach to foreign policy and national security. Any set of policy ideas is only valuable insofar as it is politically viable. And the end of one presidential administration and beginning of another offers the chance to reflect, review, and regroup. Our hope is that the following essays will continue the conversation about the principles and policies that will promote a world where peace, freedom, and opportunity will flourish—but also that are responsive to the shifting political environment.

Fundamentally, the Reagan Institute Strategy Group is not a nostalgia exercise yearning for a bygone era that will not return. Rather, it is a forward-looking endeavor that focuses on the new ideas, priorities, and frameworks needed for meeting the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century based on the timeless vision and values of our 40th President.

What is the Role of Human Rights in Strategic Competition?

Elliott Abrams

The role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy in an era of great-power competition is not a new question, but one with which the Reagan administration was quite familiar. Since Ronald Reagan, the president most deeply concerned with the advance of human rights was George W. Bush, and additional lessons can be learned from his successes and failures. After this essay, you will find the 1981 memo that I wrote for Secretary of State Alexander Haig and President Reagan at the request of Judge William Clark, who was then the deputy secretary of state, on what a conservative human rights policy during the Cold War should look like. You will note some continuing themes, which is another way of saying I have perhaps not learned very much in the last 40 years. I would urge you to read this memo first, because it argues the ideological case for a human rights policy, then and now. The final sentence reads: "The goal of human rights policy is to improve human rights performance whenever we sensibly can; and to demonstrate, by acting to defend liberty and speaking honestly about its enemies, that the difference between East and West is the crucial political distinction of our times."

The most important practical guidelines are, in my view, clear.

First, programs, stated policies, and spending are not as important as what the military might call "commander's intent." Human rights policy under President Donald Trump was undermined by the view on the part of many offenders that the policy stated in speeches (both his and those of many other top officials) did not really reflect the president's policy preferences and that offenses would not carry any real cost. With Presidents Reagan and Bush, offenders understood

that the human rights policies were genuine and that offenses would carry a cost in relations with the presidents personally and with the United States more generally.

President Reagan negotiated with the Soviets even as he denounced their system; or, better put, because he denounced their system, he had the ability to negotiate with them. No one was in any doubt about his principles or longer-term objectives. This lesson should certainly apply to Russia, China, and Iran today.

At the same time, we should avoid hypocrisy by criticizing only our opponents while treating the human rights abuses of our friends with silence. Then, we do not have a human rights policy but instead are simply weaponizing human rights as one tool among many to defeat opponents.

Second, the goal of the policy must be improvement in human rights practices rather than virtue signaling. There are several reasons for this. Dictators and other offenders are not stupid. They can tell when a policy is genuinely seeking a tangible improvement—for example, releases from prison, reopening newspapers, or ending torture—or when it is designed mostly to make the president and other U.S. politicians look good. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "Even a dog knows the difference between being kicked and being stumbled over." So do dictators. They can distinguish between serious efforts meant to improve a situation we view as bad but fixable and unserious, unattainable goals that amount to utopianism or a poorly concealed search for regime change.

This distinction implies that we must choose our targets carefully, because asking a government to take actions that amount to suicide is not a serious human rights policy. Even in the Soviet case, where President Reagan clearly believed that history would produce regime change, he did not pursue it as the goal of his human rights policy. He negotiated over things like getting individuals out of confinement and sought agreements with the Soviets, such as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act that created the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and included political, arms control, and human rights dimensions. In the Bush years, we approached the Saudi government about human rights with a similar approach. We did not press the Crown Prince who then ruled to hold free elections for a parliament or suggest that monarchy was an outmoded system. We looked for a door that was slightly open and found one: the abuses of the religious police. We argued that restrictions on worship for any people, including Christians, went against the crown prince's own belief in God and in the need all mankind has for worship. We knew that many Saudis agreed that the religious police were overstepping

and were abusive. Progress reining them in was made. Additionally, in the case of China, our ambassador during the Bush administration was able to get numerous dissidents freed. Again, we chose a realistic target.

In the case of Turkey in 1982, when the army ruled and there were many human rights abuses, we tried to reduce the use of torture. We worked with the military brass and told them we knew a lot of the abuse occurred in police stations. We told them this problem existed because the police were untrained. This approach was designed to appeal to the generals because it did not blame them, nor did it blame some kind of brutal national character. Instead, it confined the problem to the police and suggested ways forward that might put the United States and the Turkish army on the same side. Was this a perfect plan or a totally accurate description of the problem? No. But it was a realistic plan designed not to win applause but to make real progress.

This approach also means that speaking both publicly and privately must be weighed in every case and every country. Silence is obviously not a human rights policy, but sometimes the choice we will face is between effectiveness or publicity. In my earliest days as assistant secretary for human rights in 1982, I criticized our ambassador to Uruguay for silence when several democratic dissidents had been arrested. He called me and said, "I am talking to the army. I can get them out in a couple of days or weeks—but only if I shut up and negotiate. What do you want me to do? Do you want the speech or the objective?"

In the Reagan administration, we watched so-called human rights advocates on the left oppose the government of the Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte in El Salvador and back the FMLN—guerrillas backed by the USSR and Cuba. They wanted U.S. aid to Duarte stopped because the army was committing human rights abuses. Indeed, it was. Our policy was to reduce those abuses steadily while backing a democrat against Communist forces whose victory would have meant an end to any hope of human rights improvements. Our goal was not utopian; El Salvador was not and is not Costa Rica, much less the United States. But we hoped and worked for real improvements, and they came.

Third, we should always remember that China and Iran are not black boxes. Neither are they defined by the leadership of Xi Jinping and Ali Khamenei—nor even the Chinese Communist Party and the Revolutionary Guards. Vladimir Putin is not Russia. These are nations with populations, many of whom are on our side. That was one reason Presidents Reagan and Bush were optimists. What we

were asking for was what many Russian and Chinese and Iranian citizens were also seeking; our demands were their demands, and we were supporting them, not imposing our own values. This remains true today with respect to all three countries. These countries have all signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many countries have signed and now violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well. So again, we must be clear that our role is not to impose our values and practices but to support citizens in those countries in their own quest for freedom.

This last point has implications that lead to the fourth guideline: We should remember to insist on *accepted universal* rights, not controversial rights we established in our own country yesterday morning. I remember a conversation with a spokesman for Hungary's Viktor Orbán on immigration and the EU. He said, "Look, we are a tiny country. We are ten million and we are shrinking. We have a history, language, and culture we want to preserve and it will be difficult. The number of immigrants we want is actually zero. Is this a crime?" Similarly, to insist on our version of abortion rights or same-sex marriage strikes me more as cultural imperialism than defending human rights. But as Condoleezza Rice used to say, no one, in any culture, wants to hear the knock of the secret police at midnight coming to drag you or your child or spouse or parent away. There are indeed some universal values we can defend, and we should not constantly seek to redefine and expand basic human rights. In my view, our best guideline is our own Constitution and the ICCPR. The latter lists the following substantive rights: physical integrity, meaning the right to life and freedom from torture and slavery; liberty and security of the person, meaning freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and the right to court review of detention; due process, fair trials, and the presumption of innocence; political participation, including the right to vote; minority rights and equality before the law; and what we would call First Amendment rights, including freedom of assembly, religion, speech, thought, movement, and privacy.

The fifth guideline is that when we think about reflecting the demands of democratic dissidents and supporting them, that is exactly what we should do. We should support them, not pour money into fancy programs that pay for conferences and consultants or establish bureaucracies. People risk their freedom and their lives. If they are killed, who will help their families? If they are imprisoned, who will help their families, both while they are in prison and when they are freed and must reintegrate into society, politics, and family life? Sometimes people need money because they have lost their jobs. Sometimes a former prisoner or dissident, under awful threats and pressure, needs a few months outside to rest, regroup, and return to

normal life. In my view, this key strategy is something that we too often sell short. If you want to help dissidents, help the dissidents. Do not build an elaborate superstructure.

The sixth guideline is related to the idea of avoiding hypocrisy. That is, we should tell as much truth as we possibly can. When President Jimmy Carter visited Iran for New Year's Eve 1977, he toasted Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's "great leadership," and said, "This is a great tribute to you, your majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect and the admiration and love which your people give to you." Now that is hypocrisy. In March 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family." It ought to be possible to say things about human rights abusers that are true, such as his government is very helpful in many U.S. policy goals, seeks stability in a region where there is a high chance of war, or manages the Suez Canal with neutrality and efficiency. Why must we fawn? Contrast these examples with the way President Reagan treated Augusto Pinochet, with whom we maintained good relations while clearly signaling the time had come for him to allow a free election in Chile and relinquish power if he lost.

Finally, the seventh guideline is to seek multilateral support. It really is much better when a protest against or reaction to human rights abuses comes from twenty democracies not one or two. Speaking in concert with other democracies greatly diminishes the opportunity for the abusers to say this is merely American imposition of foreign values or simple lies from Washington.

These seven guidelines are derived from what I think were some successful past Republican human rights policies. Notably, they are only valuable in a particular context: that we think a U.S. human rights policy is itself a thing of value. In my view, the association of the United States with liberty is one of our greatest assets. A foreign policy of pure realpolitik will not in the long run sustain public support, nor would it utilize well this asset of the United States: the admiration for our open society and respect for law, justice, and human rights that still leads so many of the world's best and brightest to seek to become Americans.

Human rights are a part of our foreign policy because they are the reason our nation was created. We are now in a great competition with China. Why do Americans fear a Chinese victory, and why should the world? Not because we will not be as rich if they win. What can we say to rally other nations to our side? That we have more cars or make better cars? Neither may be true or matter much. Needless to say, nationalism matters, and that is why the Vietnamese

regime, for example, fears Chinese domination, as does everyone else in Asia. Nonetheless, just as in the Cold War, the essential difference is whether human rights exist and are respected.

As we seek allies in our competition against China, Russia, and Iran, it is obvious that we will find some regimes on our side that are not democratic or that abuse human rights. How do we deal with them? With the skill that President Reagan showed, I hope, and perhaps with these seven guidelines in mind. Republicans should not favor utopian foreign policy. We should favor a policy that is both principled and practical, designed to advance human rights in the real world, respectful of our own political traditions, and reflective of the system of liberty under law that Americans enjoy and that so many brave people around the world are risking so much to achieve.

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Washington, October 26, 1981

SUBJECT: Reinvigoration of Human Rights Policy

Overall Political Goals

Human rights is at the core of our foreign policy, because it is central to America's conception of itself. This nation did not "develop." It was ***created***, with specific political purposes in mind. It is true that as much as America invented "human rights," conceptions of liberty invented America. It follows that "human rights" isn't something we add on to our foreign policy, but is its very purpose: the defense and promotion of liberty in the world. This is ***not*** merely a rhetorical point: ***We will never maintain wide public support for our foreign policy unless we can relate it to American ideals and to the defense of freedom***. Congressional belief that we have no consistent human rights policy threatens to disrupt important foreign policy initiatives, such as aid to El Salvador. In fact, human rights has been one of the main directions of domestic attack on the Administration's foreign policy.

East-West Relations and the Battle for Western Opinion

"Americans don't fight and die for a second car or fancy refrigerator. They will fight for ideas, for the idea of freedom."

- Representative Millicent Fenwick

"Human Rights"—meaning political rights and civil liberties—gives us the best opportunity to convey what is ultimately at issue in our

contest with the Soviet bloc. The fundamental difference between us is not in economic or social policy, but in our attitudes toward freedom. ***Our ability to resist the Soviets around the world depends in part on our ability to draw this distinction and persuade others of it.***

Neutralism in Europe or Japan, or a sagging of spirit here at home, results in part from fear of Soviet military might and fear that we do not or will not have the power to resist. But—particularly in the younger generation—its cause lies even more in ***relativism***, in a refusal to acknowledge the distinctions between them and us. Why arm, and why fight, if the two superpowers are morally equal? ***Our human rights policy is at the center of our response, and its audience is not only at home but in Western Europe and Japan, and among electorates elsewhere.*** We must continue to draw that central distinction in international politics—between free nations and those that are not free. ***To fail at this will ultimately mean failure in staving off movement toward neutralism in many parts of the West.*** That is why a credible US policy in this area is so vitally important. Our new policy should convey a sense that US foreign policy as a whole is a positive force for freedom and decency in the long run.

Two-track Policy

I recommend a two-track policy, positive as well as negative, to guide our rhetoric and our policy choices. On the ***positive track we should take the offensive:***

—Expounding our beliefs and opposing the USSR in the UN, CSCE and other bodies;

—Hitting hard at abuses of freedom and decency by communist nations;

—Reinforcing international moral and legal standards whenever possible. (We can help by responding strongly to outrages against our citizens and diplomats and by undertaking a serious program against terrorism.)

—Restoring our reputation as a reliable partner for our friends, so as to maximize the influence of our quiet diplomacy.

On the ***negative track, we must respond to serious abuses.*** It is clear that human rights is not the largest element in bilateral relations. It must be balanced against US economic and security interests. It must take into account the pressures a regime is under

and the nature of its enemies. We must be ***honest*** about this. We should not, if Pakistan or Argentina is abridging freedom, say it is not; we should instead say (if it is) that it is and that we regret it and oppose it. Then we can add that in the case in question, terrorism or revolution or US security interests, or whatever, are present and make a cutoff of aid or arms or relations a bad idea. We should note the words the Hippocratic oath addresses to would-be intervenors, "First do no harm." It does not help human rights to replace a bad regime with a worse one, or a corrupt dictator with a zealous Communist politburo.

We have to be prepared to pay a price. In most ***specific cases*** taken alone, the need for good bilateral relations will seem to outweigh our broad concerns for freedom and decency. Nevertheless, it is a major error to subordinate these considerations in each case—because ***taken together*** these decisions will destroy our policy. They will therefore feed the view that we don't care about violations of human rights and will undercut our efforts to sway public opinion at home and abroad. ***If we act as if offenses against freedom don't matter in countries friendly to us, no one will take seriously our words about Communist violations***, and few abroad will take seriously our argument that our society (and our military effort) are dedicated to preserving freedom.

In practice this means that we must, in the Multilateral Development Banks, abstain or vote against friendly countries on human rights grounds if their conduct merits it, although we should also motivate further improvement by voting "yes" when there has been substantial progress. It also means that in highly controversial areas such as crime control equipment, we should not issue licenses in questionable cases. (While there will be exceptions, this is a political rather than a security issue: this equipment is readily available on the market and those who need it can get it, so that our decision will not hurt other nations' security but can powerfully undercut our human rights policy.)

Dealing With The Soviets

We must also be prepared to give human rights considerations serious weight in our dealings with the Soviet Union. The Soviets are a special case, for they are the major threat to liberty in the world. Human rights must be central to our assault on them, if we are to rally Americans and foreigners to resist Soviet blandishments or fight Soviet aggression. But to be seen as serious we must raise human rights issues in our discussions with the Soviets. In forums such as the UN, we must address issues such as abuse of psychiatry and restrictions on emigration. With Soviet or Soviet-sponsored

invasions (in Afghanistan and Kampuchea) under attack in the UN, with Poles demanding political freedom, with Soviet CW violations coming to light, now is the time to press the issue of Soviet human rights violations.

A human rights policy means trouble, for it means hard choices which may adversely affect certain bilateral relations. At the very least, we will have to speak honestly about our friends' human rights violations and justify any decision that other considerations (economic, military, etc.) are determinative. There is no escaping this without destroying the policy, for otherwise what would be left is simply coddling friends and criticizing foes. Despite the costs of such a real human rights policy, ***it is worth doing and indeed it is essential.*** We need not only a military response to the Soviets, which can reassure European and Asian allies and various friends around the world. We also need an ideological response, which reminds our citizens and theirs what the game is all about and why it is worth the effort. We aren't struggling for oil or wheat or territory but for political liberty. The goal of human rights policy is to improve human rights performance whenever we sensibly can; and to demonstrate, by acting to defend liberty and speaking honestly about its enemies, that the difference between East and West is the crucial political distinction of our times.

What is the Role of Human Rights in Strategic Competition?

A Response from Jakub Grygiel

The rivalry between the United States and predatory states such as Russia and China is about power as well as its purpose. The winner of the competition in a region or over a particular state not only advances its power but also extends its vision of how to organize the state, how to set up the economy, and what people can practice in the public square. Joseph Stalin's claim that "everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach" continues to carry some truth, even though the imposition of an authoritarian system is practically and morally different from the establishment of a democracy. The core point remains: Power is never devoid of some purpose.

Our purpose is profoundly different from that of our geopolitical rivals. At the heart of that difference is the question of the proper role of the state in relation to its citizens. Our republic is a polity of, by, and for the citizens, while for our rivals, the people are subservient to the state. Neither Moscow nor Beijing has a global ideological appeal akin to that of their Communist predecessors, but they are authoritarian regimes that fear their citizens and seek to revise the international order—and undermine the domestic political order—of the American republic and of our allies. That we are fundamentally different is, therefore, not in doubt. Neither is the fact that, despite the relentless national flagellation by the Left, the United States and, more broadly, the Western world continue to represent a superior political and economic system stemming from a long tradition of natural law and legal frameworks, faith and reason, and political order and individual liberty.

The question is whether promoting this purpose through an emphasis on human rights in U.S. foreign policy will be as helpful as it was over

the course of the Cold War with the USSR. The short answer is yes, but with important caveats. Human rights, as commonly conceived now, are often in direct opposition to the constitutional principles of the American republic and the universal aspirations to liberty—and consequently undercut our ability to compete with our geopolitical enemies.

The Strategic Advantage of Natural Rights

There are two main reasons why the United States should, as one of the purposes of its foreign policy, protect natural rights, which are the basic, fundamental rights shielding people from the state (I will address more on the distinction between natural and human rights later). The first reason is that the United States is a republic founded on rights grounded in natural law that justified a rebellion and the creation of a new polity. Fundamental, unalienable rights that protect people from the state are inscribed in our founding documents, especially in the Declaration of Independence. These rights were considered then, as they are now, universal. That is, they are rights given to every person by God (not by the government) and that every state is called to respect. Hence, natural rights are an essential component of how the American republic ought to behave domestically and internationally.

This does not mean, of course, that the United States should be leading and bankrolling every revolt against tyrannical regimes in distant lands. Universal principles do not lose their validity when faced with the unfeasibility of their implementation. Nonetheless, ignoring them completely would be a violation of the political inheritance entrusted to us.

The second reason is practical. Our enemies—from Russia to China to Iran—represent various forms of tyrannies, and pointing out their violations of basic political rights is a useful tool to weaken their hold on power. It puts them on the defensive not just from us, but from their own people. The goal is to clarify that their political orders are based on brute force and fear rather than legitimacy and authority and that they are feared more than they are respected by their own people. Such a utilitarian reason of defending human rights does not diminish the moral standing of the United States; it is simply a benefit of being a republic that preserves liberty.

There are of course hard limits on what such an approach can achieve. Criticizing our rivals, and even punishing them when feasible, for violating natural rights—when they commit genocide, force abortion, or arrest critics, for example—will not necessarily result in China or Russia becoming friendly republics that guarantee

liberty to their people and engage in peaceful relations with us. There is no arc of history that inevitably leads to a convergence of political systems and to global commercial harmony, and we should not overestimate the geopolitical effects of a policy emphasizing basic natural rights. China will not be deterred because we hold the moral high ground; Russia will not stop its predations in Ukraine or the eastern Mediterranean because we oppose Vladimir Putin's violence against his critics. Even assuming that our rivals become democracies at some point in time, it is not a given—*pace* Kant and his democratic peace belief—that geopolitical competition and even war will vanish. Moral superiority is not a strategy of survival or victory, but it can be a valuable tool in great-power competition.

The Necessary Distinctions

There are also important questions that we, as conservatives, should ask ourselves when we advocate for human rights. The core problem is that "human rights" as a term, and thus as a policy, has lost focus and is increasingly defined not by our constitutional tradition but by leftist and postmodern ideological trends. As a result, not only do we end up pursuing policies abroad that are deeply divisive domestically, but we also undermine our ability to compete with our geopolitical rivals.

This leftward tilt is not new. The opposition to the idea of natural rights is ingrained in progressive ideology. It is sufficient to remember Woodrow Wilson, who wrote, "If you want to understand the real Declaration of Independence, do not repeat the preface." His objection to the preamble of that document arose from the view widely held among liberals that human rights are products of a generous state and not given to man by the Creator. According to such a vision, the purpose of the state—and increasingly of international institutions that claim to be the repositories of "universal values" of a global community—is to supply its citizens with a constantly evolving list of "rights" that are nothing more than particular grievances (as expressed by the rest of the Declaration, which Wilson liked). Such a vision subverts in a profound way the concept of rights, establishing the state as a domestic and international machine of social, economic, and cultural engineering. Rights become a justification for the pervasive intrusion of state power (and of international institutions) rather than a bulwark against state abuse.

In light of this difference in the meaning of human rights, three distinctions are particularly important for our foreign policy and our ability to keep our geopolitical rivals in check.

First, we should separate political rights from cultural, social, and

economic rights. Political rights describe freedoms *from* the state, limiting its power over the lives of the citizens (e.g., freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to a fair trial). They define liberty. Cultural, social, and economic rights are political goals that arise out of different national and ideological settings and require state intervention (e.g., the "rights" to health care, education, leisure time, and work). As Jeane Kirkpatrick called them, these are "letters to Santa Claus," and as such, they can be as infinite as our desires and must be provided by the state.

By conflating these rights, we undermine our ability to compete with rivals, as our experience during the Cold War demonstrates. President Ronald Reagan was clear that putting all these "rights" in the same basket—as President Jimmy Carter had done before him and President Barack Obama did more recently—was a dangerous and unnecessary concession to the Soviet Union and other leftist tyrannies. Authoritarian regimes are often very adept at fulfilling the nonpolitical "rights." Such regimes usually have no official unemployment, they offer "free" health care, they mandate education, and they manage housing. The fact that these so-called benefits are often of poor quality and despised by the population does not prevent such states from claiming to be at the forefront of "human rights" thus defined.

In fact, there may be an even a deeper contradiction. To pursue some of these goals, the state may violate some political rights because it arrogates to itself the right to decide what is education (violating freedom of speech, for instance), what is health care (violating freedom of religion), or where to build public housing (violating the right to property).

Moreover, when the United States promotes abroad these new "rights"—which are really products of a fashionable ideology du jour—the outcome is that we are seen as the enemy, not as friends. Pushing avant-garde "rights" that are not accepted fully even in the United States and are even less popular in many—perhaps a majority of—countries abroad is an enormous strategic blunder. It creates opportunities for our rivals who can present themselves as defenders of local traditions and religion against a cultural aggressor who seeks postmodern homogeneity. For instance, promoting "Pride Days" in Ukraine at U.S. taxpayers' expense makes us the enemy of much of what is an overwhelmingly Orthodox country, while Russia can become the friendly protector of tradition and religion. The Ukrainian babushka heading to the Uniate or Orthodox church will be more amenable to accepting Russian domination than this version of American "freedom."

Second, we should argue for the primacy of culture as the basis of liberty. Liberty is maintained by a set of institutions and separation of power, but these are empty shells if the citizens lack certain habits and virtues. The removal of a dictator, the rearrangement of state institutions, and the implementation of some processes such as elections are insufficient to allow for self-sustaining democratic governance. Democracy and liberty arise out of a culture based on virtues instilled by education and sustained by tradition and religion. As democracies can degenerate because of an educational system that does not instill virtues of responsibility or a deep patriotism, so we must be aware of the difficulty of establishing democratic institutions where the underlying culture necessary to sustain them is absent.

It is strange that the same conservatives who worry about the degeneration of culture undermined by woke ideologies and hollowed by historical lies at home ignore culture when it comes to democracy promotion abroad. The fragility of democratic order, including that of the American republic, revolves around the ability to preserve a core set of principles—a respect for natural rights, an admiration of our forefathers' sacrifices, or the reverence for eternal self-evident truths—that endure only when inlayed in culture. If our own culture is becoming a brittle foundation for democratic self-governance, we should be aware of the limitations of promoting democracy abroad in places where there is very shallow cultural underpinning for such a political regime. Universality of principles does not mean that they can be implemented universally.

