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

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July 12, 2017

Congressional Research Service

7-....

www.crs.gov

R44891

Summary

The overall U.S. role in the world since the end of World War II in 1945 (i.e., over the past 70 years) is generally described as one of global leadership and significant engagement in international affairs. A key aim of that role has been to promote and defend the open international order that the United States, with the support of its allies, created in the years after World War II. In addition to promoting and defending the open international order, the overall U.S. role is generally described as having been one of promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights, while criticizing and resisting authoritarianism where possible, and opposing the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia or a spheres-of-influence world.

Certain statements and actions from the Trump Administration have led to uncertainty about the Administration's intentions regarding the future U.S. role in the world. Based on those statements and actions, some observers have speculated that the Trump Administration may want to change the U.S. role in one or more ways. A change in the overall U.S. role could have profound implications for U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy, for Congress as an institution, and for many federal policies and programs.

A major dimension of the debate over the U.S. role is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing the active internationalist role that it has played for the past 70 years, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs. A second dimension concerns how to balance or combine the pursuit of narrowly defined U.S. interests with the goal of defending and promoting U.S. values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. A third dimension relates to the balance between the use of so-called *hard power* (primarily but not exclusively military combat power) and *soft power* (including diplomacy, development assistance, support for international organizations, education and cultural exchanges, and the international popularity of elements of U.S. culture such as music, movies, television shows, and literature) in U.S. foreign policy.

An initial potential issue for Congress is to determine whether the Trump Administration wants to change the U.S. role, and if so, in what ways. A follow-on potential issue for Congress—arguably the central policy issue for this CRS report—is whether there should be a change in the U.S. role, and if so, what that change should be, including whether a given proposed change would be feasible or practical, and what consequences may result.

An initial aspect of this issue concerns Congress: what should be Congress's role, relative to that of the executive branch, in considering whether the U.S. role in the world should change, and if so, what that change should be? The Constitution vests Congress with several powers that can bear on the U.S. role in the world.

Another potential issue for Congress is whether a change in the U.S. role would have any implications for the preservation and use of congressional powers and prerogatives relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy. A related issue is whether a change in the U.S. role would have any implications for congressional organization, capacity, and operations relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy.

Policy and program areas that could be affected, perhaps substantially or even profoundly, by a changed U.S. role include the role of allies and alliances in U.S. foreign policy; the organization of, and funding levels and foreign policy priorities for, the Department of State and U.S. foreign assistance; U.S. trade and international economic policy; defense strategy and budgets; and policies and programs related to homeland security, border security, immigration, and refugees.

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Introduction

This report presents background information and issues for Congress on the overarching U.S. foreign policy issue of the U.S. role in the world. Certain statements and actions from the Trump Administration have led to uncertainty about the Administration's intentions regarding the future U.S. role, and have intensified an ongoing debate among foreign policy specialists, strategists, policymakers, and the public about what that role should be.

Decisions that Congress makes about the U.S. role could have substantial or even profound implications for U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy, for Congress as an institution, and for many federal policies and programs.

This report includes (particularly in its appendixes) references to other CRS products that provide more in-depth discussions of specific policy and program areas bearing on the U.S. role. Congressional inquiries relating to the specific issue areas covered in those reports should be addressed to the authors of those reports.

In this report, the term *U.S. role in the world* is often shortened to *U.S. role*.

Background

Terminology

Key terms used in this report include the following:

- **International order.** The term *international order* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to the collection of organizations, institutions, treaties, rules, norms, and practices that are intended to organize, structure, and regulate international relations during a given historical period.
- **Role in the world.** The term *role in the world* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to the overall character, purpose, or direction of a country's participation in international affairs or the country's overall relationship to the rest of the world.
- **Grand strategy.** The term *grand strategy* generally refers in foreign policy discussions to a country's overall approach for securing its interests and making its way in the world, using all the national instruments at its disposal, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools (sometimes abbreviated in U.S. government parlance as DIME). A country's role in the world (see above) can be viewed as a visible expression of its grand strategy. For the United States, grand strategy can be viewed as a design or blueprint at a global or interregional level, as opposed to U.S. approaches for individual regions, countries, or issues.¹

¹ One strategist, reviewing a new book about grand strategy (Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2016), states:

The notion of grand strategy, albeit terribly hubristic sounding, is a decidedly practical art and a necessity for powers great and small. Such strategies are applied by accident or by deliberate rationalization in the pursuit of a country's best interests. Yet, there are few agreements about what constitutes a grand strategy and even what the best definition is....

... Ironically, I am partial to the definition postulated by Dr. Colin Gray, who defined it in *The* (continued...)

- **Regional hegemon.** The term *regional hegemon* generally refers to a country so powerful relative to the other countries in its region that it can dominate the affairs of that region and compel other countries in that region to support (or at least not oppose) the hegemon's key policy goals. The United States is generally considered to have established itself in the 19th century as the hegemon of the Western Hemisphere.
- **Spheres-of-influence world.** The term *spheres-of-influence world* generally refers to a world that, in terms of its structure of international relations, is divided into multiple regions (i.e., spheres), each with its own hegemon.²
- **Geopolitics.** The term *geopolitics* is often used as a synonym for international politics or for strategy relating to international politics. More specifically, it refers to the influence of basic geographic features on international relations, and to the analysis of international relations from a perspective that places a strong emphasis on the influence of such geographic features. Basic geographic features involved in geopolitical analysis include things such as the relative sizes and locations of countries or land masses; the locations of key resources such as oil or water; geographic barriers such as oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges; and key transportation links such as roads, railways, and waterways.³

(...continued)

Strategy Bridge as “the direction and use made of any or all the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purposes of policy as decided by politics.” This definition is not limited to states per se, is mute on its relevance to peacetime competition or wartime, and explicitly refers to all of the power assets of a community, rather than just its military services.

[Milevski's] book is a wonderful and concise treatise that in some ways will remind readers of Edward Mead Earle's original *Makers of Modern Strategy*, which was published at the end of World War II.... While Earle focused on the key figures of strategy, Milevski's focus is narrower, uncovering the context and tracing the historiography of the term “grand strategy” over the past two centuries.

[Milevski] captures the varied insights among the giants (Mahan, Corbett, Edward M. Earle, Kahn, and Brodie) that have enriched our understanding of the apex of strategy. At the end of his journey, he incorporates the insights of major recent contributors to the literature and our basis for theory today: Edward Luttwak, Barry Posen, John Collins, Paul Kennedy, John Lewis Gaddis, and Hal Brands.

(Frank Hoffman, “The Consistent Incoherence of Grand Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, September 1, 2016.)

² A spheres-of-influence world, like a multipolar world, is characterized by having multiple major world powers. In a spheres-of-influence world, however, at least some of those major world powers have achieved a status of regional hegemon, while in a multipolar world, few or none of those major world powers (other than the United States, the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere) have achieved a status of regional hegemon. As a result, in a spheres-of-influence world, international relations are more highly segmented on a regional basis than they are in a multipolar world.

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

U.S. Role in World

Role Since World War II

The U.S. role in the world since the end of World War II in 1945 (i.e., over the past 70 years) is generally described as one of global leadership and significant engagement in international affairs. A key aim of that role has been to promote and defend the open international order that the United States, with the support of its allies, created in the years after World War II. Other terms used to refer to the open international order include the *liberal international order*, the *postwar international order*, and the *U.S.-led international order*. It is also referred to as a *rules-based order*. Key elements of this order are generally said to include the following:

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

The creation of the open international order in the years immediately after World War II, and the defense and promotion of that order over subsequent decades, is generally seen as reflecting a desire by policymakers to avoid repeating the history of destruction and economic disruption and deprivation of the first half of the 20th century, a period that included World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Following World War II, the United States, along with its allies, led the creation of the open international order, and assumed the role generally described by observers as its leader and staunchest defender, largely because it was the only country with the resources and willingness to do so.

U.S. willingness to lead in the creation and sustainment of the open international order derived from a belief among U.S. policymakers that it reflected U.S. values and served U.S. security, political, and economic interests. In return for making significant and continuing investments in creating, sustaining, and enforcing the political, security, and economic institutions, organizations, and norms characterizing the open international order, the United States is viewed by supporters of the order as having received significant and continuing security, political, and economic benefits, including the maintenance of a favorable balance of power on both a global and regional level, and a leading or dominant role in establishing global rules for international trade and finance, and in operating the international organizations and institutions overseeing international trade and finance.

In addition to promoting and defending the open international order, the overall U.S. role since World War II is generally described as having been one of

- promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights, while criticizing and resisting authoritarianism where possible; and

- opposing the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia or a spheres-of-influence world.⁴

Promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights, while criticizing and resisting authoritarianism where possible have been viewed as consistent not only with core U.S. political values and but also with the theory (sometimes called the democratic peace theory)⁵ that democratic countries are more responsive to the desires of their populations and consequently are less likely to wage wars of aggression or go to war with one another.

The goal of opposing the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia or a spheres-of-influence world reflects a U.S. perspective on geopolitics and grand strategy developed during and in the years immediately after World War II. A key element of this perspective is a belief that, given the amount of people, resources, and economic activity in Eurasia, a regional hegemon in Eurasia would represent a concentration of power large enough to be able to threaten vital U.S. interests.

Commentators over the years have summarized the overall U.S. role since World War II using various terms and phrases that sometimes reflect varying degrees of approval or disapproval of that role. It has been variously described as that of global leader, leader of the free world, superpower, indispensable power, system administrator, world policeman, or world hegemon. Similarly, the United States has also been described as pursuing an internationalist foreign policy, a foreign policy of global engagement or deep engagement, a foreign policy that provides global public goods, a foreign policy of liberal order building, liberal internationalism, or liberal hegemony, an interventionist foreign policy, or a foreign policy of seeking primacy or world hegemony.

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

Uncertainty Regarding Administration's Intentions

Certain statements and actions from the Trump Administration have led to uncertainty about the Administration's intentions regarding the future U.S. role.⁶ One Administration statement

⁴ The term Eurasia is used in this report to refer to the entire land mass that encompasses both Europe and Asia, including its fringing islands, extending from Portugal on its western end to Japan on its eastern end, and from Russia's Arctic coast on its northern edge to India on its southern edge, and encompassing all the lands and countries in between, including those of Central Asia, Southwest Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Eurasia's fringing islands include, among others, the United Kingdom and Ireland in Europe, Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, and Japan and the archipelagic countries of Southeast Asia. There are also other definitions of Eurasia, some of which are more specialized and refer to subsets of the broad area described above.

Opposing the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia is also sometimes referred to as preserving a division of power in Eurasia.

⁵ See, for example, "Democratic Peace Theory," Oxford Bibliographies, accessed May 23, 2017, at <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0014.xml>.

⁶ See, for example, Colin Willett, "Trump's Asia Policy Is More Confused Than Ever," *Foreign Policy*, June 12, 2017; Nahal Toosi, "The Trump Doctrine Is made of Mixed Messages," *Politico*, April 29, 2017; P.J. Crowley, "What We Have Here Is A Failure to Communicate," *Politico*, April 28, 2017; Erin Cunningham, et al., "Other Countries Are Still Trying to Figure Out What Trump Means to Them" *Washington Post*, April 28, 2017; William Inboden, "In A Tale of Two Trumps, Which Will Emerge as President Is Anyone's Guess," *Dallas Morning News*, Greg Miller, "On Russia, Trump and His Top National Security Aides Seem to Be At Odds," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2017; Kevin Sullivan and Karen Tumulty, "Trump Promised An 'Unpredictable' Foreign Policy. To Allies, It Looks Incoherent." (continued...)

following President Trump's first overseas trip to the Middle East and Europe has received particular attention. In an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohn, Director of the National Economic Council, wrote:

The president embarked on his first foreign trip with a clear-eyed outlook that the world is not a "global community" but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors, and businesses engage and compete for advantage. We bring to this forum unmatched military, political, economic, cultural, and moral strength. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.... In short, those societies that share our interests will find no friend more steadfast than the United States. Those that choose to challenge our interests will encounter the firmest resolve.⁷

This and other statements and actions have led some observers to conclude or speculate that the Trump Administration may want to change the U.S. role to one that, compared to the U.S. role of the past 70 years, would be one or more of the following:

- less concerned with exercising global leadership, less engaged overseas, and more inward looking;
- less involved in or supportive of multilateral organizations, and more inclined toward acting bilaterally or unilaterally;
- more skeptical about the value of alliances, and more transactional in its approach to U.S. relationships with other countries;
- less concerned with promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights, and with criticizing and resisting authoritarianism; and
- less committed to pursuing free trade through multilateral or regional trade agreements, and more open to the use of protectionist measures as an element of trade and international economic policy.⁸

(...continued)

Washington Post, April 11, 2017; Julie Pace, "Trump's Strike on Syria Has Many Wondering What the President's Foreign Policy Is," *Business Insider*, April 10, 2017; Peter Baker, "The Emerging Trump Doctrine: Don't Follow Doctrine," *New York Times*, April 8, 2017; Jim Hoagland, "The Mystery of Trump's Character Deepens," *Washington Post*, April 7, 2017; Robin Wright, "Trump's Flailing Foreign Policy Bewilders The World," *New Yorker*, February 17, 2017.

⁷ H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, "America First Doesn't Mean America Alone," *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017.

⁸ See, for example, Richard N. Haass, "Who Will Fill America's Shoes?" *The Strategist*, June 26, 2017; Lawrence Summers, "After 75 Years of Progress, Was Last Week A Hinge in History?" *Washington Post*, June 4, 2017; Jonathan Easley, "Trump Cements 'America First' Doctrine with Paris Withdrawal," *The Hill*, June 2, 2017; Fareed Zakaria, "Trump's Radical Departure from Postwar Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2017; Carol Morello and John Wagner, "As the U.S. Laves Paris Climate Accord, Some See Shifts in Global Leadership," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2017; David Frum, "The Death Knell for America's Global Leadership," *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2017; Heather Timmons, "The Trump Presidency Is Systematically Destroying Any Global Moral High Ground the US Had Left," *Quartz*, March 13, 2017; Jessica T. Matthews, "What Trump Is Throwing Out the Window," *New York Review of Books*, February 9, 2017; Jeremi Suri, "How Trump's Executive Orders Could Set America Back 70 Years," *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2017; Karen DeYoung and Philip Rucker, "Trump Lays Groundwork to Change U.S. Role in the World," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2017; Charles Krauthammer, "Trump's Foreign Policy Revolution," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2017; Richard Stengel, "The End of the American Century," *The Atlantic*, January 26, 2017; John Cassidy, "Donald Trump's New World Disorder," *New Yorker*, January 24, 2017; Max Boot, "Will Trump Be the End of the Pax Americana?" *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2017; Zack Beauchamp, "Trump's Inaugural Address Showed That He's Serious About His Radical Foreign Policy," *Vox*, January 20, 2017; Fred Kaplan, "Donald Trump Really Believes All Those Things He Said During the Campaign," *Slate*, January 20, 2017.