Third, we should be open to various regimes and diverse versions of democracy supporting liberty. It is conceivable to have a monarchy that respects liberty. It is also feasible to have a democratic regime, with separated powers and consent of the governed, that does not share every fluid norm and political goal espoused by some international institution or by a nonexistent "global community." As mentioned above, democracies are stable and effective when they are grounded in tradition and cultures and are supported by the nation. That is, democracies are best when they are national—rooted in Edmund Burke's local and particular—rather than reflecting some uniform ideal version. Universality of principles does not mean uniformity of their political application.

Enforcing such uniformity weakens American security, especially when we deal with our democratic allies. They are all different, and we should respect and celebrate their differences and not impose a stilted uniformity on them. We rely on distant allies to be the first responders to threats emanating from Eurasia and to be the ramparts where we compete and fight with our rivals. Frontline allies, such

as Poland and Hungary in Europe or South Korea and Taiwan in Asia, will have variegated versions of democracy. They may differ on constitutional arrangements (e.g., who nominates judges or how governments are formed), what they consider to be essential to their political order (e.g., some will value and protect marriage, family, and life as foundational to their society), how they approach migration (e.g., they may actually build walls to preserve a national identity grounded in the same language and religion), or how they organize their media (e.g., many have state-run mass media).

Criticizing and sanctioning allies for alleged violations of what we may deem as "internationally accepted democratic norms" (itself a very fluid phrase that is redefined at breakneck speed, invariably by the Left) damages our security because it pushes allies and partners to be closer to our rivals than to us. Neither Russia nor China will sanction Hungary or Poland, for instance, for enacting pro-life laws or pro-family policies—not because Moscow or Beijing care particularly about these issues, but because they see them as a way to create wedges in the Western alliance. Those wedges become only deeper when we vociferously criticize and ostracize such allies. We are the cultural aggressors, while our geopolitical rivals, armed with money and economic incentives, become helpful defenders.

In order to be true to our political foundations and compete effectively with our geopolitical rivals, we should carefully preserve the concept and practice of natural rights, which are under attack from both foreign tyrannies afraid of their citizens' liberty and the domestic avant-garde proliferation of grievances masquerading as rights. There are deep and growing disagreements about the meaning of human rights, and it does not benefit U.S. foreign policy in an age of great-power competition to paper over them. These disagreements are not about the prudential timing of a particular policy but are fundamental and concern both the concept and the implementation of human rights.

Foreign Policy and the GOP: What Comes After the Trump Administration?

Will Inboden

On September 2, 1987, readers of the *New York Times, Washington Post,* and *Boston Globe* opened their newspapers to find a full-page "open letter" from New York City real estate developer Donald J. Trump. Addressed "To the American People" and titled "There's nothing wrong with America's Foreign Defense Policy that a little backbone can't cure," it was a broadside against President Ronald Reagan's national security policies. Trump complained, "For decades, Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the United States. ...The saga continues unabated as we defend the Persian Gulf, an area of only marginal significance to the United States for its oil supplies, but one upon which Japan and others are almost totally dependent. ... The world is laughing at America's politicians as we protect ships we don't own, carrying oil we don't need, destined for allies who won't help."[1]

The immediate context was Reagan's decision to reflag Kuwaiti oil tankers under U.S. Navy escort in the Persian Gulf to protect them from Iranian attacks. As a desperate Tehran lost ground in its war with Iraq, it sought to choke off the Gulf oil revenues that helped fund the Iraqi military and stymie the American, Japanese, and Western European economies by depriving them of Gulf petroleum shipments.

[1] This passage is adapted from my forthcoming book, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan in the White House and in the World.*

The larger context of the Trump lament reflected a fundamental difference with Reagan over the role of allies, trade, and America's role in the world. It shows that such competing visions of conservative foreign policy have been contested not just over the past four years but over the past 40 years. Indeed, the issue goes even further back to the dawn of the Cold War, when debates over Republican, and American, foreign policy featured internationalists such as President Dwight Eisenhower and Senator Arthur Vandenberg contending against the isolationism (nowadays known as "restraint") proffered by the likes of Senator Robert Taft Jr. In the 1970s, the Richard Nixon/Henry Kissinger/Gerald Ford wing of the GOP squared off against the Reagan insurgency over foundational issues such as détente, realpolitik, human rights, and a great-power contest against a Communist superpower, the Soviet Union.

The particulars of today's debates may have changed, but the themes and fault lines remain the same. Should the United States lead the free world and maintain a forward presence against adversaries or restrain itself to the hemispheric repose offered by two oceans? Are allies a net benefit or liability? Is free trade good or bad for America? Should the United States promote human rights and democracy in authoritarian countries, whether friend or foe? Does the United States spend too much or too little on defense? Should the United States seek to coexist with, compete with, or defeat a Communist great-power rival?

These questions arise amid major transitions in American foreign policy. Such shifts result from either major geopolitical shifts or domestic political realignments—and sometimes both in tandem. The combination of the return of great-power competition externally and the new populism within the GOP and new progressivism among Democrats internally recalls previous eras such as the 1890s, 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s. None of these decades are perfectly analogous with the present moment, but each is suggestive of the challenges and possibilities facing the United States—and conservative internationalism—today. The 1930s and early 1950s witnessed crests of isolationism; the 1930s and 1970s saw bouts of American decline and eroded geopolitical standing; the 1890s and 1930s brought domestic political realignments amid emerging great-power competitions; while the 1950s and 1970s heralded shifts in domestic politics amid Soviet bloc advances.

We should not let President Trump's outsized personality distort a clear reading of his influence on GOP foreign policy. Recent polling by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs shows that the foreign policy beliefs of Republican voters changed little during the Trump years. In sum, before Trump, during Trump, and after Trump, most GOP

voters remained generally internationalist, generally hawkish, and generally supportive of alliances and free trade. Similarly, there was and is a sizable minority of the Republican electorate holding more isolationist and protectionist convictions. The Reagan Institute's recent National Defense Survey reported similar findings.[2] In short, when it comes to foreign policy, President Trump serves more as a totem for a particular segment of the GOP than as a reshaper of GOP public opinion. The GOP electorate remains in play, and the internationalist wing still retains the largest segment of the base's support.

President Trump, the Trump Administration, and the Future of Conservative Foreign Policy

In any presidency there will be policy differences between the president and his top officials, differences among the top officials themselves, differences in the policies pursued at the beginning of the presidential term and those at its end, and even differences in the president's own mind as he wrestles with what to do. The Trump administration was no exception. If anything, the policy differences between President Trump and many of the appointees in his presidency were even more pronounced than other administrations. This further complicates any generalizations about "Trump administration foreign policy."

This analysis should be read in light of these distinctions, as it tries to evaluate the main features of Trump administration foreign and defense policies with both eyes on the future. It is illustrative rather than comprehensive. It aims foremost to provoke further discussion on the future of conservative foreign policy in the aftermath of the Trump era—whenever that "aftermath" will come to be.

The most consequential strategic innovation wrought by the Trump administration came in its recognition that a great-power competition is the primary strategic challenge facing the United States. This strategic paradigm should be preserved. The Trump administration, particularly former National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster and his team, deserves credit for stating this plainly and beginning to develop a strategy to address it. Even the Biden administration seems to have embraced this framework, a notable bipartisan validation (or at least a welcome nod to reality).

The main great-power peer competitor is, of course, China. The Trump administration should be lauded for both accelerating and

[2] See https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/05/27/trump-gop-foreign-policy-polling-490768 and https://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan-institute/centers/peace-through-strength/reagan-institute-national-defense-survey/.

cementing the strategic consensus that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is our main adversary and for beginning to reallocate resources and policies to address it. The CCP will almost certainly be the defining strategic threat for the next generation.

Within this framework, there are many unanswered questions and subsidiary policy challenges that a conservative foreign policy must address. First, what is the place of Russia in this great-power competition paradigm? Is it a threat of the same magnitude as China, a mere regional nuisance, or even a potential balancing partner against China? [For purposes of debate, this author inclines to a hawkish view that Russia—with its combination of nuclear arsenal, disinformation, and cyber assaults; aggression in its near abroad and in Syria; and malign intentions—poses a significant great-power threat to the United States.]

Second, what is our strategic goal toward China, and what means are we willing to employ to that end? On the former, is it to curtail China's aggressive external behavior, balance its regional hegemony, build an equitable trade relationship, or end the CCP's monopoly on power altogether? Numerous Asia experts and strategists in the Trump administration took up these questions and worked to answer them. These efforts, individual and collective, generated helpful insights and some effective policy lines but have not yet resulted in a consensus conservative strategy toward China. [Again, the author will tip his hand in favor of a near-term goal of curtailing China's aggressive behavior and an ultimate strategic goal of ending the CCP's monopoly on power.]

Third, what is the role of the broader Middle East, including Afghanistan, in the great-power competition with China? Is the region a tertiary distraction of "endless wars," draining resources and attention from the main event in the Indo-Pacific? Or is the Middle East an important theater in a global contest, home to vast energy reserves and shipping chokepoints critical to Asia and beyond, as well as a region important in its own right for reasons including Israel, terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction?

The Tools of Statecraft

One measure of an administration's foreign policy is its use of the tools of statecraft and the condition in which it leaves those instruments to its successor. In this respect, a signature Trump achievement that conservatives should continue is a restoration of national sovereignty, both as a building block of the international system and in particular as an American principle worth protecting. Sovereignty lies at the heart of self-government, accountable

behavior, and the nation-state as the basic unit of international politics. It clarifies and enables effective multilateral cooperation, participation in international organizations, enactment of treaty agreements, promotion of human rights and democracy, and other endeavors that skeptics of sovereignty sometimes distort.

Similarly, the Trump administration arrested the damaging defense budget cuts inflicted on the Pentagon by the Obama White House. While the Trump administration could have done more to restore defense spending to its needful levels—and done more to reposition the force for the competition with China—it nonetheless stopped the precipitous Pentagon decline that it had inherited.

In other areas the record is less salubrious. For example, President Trump held an impoverished view of American power that saw it merely in terms of industrial output and military strength. Both are essential; by themselves, they are also inadequate. Trump neglected other sources of American strength such as values, alliances, history, reliability, international leadership, and innovation. The net result weakened many of these tools and diminished American power and influence. In particular, America's alliances suffered under President Trump (with the notable exception of the U.S.–Israel relationship; even though Israel is not a formal treaty ally, Trump deserves credit for strengthening U.S.–Israel ties). Previous conservative presidents, Reagan foremost, appreciated what the United States' adversaries also know: America's alliances are a source of strength and asymmetric advantage. No other great power in the history of the world has enjoyed the alliance system that the United States has built and maintained for more than seven decades. Conservatives should not do any gratuitous favors for Beijing or Moscow by weakening our alliances.

However, the Trump administration did show creativity in wielding the economic arm of American power to great effect, particularly in its "maximum pressure" campaign toward Iran and its targeted sanctions and other tools of economic coercion against corporate entities of CCP state power such as Huawei. These innovations expanded the toolkit of non-kinetic coercive instruments and showed that some predictions of America's declining economic influence were exaggerated.

Another of President Trump's failures lay in a misalignment of force and diplomacy. Specifically, where President Trump extended diplomatic outreach, such as toward North Korea, he minimized or even abandoned the tools of coercion that could have strengthened that negotiating gambit. About the only good thing that can be said about Trump's North Korea policy is that it did not produce

worse results than the policies of other presidencies. Otherwise, it squandered U.S. leverage, sewed distrust with key allies such as Japan, helped solidify Kim Jong-Un's hold on power, and failed to curb North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles program.

On the flip side, when President Trump employed coercive tools, as he did with Iran, he failed to marshal an effective diplomatic effort. Although Tehran was perhaps a hopeless endeavor, he could have at least brought our European allies back aboard a multilateral pressure coalition. Similar deficiencies beset his policies toward Afghanistan, Turkey, and Russia. He signaled to the Taliban that he planned to withdraw all U.S. forces no matter what—thus undercutting his negotiators, marginalizing the beleaguered Afghan government, and assuring the Taliban that they need not make, or honor, any concessions (a policy that President Biden has, unfortunately, continued). He failed to retaliate against Russia for its election interference and failed to restore deterrence for its other aggressive actions. His desperation to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq and Syria conceded a free hand to Turkey against the Kurds, strengthened Bashar al-Assad, and benefitted Iran.

Although President Trump did enjoy foreign policy successes—for example, in midwifing the Abraham Accords or in trade negotiations updating the U.S.–Mexico–Canada trade agreement—they usually came when he aligned coercive tools with diplomacy.

On human rights and democracy, the Trump record is uneven. His administration's prioritization of international religious freedom and transcendently grounded human rights should be applauded. The State Department's Commission on Unalienable Rights was a worthy effort to recenter human rights policy and was unfairly distorted and maligned by its media and NGO critics. The Trump administration also mounted an admirable, albeit unsuccessful, effort to bring freedom to Venezuela and was right to designate China's depredations against Uyghurs Muslims as genocide. In other areas, President Trump gave too much of a pass—at times even succor—to dictators, whether foes such as Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong-Un, and Xi Jinping, or partners such as Mohammed bin Salman. Again, the record of our group's namesake shows that the United States is capable of pressing allies for democratic reform while preserving important economic and security cooperation. Recall the democratic transitions in the 1980s of South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, and other anti-Communist partners. This is a legacy that conservative internationalists should reclaim.

Two Parting Shots

First, President Trump's persistent efforts to foment divisions in the American body politic also damaged our national security by exacerbating rifts, undermining shared purpose, and creating opportunities for our adversaries (principally Russia and China) to exploit these divisions through social media mischief and other disinformation campaigns. To be sure, prominent Democratic politicians, the media, and other tribunes of the Left share much blame for these divisions too. However, conservatives should be focused on politically unifying the 60 to 70 percent of the country that identifies with the Right or Center, while honoring the Constitution and pursuing the common good for the entire nation. Conservatives should not unduly exacerbate divisions by pandering to a tribal base of just 25 to 30 percent of the electorate or by refusing to accept an election outcome and peaceful transfer of power.

Second, Americans are less concerned with whether their foreign policy is conducted by "elites" than with whether it succeeds. In the foreign policy realm, internecine disputes over the "establishment" and "outsiders" are silly distractions, unworthy of a great nation. Foreign policy positions are, by their nature, elite roles, whether they are held by people in the U.S. government in any presidential administration or at a policy think tank or university of any flavor. There are competent and incompetent elites, and there are honorable and unscrupulous ones. Let us encourage competence and honor. The American people, of all classes and backgrounds, deserve no less.

Foreign Policy and the GOP: What Comes After the Trump Administration?

A Response from Jamil Jaffer

Will Inboden's assessment of and recommendations for the future of GOP national security policy are, without a doubt, solid. He is, for example, exactly right we should preserve the strategic paradigm of great-power competition with China. Further, he is right that we should have a near-term goal of limiting China's aggressive behavior and a long-term goal of ending the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) monopoly on power. On Russia, he is likewise right to be deeply concerned about its nuclear capabilities, its use of cyberspace as a free-fire zone, its use of disinformation to stoke discontent in the United States and elsewhere, and its aggression in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Inboden is also right to call for a more aggressive U.S. posture toward Russia, although it is not clear that his characterization of Russia as a "great power" is accurate, given the relative size of the threat it poses to the United States as compared to China. And Inboden is likewise correct when he encourages the GOP to call for increased—and more China-focused—defense spending, as well as to advocate for a more robust use of our alliances in supporting our interests across the globe. When it comes to the twin notions that we need not choose between our values and our interests because they most often align with one another and that American hard power is most effective when used alongside a strengthened version of soft power, Inboden borrows a page from President Ronald Reagan, who effectuated just such policies.

Yet while the answers to the key questions Inboden asks at the beginning of his paper may be self-evident from a traditional Republican national security—and conservative internationalist—perspective, they nonetheless divide the political GOP today. For

example, there can be no question that the United States must lead the free world, rejecting the siren song of isolationism and maintaining a strong forward presence abroad to stave off wars before they approach our borders. However, many Republicans in Congress—and the former president—disagree. Many are prepared to retreat home and hope to hide from the world, relying on our two oceans for security.

There should likewise be little doubt in the minds of true conservative internationalists that allies are a net benefit, particularly when we make common cause with them around our shared interests, as traditional Republican national security leaders have done for three generations. Yet the former president mocked nearly all our allies and pushed them away on a regular basis. And yes, it is true, free trade is good for America—as long as it is truly free and fair. Many GOP members in Congress, however, question this approach and wish for a return to a mercantilist past. To be sure, a balanced trade policy that includes a strong industrial policy for critical technologies is appropriate (particularly when it comes to China, which regularly flouts international norms). However, the approach of many Republicans to toss away free trade like a passing fad is truly a mistake.

Indeed, Inboden's hopeful assessment at the core of his paper—that conservative internationalism remains a highly viable near-term concept for the modern political GOP—is one that may, unfortunately, be proven wrong, at least for now. Indeed, if President Donald Trump (or someone that shares his penchant for isolationism and populism) becomes the next Republican president, we ought to be prepared for conservative internationalism and traditional Republican national security policy to face an even longer night in the wilderness.

Inboden points to polling numbers that purport to show traditional national security views continue to hold sway among the self-described Republican base. However, these same Republican voters have overwhelmingly supported a presidential candidate for two election cycles (and may for a third time), who simply does not hold the majority (or perhaps even a handful) of those views.

For example, President Trump—just like Democratic Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden and self-described Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders—believes fervently in ending all "endless wars." This view is most assuredly *not* Republican national security orthodoxy, nor is it grounded in conservative

internationalism. Republicans generally believe in fighting wars until they are won, particularly the type of wars like the Global War on Terrorism that have kept us relatively safe at home for two decades. And conservative internationalists certainly do not leave our allies—who have increasingly fought (and won) our wars for us—out in the cold. Yet, just like President Obama before him and President Biden after him, that is exactly what President Trump did. By doubling down on getting American troops out of Afghanistan while our European allies picked up the slack, each of these presidents left our Afghan allies to hang and our European colleagues holding together what little there was left to preserve. Likewise in Iraq, President Trump claimed credit for the destruction of ISIS's territorial caliphate yet proceeded to abandon the Kurds (who actually fought and won that conflict for us) to satisfy an erstwhile authoritarian ally. This move has shades of President Obama's encouragement of the Syrian uprising and other movements across the Middle East and North Africa, including the Iranian Green movement, only to abandon them when the going got tough. And let us not forget that it was President Trump—not some antimilitary, socialist do-gooder—who suggested we should pull our troops out of South Korea and Germany. Again, these are hardly traditional Republican positions.

President Biden will now have to bear the heat of his ultimate decision to complete the Obama-initiated and Trump-supported retreat in Central Asia and the political costs of bailing out of Afghanistan in the most tone-deaf way possible—on the 20th anniversary of the murder of 2,996 Americans. However, we should be clear that it was a Republican president, Donald Trump, who tried hard to get us out even sooner and who would have expanded this military retrenchment globally. Indeed, as Inboden himself notes, these strains of isolationism and skepticism about the use of American power were nothing new for Donald Trump. To the contrary, these views date back to the late 1980s, when he attacked President Reagan's national security policies before becoming a card-carrying Democrat for nearly a decade.

Now, as Inboden points out, certain important aspects of the Trump administration's national security policies do, in fact, sit firmly in the heart of traditional Republican approaches to national security. The Trump administration's defense of American sovereignty, its (eventual) tough stance on China, its maximum pressure campaign on Iran, its prioritization of religious freedom around the globe (including its highlighting of the outrageous treatment of the Uyghur Muslims by the CCP), and its restoration of (some) critical defense spending are, without a doubt, decisions that true conservatives ought to applaud. But as Inboden also points out, for each of these policies that his more conservative staff and cabinet were able to put

in place, dozens of other opportunities were squandered or walked back by the very man that Republican voters desperately sought to put in office for a second term. Whether one looks to President Trump's coddling of Vladimir Putin and his public refutation of the U.S. intelligence community in favor of that former KGB apparatchik (a position he doubled down on just last month), his discovery of a kindred spirit in Xi Jinping (at least pre-COVID-19), or his belief that he could win over Kim Jong-Un with bluster and bravado, he is hardly the type of leader that conservative national security Republicans would historically have supported.

Yet here we are. In November 2020, over 90 percent of Republicans voted for President Trump. Even now—after the January 6th insurrection brought the worst threat to the Capitol since its targeting by al Qaeda in 2001—74 percent of Republican voters support a review of the 2020 presidential election results, 51 percent believe that information will be uncovered that will change the election's outcome, and 59 percent think that former President Trump should play a "major role" in the GOP's future. This is a far cry from the traditional type of Republican conservative national security voters who have historically put country before party—and both country and party before any individual leader.

And it is not just the personal politics of President Trump that are troubling. It is what this sustained groundswell of support for him as the leader of the modern political GOP means for Republicans in Congress. One need only look at the composition of the House GOP, the outrageous ousting of Representative Liz Cheney (a true Reagan-style national security conservative), the ongoing efforts to primary elected leaders like Representative Anthony Gonzalez, and the inability of the majority of congressional Republicans in both houses to get behind a commission to investigate the horrific events of January 6th for fear of political reprisals to see that Trump's political coattails extend well beyond his own candidacy. Indeed, many of the new members of Congress elected by GOP voters—including some notable Republican insurrectionists—trend strongly toward isolationism and populism.

If all this is true, what does it mean for the future of Republican national security policy? Unfortunately, at least in the short term, probably nothing good. While there can be no question that our movement—whether one calls it traditional Republican national security policy, conservative internationalism, Reagan-style leadership, or something else—will ultimately prevail in the long-run, barring a major global event on the scale of 9/11, it is perfectly reasonable to fear that the immediate politics of our party will make it hard for this movement to return to the fore in the present moment.

No matter the general views of the party's base, they are currently voting in a direction that makes it nearly impossible to sustain an across-the-board return to true conservative foreign policy ideals now.

What does that mean for those of us who truly believe that this is the right path for our nation? Here are a few straightforward steps:

1. We must keep the flame of this philosophy alive by discussing it, debating it, and advocating for it out in the world.

2. We must seek to cut out of the party the cancer of populism and isolationism.

3. We must not kid ourselves that continuing to internally coddle this movement—and its people—will lead eventually to some magic reconciliation.

The populist, isolationist movement within the Republican Party (which may or may not be a numerical minority, as Inboden suggests) is clearly ascendent today, if not clearly winning by a significant margin. If true conservative foreign policy is to survive and prevail, we must be prepared to cut the isolationist, populist movement off at the knees. Anything else will keep true conservative national security in the political wilderness for much too long. Leadership requires tough choices. Let's put our party to them, and let's do it now.

Foreign Policy and the GOP: What Comes After the Trump Administration?

A Response from Mary Kissel

In December 2018, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo attended a session of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels to discuss a pressing threat to transatlantic security: Russia's repeated breaches of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. As he sat in the military alliance's cavernous amphitheater, the secretary's counterparts to a person voiced emphatic support for the United States' record of compliance with the 1987 treaty, agreed unanimously that Russia had egregiously violated its terms, and gave Moscow 60 days to return to compliance.

That grace period was the result of a debate within the Trump administration about whether to withdraw immediately from the treaty or give Moscow one last chance to reverse course and afford political cover to European allies who worried about the optics of a hasty decision. In the end, the latter view prevailed, and the entire NATO alliance endorsed the U.S. withdrawal. Yet, this diplomatic victory for the free world, which sent a strong message about the importance of compliance with international agreements, was soon forgotten in foreign policy circles back in Washington.

That sequence was not a one-off, as observers often focused more on President Donald Trump's rough-and-tumble rhetoric than the methods and outcomes of his policies. There are important questions to be asked and answered about this recent period in our history. Why did President Trump see the threat from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) so clearly, when other presidents did not? How could a businessman from New York clinch Middle East peace accords that eluded prior administrations? Why had the Republican foreign policy

machine not pressed harder for allies to fulfill their commitments or for international institutions to hew to their missions?