Other statements and actions from the Trump Administration, however, have led some observers to conclude or speculate that the Trump Administration may not depart, at least not in a major way, from the role that the United States has played since World War II.⁹

Some observers, viewing the Obama Administration's reluctance to having the United States become more heavily involved in conflicts such as those in Syria and eastern Ukraine, believe that a change in the U.S. role in a direction of reduced U.S. leadership and engagement began under the Obama Administration, and that any actions in the same general direction by the Trump Administration would therefore continue or deepen (rather than initiate) such a change. Particularly for these observers, there is a question as to whether (or where, or to what extent) the policies of the Trump Administration represent a change from or continuity with the policies of the Obama Administration.¹⁰

Discussions about whether and how the Trump Administration might change the U.S. role have waxed and waned over time in response to specific administration statements and actions, with observers sometimes expressing a view that the administration has sent mixed signals or is evolving its position on these issues, or both. It can also be noted that some foreign policy changes implemented under the Trump Administration, even ones that might be dramatic, might not necessarily reflect or contribute to a changed U.S. role, and could be consistent with a continuation of the U.S. role of the past 70 years. The same might be said of changes in foreign policy operating style (e.g., President Trump's use of Twitter).

Ongoing Debate Regarding Future U.S. Role

The fact that the U.S. role has been generally stable over the past 70 years does not mean that this role was necessarily the right one for the United States or that it would be the right one in the future, particularly if the international security environment is shifting. Although the role the United States has played in the world since the end of World War II has many defenders, the merits of that role have also been a matter of recurring debate over the years, with critics sometimes offering potential alternatives.

Discussions about the Trump Administration's intentions regarding the U.S. role in the world have intensified the ongoing debate among foreign policy specialists, strategists, policymakers, and the public about what that role should be. This debate has been fueled in recent years in part by factors such as recent changes in the international security environment and projections

⁹ See, for example, Elliott Abrams, "Trump the Traditionalist," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2017: 10-16; John T. Bennett, "Despite Campaign Pledges, Trump Plans Active Foreign Policy," *Roll Call*, May 4, 2017; James Jeffrey, "100 Days of Trump Foreign Policy: Chaos to Moderation," *Cipher Brief*, April 28, 2017; Danielle Pletka, "On Foreign Policy, Trump Has Become—Gasp—A Normal President," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2017; Eli Lake, "At 100 Days, Trump's No Russian Stooze or Fascist," *Bloomberg*, April 25, 2017; Matthew Lee and Josh Lederman, "Once Critical of Global Deals, Trump Slow to Pull Out of Any," *Washington Times*, April 20, 2017; Annie Karni, "Trump's Foreign Policy Goes Mainstream," *Politico*, April 10, 2017; Julie Pace and Vivian Salam, "Once Opposed to Intervention, Trump Says He Can Be Flexible," *Military Times*, April 10, 2017; Binyamin Applebaum, "President's Growing Trade Gap: A Gulf Between Talk and Action," *New York Times*, March 31, 2017; Julie Hirschfeld and Alan Rappeport, "After Calling Nafta 'Worst Trade Deal,' Trump Appears to Soften Stance," *New York Times*, March 30, 2017; Mark Landler, Peter Baker, and David E. Sanger, "Trump Embraces Pillars of Obama's Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, February 2, 2017.

¹⁰ See, for example, Lawrence J. Haas, "Encouraging Putin's Recklessness," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 27, 2017; Eli Lake, "Obama Choked on Russia Long Before the 2016 Election," *Bloomberg*, June 27, 2017; Josef Joffe, "How Trump Is Like Obama," *Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2017; John Vinocur, "Obama's European Legacy," *Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 2017; James Kirchick, "Who Killed the Liberal World Order?," *American Interest*, May 3, 2017; Leon Wieseltier, "Aleppo's Fall is Obama's Failure," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2016.

regarding U.S. federal budget deficits and the U.S. debt (which can lead to constraints on funding available for U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy activities).¹¹

A major dimension of the debate is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing the active internationalist role that it has played for the past 70 years, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs. Among U.S. strategists and foreign policy specialists, advocates of a more restrained U.S. role include (to cite a few examples) Andrew Bacevich, John Mearsheimer, Barry Posen, Christopher Preble, and Stephen Walt. These and other authors have offered multiple variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role, depending on the specific person or organization advocating it. Terms such as *offshore balancing*, *offshore control*, *realism*, *strategy of restraint*, or *retrenchment* have been used to describe some of these variations.¹² These variations on the idea of a more restrained U.S. role would not necessarily match in their details a changed U.S. role that might be pursued by the Trump Administration. The debate about the U.S. role in the world, moreover, is not limited to one between those who favor continued extensive engagement along the lines of the past 70 years and those who prefer some form of a more restrained role—other options are also being promoted.¹³

A second major dimension within the debate over the future U.S. role concerns how to balance or combine the pursuit of narrowly defined U.S. interests with the goal of defending and promoting U.S. values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. Participants in this debate again stake out varying positions.

A third dimension of the debate over the U.S. role in the world relates to the balance between the use of so-called *hard power* (primarily but not exclusively military combat power) and *soft power* (including diplomacy, development assistance, support for international organizations, education and cultural exchanges, and the international popularity of elements of U.S. culture such as music, movies, television shows, and literature) in U.S. foreign policy.

¹¹ As discussed in another CRS report, world events have led some observers, starting in late 2013, to conclude that the international security environment has undergone a shift from the familiar post-Cold War era of the past 20 to 25 years, also sometimes known as the unipolar moment (with the United States as the unipolar power), to a new and different situation that features, among other things, renewed great power competition with China and Russia and challenges by these two countries and others to elements of the U.S.-led international order that has operated since World War II. See CRS Report R43838, *A Shift in the International Security Environment: Potential Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted) .

¹² The terms *offshore balancing* and *offshore control* refer in general to a policy in which the United States, in effect, stands off the shore of Eurasia and engages in the security affairs of Eurasia less frequently, less directly, or less expansively. The term *retrenchment* is more often used by critics of these proposed approaches.

¹³ For example, one analyst and former White House aide states: “For much of its history, the United States kept itself largely apart from the world ... During the Cold War and its aftermath, the United States sat atop the world. Militarily, economically, technologically, diplomatically, politically, and ideologically, the United States was dominant by almost every measure ... [Today] the United States finds itself neither apart nor atop but rather amidst the world, both shaping and being shaped by global events and forces....” As a consequence, he argues, there is the need for a new approach that differs from both retrenchment and re-assertion, an approach he labels “re-calibration” to the “geopolitical, economic, technological and other dynamics driving the 21st-century world.” Such an approach, he argues, would entail a reappraisal of U.S. interests, a reassessment of U.S. power, and a repositioning of U.S. leadership. (Bruce Jentleson, “Apart, Atop, Amidst: America in the World,” *War on the Rocks*, January 2017.)

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

The question of more engagement vs. less engagement, the question of the balance or mix of narrowly defined interests and broader values, and the question of the balance between hard power and soft power form three of the most important dimensions of the debate over the U.S. role.

Issues for Congress

A change in the overall U.S. role could have profound implications for U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy, for Congress as an institution, and for many federal policies and programs. Below are brief discussions of some issues for Congress that could arise from a potential change in the U.S. role. For some of these discussions, appendixes at the end of this report provide references to additional articles and CRS reports providing more in-depth discussions.

Future U.S. Role

What Are the Trump Administration's Intentions?

An initial potential issue for Congress is to determine whether the Trump Administration wants to change the U.S. role, and if so, in what ways. Because many details of the Trump Administration's foreign policy have yet to be articulated and may be evolving, it is not clear that they will eventually add up to a desire to change the U.S. role in one or more ways. Potential questions that Congress may consider include the following:

- To what degree does the Trump Administration want to change the U.S. role toward one that is one or more of the following:
 - less concerned with exercising global leadership, less engaged overseas, and more inward-looking;
 - less involved in or supportive of multilateral organizations, and more inclined toward acting bilaterally or unilaterally;
 - more skeptical about the value of alliances, and more transactional in its approach to U.S. relationships with other countries;
 - less concerned with promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights, and with criticizing and resisting authoritarianism; and
 - less committed to pursuing free trade through multilateral and regional trade agreements, and more open to the use of protectionist measures as an element of trade and international economic policy?
- To what degree has the Trump Administration sent what some observers consider to be mixed signals about whether and how it intends to change the U.S. role? How should Congress interpret mixed signals? How might Congress require the executive branch to clarify its position on this issue by a certain date?
- Is the Trump Administration's policy regarding the U.S. role evolving? If so, in what direction, and how long will the process of evolution continue? What are the potential consequences of an extended period of uncertainty or evolution regarding the administration's policy on the U.S. role?

Should the U.S. Role Change, and If So, How?

A follow-on potential issue for Congress—arguably the central policy issue for this CRS report—is whether there should be a change in the U.S. role, and if so, what that change should be, including whether a given proposed change would be feasible or practical, and what consequences may result. The following sections discuss some aspects of this issue.

What Should Be Congress's Role in Considering This Issue?

An initial aspect of this issue concerns Congress: what should be Congress's role, relative to that of the executive branch, in considering whether the U.S. role in the world should change, and if so, what that change should be? Regarding this question, it can be noted that Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution vests Congress with several powers that can bear on the U.S. role in the world,¹⁴ and that Article II, Section 2, states that the President shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur.

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

For a list of selected CRS reports discussing congressional powers and activities that can bear on Congress's role in determining the U.S. role in the world, see **Appendix A**.

Arguments on Continuation of Role of Past 70 years vs. More Restrained Role

As noted earlier, one major dimension of the debate on this question is whether the United States should attempt to continue playing an internationalist role that defends and promotes the open international order and resists the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia and a spheres-of-influence world, or instead adopt a more restrained role that reduces U.S. involvement in world affairs and puts less U.S. effort into pursuing these goals. Those who advocate a more restrained U.S. role generally argue one or more of the following:

¹⁴ These include the power to

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

- Other world powers, such as China, are becoming more powerful economically, militarily, and politically, narrowing the preponderance of power that the United States has had since World War II. These other world powers have their own ideas about international order, and these ideas do not match all aspects of the current open international order. This might be particularly the case with regard to China.¹⁵ The United States should acknowledge the changing global distribution of power and work with these other countries to define a new international order that incorporates ideas from these other countries.
- Eurasia can be self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemony. Consequently, the level of U.S. intervention in the affairs of Eurasia can be reduced without incurring undue risk that regional hegemony will emerge there. The current substantial level of U.S. intervention in the affairs of Eurasia could discourage countries in Eurasia from acting more fully on their own to prevent the emergence of regional hegemony.
- Even if one or more regional hegemony were to emerge in Eurasia, this would not pose an unacceptable situation for the United States—vital U.S. interests could still be defended. Similarly, the emergence of a spheres-of-influence world need not be unacceptable for the United States, because such a world would again not necessarily be incompatible with vital U.S. interests.
- It may be desirable for the United States to oppose the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia and a spheres-of-influence world. Given projected U.S. budget deficits and debt, however, as well as competing priorities for domestic spending and the increasing wealth and power of Eurasian countries such as China, the United States may no longer be able to afford to sustain the effort that would be needed to do so in coming years.
- Given limits on U.S. resources and pressing domestic problems, the United States needs to devote fewer resources to defending the international order and resisting the emergence of regional hegemony, and more resources to addressing domestic needs. Overextending U.S. participation in international affairs could lead to excessive amounts of federal debt and inadequately addressed domestic problems, leaving the United States poorly positioned for sustaining any future desired level of international engagement.

¹⁵ See, for example, Steven Erlanger, “China Sees Opening Left by Trump in Europe, and Quietly Steps In,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2017; “China, B&R [Belt and Road] Countries to Take Lead in Global Economic Governance: Foreign Experts,” *People’s Daily Online*, June 26, 2017; Andrew Browne, “Fitting Into Beijing’s New World Order,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017; Natalie Liu, “China Expands Globally Amid Concerns Over its Mercantilist Policies,” *VOA News*, May 25, 2017; Jane Perlez and Keith Bradsher, “Xi Jinping Positions China at Center of New Economic Order,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2017; Jane Perlez and Yufan Huang, “Behind China’s \$1 Trillion Plan to Shake Up the Economic Order,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2017; “Is China Challenging the United States for Global Leadership?” *Economist*, April 1, 2017; Uri Friedman, “What a World Led by China Might Look Like,” *The Atlantic*, March 29, 2017; Bjorn Jerden, et al., “Don’t Call it the New Chinese Global Order (Yet),” *Foreign Policy*, March 7, 2017; Zhao Minghao, “‘Post-West’ World Calls for New Structure,” *Global Times*, February 28, 2017; Zheping Huang, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Has Vowed to Lead the ‘New World Order,’” *Quartz*, February 22, 2017; Ross Terrill, “A Beijing Model? Xi Jinping’s Version of Democracy,” *Weekly Standard*, February 20, 2017; Elizabeth C. Economy, “Beijing Is No Champion of Globalization,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 22, 2017; Robert Daly, “While the West Fiddles, China Races to Define the Future,” *Foreign Policy*, January 20, 2017; “Xi Calls for Reforms on Global Governance,” *Xinhuanet*, September 28, 2016; Liu Jie, “Commentary: Revamping Global Economic Governance in Due Course,” *Xinhuanet*, September 1, 2016; Simon Denyer, “The Internet Was Supposed to Foster Democracy. China Has Different Ideas,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 2016; Richard Fontaine and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “How China Sees World Order,” *National Interest*, April 20, 2016.

- U.S. interventions in the security affairs of Eurasia have frequently been more costly and/or less successful than anticipated, making a strategy of intervening, either to prevent the emergence of regional hegemony and a spheres-of-influence world, or for other purposes, less cost-effective in practice than in theory. U.S. interventions can also draw the United States into conflicts involving other countries over issues that are not vital or important U.S. interests.
- The United States has not always lived up to its own ideals, and consequently lacks sufficient moral standing to pursue a role that involves imposing its values and will on other countries. Attempting to do that through an interventionist policy, moreover, can lead to an erosion of those values at home.
- The U.S. role of the past 70 years is an aberration when viewed against the U.S. historical record dating back to 1776, which is a history characterized more by periods of restraint than by periods of high levels of international engagement. Returning to a more restrained U.S. role would thus return U.S. policy to what is, historically, a more traditional policy for the United States.
- In public opinion polls, Americans often express support for a more restrained U.S. role, particularly on issues such as whether the United States should act as the world's police force, funding levels for U.S. foreign assistance programs, U.S. participation in (and financial support for) international organizations, and U.S. defense expenditures for defending allies.

Those who advocate continuing the U.S. role of the past 70 years generally reject the above arguments, arguing the following, for example:

- The open international order reflects U.S. interests and values; a renegotiated international order incorporating ideas from authoritarian countries such as China would produce a world less conducive to defending and promoting U.S. interests and values.¹⁶
- Eurasia historically has not been self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemony, and there is little reason to believe that it will become self-regulating in the future.
- A regional hegemon in Eurasia would have enough economic and other power to be able to threaten vital U.S. interests.
- In addition to threatening U.S. access to the economies of Eurasia, a spheres-of-influence world would be prone to war because regional hegemony historically are never satisfied with the extent of their hegemonic domains and eventually seek to expand them, coming into conflict with other hegemony. Leaders of regional hegemony are also prone to misjudgment and miscalculation regarding where their spheres collide.
- The implementation of the U.S. role of the past 70 years, including U.S. interventions in the security affairs of Eurasia, though not without significant costs and errors, has been successful in preventing wars between major powers and defending and promoting vital U.S. interests and values.
- The United States, though not perfect, retains ample moral authority—and responsibility—to act as a world leader.

¹⁶ See footnote 15.

- Although a restrained U.S. foreign policy may have been appropriate for the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, experiences in more recent years (including World Wars I and II and the Cold War) show that a more restrained U.S. foreign policy would now be riskier or more costly over the long run than an engaged U.S. foreign policy. A U.S. retreat from global leadership could lead to instability damaging to U.S. interests or a vacuum that could be filled by other major powers, such as China.¹⁷
- Other public opinion poll results show that Americans support a U.S. global leadership role.