As Will Inboden skillfully captures in his essay, the Trump era has created a nascent debate about the legacy of those years, what can be learned, and what a Republican foreign policy should look like going forward. This is a welcome and healthy development. However, the current cogitation will not be productive without an honest accounting of the Trump record and our allies' and partners' willingness to cooperate with us. The task is urgent, especially as the free world faces new and profoundly complex challenges from China, Iran, Russia, terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, and other bad actors.

Inboden references President Trump's economic record, and that is a good place to start. Perhaps the most underappreciated aspect of President Trump's foreign policy is how it was underpinned by economic strength at home. The 45th president enthusiastically embraced President Ronald Reagan's peace through strength maxim, enacting 1980s-style tax reform and comprehensive regulatory relief while investing in our national defense. Thanks to the record job creation and economic boom, the Trump administration was able to start to rebuild the U.S. military and, importantly, U.S. deterrence, after decades of neglect and decline. While the Trump trade team wielded tariffs as a weapon, often to the detriment of U.S. domestic industries, the president loudly and often supported freer trade and caviled against nations that did not practice it. Should a future GOP foreign policy tolerate unequal trade deals with the balance tipped against America? Of course, we should not—but we did for decades, and President Trump tried to correct that error. Although his focus on trade deficits might have been misguided, the Trump economic legacy should be viewed in a more complete and complimentary fashion, given the extraordinary results.

With regard to our foreign policy, the Trump administration was not instinctively isolationist, as Inboden suggests. In the Middle East, the United States worked with Gulf allies to enact a maximum pressure campaign on the Islamic Republic of Iran to curb its terrorist activities, surged troops into Saudi Arabia, and forged peace accords between multiple Arab states and Israel. In the Asia-Pacific theater, the administration revivified the Quad, tried a new approach to the North Korean nuclear challenge, and took pains to improve ties with smaller partners like the Maldives. No administration in recent memory spent as much time courting our partners in the Americas and the Caribbean or reviving our focus on the Arctic. Would an isolationist president have worked so hard to shore up NATO's finances, marshal more than 60 nations to reject China's surveillance

state and other forms of malign influence, or coordinate allies to protect the integrity of important UN agencies such as the World Intellectual Property Organization?

These achievements are hard to square with the isolationist label. It might be more accurate to say that the Trump administration focused less on rhetorical flourishes and grand theories of international relations and more on results. That approach led to a presidency that was very active on the world stage but not wedded to a permanent presence abroad when it was unnecessary. Putting America First was not a sly reference to what Inboden calls "noxious historical baggage." It was a simple reiteration of a principle that conservatives roundly support; that is, using our national security policy to further the interests of the American people.

Inboden is not wrong in his critiques of the president's often gratuitous overtures to authoritarians, which harmed America's unique moral authority. President Trump may have thought that his personal charisma would tempt these leaders into negotiations and, ultimately, better behavior. He is not the first president to believe that to be true. (Recall George W. Bush's statement, "I looked the man [Putin] in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. . . I was able to get a sense of his soul.") But President Trump's outreach obscured the punitive and multilateral measures his administration took to contain these regimes. No administration in recent history was tougher on Vladimir Putin or did more to rally the world against Communist China's malign activities.

Perhaps the most difficult question the Trump era raises is what we should expect of our allies and partners who act, as we do, on conviction or domestic political calculations of their own. President Trump could not convince traditional Western European allies to snap back UN sanctions on Iran or to rally behind real reform of a dangerously inept and corrupt World Health Organization, even though we perceived both to be in their interests and ours. Critics of the administration attribute these failures to President Trump and Secretary Pompeo's sometimes-hectoring style. But is that explanation wholly satisfactory? Would a kinder, gentler American diplomacy have convinced Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, to sever Germany's ever-closer ties with Putin's Russia, or does Berlin have values and interests that differ from our own? One lesson of the Trump years is that we must not be afraid to reassess our alliances and judge them on their own merits—and form new ones, when need be, as we did with Brazil and Greece.

Inboden asserts that the GOP has already adopted some aspects of the Trump foreign policy, from its focus on national sovereignty,

recognition of great-power competition as "the primary strategic challenge facing the United States," and reorientation of human rights policy back to first principles. This is all to the good, especially as Communist China presents an ever-more-dangerous and complex threat to the United States and our free world allies and partners. Unlike the former Soviet Union, Beijing has constructed vast networks of economic partnerships and lobbyists here in the United States and elsewhere to obscure and further the party's ambitions. The CCP is no Soviet Union. It is far more strategic and already inside our gates.

Inboden is surely right to call for Republicans to unify their base and adopt a civilized debate about the future of GOP foreign policy in the face of such challenges. We need that vigorous exchange now—and more urgently than ever.

The View from Beijing: What are China's Ambitions and Strategies?

Matt Pottinger

Introduction

Many Americans were slow to realize it, but Beijing's enmity for Washington began long before Donald J. Trump's election in 2016 or Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012. The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), to varying degrees, has always cast the United States as an antagonist. Then, three decades ago at the end of the Cold War, Beijing quietly revised its grand strategy to regard Washington as its primary external adversary and embarked on a quest for regional, followed by global, dominance.

While the United States and other free societies have shown up late to the contest of our lives, there are measures we can adopt now to convert vulnerabilities into strengths and to dampen the harmful effects on all nations of Beijing's political warfare.

First, the United States and its allies must take bolder steps to stem the flow of our capital into China's "military–civil fusion" enterprise and into Chinese companies that are complicit in technical surveillance and crimes against humanity. Second, we must frustrate Beijing's aspiration for leadership in, and even monopoly control of, high-tech industries, starting with semiconductor manufacturing. Third, we should undertake campaigns to expose and enfeeble Beijing's information warfare, which spews disinformation at us and sows division by exploiting American social media platforms that are banned inside China's own borders. We should also "return the favor" by making it easier for the Chinese people to access authentic news from outside China's Great Firewall.

Some have argued that because the CCP's ideology holds little appeal abroad, it poses little threat. Yet Communist ideology hardly appeals to the Chinese people, either. That has not prevented the party from dominating a nation of 1.4 billion people. The problem is not that many people will find Leninist totalitarianism alluring, but that Leninist totalitarianism, as practiced by the well-resourced and determined rulers of Beijing, has tremendous coercive power. As such, the ideological dimensions of our contest should never be ignored; indeed, they should be emphasized. Our values—liberty, independence, faith, human dignity, and (for most countries, still) democracy—are not only what we fight for. They are also among the most potent weapons in our arsenal because they contrast so starkly with what the CCP stands for, which is little more than its own power.

Relearning Political Warfare

The West's sluggishness to comprehend that it has been on the receiving end of an elaborate, multi-decade, hostile strategy by Beijing owed much to hubris following our triumph in the Cold War. We assumed the CCP would find it nearly impossible to resist the tide of liberalization set off by the collapse of the Berlin Wall. By helping enrich China, we believed we would loosen the party's grip on its economy, people, and politics, setting the conditions for a gradual convergence with the pluralistic West. Or so the thinking went.

But our miscalculation also stemmed from the methods the party employs to prosecute its grand strategy. With enviable discipline, Beijing for decades camouflaged its intention to ultimately challenge and overturn the U.S.-led liberal order. Western technologies that we assumed would democratize China were instead co-opted by Beijing to enhance the surveillance and control of its people—and to target a growing swath of the world's population outside China's borders. Western corporations and investors that would have been prohibited from doing business with the Soviet Union are systematically cultivated by Beijing to pay deference to its policies and lobby their home capitals on its behalf.

Beijing's methods are all manifestations of "political warfare" as defined by George Kennan in a 1948 memo that he issued from his desk at the State Department. Kennan wrote, "In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives." Kennan credited the Soviets with "the most refined and effective" conduct of political warfare. Were he alive today, Kennan would marvel at the ways Beijing improved on the Kremlin's playbook.

Today, free and open societies are awakening again to the reality of political warfare. While there are holdouts—mostly academics and businesspeople—polls show that the general public in Europe, the United States, and several Asian countries are finally attuned to the malevolent nature of the regime in Beijing and its global ambitions. Beijing deserves credit here, too, given its "greatest hits" in 2020: covering up COVID, attacking Indian troops on its border, choking off trade with Australia, crushing the rule of law in Hong Kong, and intensifying its genocide against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities within its borders.

Beijing's Grand Strategy, in the Buff

Still, some observers remain confused about the sources of Beijing's behavior, believing Xi's repression represents an aberration from Communist Party history or, even more preposterously, that Beijing's hostility is provoked by things the United States says or does.

Fortunately, new scholarly works and memoirs that delve deep into primary source materials make plain that the CCP has merely entered a new phase of a decades-old strategy and that it is the party's very nature that best explains its malign conduct.

For his recent book *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (2021), the American scholar Rush Doshi pored over Chinese leaders' speeches, policy documents, and memoirs to document how Beijing came to set its sights on dismantling American influence around the globe. Three historic events badly rattled party leaders: the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, the lopsided American-led victory over Saddam Hussein's forces in early 1991, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991.

"The Tiananmen Square protests reminded Beijing of the American ideological threat; the swift Gulf War victory reminded it of the American military threat; and loss of the shared Soviet adversary reminded it of the American geopolitical threat," writes Doshi, who now serves on the National Security Council staff. "In short order, the United States quickly replaced the Soviet Union as China's primary security concern, that in turn led to a new grand strategy, and a thirty-year struggle to displace American power was born."

The grand strategy aimed first to dilute American influence in Asia, then to displace American power more overtly from the region and, ultimately, to dominate a global order in ways that suit and promote Beijing's governance model.

That governance model isn't merely authoritarian, but "neo-totalitarian," according to Cai Xia, who served two decades as a professor in the highest temple of Chinese Communist ideology: the Central Party School in Beijing. Cai recently wrote that "the American strategy to 'engage' China has been deeply naïve." She added, "The Chinese Communist Party's fundamental interest and its basic mentality of using the U.S. while remaining hostile to it have not changed over the past seventy years."

In other words, Xi did not sire the party's strategy; he has merely shifted it to a more overt and aggressive phase. Had observers more carefully pondered Deng Xiaoping's precept that China "hide its capabilities and bide its time," they would have realized Deng's approach was always intended as a transient stage until China was strong enough to contest the United States openly.

Economic Warfare, Beijing-Style

Kennan considered economic statecraft a key component of political warfare. Beijing's approach bears some scrutiny here, since it is at the heart of the Communist Party's most recent five-year plan, published in March.

The economic concept Beijing is pursuing can be thought of as "offensive leverage." It has three components the world should be concerned about. The first entails decreasing China's dependence on high-tech imports while making the world's technology supply chains increasingly dependent on China. The second involves expanding China's status as the world's biggest importer of raw materials and working assiduously to ensure that any import from one country can be easily substituted with the same import from another country. The third is to then use the resulting leverage to advance Beijing's political objectives around the globe.

"We must sustain and enhance our superiority across the entire production chain … and we must tighten international production chains' dependence on China, forming a powerful countermeasure and deterrent capability against foreigners who would artificially cut off supply [to China]," Xi said in a seminal speech last year.

Try not to be fooled by the seemingly defensive rationale. Beijing is already demonstrating its willingness to use its economic leverage offensively in pursuit of political goals.

Consider the case of Australia. More than a year ago, Australia proposed that the World Health Organization investigate the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. The idea was supported by nearly all the

members of the World Health Assembly, but Beijing decided to punish Canberra for its temerity. Beijing soon began restricting imports of Australian beef, barley, wine, coal, and lobster. Then Beijing released a list of 14 "disputes" that are, in effect, political demands made of the Australian government. They include a demand Australia repeal its laws designed to counter Beijing's covert influence operations and that Australia muzzle its free press to suppress news critical of Beijing.

An American Counterstrategy

America's China policy, then, beginning with the Trump administration and continuing under President Joe Biden, is best viewed as a belated *counterstrategy* to China's decades-old grand strategy. What follows are a few areas where we need to strengthen our counterstrategy quickly.

First is in the realm of finance, since the retirement savings of Americans are being directed toward Beijing's military modernization and toward Chinese companies complicit in genocide and other crimes against humanity. Executive orders by the Trump and Biden administrations led to a prohibition against Americans buying stocks or bonds in 59 named Chinese companies involved in the People's Liberation Army's modernization or complicit in human rights atrocities. This blacklist is a good start, but the U.S. Treasury Department needs to grow the list by an order of magnitude and to make clear that the subsidiaries of blacklisted companies are also off limits to American investors.

The EU should adopt a similar investment blacklist and permanently abandon the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment it negotiated with Beijing.

Second, American, European, and other governments should also challenge the naked hypocrisy of the "ESG" fad. This trend has led money managers to eschew investing in Western companies that do not meet professed environmental, social, and governance standards, even as they double down on investments in Chinese companies that feature atrocious records in all three categories.

Third, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has yet to fulfill its legal obligations under the Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act of 2020, which prescribed an (overly generous) three-year grace period before delisting Chinese companies that fail to meet U.S. accounting standards. The SEC has yet to even start the clock on the three-year countdown.

Fourth, we must frustrate Beijing's plans to dominate semiconductor manufacturing. Chinese leaders are well aware that most 21st century technologies—from 5G telecommunications to synthetic biology and machine learning—are built on the foundation of advanced semiconductors. Accordingly, those leaders have thrust hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies toward building Chinese chip foundries, with mixed results.

Currently, most of the world's cutting-edge logic chips are produced by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, and Beijing is undoubtedly engaged in scenario planning to determine whether a successful military invasion of Taiwan could result in China controlling the global supply of these chips. Beijing may be tempted to assume it would come out ahead of the United States even in a dire scenario if it believed it could recover more quickly. That is precisely the lesson Beijing drew from the Covid pandemic. Chinese officials have compared the human and economic costs of the pandemic to a "world war." Yet, judging by their self-congratulatory public assessments, it is a world war that Beijing benefited from in relative terms (which are the terms that matter to Chinese leaders).

To be sure, Beijing would not take so fateful a step as attacking Taiwan and risking war with the United States based on semiconductor inventories. The point is that Chinese leaders may not view the impact on semiconductor supply chains as an inhibitor to launching a war.

U.S. semiconductor policy, then, should aim to "run faster" by subsidizing the return of chip foundries to the United States—something the 2020 CHIPS Act and the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 seek to do. Nonetheless, the U.S. Commerce Department must also slow down Beijing's aspirations to massively scale up its foundries by applying sharper restrictions on the export of U.S. semiconductor-making equipment.

Finally, there is the question of how to address Beijing's information warfare more effectively. In one of the weirder ironies of our time, U.S. social media giants routinely censor and even deplatform American citizens for political speech, while they simultaneously channel CCP disinformation and agitprop to millions of viewers worldwide.

Congress should seek to address both of these phenomena simultaneously, supporting the free speech of U.S. citizens while also pushing tech companies to expose and reduce the ways Beijing boosts its propaganda to far larger audiences than would naturally seek it out. This can and should be done in ways that uphold the

letter and spirit of the First Amendment. The idea is not to censor Beijing's posts, but to expose covert schemes and tamp down the sheer amplitude achieved by Beijing's heavy spending and well-resourced manipulation of algorithms. Foreign media ownership rules that were designed to prevent Nazi Germany from dominating American airwaves should be updated for the age of social media and artificial intelligence.

At the same time, free and open societies—and the companies that flourish in them—must make it easier for the Chinese people to access information from outside China's Great Firewall and to communicate with one another away from the watchful eye of Beijing's digital panopticon. One good place to start would be with the Chinese diaspora. The United States should hand a second smart phone to every Chinese national who comes to study in our country—one that is free from Chinese apps such as WeChat, which monitor users' phone activity and censor news feeds.

Conclusion

The failure of Beijing's recent attempt to coerce Australia provides an inspiring pathway for free and open societies. Beijing gambled that those Australian businesses hurting from Beijing's targeted trade embargo would lobby their government to make political concessions to Beijing. However, the Australian people—business leaders and exporters included—understood that if they accepted Beijing's ultimatum, it would mean Australia would have submitted to a dangerous new order.

Australian businesses ate the losses, weathered the embargo, and have had success finding new markets as substitutes for China. Australians decided their sovereignty was more important than lobster sales—no doubt confounding those in Beijing who had assumed Australia would put business interests ahead of values. The Communist Party, having played this card, will never be able to play it again with much effect on Australia—or against those who follow her lead.

The View from Beijing: What are China's Ambitions and Strategies?

A Response from Dan Blumenthal

The long-term, post-Cold War strategic objective of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) indeed has been to displace the United States. However, the CCP has faced obstacles, and internal politics intervened. Beijing adjusted. The most significant change was the replacement of Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening" approach that drove economic growth inside China with today's "great leap backwards." Deng and Jiang Zemin focused on market-oriented reforms while quietly building up national power—especially military–technological power. This approach is often referred to as the "hide and bide" strategy: hide your capabilities as you develop them. Since then, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has transitioned internally from a developmental autocracy into a national security state, with internal security and short-term external gains as higher priorities than economic growth. The United States has a better chance of thwarting this strategy than the previous "hide and bide" approach but must be hypervigilant in the short term.

What the Chinese "National Intelligence Estimate" Might Say: Paranoia About Internal Subversion Supported by Foreign Hostile Forces

Even though China's power and prestige were increasing, the 1990s and early aughts were also a time of great peril for the CCP. The demise of the Soviet Union and the nationwide protests of 1989 were regime-threatening events. Soon after came America's lopsided military victories in Iraq and Kosovo and the rise of a new democratic nation-state in Taiwan, which solidified U.S. support for the island. All of a sudden, the U.S. alliance presence close to China's only coastline,

home to all of China's ports, became simply untenable. In Beijing's view, there was nothing to stop the United States from supporting Taiwanese independence. The PRC believes that a failure to reunify the "motherland" will result in its demise and acts with accordant ruthlessness. Witness how the CCP has addressed "separatism" in Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang.

The CCP has already drawn *political* red lines on Taiwan. Just as it acted decisively when it believed that "foreign hostile forces" were working to "forever break" Hong Kong away from Beijing's suzerainty, the CCP has now said on several occasions that it will not allow "Taiwan separatists" with the help of "foreign hostile forces" to permanently keep the island separate. The final, official CCP verdict of Tiananmen Square is that foreign hostile forces worked with counterrevolutionaries to bring down the party. That is why the fear about Taiwan is now catalyzing more intensive coercive activity.

A Change in Strategy

Deng and Jiang's approach to dealing with their bleak assessment of security in the post-Tiananmen environment was to build up China's economy very rapidly and translate wealth into military and diplomatic power without triggering a counter-balancing coalition. Once Deng left the scene, the "new left" (in reality, far right-wing populism) attacked the reforms as weakening the party. Xi Jinping represents this new politics. Since the 2008 financial crisis, Beijing's strategy has shifted markedly. China panicked that it would lose its big export markets. It began to lend massive amounts to unprofitable state-owned enterprises (the private sector had been allowed to flourish during the reform period) and took on crushing debt. Total debt as a percentage of GDP was 139 percent in 2008 and 259 percent in 2019.[1]

As the political-economic growth plan changed, the CCP also faced a new political crisis when Bo Xilai made an independent bid to succeed Hu Jintao. As a condition of assuming power during a challenging period, Xi secured a mandate to reign harshly and singularly through Stalinist purges and Maoist-like reeducation campaigns to enforce party discipline. Almost everything was labeled a national security threat, from Western "spiritual pollution" to practices of religion.

Xi also gained support for a new assertive foreign policy that he announced on the world stage. (Hu Jintao had started to assert

[1] U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Report to Congress*, 116th Cong., 2d sess., December 2020, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Chapter_2_Section_2--Vulnerabilities_in_Chinas_Financial_System_and_Risks_for_the_United_States.pdf. Last year, Chinese state firms defaulted on 71.8 billion yuan (US$11.1 billion) worth of debt. https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3117686/debt-chinas-state-owned-firms-spotlight-credit-tightening.

Chinese interests.)[2] He announced that China had entered a new era "of geopolitics during which it would become the global leader." In the "new era," he said, "it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia."[3] Beijing would no longer hide its capabilities or its ambitions.

At the same time, Xi warned that the CCP faced "the most complicated internal and external factors in its history" and that these threats are "interlocked and can be mutually activated."[4] When it faces domestic problems, China escalates international tensions and relies on foreign policy successes. Even as Xi engages in a massive internal crackdown, he is intent on moving back to "center stage" in geopolitics and shaping a new "favorable environment for … building … a great modern socialist country in all aspects."[5] Beijing advances its goals by: (1) building new "networks of strategic partnerships" to replace the "unequal" U.S. alliance system; (2) striving to become the most technologically advanced nation; (3) building a first-in-class military; and (4) revivifying information and ideological statecraft to subvert and weaken its adversaries.[6]

The results of the change in strategy have been mixed. To be sure, China has made some serious gains. It has effective control over the South China Sea. It has advanced its military modernization plans and thereby changed the regional balance of power. During the global pandemic, Beijing demonstrated its ability to manipulate information and international organizations and bully nations into muting their criticisms of China. Beijing uses its market power (e.g., Wall Street, Silicon Valley, the NBA, Hollywood) to soften responses to its malignancy.

But Xi is also facing pushback, sometimes even coordinated international resistance on certain issues. And a growing number of Asian countries are willing to cooperate with the United States. Beijing is very concerned that the United States will lead a coalition to starve it of critical technologies, and Xi and his top cadre have made speeches about hastening technological and economic self-sufficiency. China is highly dependent on imports from agriculture to energy to advanced technology.[7]

While China poses a formidable challenge and clear and present

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[2] Dan Blumenthal, *The China Nightmare: The Grand Ambitions of a Decaying State* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 2020), 19.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Sheena Chestnut Greitens, "Internal Security & Grand Strategy: China's Approach to National Security under Xi Jinping," statement before the U.S.–China Economic & Security Review Commission, January 28, 2021, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-01/January_28_2021_Hearing_Transcript.pdf.
[5] Blumenthal, *The China Nightmare*, 5.
[6] Blumenthal, *The China Nightmare*, 16.
[7] For example, China is still reliant on foreign companies for most of its high-end semiconductor needs. See https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/lagging-but-motivated-the-state-of-chinas-semiconductor-industry/

threats, the near-constant political purges, darker economic prospects, and unfixable demographic problems make it less competitive than it otherwise would have been.

U.S. Strategy

Given the many nations now wary of China, the United States has a new strategic opportunity. Washington should build different types of coalitions to contain China's ambitions, undermine its strategy, and defend against its attempts to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies. U.S.-led coalitions will be highly differentiated across the globe, depending upon the specific challenge China poses. For example, some will focus on China's human rights abuses and China's malign influence over global governance. Others will be concerned about economic distortions and predation and technological manipulation. The United States should also maintain close relations with the main suppliers of China's irreplaceable imports.

But the thrust of our diplomatic and military energy must be to deny the PRC hegemony over Asia and build the "free and open order" as an affirmative alternative to Sino-centrality. The most pressing requirement of this strategy is to keep Taiwan out of the CCP's hands and integrated into the Asian order. Forceful unification though coercion and subversion or occupation would lead to a deepening split of Asia—geopolitically and ideologically.[8] Asia is already dividing with the CCP's effective control over the South China Sea and the division of the Korean peninsula into spheres of influence. If Beijing creates its own sphere of influence in Asia, it will have the power and leverage to build a world order conducive to "the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" that it seeks as the new model for others to emulate.

Fundamental to this geopolitical strategy is the continued defense of the United States and allies against the erosion of our technological advantage and subversion of our internal political systems. In turn, the United States must limit, to the maximum extent possible, Chinese technological progress and economic growth.[9]

[8] While the Department of Defense should focus on the most pressing scenarios, such as an invasion of Taiwan, the PRC is very much focused on how to subvert Taiwan's democracy and back a quisling government. We are at risk of losing focus on the political nature of the Taiwan question.
[9] This would include stopping the massive unregulated and undisclosed amount of U.S. offshore capital financing of Chinese firms in China.

The View from Beijing: What Are China's Ambitions and Strategies?

A Response from Jacqueline Deal

Matt Pottinger brings unique firsthand experience and skilled close reading of primary sources to his assessment of the U.S.–People's Republic of China (PRC) competition. He adeptly frames the situation:

- For 30 years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has executed a strategy to dilute, displace, and dominate U.S. power.

- Beijing's recent treatment of Australia offers a preview of CCP domination.

- The United States is now mounting a counterstrategy, with a focus on the information, financial, technological, and military domains.

Additional context from CCP sources provides grounds for both urgency and hope. The party's agenda differs dramatically from that of the United States and is essentially hostile. A future in which the party achieves its geopolitical ambitions is a dystopian one. With the exception of my fellow essayists and a few others, American officials have failed to appreciate this for too long. We are now waking up—but applying our strengths will require more leadership of Pottinger's kind.

The Centrality of the CCP

By tracing the party's strategy back to the late Cold War, Pottinger shows that the United States faces a competitor with momentum behind it. Three decades of relative power gains now position the CCP to threaten to overtake the United States. The party has accomplished

this while deceiving large parts of the American establishment, and the broader West, about its intentions. What many describe as a development miracle could also be cast as the victory of a plot to infiltrate, rob, and subjugate the developed world on behalf of a corrupt autocracy.

Asymmetries in regime type or basic assumptions have worked in the CCP's favor. The party has drafted off a U.S. view that economic interactions occur largely outside the control of governments. American officials often talk about globalization and interdependence as if they are abstract trends rather than products of state policy.[1] By contrast, the CCP has insisted on a central economic role, even when its plans have led to catastrophe—from the Great Leap Forward famine to the Cultural Revolution.

It should not come as a surprise that, starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping and other CCP political–military elites identified global interdependence as a development to be encouraged and exploited. The PRC's size and scale would enable it to extract what it wanted from the rest of the world while defending against reciprocal vulnerability. In a 1982 speech on foreign economic relations, CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang articulated a strategy to use the size and potential of China's domestic market to lure in foreign resources, with the goal not of sharing the wealth or liberalizing politically but rather of securing the party's hegemony.[2] "Comprehensive planning" and intelligence about the economic needs of trade partners would be essential. The main dangers were ideological and material corruption,[3] which the general secretary countered with paeans to "socialist modernization" and "complete victory."

Concurrently, military strategists writing in the *People's Liberation Army Daily* offered their own triumphant vision. They anticipated using advanced technology—not to catch up with, but to leapfrog over the major powers.[4] In particular, dual-use information technologies, to which the PLA would gain access through commercial and academic exchanges, were the means to accomplish this displacement.

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[1] From trade agreements to tariffs, sanctions, and export controls, states wield many tools to promote or constrain international commerce. For a reminder of how the United States wielded these tools for strategic ends in the past, see Robert D. Atkinson, "The Global Third Way," *The International Economy*, Winter 2021, www.international-economy.com/TIE_W21_Atkinson.pdf.

[2] Hu Yaobang, "On the Issue of Foreign Economic Relations," speech at the meeting of the Central Secretariat on 14 January 1982 [reprinted in 2015 on the occasion of Hu's 100th birthday]. The source for this paragraph can be found at https://web.archive.org/web/20211216034401/http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2015-11-18/detail-ifxksqiu1669921.shtml. Among other prescient lines, the speech refers to harnessing cheap labor, exporting strategic raw materials and "electric and mechanical products" while constraining certain imports, and "going out" into the world to cultivate customers, with a focus on Eurasia.

[3] As discussed below, Hu was right to worry about corruption, but Xi appears to think he can buy or bully his way past it.

[4] For specific quotations, see Jacqueline Deal, "The Fudan Fulcrum," Reagan Institute Essays on Presidential Principles and Beliefs, Remarks at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, April 30, 1984, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan-institute/scholarly-initiatives/essay-series-on-presidential-principles-and-beliefs/remarks-at-fudan-university-in-shanghai-china-april-30-1984/.

Hindsight, of course, makes it is easy to trace the ambitions and pathways leading up to the present. The party's intentions were not clear in real time, however.

The Situational Awareness Gap and Xi's Acceleration

In mounting a counterstrategy, the United States is recovering from a situational awareness gap at the level of foreign policy. Dogma about how free markets should operate partly blinded us, but CCP's United Front Work also delayed recognition of the competition's character and stakes. United Front Work is a department of the CCP tasked with wooing nonparty members, co-opting or suppressing skeptics, and weakening enemies—both domestic and foreign. It is no coincidence that General Secretary Xi Jinping has recently emphasized this "magic weapon,"[5] of which a key theme is projecting the inevitability of the PRC's rise while forecasting doom for foreign opponents.

Xi has compressed the timeline for surpassing rivals while turbocharging projections of ascendance.[6] It appears as if he is racing to use the PRC's scale and momentum to lock in dominance. Wolf warrior diplomats have doubled down on the inevitability argument. The PLA is on a procurement binge that will see it eclipse that of the U.S. military by the end of President Joe Biden's first term.[7] And as Pottinger highlights, Xi has recently stressed the importance of cultivating offensive leverage over rivals through superior access to—if not a stranglehold on—data, critical natural resources, and essential elements of supply chains. Globally—or, in CCP terms, across China's "big periphery"—the party seeks to become a real-life version of Western economists' metaphorical "invisible hand." Taiwan is often recognized as the potential biggest (or most immediate) loser, but we would all be in the crosshairs of the coercion this would enable.

If we had recognized the CCP's strategy earlier, the United States might have moved to defend itself sooner. We might also be further along in educating an independent cadre of experts on CCP history, strategy, and the like. Fortunately, it is not too late—but we must act soon.

Weaknesses to Exploit, While We Still Can

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[5] The other two CCP "magic weapons" articulated by Mao are party building and military struggle.
[6] On timeline compression, see Jacqueline Deal, "China Could Soon Outgun the U.S.," *Politico China Watcher*, 27 May 2021, https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2021/05/27/china-could-soon-outgun-the-us-493014.
[7] Ibid.

The party's greatest weakness is that it stands only for itself. The Chinese people are its worst victims, and the thin reed on which the system leans is CCP elites' will to hang together, lest they hang separately. PRC founder Mao Zedong once promised to elevate the countryside, but he and his heirs instead consigned it to permanent underclass status,[8] while enriching themselves. When the costs of corruption are factored in, the party turns out to have constrained rather than enabled China's growth. For all its triumphalism, the CCP is a parasite that needs the outside world much more than the world needs it.

One indicator is the continuation of overseas "talent" programs, which assume that cutting-edge breakthroughs will originate outside China and must be imported—legally, illegally, or via gray-zone techniques. "Military–civil fusion" then ensures that the Chinese military benefits from civilian, dual-use advances (and vice versa).[9] Keeping the CCP in the middle of the economy is expensive.[10] The party's selection of winners and losers inevitably spawns high levels of corruption.

For this reason, some experts have warned of the buildup of debt and untenable increases in the cost of generating additional growth in the PRC. As Pottinger points out, however, U.S. pension fund money and smart capital currently subsidize the party's addiction to nonproductive investment. The CCP is well on its way to making itself "too big to fail" on the back of its inevitability argument.

Much of this is happening in what the party considers to be the "virtual" realm—the financial sector. But if we do not act with haste and prudence, Beijing will continue to gain ground in the "real" economy as well, cornering the market in semiconductors as it has in so many other sensitive or dual-use areas, from batteries to pharmaceutical components. As we were reminded during the pandemic, our national security depends on the ability to make the things we want or need.

Stepping back, it is worth asking what is wrong with the PRC's supposedly world-class academic institutions such that siphoning foreign expertise remains necessary. The answer lies in the character of the political system and its sociological effects. Incentives within

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[8] Scott Rozelle and Natalie Hell, *Invisible China: How the Urban-Rural Divide Threatens China's Rise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). The numbers behind Xi's antipoverty campaign are no more credible than any other statistics originating from Beijing.
[9] As with United Front Work, this plank of the CCP's strategy is not new, but Xi has formally elevated it. To take an obvious example, prior to launching its 5G domination campaign, PLA-linked Huawei enjoyed decades of state backing as it hoovered up dual-use foreign technology.
[10] It also appears to be fraught. Consider the recent United Front Work emphasis on urban professionals, upgrading of party cells' role within private firms, and crackdown on domestic tech giants such as Alibaba.

the PRC are not aligned for basic-research innovation. With obedience and deference to authority the hallmarks of the educational system, and in the absence of respect for private property rights, getting ahead is often a function of connections more than merit. Additionally, the PRC neglects to cultivate a huge portion of its population by perpetuating *hukou* residency permits that condemn rural people to inferior schools and health care. What a miserable system.

From a defense perspective, in reacting to the aforementioned procurement sprint, we should remember that the PLA has long recruited mainly from rural youths. The education and basic health of this population is now well beneath the level of Chinese urbanites. Much, therefore, rides on the ability of higher-level commanders to keep their subordinates in line through commissars and, perhaps increasingly, automation. In the face of recent PRC aggression across all domains, the U.S. military might take a risk-acceptant approach to probing the details of these arrangements, as exposing their limits or vulnerabilities could be necessary to keep the peace.

The party's neglect of Chinese human capital, particularly in rural areas, is matched by its abuse of the environment. Afflicted with a poor natural resource endowment (e.g., only a quarter of the global average per capita of clean water), China would have benefited from leadership more attuned to conservation. Instead, the CCP's economic growth policies have resulted in catastrophic levels of air and water pollution as well as a reduction in arable land. To say that the PRC's rise has been resource-intensive is an understatement.

The Task Ahead

For our own protection, it is past time to illuminate the CCP's neo-mercantilist vision and wasteful approach to its self-promotion. Too often, U.S. policymakers speak as if security hedges must be traded against economic gains in dealing with the PRC. The truth is that China's economy and that of the rest of the world would be better off without the party's costly, self-aggrandizing meddling. Our wealth *and* our power hang in the balance. Pottinger's emphasis on information warfare as the first element of the U.S. counterstrategy is therefore extremely well-taken. More systematic and persistent efforts to expose basic elements of the CCP's strategy will, at a minimum, slow its progress, buying time for other U.S. countermeasures.

In practice, this will require education across our government to create a shared appreciation of the challenge. Civil servants, foreign service officers, congressional staff, and state and local leaders should all be better informed. Pottinger has himself contributed mightily to our collective awakening and burgeoning defense. But,

as he warns, this is no time for complacency.

I do not know if President Biden has the CCP in mind when he speaks of "building back better" and "a foreign policy for the middle class," but he should—and it should not be a secret. The rest of us should do our part to ensure the centrality of the competition to the agenda of not only this administration but also its successors for as long as necessary.

Economic Competition & International Trade: From Decoupling to Industrial Policy

Brent McIntosh

The outsized economic might of the United States has for so long been the envy of the world that much of Washington's policymaking takes for granted its continuation. This is unwise. America's strategic competitors are working tirelessly to build economies that rival or surpass our own. With their growing economic strength comes greater influence in the global order, which they use in turn to facilitate further growth. To preempt a troubling erosion of American power and influence, American policymakers should adopt a mindset that consistently puts the strength and dynamism of our national economy at the center of policy deliberations. The effects of employing such an approach may not be immediate, but the consequences of not doing so would be both dire and long-lasting.

A clear-eyed assessment of U.S. economic competitiveness and the policies intended to promote it would render a mixed verdict. The United States is home to the world's premier educational and research institutions as well as the world's deepest and most liquid capital markets. Innovation and entrepreneurship remain vibrant here, and many of the world's most successful companies are born and based here. If current trends hold, the U.S. economy will more rapidly regain the ground lost during the pandemic than will most other advanced economies. On the other hand, the U.S. manufacturing base has been shrinking. The United States is reliant on supply chains controlled by competitor countries, as the pandemic revealed, and red tape and regulatory uncertainty discourage capital investment. One could identify any number of other warning signs.

At the same time, American policymakers are rightly focused on China's steady accumulation of economic power. In Washington,

no topic in foreign affairs received more well-deserved attention over the past four years than America's economic competition with Beijing. While commentators were marveling at China's remarkable growth rates and its expanding international clout, Trump administration officials and others were pointing out that China's rise was fueled in part by deviations from legal rules and market norms that the rest of the world's economic powerhouses generally observed. Over time, a bipartisan consensus coalesced around the conclusion that, contrary to the predictions of prior decades, China was not evolving toward being a "responsible stakeholder" in the international economic order. Along with that consensus came the widely expressed sentiment that the United States must do more to ensure continued economic vitality if it is to sustain the broad-based prosperity that a strong U.S. economy provides.

This situation has sparked innumerable studies on how to shore up American economic competitiveness. Policy prescriptions have consistently focused on a handful of important points. Public funding for research and development (R&D) should be increased, as should incentives for private R&D spending. The United States should pursue policies that create incentives for capital investment. To develop a workforce fit for the future, the United States should redouble its commitment to education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and we should admit more high-skilled immigrants. These widely supported policy changes and others along the same lines are well elaborated in study after study—and yet action to execute on them is slow, inconsistent, and at times wholly absent. Why?

The answer, at least in part, is that success in the ongoing global economic competition—far from being a central objective of U.S. policymaking—is often a secondary goal, or even an afterthought. If the United States is to retain its preeminence in the international economic arena, that must change. Support for U.S. economic competitiveness is not fundamentally a discrete set of policy proposals. It must be an integrated policymaking mandate.

Refocusing Policymaking

Policymakers should consider expected effects on American economic strength in *all* policymaking. Too many policies formulated in Washington are informed solely by near-term domestic political considerations and immediate consequences for favored constituencies, with no thought to how those policies will enhance or degrade America's competitive position in years to come. Many laws and policies that are not directed to economic competitiveness nonetheless have consequences for it through increased fiscal stress

and tax burdens, gradual accretion of regulatory encumbrances, and effects on labor markets. The variables are endless.

Take, for example, what the Biden administration calls its American Rescue Plan, a multi-trillion-dollar stimulus package enacted when the U.S. economy was already on track for a robust post-pandemic recovery and economic indicators were favorable. Former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers called this spending "excessive stimulus driven by political considerations" and "a consequential policy error." As Secretary Summers described, support for this "rescue" was motivated by domestic political positioning, not policy objectives. Most opposition was based in policy objections, but even these tended to be domestically focused. Yet the package is likely to have harmful effects on U.S. global competitiveness. Employers and economists alike believe its generous benefits are delaying workers' return to the workforce, its $1.9 trillion price tag will necessitate an increased future tax burden on domestic economic activity, and its size has sparked concerns about the return of inflation. Each of these effects chips away at American competitiveness. In addition, the size of the package appears to have suppressed congressional appetite for ambitious spending on infrastructure and R&D, which could directly enhance American competitiveness.

In adopting a competitiveness-focused mindset, policymakers must recognize that their goal should be protecting the U.S. business environment, not individual businesses. As a matter of political reality, it is perhaps understandable that politicians focus on the latter at the expense of the former, but that road leads to sclerosis and stagnation, not dynamism and innovation. Much of what passes for industrial policy is designed to protect the economy as it exists today. Protecting sectors and companies in a static state is not a recipe for a vibrant, healthy economy. On the contrary, it is a recipe for inert industries that watch helplessly as China and other competitors pass them by. The U.S. economy, including its manufacturing sector, must evolve to meet the needs of the moment.

The same focus on American competitiveness should inform the U.S. approach to regulation. Regulatory clarity and continuity attract investment and empower innovation. In general, alternating Democratic and Republican administrations seesaw between layering on and relieving regulatory burdens on American businesses. For a particular area of economic activity, the optimal level and shape of regulation can fairly be debated. Nonetheless, there can be no question that steadily increasing regulatory burdens will diminish American businesses' global competitiveness, adding substantial compliance costs, trapping innovation in layers of red tape, and interposing lengthy delays between project conceptualization and realization.

The seesawing between greater and lesser regulation itself undermines American competitiveness because it generates uncertainty regarding applicable regulatory requirements as businesses make investment decisions on years- and decades-long time frames. Regulators proposing new rules—even those that would be desirable in the abstract—rarely account for the high costs of uncertainty inherent in a regulatory regime that is in constant flux. This is not to say that no new regulations should be promulgated, but neither should regulators continue to ignore the harms to American competitiveness caused by the shifting sands of continually changing regulations. The same is true of the lamentable practice of "regulation by enforcement"—formulating new rules not through proper rulemaking channels but by bringing post hoc enforcement actions. This practice, legally dubious but nonetheless widespread, undercuts certainty in the regulatory environment. In all they do, regulators should consider the likely consequences of their actions for American competitiveness.

Leading Internationally

It is not only the domestic legal and regulatory environment that should concern American policymakers. The global operating environment for American businesses is in many respects dictated by international standards set multilaterally. These standards span the whole breadth of economic activity, both international and domestic. They cover intellectual property protections, rules governing trade in goods and services, technical standards for countless products, telecommunications protocols, financial stability measures governing financial institutions, rules coordinating international air travel and sea transport—the list goes on. Countries vie for influence in the various international bodies that set these economic standards, trying to shape the rules in ways that benefit their domestic industries. In this effort, both success and failure are self-reinforcing. Economic success provides influence in setting the standards. Setting those standards so that they are conducive to a nation's economic interests in turn fosters further economic success. Because the United States and like-minded countries founded many of these standard-setting bodies, this virtuous cycle has for decades benefited the United States and its friends.

This self-perpetuating scenario explains why the Chinese government has quietly been making a steady, well-planned effort to secure greater influence in international standard-setting bodies. Over the past decade, the Chinese government has worked to install Chinese officials in leadership roles in these bodies as well as in the various other multilateral economic organizations. In the past few years, policymakers in the United States became acutely aware of

China's ambitions and began to push back, rallying like-minded countries to preserve the influence of market economies in setting global standards. This played out most notably in the selection of a Singaporean candidate to head the World Intellectual Property Organization, despite a muscular Chinese campaign for the post.

It is in the U.S. national interest to continue proactively seeking and exercising leadership in standard-setting bodies and other multilateral economic entities such as the G7, G20, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Financial Stability Board. Moreover, where formal U.S. leadership is not viable—leadership posts in many of these bodies rotate among members—the United States should work to promote leaders from like-minded market economies, such as our G7 partners, Australia, and South Korea.

Fortunately, in the recent past, the United States has succeeded in maintaining leadership in many important international economic bodies. During the Trump administration, U.S. officials sought and secured the top posts at the Financial Stability Board and the Financial Action Task Force as well as the vice-chair position at the International Organization of Securities Commissions. The United States presided over the G7 during that body's consequential pandemic response efforts in 2020. Americans now lead the World Bank (which is traditionally led by an American) and the Inter-American Development Bank (which is not). To be sure, there were times when U.S. policy positions ran contrary to those of other countries, but leadership in international organizations should not be confused with acquiescence to positions that contravene fundamental American interests. Future administrations should continue to seek and exercise leadership in multilateral economic bodies, while never hesitating to stand up for American interests in those bodies.

Standing up for American interests will be especially important in the formulation of international rules and norms for data governance. As Matthew Slaughter and David McCormick have argued, control over data governance, including standards for cross-border data transfers, will have significant ramifications for future economic and political power. The EU has staked out an aggressive position on these matters, which critics assert to be a protectionist response to the international prominence of U.S. technology companies. China is developing its own model, founded on authoritarian precepts. Both approaches would impose substantial impediments to cross-border data flows. The United States needs to work with like-minded countries toward the adoption of international data governance standards that are consistent with American interests.

Strengths and Challenges

An examination of American economic policymaking reveals bright spots that can serve as models for other initiatives. For example, the United States has thoroughly reformed its screening mechanism for foreign direct investment, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), to make it more capable of identifying and addressing investment that would harm national security while at the same time preserving the open investment climate that serves as an engine of growth. The bill prescribing these reforms enjoyed broad bipartisan support. The reformed CFIUS investment screening mechanism is a product of thoughtful balancing of competing considerations—protecting national security and attracting foreign capital—to achieve a result that furthers American competitiveness. Moreover, American policymakers recognized that many partner countries also face threats from malign investment and that a unified front against such exploitation would benefit all market economies. Between 2018 and 2021, the U.S. Treasury Department, which leads the CFIUS process, worked with dozens of countries to help them build out their own investment screening mechanisms.

Similarly, the United States has shown itself capable of rapid, decisive action to advance American interests, including its economic interests. Operation Warp Speed's success in facilitating vaccine development and distribution is a historic success that accelerated the recovery from COVID-19's depths, both in the United States and around the world.

The United States has also demonstrated that it can galvanize like-minded countries to set rules of the road on issues of common concern. U.S. leadership spurred rapid, widespread international adoption of the Clean Network initiative, which built a community of countries committed to including only equipment from trusted communications providers in their national telecommunications networks.

Compare these rapid, effective, consequential initiatives to the plodding pace at which necessary approvals for capital investments or innovations in regulated industries can be secured. Surely the United States can, without sacrificing analytic rigor, speed up consideration of these matters to give U.S. investors and entrepreneurs confidence that the projects they propose will not be trapped indefinitely in continuous loops of regulatory decision-making.

For example, the United States needs to internalize a commitment to responsible regulatory agility in financial innovation. Worldwide, the financial sector is experiencing rapid and thoroughgoing digitization.

While that trend presents risks that innovators and regulators must address, it also promises substantial benefits in terms of the speed, cost, efficiency, and inclusiveness of financial services. Many of the most dynamic, most innovative financial companies in the world are U.S.-based. To harness the potential that digitization and American financial innovators can offer, U.S. policymakers need to work rapidly toward providing clarity and certainty regarding the regulatory regime applicable to new financial technologies, including digital assets. The dangers of failing to do so are that these technologies could come to maturity elsewhere, the United States could become an importer of financial technologies, and other countries' decisions regarding regulatory treatment could become more influential than our own.

U.S. policymakers must also take urgent action with regard to international supply chains. With manufacturing declining as a share of economic activity in all advanced economies, it is unrealistic to believe that most manufacturing of goods consumed in the United States will be re-shored to American factories. Nor it is realistic to believe that the United States and China will fully decouple, severing all trade or financial interconnection. Nonetheless, the current U.S. supply chain configuration imperils national security and compromises American economic power. For critical goods, the United States cannot tolerate dependence on undiversified supply chains controlled by strategic competitors. To prevent substantial vulnerability in semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, advanced batteries, and rare-earth minerals essential to cutting-edge technologies, the United States must have assured supplies of these vital inputs. As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, the United States must have an ironclad access to medical goods, including domestic production capacity for the most critical items. U.S. policymakers must immediately work to ensure that the United States either has the capacity to produce these items itself or that it has a guaranteed ability to procure them from our closest allies without interference by strategic competitors.

In all these matters, there are no quick fixes. But there is also no excuse for failing to move rapidly to re-center American policymaking on enhancing and ensuring U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. We must treat the pursuit of economic strength and dynamism not as an afterthought but as a mandate.

Economic Competition & International Trade: From Decoupling to Industrial Policy

A Response from Jonathan Burks

Since the Second World War, American trade policy has been driven by a core conviction that the United States has more to gain—both economically and strategically—from free trade than it stands to lose from increased competition from abroad. Brent McIntosh's call for a "mindset that consistently puts the strength and dynamism of our national economy at the center of policy deliberations" challenges policymakers to look afresh at whether that trade policy consensus should still hold. In the context of the competition with China, the answer is not a simple one. Free trade still provides the greatest economic benefits, but in terms of strategic concerns, the calculus is much more difficult than during the Cold War when the strategic threat was distinct from the economic challenge.

The Postwar Consensus

At the close of World War II, the United States was the only major economy undamaged by the war. Enjoying absolute advantages in almost every category of production, U.S. policymakers did not view any other state as an economic threat. The war had spurred massive increases in industrial capacity and a significant increase in the dispersion of skilled labor across the country. Moreover, it was a common belief among policymakers that prewar tariff increases had contributed to—if not outright caused—the Great Depression, which policymakers in the immediate postwar years feared could return once the demand stimulus from wartime was removed.