Arguments on U.S. Interests and Values

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

In a May 3, 2017, address to Department of State employees, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated:

So let's talk first about my view of how you translate "America first" into our foreign policy. And I think I approach it really that it's America first for national security and economic prosperity, and that doesn't mean it comes at the expense of others. Our partnerships and our alliances are critical to our success in both of those areas. But as we have progressed over the last 20 years—and some of you could tie it back to the post-Cold War era as the world has changed, some of you can tie it back to the evolution of China since the post-Nixon era and China's rise as an economic power, and now as a growing military power—that as we participated in those changes, we were promoting relations, we were promoting economic activity, we were promoting trade with a lot of these emerging economies, and we just kind of lost track of how we were doing. And as a result, things got a little bit out of balance. And I think that's—as you hear the President talk about it, that's what he really speaks about, is: Look, things have gotten out of balance, and these are really important relationships to us and they're really important alliances, but we've got to bring them back into balance.

So whether it's our asking of NATO members to really meet their obligations, even though those were notional obligations, we understand—and aspirational obligation, we think it's important that those become concrete. And when we deal with our trading partners—that things have gotten a little out of bounds here, they've gotten a little off balance—we've got to bring that back into balance because it's not serving the interests of the American people well.

So it doesn't have to come at the expense of others, but it does have to come at an engagement with others. And so as we're building our policies around those notions, that's what we want to support. But at the end of it, it is strengthening our national

¹⁷ See footnote 15.

security and promoting economic prosperity for the American people, and we do that, again, with a lot of partners.

Now, I think it's important to also remember that guiding all of our foreign policy actions are our fundamental values: our values around freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated. Those are our values. Those are not our policies; they're values. And the reason it's important, I think, to keep that well understood is policies can change. They do change. They should change. Policies change to adapt to the—our values never change. They're constant throughout all of this.

And so I think the real challenge many of us have as we think about constructing our policies and carrying out our policies is: How do we represent our values? And in some circumstances, if you condition our national security efforts on someone adopting our values, we probably can't achieve our national security goals or our national security interests. If we condition too heavily that others must adopt this value that we've come to over a long history of our own, it really creates obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests. It doesn't mean that we leave those values on the sidelines. It doesn't mean that we don't advocate for and aspire to freedom, human dignity, and the treatment of people the world over. We do. And we will always have that on our shoulder everywhere we go.

But I think it is—I think it's really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values, and in some circumstances, we should and do condition our policy engagements on people adopting certain actions as to how they treat people. They should. We should demand that. But that doesn't mean that's the case in every situation. And so we really have to understand, in each country or each region of the world that we're dealing with, what are our national security interests, what are our economic prosperity interests, and then as we can advocate and advance our values, we should – but the policies can do this; the values never change.

And so I would ask you to just—to the extent you could think about that a little bit, I think it's useful, because I know this is probably, for me, it's one of the most difficult areas as I've thought about how to formulate policy to advance all of these things simultaneously. It's a real challenge. And I hear from government leaders all over the world: You just can't demand that of us, we can't move that quickly, we can't adapt that quickly, okay? So it's how do we advance our national security and economic interests on this hand, our values are constant over here.

So I give you that as kind of an overarching view of how I think about the President's approach of "America first." We must secure the nation. We must protect our people. We must protect our borders. We must protect our ability to be that voice of our values now and forevermore. And we can only do that with economic prosperity. So it's foreign policy projected with a strong ability to enforce the protection of our freedoms with a strong military. And all of you that have been at this a long time understand the value of speaking with a posture of strength—not a threatening posture, but a posture of strength. People know we can back it up.¹⁸

Balance of Hard and Soft Power

As also noted earlier, a third dimension of the debate over the U.S. role in the world relates to the balance between the use of so-called *hard power* (primarily but not exclusively military combat power) and *soft power* (including diplomacy, development assistance, support for international

¹⁸ Remarks to U.S. Department of State Employees, Rex W. Tillerson, Secretary of State, Dean Acheson Auditorium, Washington, DC, May 3, 2017, accessed June 27, 2017, at <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>.

organizations, education and cultural exchanges, and the international popularity of elements of U.S. culture such as music, movies, television shows, and literature) in U.S. foreign policy.

In presenting the Trump Administration's proposed FY2018 budget outline in March 2017, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Mick Mulvaney stated that it was not "a soft power budget. This is a hard power budget and that was done intentionally. The president very clearly wanted to send a message to our allies and to our potential adversaries that this is a strong-power administration."¹⁹ Under that budget outline, the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs were identified for proposed budget increases, with the Department of Defense receiving the largest share of the increase (primarily for addressing readiness-related issues), while other major departments and agencies, including the Department of State, were identified for proposed budget reductions, some of them substantial in percentage terms.²⁰

The Administration's full FY2018 budget proposal, which was submitted on May 23, 2017, is generally consistent with the budget outline that was presented in March 2018. The proposed balance between funding for hard and soft power within the budget is one of many issues that Congress is examining as it reviews and marks up the FY2018 budget. Administration officials have defended their proposed budget, including the proposed balance between hard and soft power. Some Department of Defense officials, when questioned at hearings on the proposed FY2018 defense budget, have stated that a significant reduction in funding for the Department of State and other non-defense security agencies and programs could result in increased mission demands for Department of Defense.²¹

¹⁹ As quoted in Russell Berman, "President Trump's 'Hard Power' Budget," *The Atlantic*, March 16, 2017. The article states that Mulvaney made the remarks in "a Wednesday [March 15] briefing previewing the [budget] proposal's release." In a March 16, 2017 White House press briefing, Mulvaney similarly stated:

Again, I come back to what the president said on the campaign, which is that he's going to spend less money overseas. To your question, though, because this came up the other day, which is the hard power versus soft power. There's a very deliberate attempt here to send a message to our allies and our friends, such as India, and our adversaries, other countries, shall we say, which is that this is a hard-power budget; that this administration intends to change course from a soft power budget to a hard power budget. And that's a message that our adversaries and our allies alike should take.

(Transcript of White House regular news briefing, March 16, 2017, as posted at CQ.com.)

²⁰ See Office of Management and Budget, *America First A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*.

²¹ For example, at a June 15, 2017, hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Department of the Navy's proposed FY2018 budget, the following exchange occurred:

SENATOR ELIZABETH WARREN (continuing):

I want to quickly ask about the importance of our non-military agencies and programs to the Navy mission. Admiral Richardson, would a significant reduction in funding to the State Department and other non-defense security agencies and programs make the Navy's job easier or harder to do?

ADMIRAL JOHN RICHARDSON, CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS:

If you—if you—harder, to be blunt about it, ma'am.

WARREN:

I'll take blunt.

RICHARDSON:

Yeah, that's—(inaudible). So, you know, the lack of diplomacy and those sorts of other elements of national power—if those aren't there, it makes our mission harder.

(Transcript as posted at CQ.com.)

Potential Implications for “U.S. Brand”

One additional potential consideration for Congress concerns what some commentators have referred to as the “U.S. brand” in foreign affairs, or, in other words, America’s reputation or what America is seen to stand for.²² Some observers have argued that adopting a more skeptical and transactional approach to alliances, or placing less emphasis on freedom, democracy, and human rights as universal values, could tarnish or damage a U.S. reputation as a reliable alliance partner and moral leader. Were that to happen, these observers argue, the United States could experience more difficulty in the future in attempting to attract new allies or hold the moral high ground in dealing with authoritarian countries.

Others might argue that the value of the current U.S. brand on these issues is overrated, and that changing the U.S. role could help establish a new U.S. reputation centered, for example, on an image of a country that does not go abroad in search of enemies, and that attempts to set an example for others without acting in a high-handed manner or attempting to impose its values on others. This alternative brand, they might argue, has its own value in the current and evolving global environment.