Summoning economic concerns to argue for liberalized trade, policymakers felt comfortable leveraging the strategic value of access to American markets and financing as a prime inducement for countries to choose the non-Communist West over alignment with

the Soviet bloc. Indeed, the postwar architecture of global economic institutions that included the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was originally intended to include an International Trade Organization. While the latter was never created, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which eventually became the World Trade Organization, was the substantive realization of the same goal, establishing liberalized trade as a bedrock of the Western economic order.

America's postwar economic predominance inevitably declined as the world recovered from the ravages of war. This meant more competition from abroad for American industry, and, predictably, it translated into diminishing domestic political support for free trade. Still, the broad consensus held, with each administration during the Cold War playing some role in expanding the community of countries participating in the market-driven, global economy.

The Present Challenge

More recently, that consensus has frayed in the face of long-standing concerns about a perceived decline in U.S. manufacturing, exploitative trade and industrial practices by a very large entrant into the global economy, and worries about the strategic implications of reliance for manufactured goods on the People's Republic of China.

While the consensus view of economists remains that free trade is the most economically efficient arrangement (i.e., it results in the most output for the given inputs), there is a much greater level of debate around the reality that the costs and gains from trade are not equally distributed. Workers in import-competing industries bear a disproportionate share of the costs, while the gains to consumers and to workers in industries that rely on imported inputs are more broadly shared but relatively smaller. This distributional disparity matters because it undermines the political consensus that is necessary for modestly consistent strategy over time. Moreover, if the "loser" from trade is the domestic manufacturing sector, then the United States may lose a measure of strategic autonomy given the centrality of some manufacturing to the generation of national security. What is economically efficient is not necessarily optimal across other important indicia of strength.

How then should policymakers with the McIntosh mindset develop a trade policy optimized for the competition with China? The following considerations are a useful guide to policymakers who will have to grapple with this question day-to-day and not just in terms of an abstract commitment to an "America First" philosophy or to a trade policy that "works for the middle class."

• *Bilateral deficits are economically meaningless but could have strategic and political importance*. In economic terms, it does not matter if the United States has a trade surplus or deficit with any given country. The national income accounting system is just an artifice. In domestic political and strategic terms, however, bilateral deficits can have real importance. Domestically, they can shape popular perceptions about the nature of our relationships with adversaries and partners alike. In strategic terms, the nature of the deficit could be a sign of real dependence and thus vulnerability in either direction—or in both directions.

• *Policies to address bilateral deficits have multilateral effects*. Bilateral trade disputes can rearrange trade—and thus political—relationships in unintended ways. The trade war with China is a case in point. As China imported fewer U.S. goods, it increased imports from the rest of the world. The net effect was that China deepened economic relationships with many countries that might otherwise have been natural U.S. allies. Steps taken for economic reasons can have a profound impact on the strategic sphere.

• *Many countries in Asia share our strategic concerns, and working with them can lessen the economic costs of action*. Almost any government intervention to change the shape of the economic relationship with China—whether full decoupling, more modest redesign of select supply chains, or anything in between—will entail real costs to the U.S. economy. How many of those costs we bear alone is a choice. Other states in the region share our strategic concerns and, if engaged intelligently, can help to reduce some of the costs. For example, policies to facilitate foreign direct investment could lower the costs to U.S. suppliers of relocating supply chains out of China.

• *Access to the U.S. market benefits U.S. consumers and can attract allies*. The ability to import relatively inexpensive consumer goods is a core element of the high living standards enjoyed by Americans across the income spectrum. In addition to being good for U.S. consumers, access to our market is also of tremendous value to potential allies in the competition with China. Just as strategists worry that the U.S.–China economic relationship might limit our freedom of action, robust and growing trade relations with third countries can help them choose the right side in the competition with China.

• *Our traditional allies in Europe have long had competing economic philosophies and are unlikely to be reliable partners in the economic competition with China*. Some of the principal beneficiaries of the U.S.–China trade war have been European countries. Moreover,

as a matter of principle, most European governments believe in industrial policy as a normal policy tool, have less of an aversion to economic espionage, and have no ideological commitment to limited government intervention in the economy. While they may share some of our strategic concerns about China, they are not natural allies on the most important elements of the economic competition.

Conclusion

Trade policy can do only so much. A complete decoupling of the American and Chinese economies would not mean victory in our present strategic competition—nor would it cripple the U.S. economy. It would be costly and disruptive but, ultimately, inconclusive. Measures short of decoupling can have incremental effects and should be evaluated with the considerations outlined above. Ultimately, the greatest contribution trade policy can make in the competition with China is to help the American economy grow faster and maintain its dynamism, which historically has been our path to success.

Economic Competition & International Trade: From Decoupling to Industrial Policy

A Response from Eric Chewning

As Brent McIntosh adeptly points out, "Support for U.S. economic competitiveness is not fundamentally a discrete set of policy proposals. It must be an integrated policymaking mandate."

But what would such a policymaking mandate look like? Particularly one that might appeal to limited government, free-market-oriented conservative internationalists.

The example from President Ronald Reagan's 1985 Commission on Industrial Competitiveness might be helpful. The commission, convened in response to Japan's rapid economic rise, was led by John Young, president and chief executive officer of Hewlett-Packard. It recommended a focus on crosscutting policies to improve America's business environment for all companies—that is, a "horizontal" industrial policy emphasizing four areas: technology, capital, human resources, and trade.[1]

The Young Commission also offered a particularly useful definition of competitiveness:

> The degree to which a nation can, under free and fair market conditions, produce goods and services that meet the test of international markets while at the same time maintaining or expanding the real incomes of its citizens.

[1] For context, industrial policies are targeted government interventions with the aim of increasing the positive externalities of select economic activities. In theory, industrial policies address market imperfections. In an environment with full information and strong governance, policymakers should invest selectively to take advantage of externalities and spillovers that some activities have relative to others. In practice, governments face two key issues: imperfect understanding of existing constraints, incentives, and opportunities and their vulnerability to corruption, manipulation, and rent seeking. These policies can vary between "vertical" policies that favor specific firms or narrow sectors and "horizontal" policies that target broad sectors by improving their business environment. The more "horizontal" these policies are, the more they approach the characteristics of public goods.

Note three important concepts: free and fair market conditions, the test of international markets, and rising standards of living at home.

By this measure, America's performance in the 21st century has been mixed. Since 2001, the U.S. trade deficit, the amount by which we import more than we export, has grown by 121 percent. On the other hand, per capita GDP, a measure for standard of living, grew by 71 percent.

In contrast, since entering the World Trade Organization in 2001, China's trade surplus has grown by 1,853 percent and its standard of living has increased by 1,022 percent.

Now, U.S.–China economic relations are not necessarily zero-sum, and China should be expected to outperform on some metrics given the significantly lower base of economic activity. That said, such rapid economic growth is unprecedented. For example, the closest analogue might be Japan's economic growth from 1973 to 1995, when its economy grew by a factor of 12. China's recent economic growth is a factor of 16. Today, it is the world's second-largest economy in absolute terms—and the largest when measured on the basis of purchasing power parity.

China's State-Capitalism Approach

China's model of state capitalism is based on investment spending, significant state ownership of the largest companies, controlled market access for foreign players with forced technology transfer, direct intervention in markets and firms, and blurred lines between party, state, and corporate leaders.

Over the past two decades, China has seen significant GDP growth and rise in incomes, supported by significant rates of investment in assets like capital equipment, factories, residential structures, and inventories (approximately 45 percent of GDP versus 20 to 30 percent in peer economies).

These investments are enabled by China's high household savings rate (23 percent of GNI versus 8 percent in the United States). Households save money that is then lent by state-owned banks to corporations that use that money to invest in their business operations.

A significant portion of this lending goes to state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which represent approximately 30 percent of the full economy but 65 percent of the largest 500 firms. SOEs are contributing to China's rising rates of corporate debt (150 percent of GDP versus 75 percent in the United States).

The majority of large SOEs are wildly inefficient and destroy value, with economic profit concentrated in a handful of "superstar" private sector entities. Their size, protected status, and state subsidization enable SOEs to bring down the expected returns of global industries like manufacturing. This contributes to the economic pressures to move work from higher to lower cost regions.

Going forward, this state-capitalism model may be challenged as China's annual GDP growth slows. The experience of comparable developing economies suggests there are several potential structural challenges to China's growth trajectory, including slowing productivity gains, shifting demographics, lack of globally competitive multinational companies, and rising corporate debt levels. Much hinges on China's ability to reduce reliance on debt-fueled investment as a growth driver and boost consumer spending and productivity in the economy.

An Integrated Policy Response for American Competitiveness

As McIntosh rightly calls out, "Policymakers must also recognize that their goal should be protecting the U.S. business environment, not individual businesses." This is a foundational concern with Chinese state capitalism: It undermines the U.S. business environment. Therefore, U.S. policymakers need to get China to change its behavior and/or take steps to improve the competitiveness of U.S. companies.

The Trump Administration's Section 301 Tariffs (which are still in place) were launched, in part, to further the first objective. Let's briefly explore the second.

A horizontal industrial policy focused on American competitiveness should have five objectives:

1. *Capture growth from trade shifts.* McKinsey Global Institute estimates $4.6 trillion in trade flows could shift over the next five years because of both economic and noneconomic factors. To capitalize on this opportunity, policymakers and business leaders need to work together to ensure a level playing field for companies based in the United States and like-minded countries. This includes working with allies on things like standard-setting in new technologies, mutual defense trade agreements, and incentives to replant supply chains out of China.

2. *Ensure access to capital.* U.S. investor expectations for rapid returns make investment in physical capital less attractive. U.S. firms in capital intensive manufacturing industries average higher returns on invested capital than European and East Asian

counterparts, but they have failed to reinvest in plants, property, and equipment. Depreciation of physical capital is outpacing investment, resulting in a net aging of equipment and facilities. Equipment tends to be older, particularly in industries with more small and midsized manufacturers—indicating that smaller firms may struggle to invest in modernizing equipment.

3. *Adopt Industry 4.0 technologies*. In order to boost productivity, American manufacturers need to embrace digitally enabled technologies, processes, and business models. However, early indications on U.S. competitiveness are not encouraging. For example, the World Economic Forum Global Lighthouse Network highlights factories that serve as aspirational targets for the adoption of Industry 4.0 digital manufacturing technologies. Currently, just 7 of 69 lighthouses operate in the United States. Twenty operate in China.

4. *Foster resilient supplier ecosystems*. Firms thrive in ecosystems surrounded by suppliers and research institutions. Business leaders and federal, state, and local governments need to work together for a holistic approach to address the health and comprehensiveness of many small- and medium-sized suppliers—an effort that would have positive implications for spurring new economic activity.

5. *Focus on developing people, not just saving jobs*. As production technology changes, so too must the workforce. Real wages for production workers have increased by only 6 percent since 1997, while the U.S. median income has risen by 34 percent. One industry survey found a "technical skills gap" to be the most likely cause of derailed manufacturing plans in the next two to four years. U.S. firms must address the underlying factors that have made attraction and retention increasingly difficult.

Conclusion

Given the ability to translate economic output to military power, there are national security implications to economic competitiveness. As President Reagan said in his 1987 State of the Union Address, "It is now time to determine that we should enter the next century having achieved a level of excellence unsurpassed in history. We will achieve this, first, by guaranteeing that government does everything possible to promote America's ability to compete." Now, a quarter way into the 21st century, it is clear that democratic governments have a necessary role in addressing the market-distorting impact of China's state-capitalism model, so that their companies can compete.

U.S. Strategy and Presence in the Middle East Amid Great Power Competition

Paul Miller

A conservative internationalist approach ranks the relative importance of different geopolitical regions of the world by looking at their comparative levels of wealth, power, freedom, and danger. By those criteria, Europe and East Asia still rank as the preeminent geopolitical theaters in the world and demand the highest level of American engagement and investment. By those same measures, the importance of the Middle East has long been exaggerated and should occupy less American time, attention, and resources—though complete withdrawal would be dangerous and unrealistic—while South Asia has long been neglected and should command more.

The Middle East

The Middle East has taken place among the first rank of geopolitical regions because of its influence in the world oil market. The region produces a smaller proportion of world GDP than either Latin America or South Asia, constitutes less than 5 percent of U.S. trade, and has a smaller proportion of global power than Africa. Much of the political violence in the region—including the recent flare-up between Israel and Hamas—is irrelevant to the United States and matters only insofar as it might threaten global oil supplies or empower Iran. The Middle East is mostly populated by poor, small, corrupt, incompetent autocracies unimportant to U.S. national security and unable (and unwilling) to contribute meaningfully to the liberal order.

The United States' long-term strategic goals for the region include helping bolster Israel's security, containing the influence of a nuclear

Iran, and supporting local allies' efforts to defeat ISIS and other jihadist groups. It can pursue most of these goals through relatively low-cost means. Between the Iron Dome and its nuclear deterrent, Israel's security is essentially assured and requires little ongoing American engagement aside from continued weapons sales. While the spread of democracy to the region would be an ideal long-term solution to some of the region's perennial problems, there is no prospect for such an outcome in the foreseeable future. The declining importance of the Middle Eastern oil market also means the United States does not need to sustain its commitment to the defense of its autocratic allies in the region for much longer, the usefulness of whom to U.S. national security is increasingly questionable.

In most respects, the United States can afford to view engagement in the Middle East as a secondary priority. That said, we should also recognize that since the withdrawals from Iraq and Syria, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East is at or near the lowest level it has been in 30 years. Further military withdrawal introduces much higher risk with little discernible benefit, while some small increase in forces could substantially improve the United States' ability to influence events.

Iran, Syria, and ISIS

The rise of a hostile government in Iran since 1979, its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and its support for jihadist terrorism are significant, but not existential, security challenges to the United States. Iran is a lesser threat than Russia or China, which are global powers, and even less than North Korea. North Korea inhabits an economically important neighborhood, has a close relationship with China, and is near several democratic U.S. allies. North Korea is poorer and weaker than Iran, but it can threaten more things the United States cares about.

The U.S. goal is not to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, which is probably impossible; Iran is already a "near-nuclear" power. Its acquisition of nuclear weapons is virtually assured, and crossing the threshold will not change the regional security dynamic, which has already adjusted to treat Iran as a nuclear power. The 2015 nuclear deal left key nuclear facilities in place, conceded crucial details of the inspections and enforcement regime to Iranian preferences, expired after a decade, and did not cover delivery systems or Iran's support for terrorism. It was essentially the formal codification of Iran's nuclear breakout capability and regional hegemony. The deal was deeply flawed, but President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the deal and reimposition of sanctions did not give the United States enough leverage for the Biden administration to compel Iran

to agree to a better one. Iran, meanwhile, is unfettered to pursue a nuclear capability.

In any other region, the U.S. strategy would be straightforward: Ally with regional democratic partners to contain the influence of a rival nuclear autocracy. The situation in the Middle East is more complicated because, besides Israel, there are no stable democracies. Several neighboring states are failed or failing, there are ongoing wars in Syria and Iraq, the region is haven for several terrorist groups, and Russia is increasing its influence in Iran and Syria. The United States cannot solve all these problems, but their presence makes the containment of Iran much more difficult.

The obvious candidate for a counterweight to Iran is Iraq, which is the role it played during its 1980–88 war with Iran. But consumed with its own descent into state failure, recovering from its life-or-death struggle with ISIS, and increasingly drawn into Iran's orbit because of its sectarian and autocratic Shi'a-led government, Iraq is unable to act as an effective counterweight to Iran. Alternatively, Israel is a rich, powerful, liberal, democratic ally in the Middle East, widely believed to have nuclear weapons, and implacably opposed to Iran. However, the U.S.–Israeli alliance has less regional influence because of Israel's poor relations with the Arab world. In addition, despite Israel's technological superiority, it may be simply too small to contribute meaningfully to a major war with Iran.

The United States has no good options to tackle these interweaved problems. Some policymakers called for the United States to intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war. Although it was probably right not to intervene, the United States made that decision for the wrong reasons. The United States appears unable or unwilling to devote the energy and resources required for successful stabilization and reconstruction operations. President Trump explicitly disavowed nation building, tried repeatedly to withdraw entirely from the region, and abandoned the United States' Kurdish allies in Syria. The Biden administration has shown no greater appetite for messy engagements in failed states. Intervening halfway is worse than not intervening at all and would likely empower Iran, not contain it. By staying relatively aloof in Syria, the United States at least avoided that outcome.

A mildly better option would be to encourage a Saudi-led coalition to fight both ISIS and Iranian proxies, as it did in Yemen, and act as the regional counterweight to Iran. But the kingdom is an unreliable long-term partner because its refusal to liberalize at home risks political instability, while its inability to diversify its economy guarantees its eventual economic stagnation. Saudi Arabia purports

to combat jihadists while simultaneously exporting many of the ideological resources that inspire them. Regional hegemony by Saudi Arabia would extinguish the last sparks of liberalism in the Arab world. Worse, it might risk sparking a Saudi–Iranian war with U.S. and Russian sponsorship on opposite sides. These drawbacks lead to an obvious, if controversial, conclusion: If the United States can construct a viable containment strategy against Iran without Saudi help, it should repudiate the Saudi alliance.

The best option for a containment strategy against Iran is likely a mutual defense treaty with Israel, extending the United States' nuclear umbrella over the region's only democracy (obviating the need for Israel to go public with its arsenal), while seeking to use the momentum of the Abraham Accords to broaden the Israel–Arab rapprochement and build a coalition against Iran. In addition, the United States should probably maintain or even increase a small number of ground forces to Iraq and Syria to resume training and combat support with the Iraqi army and Kurdish forces. But any such mission would be far smaller and have humbler aspirations than before: U.S. forces cannot occupy, administer, or democratize Iraq or Syria. They can seek to consolidate gains against ISIS, train local security forces, provide a minimal level of ballast against Iranian influence, and gradually return the region to a basic level of stability. In turn, a more stable environment might open doors a decade or more from now for further diplomatic and economic engagement to broaden the anti-Iran coalition with more reliable, stable, prosperous, and responsible partners. But any such investment today is likely to be wasted.

South Asia

In contrast to the Middle East, South Asia is home to two nuclear-weapons states, a third of the planet's population, the densest network of jihadist groups, the epicenter of global terrorism, the world's largest democracy, and one of the rising economic superpowers of the century. It accounts for a greater share of global GDP, national military capabilities, and overall global power than the Middle East. If the United States trims its commitments in the Middle East and bides its time, South Asia should command an increasing share of American time, attention, and resources. American engagement should take two forms: courting India and recommitting to Afghanistan.

India

The most obvious opportunity for the United States is India, whose value to the United States far outstrips that of Israel or Saudi Arabia.

The United States and India share common concerns over China and Islamist terrorism. Thanks to its economic liberalization since 1991, India is one of the two great rising economic superpowers of the 21st century and, with a large talent pool of educated, English-speaking youth, a valuable U.S. trading partner. And, of course, India is the great democratic miracle of the world.

India receives very little economic aid from the United States, but its economic liberalization means it is capable of making efficient use of economic assistance. The U.S.'s Millennium Challenge Corporation, for example, should become, essentially, the India Investment Corporation. The Indian military is an obvious candidate for strategic investment, including counterterrorism training, joint naval exercises, and weapons sales. The U.S. military's hard-won experience in counterinsurgency operations might be welcomed by Indian forces still grappling with several Maoist and separatist movements. The Indian market for weapons by itself could become a major component of the U.S.–India trade relationship, and the U.S. should also explore a deeper and broader intelligence liaison relationship with India.

Afghanistan

U.S.–Indian ties will be more difficult to cultivate if the United States withdraws from Afghanistan and leaves behind a weak and fragile Afghan state susceptible to Pakistani dominance, a resurgent Taliban, and renewed safe haven for jihadist terrorists. For that and other reasons, Afghanistan remains important to American security.

The war in Afghanistan has neither completely failed nor yet achieved sustainable success. Al-Qaeda has not launched another 9/11-scale attack. The Taliban fell from power and, while they control large swaths of the countryside, have yet to regain formal power in Kabul. The government in Kabul and its army is allied to the international community in its fight against terrorism. The Afghan economy is better than it used to be (a low bar) and most indicators of human development show progress. Most importantly: An Afghan army and police force exist and, despite corruption and illiteracy, are leading the fight against the Taliban and its allies.

The war has lasted so long because the United States long ago gave up on any effort to stabilize or rebuild the country and stayed only to play whack-a-mole with terrorist groups. Endless war was a feature, not a bug, of U.S. strategy there. The answer is not to leave, but to stay and change strategy. Reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan are vital to American security if we want to achieve lasting peace. Because the Taliban gives active safe haven and support to al-Qaeda,

the United States has to defeat the Taliban to defeat al-Qaeda. In turn, defeating the Taliban *and preventing their return* requires empowering the Afghan government and army.

The agreement that the Trump administration and the Taliban signed last year, and that the Biden administration is inexplicably executing, is unlikely to ach eve the United States' single most important goal—the denial of safe havens for terrorist groups—because the agreement is lopsided. The obligations on the United States are clear, specific, and measurable: Remove all U.S. troops and vacate all military bases. The Taliban's obligations are, by contrast, vague and unspecified. The Taliban promises not to let any group use Afghanistan to threaten the United States, not to cooperate with or host any such group, and to "send a clear message" that such groups "have no place in Afghanistan." The agreement contains no details and no means of enforcement or verification for the Taliban's commitments.

If the Biden administration goes through with the withdrawal agreement, it will have withdrawn all assets and all forces that provide the best intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance against the most dangerous terrorist targets in the world and left our security in the hands of the very Taliban who harbored them in the first place. Few believe the withdrawal will end the war or even end the terrorist threat to U.S. national security. In light of these realities, there is no persuasive reason to withdraw the few troops remaining from Afghanistan. U.S. troops prevent the Taliban from overrunning the country and giving safe haven to al-Qaeda. They help train the Afghan army and keep them in the fight against our common enemies. Only 66 U.S. troops have been killed in action over the past six-and-a-half years—fewer than one per month. There is no large-scale antiwar movement and no domestic political pressure to end the U.S. military deployment there. The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is indefinitely sustainable and strategically vital, and there is no compelling reason to end it.

Withdrawal temporarily endangers U.S. interests while removing U.S. influence, and ensuing events are likely to draw the United States back in, as happened in Iraq, but only after the situation deteriorates and makes reengagement harder and costlier. Ending wars requires long-term commitment, deep engagement, and American leadership, not withdrawal and restraint. It will be time for the United States to withdraw when al-Qaeda and its affiliates have been definitively defeated or when the United States has enabled its Afghan allies to successfully deny safe haven to them in South Asia.

In lieu of that, there are few plausible policy options for what to

do the day after withdrawal. Leaving will almost certainly mean a humanitarian crisis, a new wave of Afghan refugees, one of the most significant reversals for women's rights in the developing world in two decades—and possibly the collapse of the Afghan state, the fragmentation of the Afghan army, and the ascendency of the Taliban and their ideological allies. It will encourage and empower jihadists across the world, damage the United States' standing with other allies, and give momentum to Chinese and Russian efforts to portray the United States as weak, feckless, and dangerous. Drawing down to zero gets the United States almost no further gain but carries enormous risk of collapse, defeat, and irreversible failure that will reverberate across South Asia, the Middle East, and the world.

U.S. Strategy and Presence in the Middle East Amid Great Power Competition

A Response from Elbridge Colby

The United States must limit much more substantially its strategic engagement in the Middle East. This is both necessary and feasible.

It is necessary because America needs to prioritize the much greater threat posed by China in Asia and the Western Pacific. The United States must direct the overwhelming weight of its strategic effort to ensuring that China—by far America's most serious military and economic rival—does not dominate that region, the world's largest market area. Achieving this difficult goal requires a more disciplined focus by the United States, including via substantial reduction in the attention and resources that we allocate to other regions, particularly the Middle East.

Such a reduction is feasible because U.S. interests in the Middle East are narrower in scope than has often been expressed. Boiled down to their essence, these interests are to

- prevent the domination of the oil-rich Gulf states by a potentially hostile power;
- protect Americans from the threat of transnational terrorism; and
- ensure the security of the state of Israel.

These interests can be served through a far more scoped and modest approach than the United States has pursued over the last generation—most notably through the "freedom agenda" but also through its efforts to broadly stabilize the Middle East. The United States should therefore reduce its military engagement and presence in the region, shifting burdens as much as possible to other, primarily

regional, actors. This last goal can best be pursued by supporting and bolstering the capabilities of Israel and regional states like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, whose interests on key issues broadly align with the United States.[1]

Let us address in sequence how the United States can optimally pursue these three core interests in the Middle East.

America's fundamental geopolitical interest is in ensuring no state can dominate one of the key regions of the world, which are defined as those regions with the greatest concentration of economic and thus military power. The Middle East, as a whole, is relatively unimportant; its proportion of global GDP is significantly less than 10 percent. Direct U.S. geopolitical interests are more narrowly clustered in the Gulf states due to the enormous concentration of hydrocarbons there; this area represents approximately 5 percent of global GDP. If a state could dominate that area, it could deploy the leverage such control would provide for coercive purposes, as happened in the oil crises of the 1970s. This is true despite America's newfound (and welcome) energy independence because such leverage would still affect the price of oil. This interest is secondary because it most directly affects U.S. allies rather than the United States itself, but it is still significant.

That said, there is no real threat of a state being able to achieve this goal of hegemony over the Gulf in the face of a reasonably anticipatable degree of regional resistance and a modest level of backing from the United States. During the Cold War, the mighty Soviet Union presented a real prospect of dominating the Gulf, but the relatively diminished contemporary Russia lacks the strength to pretend to such a goal. Iran, meanwhile, is too weak, comprising less than a fifth of the region's economic strength. While Tehran uses robust asymmetric capabilities to back sympathetic (usually Shi'a) populations, it lacks meaningful conventional military power projection to defeat, let alone conquer, states that do not want to fall under its sway—namely, the Gulf states. Accordingly, Iran can be checked from any plausibility of dominating the Gulf states by supporting their and Israel's efforts to check Tehran's ambitions. China, meanwhile, will not be able to securely (and thus militarily) dominate the Gulf without first dominating the regions between, including India. Thus, if America can prevent China from dominating Asia, it will, by definition, ensure Beijing cannot dominate the Gulf.

[1] For a useful frame in which to approach this effort, see A. Wess Mitchell, "The Middle East in an Era of Great Power Competition," *The Caravan*, The Hoover Institution, December 12, 2019, https://www.hoover.org/research/middle-east-era-great-power-competition.

Considering these factors, retaining the large legacy U.S. force posture and habits of employment in the region, much of which is oriented toward (putatively) "deterring" Iran and defending the Gulf states, is both unnecessary and dangerous. It is unnecessary because it is beyond what is needed to achieve these strategic goals. The United States can pursue these goals more efficiently by bolstering the military capabilities of its partners in the region. And, if need be, it can always flow forces in to assist such defenses and eject any invading Iranian forces, should the need arise. Because of Iran's weakness, Washington does not need to worry about the fait accompli in the way it does with respect to China in Asia and Russia in Europe.[2] Washington should also, where possible, encourage and promote the ability of European states with the interest and capacity to act in the Middle East (such as France, the UK, and Italy) to backfill U.S. forces, reducing the risks.

Retaining the legacy approach is dangerous because it perilously saps attention, capability, and resources from the priority focus on China in Asia. Accordingly, the U.S. military focus on Iran should be dramatically reduced, and requests for additional U.S. forces to "deter" Iran should generally be rejected. The smaller force that remains should be focused on strictly counterterrorism missions and enabling partner efforts to assume the burden of deterring Iran. Meanwhile, forces freed up by this narrowing should be redirected elsewhere, primarily toward China, or retired promptly if unsuited for such redirection.

The second core American interest in the Middle East is in preventing transnational terrorist attacks, particularly against Americans. As is evidenced by the experience of recent decades, large ground interventions do not help resolve this issue and almost certainly exacerbate the problem.

Instead, the United States is better off focusing on maintaining and improving the very sophisticated counterterrorism apparatus it has developed over this period. This apparatus is composed of an architecture of intelligence, diplomacy, security assistance, logistics enablers, and military forces such as special operators; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and strike platforms. The United States should keep investing in this architecture with the aim of continuously degrading, deterring, and, as necessary, destroying threatening terrorist elements. The emphases should be on enabling and incentivizing local partners to carry the brunt of the frontline activity and on developing less expensive and sapping military ways

[2] Evan Braden Montgomery, "Primacy and Punishment: U.S. Grand Strategy, Maritime Power, and Military Options to Manage Decline," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (2020): 769-796, doi:10.1080/09636412.2020.1811463.

of doing this (e.g., relying on non-stealthy, unmanned aerial vehicles rather than F-35s).

This counterterrorism effort will not be cheap. It is reasonable to assume that this effort will continue to constitute between about 10 to 15 percent of the U.S. defense budget as well as substantial intelligence and law-enforcement funding. But Americans should be prepared to continue paying this expense for the foreseeable future, given the ongoing risks of terrorism.

Third, the United States should continue to promote a secure Israel by ensuring its qualitative military edge, supporting its efforts to defend itself, and enabling its collaboration with Middle Eastern states that are increasingly willing to partner with it. In this last respect, the United States should build on the strong example and basis of the Abraham Accords.

Considering these factors, the United States was right to withdraw from Afghanistan and should markedly decrease its remaining forces in Syria and Iraq. Going forward, the United States should avoid any military operations in the Middle East that are not clearly and narrowly connected to one of the three interests specified above. Any efforts it does undertake should be as narrow, limited, and "offshore" as possible. More ambitious or ill-defined efforts—as have been all too common in recent decades—are very unlikely to be worth the effort. In any case, we generally do not have the combination of will and capability to successfully pursue such pacification efforts. Moreover, they imprudently draw away critical resources, including leadership attention and popular support, from far more important defense objectives, namely, ensuring a favorable and stable balance of power in Asia.

More fundamentally, the painful and frustrating American experience in the Middle East in recent decades sharply illuminates a reality that conservative foreign policy should acknowledge and proceed from. It is this: The purpose of American foreign policy should be to serve Americans' interests—their enlightened conception of their interests, to be sure, that often align with the interests of others—but always coming back ultimately in some direct, concrete, and proportionate way to the welfare of the American citizenry, namely, their security, freedom, or prosperity. That is, after all, the core purpose of the Republic that the Constitution gives us. It is also the conservative way: first looking after one's primary responsibilities and always carefully weighing the costs, benefits, risks, and anticipatable consequences of one's actions and how they might impinge on those primary responsibilities.

Therefore, the actual goals of American foreign policy cannot reasonably be to end tyranny, ensure the triumph of democracy in the world, spread a Pax Americana, or the like. Certainly those cannot be the aims for a truly conservative foreign policy. American interests, of course, generally benefit from a less tyrannous, more democratic, and more peaceful world, but that is not at all the same as saying it must be America's goal to end tyranny, ensure the triumph of democracy, or spread the Pax Americana.

America's foreign policy should first and foremost be about promoting and protecting the security, freedom, and prosperity of Americans in ways that proportion the risks and costs incurred with the benefits to be gained. Opposing tyranny, promoting democracy, and securing peace will often be consistent with those goals, and whenever this is the case, the United States should actively do so. But they will not always be aligned with those core purposes and, indeed, sometimes may directly contradict them. When that happens, American foreign policy must prioritize Americans' security, freedom, and prosperity.

U.S. Strategy and Presence in the Middle East Amid Great Power Competition

A Response from Morgan Ortagus

A successful U.S. strategy toward the Middle East will focus on three aspects: preserving the stability of friendly governments and their ability to perform counterterrorism operations advanced over the past 20 years at the lowest financial, military, and diplomatic cost to the United States; deterring and containing Iranian aggression; and expanding on the diplomatic and social progress made by the Abraham Accords. As tempting as it is to withdraw more forces from the Middle East, if we remain at current levels without increasing, we can continue to take actions necessary to ensure that the balance of power and regional dynamics do not destabilize to the point that a more significant U.S. intervention is required.

Ten years ago, the United States tested the premise that we could withdraw forces from unstable conditions in the Middle East when we withdrew from Iraq. The emergence of ISIS sent us back in only three years later. We will see an early taste of how this tactic works again when the final U.S. forces leave Afghanistan in September.

It is perhaps an attractive geopolitical prospect to relocate nearly all our troops out of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) theater in order to prepare for potential attacks from China and Russia, the more critical foes in the era of great-power competition. However, we should consider the possible ramifications of such a move:

- A disintegration of the Iraqi state, with Iran and its proxies gaining considerable influence

- A reconstitution of al-Qaeda across Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Sahel

- Deposition and replacement of friendly (even if not liberal democratic) governments in the Gulf and Levant by Sunni or Shi'a extremists, transforming the regional power dynamic

As a democracy, we must also recognize the reality of the political will of the American people. There is simply no appetite across either major political party for an increase of American troop presence in the Middle East. Thus, the United States must focus on a small, counterterrorism footprint in CENTCOM dedicated to disrupting terror operations and keeping critical intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in place. We do not need to move aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf whenever Saudi Arabia is attacked, but we should not invite a scenario where the Middle East's security degrades to the point that we are compelled to return large numbers of forces back into the region in a repeat of the 2014 anti-ISIS campaign. Instead, we should maintain a light footprint—intelligence operations and ISR assets, counterterror strike brigades, and rapid response units—in Iraq and Afghanistan as long as conditions require our presence.

Continuing to stabilize the Middle East is an important investment that will pay significant dividends. Congress should invest in a revitalized diplomatic corps (accompanied by major reforms in the Foreign Service) to push the region's autocratic and near-failed states toward more consistent and ongoing transparency, reforms, and accountability to their populations. While Americans understandably do not want to see large deployments of troops in the Middle East, a substantial increase in diplomatic presence, including in Iraq where most diplomats have been withdrawn, will be essential to push forward genuine democratic reforms. Progress may take decades, but shifting the burden toward the diplomacy and development side of the budget will be a more realistic long-term solution for a region where America's military has been hyper focused for far too long.

America cannot achieve any of its goals in the region without containing Iran. It is the linchpin to securing fragile nation-states and preventing the worst-case scenarios from occurring. Today, the regime is the last major impediment to widespread peace in the Middle East. We must remember that Iran remains the world's last revolutionary regime, ideologically committed at the most senior levels to regional and eventually world domination. The United States has two main strategic interests toward Iran: curbing their support and funding of terror operations and preventing them from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Since 2012, Iran has provided more than $16 billion in

financial support to the Assad regime, Iraqi militias, and other terror proxies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. They continue to harbor senior al-Qaeda leadership and have provided them with an operational headquarters and logistical support to fundraise, communicate, and organize attacks. Unfortunately, the deal that the Biden administration is close to sealing would provide the Iranian regime with $90 billion in sanctions relief along with an additional $50 billion in oil revenue annually. This will undo much of the progress made over the past four years to stabilize the Middle East.

The United States, along with Israel, is still quite capable of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and the past five U.S. presidents have all pledged to do so. This should remain a top priority for all U.S. administrations, as an Iranian regime equipped with a nuclear weapon would wield enormous leverage over its rivals, spark an arms race in the region, and be a dangerous proliferation risk. The regime has already transferred significant missile technology to Hamas and Hezbollah, which Hamas used in May to fire long-range missiles at Israeli cities for the first time. Long-range ballistic missiles paired with a nuclear weapon would threaten Israel as well as NATO allies in Europe. Unfortunately, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) permits Iran to pursue a rapid nuclear breakout in 2031. In the absence of a permanently denuclearized Iran, the United States should continue to provide Israel with all the assets and support to eliminate a nascent Iranian nuclear weapons program. A firm military deterrent has been sufficient to prevent Iran from pursuing a nuclear breakout during the three years that the United States has been withdrawn from the JCPOA. As recently as April 2021, the intelligence community has continued to assess that Iran has decided against pursuing a nuclear weaponization capability.

A policy of long-term containment and military deterrence against Iran, coupled with strong economic pressure, can turn off the spigot of terror financing and give governments embattled by Shi'a fighters a chance to catch their breath and regain sovereign control over their territory. An underfunded and poorly equipped Iranian military would give the regime more pause about pursuing a nuclear weapon if it cannot parry an Israeli or U.S. strike. And as long as Iran's economy plateaus, the other nations of the Middle East will grow while Iran stagnates. According to World Bank data, Iran's GDP was 31.5 percent of the combined GDPs of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2016. However, this ratio fell to 28.2 percent at the end of 2019—after just 18 months of U.S. economic pressure.

Efforts to promote democratization and support the flourishing of liberal society did not seem to show much progress over the past 20 years. Beginning in 2020, however, long-term changes in Middle

Eastern society bore fruit through the Abraham Accords that brought diplomatic and economic progress between Israel and Arab nations. We must continue to promote these agreements and encourage more Arab states to normalize their relationship with Israel. The impact of the Abraham Accords cannot be overstated. The accords bring stability to the region and enable coalitions of U.S. partners to work in the open with each other on combatting Iranian and extremist threats. The worst decision that the Biden administration could pursue would be to abandon relationships with Gulf nations and push them further into Russian and Chinese influence. President Joe Biden risks this today with his policies toward Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

Consolidating Diplomatic Bureaucracy

Not only does the Middle East continually draw in military assets, but the constant crises also suck up enormous diplomatic and bureaucratic bandwidth from the Department of State and National Security Council. Our senior diplomats, such as the secretary of state, deputy secretary of state, and national security advisor, should focus more of their attention on bolstering economic and diplomatic ties with allies in Latin America, Southeast and East Asia, and Europe. As Paul Miller notes in his piece, we need to court India far more than we have to date because their importance as an economic partner and buttress against China is paramount. This will admittedly be difficult, as Middle East issues (particularly those involving Iran and Israel) are often ones that seep into the U.S. news cycle.

The Trump administration had separate senior diplomats in charge of Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan. The assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs and under secretary for policy had carved out parts of the Levant and North Africa for themselves, while Presidential Senior Advisor Jared Kushner was at the top of the chain for most issues involving Israel and the Gulf. Along with the regional ambassadors, each were reporting directly to the secretary of state or the president, creating a massive bureaucratic jumble. The Biden administration has made this worse by separating Libya and Yemen away from the existing bureaucracy by giving them their own special representatives who also report to the secretary of state. As a result, the secretary of state is spending considerable time and effort micromanaging nearly every decision made in the Middle East since each of these officials effectively only reports to the secretary.

To solve this problem and enable senior leadership to focus on other parts of the world, the State Department should create a disciplined, hierarchical structure to consolidate diplomatic responsibilities for the Middle East. The president should empower the secretary of state to ensure that decision-making on diplomatic matters remains at

the State Department rather than proliferating authority across the government. The State Department should install an experienced and senior assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs who can coordinate with each of the special representatives assigned to each crisis area. However, those special representatives—if they are even needed—should report to that NEA assistant secretary. The assistant secretary would be the main interlocutor with the secretary, deputy secretary, and under secretary of state for policy and serve as the counterpart to the deputy national security advisor at the White House and the CENTCOM commander at the Pentagon. As a result, that official would be trusted by Middle Eastern governments to speak authoritatively on behalf of the U.S. government and could speed along diplomatic discussions without requiring the secretary of state's constant input.

A change in bureaucratic structure surely will not solve the problem of American foreign policy's overzealous focus on the Middle East that often comes at the expense of priorities in Europe and Asia. However, relocating more of these special envoy roles (and their accompanying political experience and clout) to Asia will at least serve to focus the secretary of state on the more important theaters. As we wind down special representatives to the Middle East, America should focus on where special representatives are needed in Asia. It is crucial for senior diplomats to focus on bolstering the Quad (the United States, Australia, India, and Japan), which the Trump administration revived after it went dormant for years during the Obama administration. Also in the near term, the United States and allies in Asia should begin laying the groundwork for an Asian version of NATO. Finally, the U.S. government, and especially the State Department, must continue to focus on public diplomacy messages to the populations of our Asian allies that will counter the propaganda spread throughout the region by the Chinese Communist Party.

Nuclear Deterrence and Arms Control in the 21st Century

Rebeccah Heinrichs

The greatest geopolitical threat to the United States and the U.S.-led order is China. Russia, likewise, poses a pressing threat to U.S. vital interests, and it views and treats the United States and NATO as its primary foes. Rogue regimes, including nuclear North Korea and Iran, continue to seek more effective means of coercing the United States. Nuclear brinksmanship has become more common, and the risk of a nuclear exchange is becoming increasingly acute.

A combination of factors has led us to this point, but the crux of the problem is that as our enemies have become more able to challenge the United States. Simultaneously, they perceive an inverse correlation in the strength of American resolve to put up an adequate defense. Their doubt in U.S. resolve is abetting the deterioration of the credibility of strategic deterrence that has underpinned the U.S.-led order for 70 years.

Central to the effectiveness of U.S. strategic deterrence is convincing our enemies of our resolve to defend American vital interests from aggression with whatever combinations of weapons necessary. Weapons included within the arch of strategic deterrence are the nuclear deterrent—the keystone of our national defense. American observers might enthusiastically disagree with the notion that American resolve has weakened. Although they might be right, their view has no bearing on the effectiveness of deterrence. What matters for deterrence to hold is *our adversaries'* perception of our resolve, and both through inaction and action, the United States has given them reason to doubt.

We have given them reason to doubt through our failure to attend to both the weapons development and revanchist aims of our adversaries, as was famously the case with the rise of China. We must

change course. Admiral Charles Richard's testimony to Congress has highlighted that "every operational plan in the Department… rests on an assumption that strategic deterrence and, in particular, nuclear deterrence is holding."[1] Although this essay is primarily focused on our nuclear deterrent, it should be said that it must be a top priority for the United States to regain the competitive advantage versus China conventionally as well. After all, a strategic attack will not necessarily be a nuclear one—at first. Secretary James Schlesinger reminded Congress that one of the best ways to deter nuclear war was to deter conventional war, since nuclear wars are plausible when a conventional war escalates.[2]

We have also given our adversaries reason to doubt through our failure to truly modernize—not just maintain—our nuclear enterprise and delivery systems. We also have given them reason to doubt due to our policy statements that place a premium on arms control and Cold War notions of simple stability through vulnerability. Despite this archaic thinking about what constitutes "stability" today, the geopolitical landscape is dynamic, the strategic capabilities of our adversaries are advancing and changing, and the national aims, military strategies, and willingness to take on risk vary from adversary to adversary.

However, the bulk of commentary from advocates and analysts argues that many things threaten the "stability" paradigm, including strategic missile defense, theater missile defense that could become "too effective," additional low-yield weapons, increasingly advanced conventional weapons such as hypersonic glide vehicles, any "new" capability that leverages modern technology, or anything that could be lethal in the space domain. Despite these intellectual and ideological headwinds, the Obama and Trump administrations and bipartisan congressional consensus concluded, as expressed in policy statements and modernization plans, that the U.S. deterrent is not only vital but also must be updated and even adapted.

This is because our nuclear enterprise is deteriorating. We placed a nuclear testing moratorium on ourselves and have not tested a nuclear weapon since the 1990s. North Korea tests, and there is reason to believe that Russia and China have tested, above a zero yield. As our nuclear stockpile ages and we eschew testing, we are also unable to produce the core component of our warheads: plutonium pits. Russia, China, and North Korea produce plutonium pits. As I penned with my colleague Tim Morrison, "Being able

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[1] Admiral Charles Richard, To receive testimony on United States Strategic Command and United States Space Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2022 and the Future Years Defense Program. (2021). https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/21-22_04-20-2021.pdf
[2] Secretary James Schlesinger, (rep.) Annual Defense Department Report FY1976 and FY 1977 (1975). https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/1976-77_DoD_AR.pdf?ver=5Yhnnc5giX2RjfQtS-jD-Vw%3d%3d

to produce at least 80 plutonium pits per year is the minimum requirement articulated by our nation's senior military and civilian leaders across administrations that bipartisan majorities of Congress enshrined into law."[3]

As for the U.S. nuclear triad, our nuclear delivery systems rely on decades-old technology.[4] The United States' 400 Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) entered service in 1970 and were scheduled to retire a decade later. The replacement missile, the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent, is needed because it will grant the United States a significant increase in reliability and will integrate cutting-edge technologies, giving our ICBMs an advantage over the kinds of defenses we anticipate our adversaries will possess in the decades to come. Similarly, the current Air Launch Cruise Missile (ALCM) carried by our bombers is scheduled to retire in 2030, and the Long Range Stand Off (LRSO) weapon, if supported, will replace it. Like the ALCM and Minuteman III, there are real challenges due to component part obsolescence with the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), and the entire fleet must be retired by 2039 regardless of whether its replacements (the Columbia-class SSBNs) are ready.[5]

In the United States, military and government leaders face domestic headwinds opposing any adaptation to U.S. strategic deterrence and allocation of the necessary resources over many budget cycles. Meanwhile, U.S. adversaries march ahead with their conventional, nuclear, and defensive systems in all domains with temerity.

China is investing with focus and prioritization of its nuclear weapons, and it is doing so as it becomes bolder in its threats against the United States and our allies in the region. As Commander of U.S. Strategic Command Admiral Richard recently summarized:

> [China's] strategic dyad of ICBMs and SLBMs will soon become a triad, with the completion of a nuclear-capable long-range bomber. China is building new land-based, road-mobile ICBMs, providing its forces more flexibility and capability. The PLA Navy Jin-class ballistic-missile submarines carry up to 12 SLBMs each. China has built new warning and C2 capabilities and improved its readiness. Further, China's nuclear weapons stockpile is expected to double (if not triple or quadruple) over the next decade.[6]

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[3] Jonathan Medalia, Manufacturing Nuclear Weapon Pits: A Decisionmaking Approach for Congress. (2014). Congressional Research Service. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R43685.pdf
[4] Patty-Jane Geller, & Rebeccah Heinrichs, (rep.) *Extending New START Makes U.S. Nuclear Modernization Imperative.* (2021). Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. https://www.heritage.org/arms-control/report/extending-new-start-makes-us-nuclear-modernization-imperative
[5] Dakota Wood, (rep.) *2020 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (p. 389). (2020). Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2020_IndexOfUSMilitaryStrength_WEB.pdf
[6] Admiral Charles Richard. *Forging 21st-Century Strategic Deterrence.* (2021). U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 147/2/1,416. https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/february/forging-21st-century-strategic-deterrence

Despite the relief of some Democrats and other liberal internationalist analysts, the New START Treaty has neither moderated Russia's behavior nor stopped the growth of Russia's nuclear weapons program. Setting aside the accounting problems in the New START Treaty, Russia has simply gone around the treaty's parameters to build delivery systems that are not limited by the agreement. As the Trump administration's Missile Defense Review explains, "Moscow is fielding an increasingly advanced and diverse range of nuclear-capable regional offensive missile systems, including missiles with unprecedented characteristics of altitude, speed, propulsion type, and range. These missile systems are a critical enabler of Russia's coercive escalation strategy and nuclear threats to U.S. allies and partners."[7]

When President Donald Trump entered office, North Korea's dictator Kim Jong-Un was repeatedly testing nuclear weapons and missiles, flying them over Japanese territory, and threatening to shoot at Guam, where American citizens live and on which our military operations in the region rely. In 2017, they successfully tested the Hwasong-14 ICBM, demonstrating that North Korea could likely deliver a nuclear warhead all the way to the American Midwest. Since the summits with President Trump, Chairman Kim has not resumed testing ICBMs, but he has tested other missiles in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions.[8]

Iran has demonstrated a commitment to improving its nuclear program and has sought to extort the United States for sanctions relief by threatening further nuclear weapons work. At the same time, it continues to improve its massive missile arsenal. In 2020, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps conducted a successful satellite launch. The Iranian regime's space-launch program is developing capabilities directly applicable to the advancement of an ICBM program. Iran has now shown it is willing not only to arm its proxies in Yemen to be used against Saudi Arabia, but also to launch other kinds of missile attacks against U.S. partners—and even ballistic missiles against U.S. bases.