Potential questions for Congress to consider include the following:

- On issues such as the value of the United States as a reliable alliance partner, or as a moral leader on issues such as freedom, democracy, and human rights, is there a U.S. brand? If so:
 - What is its value in defending and promoting U.S. interests?
 - How might that brand be affected if, for some period of time, the U.S. role shifts to one that adopts a more skeptical and transactional approach to alliances or places less emphasis on freedom, democracy, and human rights? To what degree, if any, has the United States discredited its brand? If it has been discredited, how much effort and time might be required to reestablish it?
 - If that U.S. brand is affected, what would be its impact on the ability of the United States to defend and promote its interests? How much time and resources would be required to restore such a U.S. brand?
- If the U.S. role were to change in one or more of the ways outlined earlier, would this establish a new U.S. brand regarding U.S. participation in international affairs? If so:
 - What would that brand be, and what would be the value of that brand in defending and promoting U.S. interests?
 - How might that brand be affected if, at some point, the U.S. role changed back to something resembling the U.S. role of the past 70 years?
- Are the brands of other major world powers, such as China, becoming more compelling or convincing than that of the United States, and if so, to what degree, and why?²³

²² See, for example, Mark P. Lagon and Brian P. McKeon, “Donald Trump’ Is Tarnishing America’s Brand,” *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2017.

²³ See, for example, Fu Ying, “China’s Vision for the World: A Community of Shared Future,” *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2017; Isaac Stone Fish, “Is China Becoming the World’s Most Likable Superpower?” *The Atlantic*, June 2, 2017; David E. Sanger and Jane Perlez, “Trump Hands the Chinese a Gift: The Chance for Global Leadership,” *New York* (continued...)

U.S. Public Opinion

An additional potential consideration for Congress concerns U.S. public opinion, which can be an important factor in debates over the future U.S. role in the world. Among other things, public opinion can shape the political context (and can provide the impulse) for negotiating the terms of, and for considering whether to become party to, international agreements; it can influence debates on whether and how to employ U.S. military force; and it can influence policymaker decisions on funding levels for defense and foreign affairs activities.

Foreign policy specialists, strategists, and policymakers sometimes invoke U.S. public opinion poll results in debates on the U.S. role in the world. At least one has argued that the American people “always have been the greatest constraint on America’s role in the world”²⁴ One issue relating to U.S. public opinion that observers are discussing is the extent to which the U.S. public may now believe that U.S. leaders have broken a tacit social contract under which the U.S. public has supported the costs of U.S. global leadership in return for the promise of receiving certain benefits, particularly steady increases in real incomes and the standard of living.

For additional information on U.S. public opinion regarding the U.S. role, see **Appendix B**.

Potential Oversight Questions for Congress

Potential questions for Congress to consider—a number of them quite fundamental—include the following:

- What are the benefits and costs to the United States of the open international order?
- In considering the future U.S. role, is the historical experience of the first half of the 20th century or other periods of U.S. history, such as the 19th century, relevant today, and if so, in what ways?
- How much power, economic and otherwise, does the United States have today relative to other countries, particularly other major powers? How might this situation change in coming years?
- How much U.S. effort, at what cost, would be needed to ensure the continuation of the open international order? Given projected federal budget deficits and U.S. debt, as well as competing priorities for domestic spending and the increasing wealth and power of Eurasian countries such as China, can the United States afford to sustain that effort?
- How much U.S. intervention in the security affairs of Eurasia would be needed in coming years to prevent the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia, particularly given the growing wealth and power of Eurasian countries such as China? Would a regional hegemon in Eurasia be powerful enough to threaten vital U.S. interests?

(...continued)

Times, June 1, 2017; Elsa Kania, “China’s War for Narrative Dominance,” *National Interest*, May 28, 2017; “China to Continue Contributing to Global Stability, Growth, Peace, Governance,” *Xinhua*, March 8, 2017.

²⁴ Kori Schake, “National Security Challenges,” *ORBIS*, Vol. 61 Issue 1, Winter 2017.

- In terms of costs and outcomes, what is the track record of U.S. interventions, using both hard and soft power, over the past 70 years? What does that record imply for future U.S. decisions regarding intervention?
- If the United States were to reduce its level of effort for defending and promoting the open international order, how likely is it that the open international order would erode or collapse? Is it already eroding or collapsing, as some commentators suggest, and if so, why?
- If the open international order were to erode or collapse, what might take its place? What kind of international order would rising powers, such as China, prefer to see in coming years? To what extent would the features of such an order be consistent with U.S. interests and values? What are the preferences of other potential key players such as Russia or those in the developing world who criticize the current order as too “Western?” What other views should be taken into account?
- To what degree might the successor order
 - be a power-based order (i.e., a might-makes right world) rather than a rules-based order?
 - be characterized by protectionism and mercantilism, rather than free markets and free trade?
 - feature regional hegemons and spheres of influence?
 - include a greater dimension of important networked non-state actors, including terrorists, cities, social movements, and global corporations?²⁵
- What might be the benefits and costs to the United States of a successor international order with one or more of the above characteristics?
- In the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, how should pursuing narrowly defined U.S. interests be balanced or combined with defending and promoting U.S. values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights? To what degree does defending and promoting such values hinder or help the pursuit of U.S. interests?
- What is the relationship or link, if any, between defending and promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights internationally, and defending and promoting those values in the conduct of domestic U.S. affairs?
- What is the proper balance of funding for hard power and soft power programs in the federal budget?
- How should the debate over the U.S. role in the world be informed and shaped by U.S. public opinion? What do polls state regarding U.S. public opinion on the U.S. role?

Additional Citations

For examples of recent articles in which authors express varying views on what kind of role or grand strategy the United States should pursue in coming years, see **Appendix C**. And as

²⁵ See, for example, Benjamin Jensen, “How the International System Shapes the Character of War: Order, Geography, and Networks,” *War on the Rocks*, June 4, 2017, warontherocks.com/2017/06/how-the-international-system-shapes-the-character-of-war-order-geography-and-networks/

mentioned earlier, for additional information on U.S. public opinion regarding the U.S. role, see **Appendix B**.

Congress as an Institution

Congressional Powers and Prerogatives

A potentially important issue for Congress is whether a change in the U.S. role in the world would have any implications for the preservation and use of congressional powers and prerogatives relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy. A key question for Congress in this regard is whether the general pattern of presidential and congressional activities in these areas that developed over a 70-year period of general stability in the U.S. role—a pattern that developed in part as a result of deliberate delegations (or tacit ceding) of authority by Congress to the executive branch—would continue to be appropriate in a situation of a changed U.S. role. One observer states:

Like other wide congressional grants of authority to the executive branch—the power to levy “emergency” tariffs comes to mind—the vast discretion over immigration Trump has inherited was a product of a different time.

Lawmakers during the post-World War II era assumed presidents of both parties agreed on certain broad lessons of prewar history, such as the need to remain widely engaged through trade and collective security, and the importance of humanitarian values—“soft power”—in U.S. foreign policy.

They did not anticipate today’s breakdown in national consensus, much less that heirs to the America Firsters who had failed to attain national power before World War II could ever attain it afterward.²⁶

Potential key questions for Congress include the following:

- If the U.S. role changes, what would be the optimal approach regarding the preservation and use of congressional powers and prerogatives in the area of foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy?
- Is the record of how these matters were handled in the decades prior to World War II relevant, and if so, how?

Congressional Organization, Capacity, and Operations

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

- **Committee organization.** If there is a change in the U.S. global role, to what degree would current committee and subcommittee structures for working on issues relating to foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy still be appropriate?

²⁶ Charles Lane, “Sorry, Trump’s Refugee Order Is Probably Legal,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2017.