Despite the variety of threats and the dangerous trends for missile development and proliferation, U.S. missile defense is not advancing at the necessary pace to stay ahead of the threats. The Missile Defense Agency is repeatedly asked to do more but with a painfully small budget that does not grow with the increased responsibilities. The

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[7] Office of the Secretary of Defense, (rep.) 2019 Missile Defense Review (p. 8). (2019). https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Interactive/2018/11-2019-Missile-Defense-Review/The%202019%20MDR_Executive%20Summary.pdf

[8] Rebeccah Heinrichs, *What North Korea's First Missile Test during the Biden Administration Means*. National Review. (2021). Retrieved from https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/03/what-north-koreas-first-missile-test-during-the-biden-administration-means/

Next Generation Interceptor will be added to missile fields in Alaska sometime by the end of the decade, evolving the entire homeland missile defense system, the Ground-based Midcourse Defense, if administrations and Congress support and sustain it.

Despite regularly opposing U.S. and ally missile defense advancements, Russia and China are investing in significant missile defense systems. Both are developing antisatellite systems. Russia has not failed to modernize its missile defense system deployed around Moscow and throughout Russia, including 68 nuclear-armed interceptors and other mobile missile defense systems. The Trump administration wisely included these advances in the 2019 Missile Defense Review, undermining the argument that there is credibility to Russian and Chinese opposition to U.S. missile defense developments.[9]

To bolster the credibility of our strategic deterrence, the United States must take the following bold, coordinated steps across administrations. These five steps will signal to our adversaries that they would be mistaken to calculate that the United States would be unwilling to do whatever is necessary to defend our vital interests and that, should strategic deterrence fail, we are committed and willing to fight to a conclusive victory.

1. *The first step is a matter of rhetoric and statements of policy*. The president should eschew the aspirational claim that his or her priority is to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our defense strategy. Instead, the president should issue a clear statement that the United States will defend its sovereignty and vital interests by any means consistent with American principles of justice (i.e., laws of war and, loosely, just war doctrine). Then the president should proceed to outline the agenda to make sure we are able to do this by making a full commitment to modernize as quickly as possible the nuclear stockpile and attendant infrastructure, to reconstitute the plutonium pit production capability at two sites, and to develop the next generation of nuclear delivery systems.

2. *Policymakers should resist pressure to elevate arms control as a national security achievement on its own*. Arms control can be a tool to contribute to stability; for example, greater insight and restrictions on Chinese nuclear-capable weapons would be welcome as would be constraints on Russian theater nuclear weapons. However, arms control can also be an impediment to the United States bolstering its security and sovereignty, as was

[9] Office of the Secretary of Defense, (rep.) 2019 Missile Defense Review (p. 8). (2019). https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Interactive/2018/11-2019-Missile-Defense-Review/The%202019%20MDR_Executive%20Summary.pdf

the case when the Russians continued to violate the Intermediate Nuclear-Force Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty. The ballyhooed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also had a deleterious impact on U.S. and regional security.

3. *With great intentionality, the United States should strengthen our network of allies and partners with the express purpose of deterring shared adversaries from carrying out their revanchist aims*. This step will greatly enhance assurance aims as well. Improving U.S. conventional advantage is a priority, but we must be ready with credible nuclear options in a state of acceptable readiness in the event of escalation that results in strategic attack. To do this, we must fortify Guam. It is critical that Guam receive the full missile and air defense capabilities that U.S. Indo-Pacific commanders have requested, along with greater cruise and ballistic missile sensor awareness and more regular practicing of "fly-on-warning" takeoffs for our bombers. The ALCM-B will remain serviceable until LRSO comes online. Also, the Trump administration reintroduced the W76-2 low-yield Trident submarine warhead to deter Russian aggression. The Biden administration should maintain this and signal its willingness to consider it in the Pacific as well.

4. *The United States should maintain high nonproliferation and counterproliferation standards for our adversaries*. The Biden administration has continued the Trump administration's insistence that complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program is the aim. Sanctions should remain in place in the interim and should not be relaxed to persuade North Korea to weaken only reversible parts of its program. The United States should also fully resume ally military exercises in the region both for the purpose of readiness and to bolster deterrence and assurance. And, as for Iran, the United States should go back to zero uranium enrichment as the standard for that regime.

5. *We should pursue robust missile defense development for both the regional context as well as defense of the U.S. homeland*. Even if the United States maintains that its homeland defense is only meant to defend against rogue threats, as those threats become more sophisticated and as we improve and increase the scale of our defenses, it will become untenable to walk the Cold War tightrope of remaining both satisfactorily vulnerable to peers in the name of "stability" and satisfactorily defended against rogue state threats. Maintaining mutual vulnerability between not just one but two peer competitors in the name of "stability" while both of those nations invest heavily in significant offensive and

defensive systems is already a dubious ambition. But failing to stay ahead of a growing North Korean threat in the name of mutual vulnerability would be indefensible. Missile defense contributes to deterrence by denial and, thereby, makes deterrence by punishment more credible. And if deterrence does break down, missile defense will contribute to damage limitation with the goal of fighting to win on terms most favorable to the United States. Missile defense is quite simply a necessary component of strategic deterrence, and we must take advantage of cutting-edge technologies in all military domains to more clearly demonstrate our resolve to deter the range of adversaries threatening the United States and to protect the American people.

Nuclear Deterrence and Arms Control in the 21st Century

Response from Kori Schake

Rebeccah Heinrichs makes assertions in her opening about the risk of nuclear weapon use and international perceptions of waning U.S. strength with which I disagree. However, those things need not be true to make a strong case for continuing and strengthening our nuclear modernization programs. I find much to agree with in Heinrichs' arguments. I agree with her Schlesinger reference that if you want to prevent nuclear war, you need to prevent conventional war among nuclear powers. Geoffrey Blainey's work shows that, historically, states tend to become more, not less, committed to their war aims if victory is not achieved quickly.[1]

Whether or not strategic stability should be our objective, we do not have it. And the reason is that our adversaries are modernizing their forces and cheating on arms control agreements. I agree with Heinrichs that modernization is important both for actual warfighting capabilities and for deterrence. Moreover, modernization was the bargain required to deliver Republican votes for the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, and the Biden administration should be held to those terms.

Still, I do not think the policies Heinrichs recommends are likely to be taken up either by the Biden administration or forced on the administration by Congress. For example, I struggle to see how the Biden administration can credibly argue "we are committed and willing to fight to a conclusive victory" after abandoning the war in Afghanistan. Certainly a Congress in which even Republicans adopt the framing of "endless wars" cannot sustain the fiction.

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[1] Geoffrey Blainey, *Causes of War*, chapter 11, "A Day That Will Live in Infamy."

We are probably in for a decade or more of satisficing on defense rather than closing the dangerous gap between our strategy—even our safety—and what the government commits in spending to attain it. The long shadow of mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan is part of the problem, but the burgeoning definition of what constitutes national security is also contributary. Democrats wanted climate change to be integral to the Defense Department's mission since the Clinton administration. President Barack Obama argued against nation building abroad when we need nation building at home. President Donald Trump disbelieved that the American-constructed international order was advantageous to our security. The pandemic raised new kinds of demands for protecting Americans from disease. And the Biden administration champions a self-congratulatory "foreign policy for the middle class," with Secretary Lloyd Austin testifying that nondefense spending in the Department of Defense budget (for education, for example) significantly contributed to national security. Together, this has all given momentum to the argument that money spent on conventional and nuclear warfighting is no more important to preserving and advancing our national security than are domestic expenditures.

Let me underscore that this is not true. An economy as dynamic as ours can easily shoulder spending 6 percent of GDP to protect and advance its national security interests. We should reject the pretense that shaping the international order is of less importance to the country than domestic priorities—or that a country as vastly wealthy as ours must make draconian trade-offs between guns and butter. The international order the United States and its allies created from the ashes of World War II has made us and so many others safe and prosperous, and it is worth defending, even at its ragged edges. Pulling countries into freedom and good governance makes us safer, adding countries that align with our interests and values and reducing the risks of wars the United States might be dragged into.

However, if the chasm between national security requirements and spending will continue to expand because the United States will not pay for its security, the country has four options: constrict demand, "innovate our way out of this problem," rebalance alliance responsibilities, or lose the next great-power war.

Mackenzie Eaglen and Michael Beckley's work shows just how essential but unpalatable actually prioritizing obligations to prejudice containing China will be.[2] In some ways, this is the strongest case for

[2] Mackenzie Eaglen, "Defense strategy and priorities: Topline or transformation?" *Reagan Forum*, March 2020; Michael Beckley, America Is Not Ready for a War with China: How to Get the Pentagon to Focus on the Real Threats, *Foreign Affairs*, June 10, 2021.

serious nuclear modernization of the kind Heinrichs argues for. We are not buying the military force to cover all of our commitments and will not want to accept the consequences of overtly parsing those commitments. Therefore, we will need to rely on a "New New Look" strategy, with conventional forces sized at least implicitly to provide escalation credibility.

American society remains besotted with innovation. We want to drive SUVs that are clean-energy powered. We have a society and economy that often achieve conflicting objectives. Steve Jobs' famous assessment of Apple captures the sentiment: "The cure for Apple is not cost-cutting. The cure for Apple is to innovate its way out of its current predicament."[3] That approach very often works. The United States is an engine of innovation due to immigration, deep and varied capital markets, Chapter 11 bankruptcy provisions, and a risk-tolerant culture. Nonetheless, betting on innovation is poor strategy, especially since it relies on adversaries granting the United States time to adapt.

Shifting more responsibility for allied security obligations to the allies most affected is overdue. The progression of the U.S. role for European defense is illustrative. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the United States committed to reverse any conquest; in the 1960s and 1970s, to defend at the forward edge of NATO territory; in the 1980s, to attack Soviet troops before they crossed into allied territory; in the 1990s, to take in new allies on the Russian periphery without stationing troops on their territory and expanding the kinds of attacks NATO addresses (e.g., cyber, gray zone). There are, however, limits to this approach. Most allies other than South Korea are a very long way from the ability to defend their territory, much less their interests, and are likelier to compromise their and our interests rather than shoulder greater obligations. A shift without catastrophic risk could not be carried out within about a decade.

Losing a war or balking at fighting are surefire ways to reduce obligations—just not risk. As we have seen in Iraq and are beginning to see in Afghanistan, wars do not end just because we stop fighting, and risks increase rather than decrease without U.S. involvement.

This leaves us in a dangerous place. If I were a U.S. enemy, I would rush to nuclear possession. The challenge is determining what works to prevent wars among nuclear powers or nuclear weapons acquisition by our adversaries.

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[3] Steve Jobs, quoted in Carmine Gallo, "The 7 Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs," *Forbes*, May 2, 2014.

Modernization is important but insufficient. Missile defenses are unlikely to ever surmount the problem of saturation. Nuclear stability among contesting great powers has historically resulted in proxy wars, pushing the responsibility for preserving our interests onto states least able to bear them.

The threat of preventative force has proven incredible in the cases of North Korea and Iran. Our enemies accurately read public hesitance across the Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations to attack either North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapons facilities.

Regime change is attractive, but we have little means to influence internal developments, especially on a politically salient time frame. Moreover, sanctions have produced a harder-line trend in Iran and possibly Russia, which may make the regimes more brittle. However, it is not clear whether that brings them closer to replacement or just produces even more dangerous governments.

Sanctions have succeeded in dramatically raising the costs but not preventing Iraq, Iran, or North Korea from pursuing their weapons programs. Moreover, our use of secondary sanctions is aggravating allies whose support we need and has begun to foster payment systems that skirt the dollar zone (e.g., the petroyuan in China and the payments mechanism in the EU payments mechanism), which creates a nascent but significant threat to dollar dominance.

Giving stature to adversaries, as President Trump did with Kim Jong-Un and both President Trump and President Joe Biden have done with Vladimir Putin, incentivizes bad behavior and does not appear to inhibit continued nuclear development. While North Korea has not tested a nuclear weapon since the summit, that may be due to where they are in the development cycle.

John Maurer argues that linking modernization and arms control in ways that channel development to the advantage of the United States can create the basis for bipartisan action.[4] That may be sufficient for securing domestic support for modernization but probably not for getting arms limitation agreements. We have not been able to cajole China into any negotiations to limit their nuclear forces nor Russia on tactical weapons. Russia's comportment toward the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty suggests that not only will they remain in noncompliance with current agreements but that they want to be known as cheating. Maurer admits that "with Russia so far ahead of the United States in their nuclear modernization, there is little

[4] John D. Maurer, "Restoring Nuclear Bipartisanship: Force Modernization and Arms Control," *War on the Rocks*, April 14, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/restoring-nuclear-bipartisanship-force-modernization-and-arms-control/

chance of serious concessions in the short term." U.S. withdrawals from treaties (beginning with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002) make any adversary agreement more difficult and probably more costly.

To conclude, I agree with Heinrichs that modernization as she has outlined is important, but it cannot substitute for resolve that engenders credibility. Substantial increases in defense spending and deeper commitment to winning wars would go a long way toward restoring U.S. credibility. We are a long way from doing either of those things. Therefore, while pressing for modernization and better strategies, we also need to try and reduce the political value of adversaries acquiring nuclear weapons by reiterating they will make no difference in our resolve to honor our own security and our commitments to help defend allies. Then, we should brace ourselves to be tested.

Nuclear Deterrence and Arms Control in the 21st Century

A Response from Alex Wong

Rebeccah Heinrichs puts forth a cogent evaluation of the U.S. nuclear deterrence posture and specific recommendations that err on the side of clarity and boldness over muddled intellectual hedging. That is no small compliment. As a foreign policy and national security community, we are too often captive to broad trends in thinking. It is tempting to channel our analyses through conceptual paradigms that may have been applicable in years and decades past but are ill-suited for a changed world. It is a continual struggle to step outside those paradigms, craft new ideas, and then shepherd them through the political and governmental processes that put them into practice.

In light of this struggle, it is important to emphasize the specific objective of this discussion. We are discussing nuclear deterrence and arms control in the *21st century*. Although we are more than one-fifth of the way through the 21st century, the tenor of the nuclear policy debate in the United States is still to a large extent weighed down by 20th century thinking and language. Heinrichs alludes to this in her paper when she mentions "archaic thinking about what constitutes 'stability,'" and "Cold War notions of simple stability through vulnerability." It is worth expanding upon this idea.

The latter half of the 20th century, of course, gave rise to the area of nuclear strategic studies. Its development occurred in the high-stakes crucible of the Cold War and the nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The best strategic and military minds debated and informed U.S. nuclear doctrine and its investments in strategic forces. The deterrence and arms control thinking that developed in that bipolar world had its near misses and harrowingly close shaves. But it also had its signature,

historic successes, including those attributable to this conference's namesake, President Ronald Reagan. The nuclear strategy of that era reduced threats, established international norms of transparency and cooperation, and bought time for the wider U.S. Cold War strategy to run its full course toward the soft collapse of the Soviet Union. That we ended that era without a nuclear exchange between great powers was an unvarnished success, and it was an outcome that was by no means preordained. It is not a surprise, then, that the legacy of that era's nuclear thinking would cast a long shadow—particularly as the strategic focus of the intervening 30 years took a looping sojourn away from nuclear-armed competition toward a unipolar strategy, then to counterterrorism and "small wars," and now back again.

However, it is imperative that we step outside of that shadow. History does not repeat. It does not even necessarily rhyme. We should be careful about an approach to nuclear strategy that consciously or unconsciously echoes what may have worked in the past. Scholars and policymakers should endeavor to reorient the nuclear policy discussion—complete with new concepts and more supple and flexible thinking—to account for the strategic landscape as it exists today. The failure to do so will pose dangers for the American people and the world.

Outmoded thinking leads to deficient U.S. nuclear capabilities, doctrine, and messaging. A deficiency in any of those elements risks enticing our geopolitical competitors to military adventurism—whether conventional, nuclear, or both. It risks the breakdown of the nonproliferation consensus we have forged with our partners, as nuclear-weapons development spreads beyond rogue states to stable governments seeking security outside the traditional U.S. nuclear umbrella. It also risks putting vital U.S. interests in certain theaters—and those of our friends and allies—at the mercy of the jealous and growing ambitions of China and Russia.

In the context of our current security environment, it is particularly important to consider how outmoded thinking negatively affects one area of our nuclear strategy: the growing challenge of China's nuclear forces.

Deterrence and China's Strategic Culture

Heinrichs lays out the facts of China's recent nuclear investments, which feature significant modernization, expansion, and diversification of its capabilities. Not many of these facts are in dispute among scholars and practitioners. What is in dispute are Chinese intentions and the impetus behind the nuclear buildup. This

debate introduces a strong line of thinking that

- China's recent buildup is fully consistent with its half-century-old (albeit uncertain) "no first use" policy;

- the buildup changes no strategic realities for the United States in the region, given the continuing advantage we have in arsenal size; and

- the "logic" of strategic deterrence between the United States and China is holding.

To the extent that the strategic balance is being threatened, it is U.S. nuclear modernization and ballistic missile defense development that is tipping the scales out of whack.

Proponents of this line of thinking draw from a half century of strategic theory—born mainly from a Cold War framework—to inform their assessments. However, what they do not have (due to Chinese obfuscation and opacity) is insight into current Chinese doctrinal thinking on nuclear forces, let alone clear insight into China's actual capabilities. In the face of this uncertainty, strategists should not rest so comfortably on what we have come to call the "logic" of deterrence. The prevailing theories of deterrence and arms control are underpinned by a common idealism, rationalism, and classical liberalism that—even if not shared by the Soviet Union at first—came to infuse the deterrence frameworks that arose in the latter half of the Cold War.

These principles may be inapt for a rising China. This is not to say that our strategists are being naïve or that Chinese decision makers are in some way irrational. However, it is to say that China's strategic culture may not map neatly onto the deterrence frameworks of the past 50 years. This is particularly so as China has entered a period where the sources of their power have swelled, the domestic Chinese political imperative to wield that power is rising, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has unveiled and expanded China's grand strategic designs.

In evaluating how China's strategic culture affects its nuclear planning and doctrine, we should ask a number of questions.

- How clean is their doctrinal line between nuclear warfare and conventional warfare? How does the line change depending on the contingency? Is there a line at all?

- What is the framework by which the CCP values the lives of

the Chinese people and its numerous population centers? Is that framework commensurate with the value that the United States places on our population and those of our treaty allies? How does the fact that China is a party state—with a Communist Party that exists parallel to and above the government and population—affect that valuation framework?

- How does China's geographic position, combined with its historical self-conception at the center of Asia, affect notions of strategic deterrence and regional coercion? Do these immutable realities and historical legacies lead them to unwisely discount the value that the United States places on our position as a Pacific nation? Does this lead them to misunderstand the depth of our connections to the region's democracies and expanding prosperity?

- How does China's persistent territorial tensions with India and Russia, which are nuclear powers, affect its nuclear strategy?

- What effect, if any, do the idiosyncrasies of Xi Jinping (with his personality-driven rule and indefinite time in power) have on Chinese nuclear strategy, risk tolerance, and perception of U.S. doctrine?

Inherent in the concept of "strategic stability" is a belief shared among all players that the status quo, if perhaps not desirable, is at minimum the least disliked state of affairs. Judging from recent history, though—from its actions in the South China Sea to its global One Belt One Road endeavor to aggressive moves to quell dissent in its historic periphery—China is very much *not* satisfied with the status quo. It therefore does not desire stability. It desires *strategic instability*, at least in the short and medium term. With its nuclear buildup, China is willing to undergo a period of tension and heightened risk to advance a revised regional, if not global, order. The exact shape of that order is unclear, but the trajectory of their buildup indicates that it will be buttressed by a Chinese nuclear arsenal that is world-class in terms of capability and nearer in parity to those of the United States and Russia in terms of absolute warhead and delivery system numbers.

Sustainable Deterrence Will Rise Out of Actual War Planning

How should the United States respond? This is where the flavor of Heinrichs' practical recommendations is instructive. The United States needs to make investments in modernization and diversification of nuclear capabilities (alongside conventional enhancements) that truly reflect how a conflict with China would

play out, up to and including nuclear exchange. Only by making investments with an eye toward actually fighting a war along the full spectrum of conventional and nuclear conflict will we complicate the Chinese calculus, introduce doubt into their scenario and arsenal planning, and form a true foundation for sustainable deterrence.

I emphasize actual war planning specifically to break free from outmoded Cold War ideas. I have mentioned that evaluating China's nuclear buildup within a Cold War framework encourages a certain complacency about our own nuclear forces. However, a narrow focus on the concept of "strategic stability" also tends to disembody deterrence policy from actual warfighting. Instead of shaping our arsenal according to battlefield needs, it becomes subject to the simplistic bean counting of an abstract deterrence game, with numbers to be metered up or metered down in an imagined negotiation. Perhaps that frame of mind works when all players agree they are in such a game and mutually recognize the rules. It certainly does not work when one party refuses to recognize that it is part of a game at all, which is the case for China today.

Put another way, nuclear strategic planning is not exclusively or even mainly about preserving an ephemeral "balance," at least not in the current environment. Strategic planning is about winning a war. Planning for that war is—perhaps ironically—the only way to achieve a balance that staves off conflict, discourages coercion, and maintains a prosperous and enduring peace.

Reviving and Revisiting Alliances

A. Wess Mitchell

America's global network of alliances is rightly seen as one of its greatest foreign-policy assets.[1] They are far more numerous and deeper than the clienteles of America's rivals; encompass most of the world's freest and richest states; extend U.S. diplomatic, commercial, and military reach into the world's vital regions; and add substantially to American military power. In an era of great-power competition, they offer important advantages for managing the pressures of protracted rivalry. Preserving them must count among the highest aims of U.S. foreign policy.

Yet U.S. alliances are also, in critical respects, underperforming. Some allies refuse to bear a greater burden for their own defense. Many maintain trade and regulatory policies that disadvantage U.S. firms and could imperil America's technological edge vis-à-vis China. Some have deepening ties with the very adversaries that the United States guards them against. While none of this is particularly new, the return of great-power competition makes these deficiencies more damaging to U.S. interests and more urgently in need of redress by U.S. policy.

Conservatives should want to see U.S. alliances preserved but also renovated and brought into closer alignment with America's strategic needs. Achieving the parallel goals of preservation and renovation will not be easy, since the latter often involves pressing allies to adopt policies that they dislike, thus producing a political dynamic of disharmony. Yet America's ability to preserve its alliances is intimately intertwined with its ability to improve the way they

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, this paper uses the term *alliances* to refer to relationships with foreign states that the United States is bound by treaty to defend in the event of war.

operate. Only by actually resisting China and Russia and aligning with the United States on important issues will allies retain the utility that, from a U.S. strategic standpoint, makes them so valuable.

The Conservative Case for Alliances

There is a long tradition among American conservatives—from John Adams to Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan—of seeing alliances as instruments of prudential statecraft. This tradition is distinct from a Jeffersonian-Libertarian approach that sees alliances as bringing unnecessary risk and a Progressive approach that sees them as a stepping-stone to transnationalism. By contrast, the conservative attitude has been grounded in a national-interest-based recognition that alliances, properly situated and delineated, provide tangible advantages that would not be obtained as readily, if at all, by acting alone.

These include, in the first instance, the geopolitical advantage of checking the growth of powerful rivals in their own regions before they can reach proportions dangerous to the United States. While America's insular geography has military advantages, it also complicates our ability to influence developments in Western Europe and East Asia, the two regions that historically have possessed the demographic and industrial strength to generate serious threats to the homeland. As America learned in both world wars, simply reacting to events in these regions requires us to wade, cyclically and at very high cost, back into European or Asian affairs after a hegemon has emerged to upset the regional balance.

By maintaining forward alliances, America can reinforce and work with the natural tendency of smaller states to resist rising powers, thus forestalling attempts at regional hegemony in Eurasia before they occur. Through NATO and its Asian alliances and partnerships, the United States has on its side the combined firepower of scores of states as well as predictable access to bases and ports that extend U.S. power far from its own shores.

There are also broader political, economic, and moral benefits to alliances. The long spans and shared republican systems of government of America's most important alliances make them a natural political base of support vis-à-vis despotic rivals. Their commitment to a generally free and open economic order makes them supportive of international trade practices that tend to favor America.