- **Staffing.** If there is heightened debate over the future U.S. role, would that have any implications for how Congress should be staffed for working on issues relating to U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy? In terms of numbers of staff, their skills, and their amounts of prior experience working on foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy issues, how should Congress be staffed within its committees, in Member offices, and at the congressional support agencies (CRS, the Congressional Budget Office [CBO], and the Government Accountability Office [GAO]) for addressing a potential change in the U.S. role? Does Congress have an appropriate amount of in-house staff capacity for providing historical perspective, institutional memory, and familiarity with basic or fundamental questions relating to U.S. foreign policy, including questions relating to the overall U.S. role, grand strategy, and geopolitics?²⁷
- **Legislative activity.** If the U.S. role were to change, would that have any implications for how Congress legislates on issues relating to U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international economic policy? For example, as discussed further in another CRS report, Congress in recent years has not regularly passed comprehensive foreign relations reauthorization legislation—the last such legislation was enacted in the 107th Congress. In 2016, Congress did, however, pass the Department of State Authorities Act, Fiscal Year 2017 (S. 1635/P.L. 114-323 of December 16, 2016), and in the first session of the 115th Congress, foreign affairs authorizing committees are considering whether to introduce comprehensive one- or two-year foreign relations authorization legislation.²⁸

Policy and Program Areas

Allies and Alliances

One specific policy issue for Congress relating to the U.S. role concerns allies and alliances as an element in U.S. strategy and foreign policy. The current U.S. approach to allies and alliances reflects a belief that allies and alliances are of value to the United States for defending and promoting U.S. interests and for preventing the emergence of regional hegemons. This approach to allies and alliances has led to a global network of U.S. alliance relationships involving countries in Europe and North America (through NATO), East Asia (through a series of mostly bilateral treaties), and Latin America (through the multilateral Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, known commonly as the Rio Treaty or Rio Pact). The approach to allies

²⁷ For a general discussion of congressional staffing and how it has evolved over time, see Congressional Research Service, *Congressional Staffing: The Continuity of Change and Reform*, by (name redacted), in CRS Committee Print CP10000, *The Evolving Congress: A Committee Print Prepared for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration*, coordinated by (name redacted), (name redacted), and (name redacted)

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

²⁸ For further discussion, see CRS In Focus IF10293, *Foreign Relations Reauthorization: Background and Issues*, by (name redacted). See also pages 17-20 of Congressional Research Service, *Changes in the Purposes and Frequency of Authorizations of Appropriations*, by (name redacted), in CRS Committee Print CP10000, *The Evolving Congress: A Committee Print Prepared for the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration*, coordinated by (name redacted), (name redacted), and (name redacted)

and alliances that some observers believe the Trump Administration may wish to pursue—an approach that would be more skeptical regarding the value to the United States of alliances, and more purely transactional—has led to a renewed debate over the value of allies and alliances as an element of U.S. strategy and foreign policy.

Skeptics of allies and alliances generally argue that their value to the United States is overrated, that allies are capable of defending themselves without U.S. help, that U.S. allies frequently act as free riders in their alliance relationships with the United States by shifting costs to the United States, and that alliances create a risk of drawing the United States into conflicts involving allies over issues that are not vital to the United States.

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

Potential questions for Congress include the following:

- What do U.S. allies contribute in terms of deterring regional aggressors, preventing the emergence of regional hegemony, and otherwise ensuring U.S. national security interests?
- Are U.S. allies adequately pulling their own weight, financially and otherwise, in terms of defense expenditures and other contributions to security? What metrics should be used in assessing the degree to which U.S. allies are free riders in their alliance relationships with the United States? What has been done, or can be done in the future, to reduce the amount of free riding that takes place? What is the best way to manage the free-rider issue?
- To what degree are the benefits of individual alliance relationships linked to the creation of larger alliance networks?
- What is the historical record as to whether alliance relationships create a risk of drawing the United States into conflicts over issues involving U.S. allies that are not vital U.S. interests?

For examples of recent articles providing perspectives on the value of allies and alliances, see **Appendix D**.

State Department, International Organizations, Foreign Assistance

Another set of policy and program issues for Congress relating to the U.S. role concerns the Department of State, U.S. participation in international organizations, and U.S. foreign assistance programs. The organization and annual funding levels of the Department of State, as well as policies and funding levels for U.S. participation in international organizations and U.S. foreign assistance programs, have evolved to reflect the generally stable U.S. role over the past 70

years—a role that has tended to assume U.S. leadership in global institutions and on issues such as foreign aid. The Trump Administration is proposing substantial percentage reductions to the State Department’s budget, U.S. funding for international organizations, and funding levels for U.S. foreign assistance programs. Potential questions for Congress include the following:

- How would the Administration’s proposed reductions in funding for the Department of State budget affect the U.S. role? If numerous bureaus, offices, and positions were eliminated from the department as a result of these reductions, what might that mean for the U.S. role and for day-to-day U.S. soft-power operations overseas? How do the benefits of these soft-power operations compare with their costs?
- If the U.S. role were to change in one or more of the ways outlined earlier, what implications, if any, would this have for the organization, staffing, and funding requirements for the Department of State?
- In a situation of a changed U.S. role, what would be the optimal balance between funding for the Department of State and funding for other government agencies, such as the Department of Defense, that affect the U.S. role?
- If the U.S. role were to change in one or more of the ways outlined earlier, how might it affect U.S. funding for, and participation in, international organizations? Conversely, how would a significant reduction in U.S. funding for international organizations affect the U.S. role in the world?
- If the U.S. role were to change in one or more of the ways outlined earlier, how might it affect goals, policies, total funding levels, and the distribution of funding by purpose and recipient for foreign assistance programs?
- What function do foreign assistance programs play in maintaining U.S. relations with other countries and otherwise shaping the international political, economic and security environment? How might this function be changed in a situation of a changed U.S. role? How might a substantial reduction in foreign assistance, including security assistance, affect the U.S. role?
- How do questions such as those above relate to the issue of the balance of hard power and soft power discussed earlier? In what instances has soft power been exercised successfully when hard power by itself has failed to achieve U.S. national security objectives, and vice versa? To what degree does the U.S. military expect a balance of appropriate hard and soft power in order to achieve national security objectives?

For a list of selected CRS products providing overview discussions of the Department of State, U.S. participation in international organizations, and foreign assistance, see **Appendix E**.

Trade and International Economic Policy

Another specific policy and program issue for Congress relating to the U.S. role concerns trade and international economic policy. A key issue for Congress is whether the United States should shift to a trade policy that places less emphasis on multilateral trade organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and more emphasis on bilateral trade agreements and protectionist measures. Potential questions for Congress regarding trade include the following:

- To what extent is economic anxiety in the United States driven by trade, compared to other economic forces, including technological change?
- In what specific ways has the United States had unfair disadvantages in global markets? Would these disadvantages be better addressed by continuing to develop an open, rules-based international trading system or by implementing protectionist trade policies? In what ways has the current global trading system created advantages for the United States? Would these advantages be better addressed by continuing to develop an open, rules-based international trading system or by implementing protectionist trade policies?
- Is the historical experience with the more protectionist trade policies of the 1930s relevant today, and if so, in what ways? How does that historical experience compare with that of trade policies that the United States has pursued since World War II? During the 2008-2010 financial crisis, international leaders pledged to avoid protectionist trade policies, a pledge they viewed as critical to avoiding an economic downturn reminiscent of the Great Depression. Does this view apply to current debates on trade?
- What are the benefits and costs of free trade and multilateral and regional trade agreements to the U.S. economy as a whole, and to specific parts of (or groups within) the U.S. economy?
- What is the potential for substituting bilateral trade agreements for multilateral and regional ones? How might the terms of bilateral agreements compare to those of multilateral and regional agreements?
- What are the potential benefits and costs to the U.S. economy as a whole, and to specific parts of (or groups within) the U.S. economy, of a U.S. trade and international economic policy that relies more on bilateral trade agreements and protectionist measures as elements of trade policy?
- What function does trade and international economic policy play in maintaining U.S. relations with other countries and otherwise shaping the international security environment? How might this function be changed in a situation of a changed U.S. role?
- Would a changed U.S. approach to trade affect U.S. adherence to its trade commitments in the WTO and elsewhere?
- What are the implications for U.S. foreign policy of the U.S. withdrawal from TPP?
- What might be the potential implications for existing trade promotion authorities and trade adjustment assistance programs of a U.S. trade and international economic policy that relies more on bilateral trade agreements and protectionist measures as elements of trade and international economic policy?
- How do questions such as those above relate to the issue mentioned earlier regarding the tacit social contract under which the U.S. public has supported the costs of U.S. global leadership in return for certain benefits, particularly steady increases in real incomes and the standard of living?
- How might a change in the U.S. role affect U.S. policy regarding the use of trade and other economic sanctions as a tool of U.S. diplomacy, or the potential effectiveness of such sanctions? How does this question relate to the earlier discussion regarding the value of allies and alliances?