In all these cases, the value of alliances is likely to grow as great-power competition intensifies. The United States will need alliances

for aggregating capabilities and waging protracted strategic, political, and economic competition with large state actors. Indeed, alliances themselves will be a major object of this competition, as our rivals seek to separate the United States from its allies as a means of dislodging it from their neighborhoods and, in China's case, contesting the commanding heights of international order.

Waging this competition will require not just the fact of alliances but specific outcomes in the policies of allies to shape the balance of power in ways that are favorable to the United States. Namely, America should want its alliances to provide

- a sufficiently large and accessible **economic and demographic base** for sustaining U.S. advantages in key military–technological fields;

- a sufficiently motivated **base of political resistance** to deny Chinese and Russian influence, commercial coercion, and economic-energy leverage in key regions; and

- sufficient **allied military capabilities** to augment U.S. resistance to the pacing threat (China) and backstop stability in secondary theaters.

Where Alliances Fall Short

How well do current U.S. alliances measure up against these requirements? The answer is mixed. On paper, they give America a comfortable margin of strength vis-à-vis rivals that are incapable of mustering more than a few clients. On closer scrutiny, however, many U.S. allies behave in ways that are strategically suboptimal or even deleterious to U.S. interests, and that could impair America's ability to compete effectively with China and Russia in the years ahead.

Most familiarly, there is the problem of overdependence on U.S. military protection. This is especially egregious in Europe where, despite efforts by successive U.S. administrations, average allied defense spending falls short of the metrics agreed to under NATO's Defense Investment Pledge. Germany, our largest and wealthiest European ally, is only able to deploy half of its already limited heavy military equipment at any given moment. The situation is only somewhat better in Asia, where U.S. allies lag in capabilities and readiness and where our largest ally, Japan, continues to limit defense budgets to 1 percent of its GDP.

While the United States has long pressed its allies in both regions to

do more militarily, the return of great-power competition heightens the stakes. Under the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), the Pentagon relinquished the two-war standard in favor of developing the ability to fight and win a war against one adversary—China. To realize that goal without adversely affecting the stability of Europe, the United States will need European NATO allies to shoulder the primary burden of conventional deterrence against Russia, and it will need allies in the Western Pacific to act as first responders to Chinese aggression. In both cases, the military weakness of our richest allies, occurring at a moment when our rivals are modernizing and expanding their arsenals, increases the security burden on the United States.

The shortcomings of U.S. alliances are not only military in nature—they are also economic. U.S. and allied markets are not sufficiently aligned to give America the scale and access to compete effectively with a rival of China's vast domestic market. America's major allied trade partners—the EU, the UK, Japan, Australia, and South Korea—maintain generally liberal trade regimes, but many apply steeper tariff and nontariff barriers to U.S. goods than we apply to theirs. The EU maintains agricultural tariffs that are more than double those of the United States and onerous nontariff barriers (e.g., quotas, regulations and rules of origin) that hurt U.S. exports.

One area where EU policies especially hinder America's ability to compete with China is in emerging technology. Since most of the critical areas of innovation (e.g., artificial intelligence, quantum computing, fintech, and robotics) are data-driven, those powers that command the largest data pools will have a strategic advantage. This makes a U.S.–EU convergence around an innovation-friendly global standard for technological norms and regulations imperative. Yet, at present, the EU maintains a digital regulatory regime that impedes convergence and a punitive tax and regulatory stance toward American firms—often while retaining a permissive stance toward monopolistic practices by China's Huawei and Russia's Gazprom.

Finally, there is the problem of allies deepening their technological, financial, and energy dependencies on the very rivals that America protects them against. In some instances, this trend has an ideological hue, as U.S. allies with pseudo-authoritarian or weakly democratic governments are courted by, and often welcome, Chinese and Russian influence. Turkey's pursuit of Russian S-400 missile systems, Hungary's hospitality to Huawei and the Russian Global Investment Bank, and Saudi Arabia's purchase of Russian defense systems are all cases in point. This ideological correlation, however, is far from consistent, as illustrated by Germany's development of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Italy's participation in the South Stream pipeline,

Indian and Israeli defense ties with Russia, and the participation by numerous democratic allies in Chinese state-backed infrastructure and telecom deals.

In the military, economic, and political arenas, the behavior of allies is an outgrowth of the permissive conditions of the post-Cold War era. Without a major threat on the horizon, it was natural that democratic governments would tilt spending away from defense to social welfare and base supply chain, energy, or 5G sourcing decisions primarily on cost rather than security grounds. Reinforcing this tendency has been the appeal of access to the Chinese market, which has given many allies like Germany a perceived interest in courting China as an economic opportunity and opposing efforts at the EU level to treat it as a strategic challenge.

As great-power competition intensifies, this behavior will take on an altogether more damaging effect for two reasons.

First, it sets back the United States in tangible ways vis-à-vis its main rivals, especially China. A Germany that shirks defense responsibilities will make it harder for the U.S. military to secure the European and Asian theaters simultaneously. An EU that saps and fetters Western centers of technological innovation makes it more likely that China will gain a crucial edge over the U.S. military in algorithmic warfare. And a U.S. ally that is dependent on China for financing or 5G capabilities, or on Russia for gas in wintertime, is an ally that will be more susceptible to Beijing's or Moscow's leverage and potentially unavailable to America in a time of crisis or war.

Second, allies that do not carry their weight or that harm U.S. interests are likely to eventually lose American domestic support. Polling suggests that a little over half of Americans view alliances positively. Among Republicans, a far larger number—around half, compared to 15 percent for Democrats—believe that America should go it alone when U.S. and allied interests diverge. As the national debt grows and the trade-offs involved in defending Europe and Asia against rivals on a static defense budget sharpen, voters are likely to become more interested in the tangible results that these investments produce for U.S. national security and the economy.

How Conservatives Should Approach Alliances

Conservatives should prioritize preserving alliances while also delivering better results from them for the American people. A conservative agenda for alliances would include the following steps:

1. *Consolidate the U.S. alliance structure at its heart—Europe.* Even as America shifts its military focus to the Western Pacific, it should see the transatlantic alliance as the seat of its political and economic strength in the world. American diplomacy should prioritize the consolidation of this Western core, as embodied in NATO and the U.S.–EU economic relationship, both as a means of denying Europe's resources to China and equipping itself with the broadest base possible for sustained competition.

2. *Take calculated risks to rebalance the transatlantic alliance*. America needs a more equitable sharing of burdens and benefits with its main allies. We should be willing to reconsider U.S. opposition to shared European military capabilities (e.g., via a European level of ambition in NATO) in exchange for allies taking greater responsibility vis-à-vis Russia. We should also pursue a technological grand bargain in which we meet the EU halfway on privacy and other digital concerns in exchange for tax and regulatory frameworks that do not sap innovation.

3. *Treat allies as integrated partners rather than as dependents*. Alliances should be America's foremost tool for managing the trade-offs required for dealing with multifront strategic competition. Our allies, by dint of geography, stand to lose more than we do if China and Russia succeed in their ambitious aims. They thus have a strong incentive to elevate their efforts, as many are already doing. The U.S. government needs an integrated strategy outlining what it needs from allies to plug emerging deterrence gaps and bring U.S. diplomacy into alignment with the military requirements of the NDS.

4. *Find ways to pressure allies other than with sanctions*. Overuse of sanctions creates incentives for allies to decouple from or even duplicate the U.S. financial system. We should use sanctions sparingly with allies and, when their secondary effects are necessary, provide as much clarity as possible on the terms of compliance for allied firms. We need handier tools for providing negative feedback to allies, such as withholding support for allied aims in international forums or restricting cooperation in intelligence-sharing and similar fields. While being selective about the tools, we should not see the fact of pressuring allies to modify behavior that harms our interests as being beyond the political pale.

5. *Favor democracies but do not exclude nondemocracies*. America should use democratic alliances to discomfit despotic adversaries. Pressing China and Russia on human rights abuses is not only intrinsically right; it also binds Europe and allied Asia closer to

America. When it comes to the governance of allies and partners, we should consistently support democracy but not estrange states that share our interests and thereby risk pushing them into rival orbits. As in the Cold War, we should play the long game of competing for positive influence, treat allies better than enemies, and pursue the widest coalition possible to counterbalance China and Russia.

6. *Use a variety of alliance and partnership formats*. The United States will increasingly find itself needing closer alignment with states with which it is unlikely or unable to form formal alliances, especially in Asia and the Middle East. We should develop tools for cementing these relationships; for example, by creating new legal categories that allow us to make wider use of financial and military perks under the Arms Export Control Act with countries like India, Vietnam, or Singapore with which it is in our interest to deepen strategic ties.

Conservatives should treat alliances and partnerships as national assets to be preserved but also as non-static structures that must be continually tended to ensure that their functioning reflects the national interest. Balancing these two goals—what Edmund Burke called the principles of conservation and correction—will require political and diplomatic skill. However, it is the essence of the conservative vocation in both domestic and foreign policy.

Reviving and Revisiting Alliances

A Response from Richard Fontaine

A searching debate has emerged in recent years about the value of U.S. allies. For traditionalists, America's alliances are a defining advantage. If its global alliance network did not exist today, they contend, leaders would no doubt be trying to construct one. For all the difficulties inherent in alliance management, traditionalists hold, it's better to fight with allies than without them and easier to deter with them than on our own. For those of a more Trumpian bent, allies are more frequently a problem rather than a solution: free-riding countries smugly enriching themselves under American protection, underinvesting in their own defense while inadequately reimbursing the United States for the cost of their security. Members of a third group, the restrainers, fret that even full-freight allies do not add to American security but subtract from it, entangling us in conflicts marginal to our national interest.

The traditionalists have, in my view, the strongest claim, for some of the reasons Wess Mitchell enumerates in his paper. They add to American military power, generate a broader sense of legitimacy for U.S. actions, and convey economic benefits through close alignment. Recent history backs up this view. NATO countries went to war in Afghanistan after we, not they, were attacked; China discerns a material difference between an American position and an allied one; most of our closest and most reliable economic partners are also military allies.

At the same time, a good deal of the recent debate about allies has been misplaced. Whether it's Trumpian haranguing or Bidenesque nice-guyism that elicits increased defense spending is an interesting question. So too is whether reassurance or hints of abandonment

better induce allies to fall in line with American plans for geopolitical competition. Yet a better course would be to shift the focus on our inquiry. We should think of American alliances in a way that is simultaneously *more reductive* and *broader* than existing concepts.

The debate is more reductive, because it alternately fetishizes, romanticizes, or finds moral inequity in alliance arrangements.[1] In fact, they represent insurance policies against threats that may or may not materialize and hold as their objective not the mystical union of two peoples but rather the mitigation of security risk. That is not often how we speak of allies. Leaders frequently invoke national affinity, shared military sacrifice, historical triumphs and traumas, and, more recently, the presence or absence of fair and good-faith burden-sharing. It is perhaps natural to do so when the currency is national blood and treasure and great, even existential, risks are at stake. The owner of an insurance policy is naturally interested in the assets behind it, the inclinations of its managers, and its other attributes. Nonetheless, what matters most is its *performance*.

So it is—or so it should be—with American alliances. The Trump administration's monomaniacal focus on the percentage of GDP spent by NATO members on defense is understandable, to some extent. Underinvesting in defense, as Germany and other allies have done for years, renders them incapable of acting meaningfully in key contingencies. Lack of capacity and capability in some countries requires other allies to fill in the gaps or forgo a mission. Unbalanced burden-sharing undermines shared enterprises. That hardly seems fair to those pulling their weight. The topline of allied defense budgets is an important thing.

It is not, however, the most important thing. Treating it as such means leaving critical dimensions of allied value unappreciated and pulls focus away from factors that matter more.

Consider the NATO Wales summit's totemic 2 percent target for domestic defense spending. What originated as a loose, in-the-future commitment buried in a NATO communiqué eventually became the stuff of political rallies and presidential summits. But there is spending, and then there is spending wisely. In some European countries, defense spending is as much about job creation as about safeguarding national security. Other allies squeeze greater capacity out of smaller total expenditures. Norway, for instance, spends less than 2 percent but contributes across the board, in part because personnel costs do not consume its budget. Denmark

[1] Here defined, as in Mitchell's paper, as relationships with foreign states which the United States is bound by treaty to defend in the event of war.

eliminated a costly submarine fleet in order to afford a doubling of its expeditionary forces.[2]

Which NATO ally spends the greatest proportion of GDP on defense? It is not Britain, which has fought alongside the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and in operations against the Islamic State and which this year is sending a carrier group into the Indo-Pacific. Nor is it the Germans, who, with their paltry 1.53 percent, nevertheless made the third-highest troop contribution to the counter-Islamic State campaign and sent 100,000 troops to Afghanistan over two decades. The winner is Greece, which allocates a whopping 2.58 percent of GDP to defense but can hardly be considered NATO's vanguard. Today, Portugal is closer to the target, percentage-wise, than the Dutch, and Albania is closer to it than Canada. Clearly such budget numbers tell just part of the story at best.

One could spin a similar story in Asia. South Korea is well above 2 percent, and Australia is likely to crack the threshold this year. Japan hovers around 1 percent of GDP, even after a decade of defense budget increases. Treaty ally Thailand spends a greater proportion than Japan, but Tokyo is the more valuable security partner.

A more accurate evaluation of allied worth would look to other important criteria. Some bring niche capabilities to the fight, such as special operations forces and maritime assets, while others are integrated into America's extended nuclear deterrent. Still others host American bases or troops on rotation. At times, allies shoulder some of the defense load in certain arenas. France, for example, took charge of counterterrorism operations in Mali, allowing the United States to focus elsewhere. When Germany declined to participate in the 2011 operation in Libya, it took on other missions to free up NATO assets. A broader measure of worth would look at allies' reliability and their will to stay engaged in grinding fights.

Defense spending is, of course, just one area in which allies sometimes fall short of America's desired mark. In Mitchell's essay, allied underperformance is said to include discriminatory regulatory and trade practices that hurt U.S. businesses. And so it does, since tensions in the economic arena could infect comity in the security sphere. Three cheers, then, for pressing our allies toward a liberal international economic agenda. However, we should take care to include the world's largest economy—our own—in that rallying cry. The United States has put steel and aluminum tariffs

[2] For recent figures, see NATO Public Diplomacy Division, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013-2020), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/pr-2020-104-en.pdf. See also Richard Fontaine, "What's a NATO Ally Worth: Getting Beyond the Two Percent Benchmark, Center for a New American Security, February 21, 2017, https://isnblog.ethz.ch/defense/whats-a-nato-ally-worth-getting-beyond-the-two-percent-benchmark.

on its allies, adopted "Buy America" provisions that disadvantage allied suppliers, cancelled key projects (e.g., Canada's Keystone Pipeline), imposed duties when allies sell products to Americans at a price below cost, and enshrined an industrial policy to incentivize domestic manufacturing. A key near-term objective, it would seem, is to keep our own protectionist impulses from diminishing allied solidarity.

Conceptualizing alliances as insurance policies designed to buy down security risk helps clarify what American leaders should care about most. It does not, however, address the sources of risk themselves. Here the ambit of American alliances must be broadened.

Take, for example, foreign efforts to disrupt a country's democratic practice. Such activities represent an acute national security threat, as evidenced by Russia's behavior during the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections. NATO must remain prepared for Russian tank columns to roll across Baltic borders. Seoul and Washington will train for a barrage of North Korean artillery aimed south of the demilitarized zone. Japan and the United States should ready themselves for a Chinese move on the Senkaku Islands. All those are appropriate measures, but they make up an incomplete allied agenda. An updated one, both for Europe and the Indo-Pacific, must focus to a far greater extent on protecting political systems and societies against malign foreign interference.

So far, such threats have remained strangely siloed. The 9/11 attacks properly elicited a response from all NATO allies. Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine elicited a coordinated, coercive (nonmilitary) reaction from transatlantic allies. The poisoning of a Russian national in Britain did the same, and even the Alexei Navalny case—in which a Russian citizen was targeted by Russians on Russian soil—brought transatlantic partners together in common response. Yet political interference has elicited no similar reaction. Russian activity during the 2016 U.S. election was treated as a domestic American affair, to be dealt with (or not) only by the United States. Meddling in the French presidential election was seen as a matter for Paris, Chinese interference in Australian politics as an issue for Canberra. The high probability of continued malign efforts such as these, together with the vast damage such operations can inflict, requires allies to treat them as common threats, deserving of shared defenses and common responses.

The traditional way of conceptualizing American alliances should be broadened in another way as well. In the medium term, adding new, formal treaty allies to the American collection is unlikely. Finland, Ukraine, and Georgia will not join NATO anytime soon; India resists

anything that smacks of a formal alliance; and neither Vietnam nor Singapore would join the United States in a mutual defense pact. Many other mechanisms for partnership are, however, possible.

The past decade has seen an explosion in informal security ties—mostly bilateral, mostly in Asia—that include American allies and other partners.[3] The region is awash with high-level defense visits, bilateral security agreements, joint operations and military exercises, arms sales and military education programs driven by worries about China's rise and uncertainty about American staying power. The United States can be a leading beneficiary of this growing network of relationships. More diverse security ties in Asia can have the dual effect of creating a stronger deterrent against coercion and aggression while simultaneously diminishing the bilateral intensity of U.S.–China competition. As a continued American presence in and security commitment to Europe renders war there virtually unthinkable, U.S. diplomacy should prioritize the deepening and broadening of this Indo-Pacific security network.

* * *

Reduce conceptually. Focus on the most meaningful measures of value. Expand the perceived range of threats, broaden the possible structures of cooperation, and double down on American alliances as the greatest distinguishing factor between us and our rivals. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan said that "to keep the peace, we and our allies must be strong enough to convince any potential aggressor that war could bring no benefit, only disaster." Not just *we*. We and our allies. True enough then. Wise enough today.

[3] See Richard Fontaine, et al., "Networking Asian Security: An Integrated Approach to Order in the Pacific," Center for a New American Security, June 2017, https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/networking-asian-security.

Reviving and Revisiting Alliances

Response from Nadia Schadlow

Dr. Wess Mitchell's essay affirms what most of us (perhaps all but the most ardent isolationists) believe: that alliances provide broad political, economic, and moral benefits and that they are a competitive advantage for the United States. Mitchell ably describes many of these advantages. They include a shared commitment to political systems that value liberty and openness and a "base of political resistance" to deny Chinese and Russian influence and economic leverage in key regions. He describes how the military capabilities of allies contribute to deterrence, noting that these capabilities augment U.S. resistance to the pacing threat (China) and backstop stability in other theaters. Alliances, Mitchell concludes, "provide tangible advantages that would not be obtained as readily, if at all, by acting alone."

Mitchell's paper also highlights the challenges that the United States faces today in managing its alliances in order to deter adversaries and, if required, prevail in conflict. These challenges are significant. In recent years, many key allies have deepened their technological, financial, and energy dependencies on the very rivals that America protects them against. As Mitchell explains, an ally dependent on China for financing or 5G capabilities or on Russia for natural gas supplies is an ally that is more susceptible to manipulation by those adversaries and "potentially unavailable to America in a time of crisis or war."

Mitchell then summarizes the problem posed by a divergence of interests among allies, noting that "pressing allies to adopt policies that they do not want to adopt" can produce a "political dynamic of disharmony." Such a dynamic of disharmony has implications beyond burden sharing. In thinking about this, I was struck by a concept that Richard Nixon advanced some 40 years ago in his

short but insightful book *Real Peace*. Nixon—having described the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union as based on "profound and irreconcilable differences"—reminds us that "real peace" requires active management. Peace is not "an end to conflict" but a means of living with conflict. Peace requires constant attention, without which it cannot survive. In the face of a threat like the Soviet Union, the United States could not undertake this requirement alone. Allies were a central part of the formula.

The question today is whether our allies would agree with Nixon's formulation of "real peace." Are they actively managing the peace that is required to deter war? A commitment to *active competition* involves more than burden-sharing, though that, of course, matters. Equally important is the broader political zeitgeist of European nations—especially that of Western Europe. In an insightful essay, Ulkrike Franke, a young German scholar, observes that Germans have "learned to reject" interests almost completely. Her generation, she adds, has developed an almost romantic idea of international relations in which alliances are seen as "friendships." Today, "German millennials struggle with the idea that the military is an element of geopolitical power."[1] Such views are not limited to Germany alone. According to recent polling, Japanese citizens would prefer by a 10-to-1 margin that the United States, not China, lead the world. However, as of 2015, less than a quarter of Japanese believed that Tokyo should play a more active military role in regional affairs.[2]

Certainly, the United States would do well to advance many of the suggestions that Mitchell outlines. These include treating alliances as a tool for promoting the national interest, consistently affirming U.S. treaty obligations, remaining unafraid to use pressure—even coercion—to modify allied behavior while "treat[ing] allies better than enemies" and exhausting all means before applying punitive tools, and remaining open-minded when it comes to including non-liberal states in coalitions to compete with China and Russia.

Yet, missing from his thoughtful analysis is additional emphasis on what Europe itself must do to meet us halfway. Western nations can pat themselves on the back, congratulating themselves that we are "friends" again now that President Donald Trump has left office, but how have conditions actually changed?[3] In our self-congratulatory

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1 Ulkrike Franke, "A Millennial Considers the New German Problem After 30 Years of Peace," *War on the Rocks*, May 19, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/05/a-millennial-considers-the-new-german-problem-after-30-years-of-peace/.
2 *Pew Research Center*, November 2018, "Despite Rising Economic Confidence, Japanese See Best Days Behind Them and Say Children Face a Bleak Future," https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/11/12/views-of-the-u-s-and-president-trump/; *Pew Research Center*, April 2015, "Americans, Japanese: Mutual Respect 70 Years After the End of WWII," https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/04/07/americans-japanese-mutual-respect-70-years-after-the-end-of-wwii/.
3 It's worth noting here that, despite recent news that the EU–China CAI is unlikely to pass, the very fact that it is still under consideration undermines the EU's tough rhetoric on China.

bubble, we risk falling into what Mitchell calls the trap of "optical comity." I would add that pursuing optical comity risks creating *optical illusions* over real capabilities. The Biden administration appears to be overcorrecting for President Trump's supposed eschewing of allies and risks by using summitry and messaging to perpetuate an optical illusion of strength, while allowing real capabilities to atrophy. This will only harm U.S. interests as well as the interests of our allies.

How could policymakers avoid optical illusions and achieve real outcomes? Ultimately, since much of the strategic competition we face will take place within alliance frameworks, the European public and business communities must show more support for policy shifts—for the active maintenance of real peace. The signs are not good.

Europe's economic dependencies on China play to Beijing's strengths, allowing the Chinese Communist Party to use economic leverage toward a divide-and-conquer strategy. Some have argued that to counter China's economic statecraft, an economic alliance is necessary. Such an alliance would provide a vehicle for the coordinated use of economic tools. Under a collective defense provision, allies would take swift and immediate action in response to Chinese coercion.[4] Alliance members would impose tariffs on Chinese goods or lower tariffs on allied countries who are threatened. They may have to directly buy goods from the allied countries that are under attack or provide subsidized loans. The first few uses of such a collective defense procedure may be costly. Is such an approach feasible? Probably not. But the fact is, without allies on board, we cannot outgun, outspend, or outproduce China.

Mitchell is right to point out that "those powers that command the largest data pools will have a strategic advantage," but it seems that U.S.–EU convergence on high technology issues is aspirational at this stage. Before pushing for an even more complex technological alliance, perhaps U.S. policymakers should begin working through ground-level differences, especially on matters of data privacy surrounding the General Data Protection Regulation.

We must ask ourselves: What are the alternatives should the EU refuse to shift fully into our orbit? One question that deserves further discussion is whether Europe remains the true linchpin of the U.S. alliance system. Mitchell does not discuss the Quad. Yet, in the face of a rising China, America's Asian allies may have the most to lose. In an age when Washington is shifting its military focus to the Pacific, perhaps it is time we shift our diplomatic focus there as well.

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[4] See Anthony Vinci, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/like-nato-but-for-economics/614332/.

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