Another key issue for Congress relates to the international economic role of the United States. During and after World War II, the United States spearheaded the creation of an international economic order built around institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the role of the U.S. dollar as a reserve currency. This international economic order formed a key part of the postwar open international order, and U.S. leadership in creating, maintaining, and modifying this international economic order has similarly constituted a principal aspect of U.S. global leadership since World War II. Potential questions for Congress include the following:

- If the United States were to reduce its leadership role in international economic institutions, to what degree would other countries—particularly China, with its large and growing economy—step forward to assume increased leadership roles?
- How might such a shift in leadership roles affect the U.S. economy? More generally, how might it affect the ability of the United States to defend and promote its interests, both economic and otherwise?
- To what degree is the U.S. leadership role in international economic policy challenged by new international financial institutions such as the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)?

For a list of selected CRS products providing overview discussions of trade and international economic policy, see **Appendix F**.

Defense

Another specific policy and program issue for Congress relating to the U.S. role concerns U.S. defense strategy, missions, budgets, plans, and programs. As discussed in another CRS report,²⁹ the U.S. role of the past 70 years, particularly the U.S. goal of preventing the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia, appears to be a major reason why the U.S. military is structured with significant strategic nuclear deterrent forces and also conventional force elements that are intended to enable the military to cross broad expanses of ocean and air space and then conduct sustained, large-scale military operations upon arrival. Force elements associated with this objective include, among other things,

- an Air Force with significant numbers of long-range bombers, long-range surveillance aircraft, and aerial refueling tankers;
- a Navy with significant numbers of aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered attack submarines, large surface combatants, large amphibious ships, and underway replenishment ships; and
- significant numbers of long-range Air Force airlift aircraft and Military Sealift Command sealift ships for transporting ground forces personnel and their equipment and supplies rapidly over long distances.

Consistent with a goal of being able to conduct sustained, large-scale military operations in distant locations, the United States also stations significant numbers of forces and supplies in forward locations in Europe, the Persian Gulf, and the Asia-Pacific.

A January 27, 2017, national security presidential memorandum on rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces signed by President Trump states: “Upon transmission of a new National Security Strategy

²⁹ CRS In Focus IF10485, *Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and U.S. Force Design*, by (name redacted) .

to Congress, the Secretary [of Defense] shall produce a National Defense Strategy (NDS). The goal of the NDS shall be to give the President and the Secretary maximum strategic flexibility and to determine the force structure necessary to meet requirements.”³⁰

Potential questions for Congress include the following:

- How might U.S. defense strategy, missions, and funding levels be affected by a change in the U.S. role in the world?
- More specifically, what might be the potential implications of a changed U.S. role for things such as
 - the size and composition of the military?
 - the mix of active and reserve forces?
 - individual weapon acquisition programs?
- Are the Trump Administration’s plans for defense consistent with its intended U.S. role? How well can Congress assess this question if there is uncertainty regarding the Trump Administration’s intentions regarding the U.S. role?

For a list of selected CRS products providing overview discussions of U.S. defense strategy, budgets, plans, and programs, see **Appendix G**.

Homeland Security, Border Security, Immigration, and Refugees

Another specific policy and program issue for Congress relating to the U.S. role concerns homeland security, border security, immigration policy, and policy regarding refugees. The Trump Administration has emphasized tighter border security and tighter controls on immigration as two of its top goals, and has taken or proposed a number of controversial actions in these areas. Changes relating to homeland security, border security, immigration policy, and refugees can have many possible domestic as well as foreign implications for the United States. Potential questions for Congress in this area that relate to a possible change in the U.S. role in the world include the following:

- What implications might a changed U.S. role have for
 - funding and programs for homeland security, and the balance between spending on defense and spending on homeland security?
 - the division of responsibilities for homeland security between the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security?
 - policies and programs relating to border security, immigration, and refugees?
 - policies relating to visas, including those associated with cultural exchanges, foreign students who wish to attend U.S. schools, and H-1 and H-2 temporary visas for workers?
 - policy relating to the national security implications foreign investments in the United States?
 - U.S. relations with Mexico, Canada, and other countries?

³⁰ “Presidential Memorandum on Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces,” accessed June 28, 2017, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/presidential-memorandum-rebuilding-us-armed-forces>.

For a list of selected CRS products providing overview discussions of homeland security, border security, immigration, and refugees, see **Appendix H**.

Appendix A. Selected CRS Products: Congress's Role in Determining U.S. Role

This appendix presents a list of some CRS products discussing congressional powers and activities that can bear on Congress's role in determining the U.S. role in the world. These products include the following:

- CRS In Focus IF10518, *The Powers of Congress: A Brief Overview*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10535, *Defense Primer: Congress's Constitutional Authority with Regard to the Armed Forces*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10539, *Defense Primer: Legal Authorities for the Use of Military Forces*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41989, *Congressional Authority to Limit Military Operations*, by (name redacted), (name redacted), and (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL31133, *Declarations of War and Authorizations for the Use of Military Force: Historical Background and Legal Implications*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42699, *The War Powers Resolution: Concepts and Practice*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10293, *Foreign Relations Reauthorization: Background and Issues*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report 97-896, *Why Certain Trade Agreements Are Approved as Congressional-Executive Agreements Rather Than Treaties*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

Additional CRS products not listed above provide discussions of specific issues relating congressional powers and activities that can bear on Congress's role in determining the U.S. role in the world.

Appendix B. U.S. Public Opinion Regarding U.S. Role

This appendix presents additional information on recent U.S. public opinion regarding the U.S. role in the world.

2016 Pew Research Center Survey

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

The public views America's role in the world with considerable apprehension and concern. In fact, most Americans say it would be better if the U.S. just dealt with its own problems and let other countries deal with their own problems as best they can.

With the United States facing an array of global threats, public support for increased defense spending has climbed to its highest level since a month after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when 50% favored more defense spending.

Currently, 35% say the U.S. should increase spending on national defense, 24% say it should be cut back and 40% say it should be kept about the same as today. The share favoring more defense spending has increased 12 percentage points (from 23%) since 2013....

The new survey, conducted April 12 to 19 among 2,008 U.S. adults, finds the public remains wary of global involvement, although on some measures, support for U.S. internationalism has increased modestly from the historically low levels found in the 2013 study.

Still, 57% of Americans want the U.S. to deal with its own problems, while letting other countries get along as best they can. Just 37% say the U.S. should help other countries deal with their problems. And more Americans say the U.S. does too much (41%), rather than too little (27%), to solve world problems, with 28% saying it is doing about the right amount.

The public's wariness toward global engagement extends to U.S. participation in the global economy. Nearly half of Americans (49%) say U.S. involvement in the global economy is a bad thing because it lowers wages and costs jobs; fewer (44%) see this as a good thing because it provides the U.S. with new markets and opportunities for growth....

While Americans remain skeptical of U.S. international involvement, many also view the United States as a less powerful and important world leader than it was a decade ago. Nearly half (46%) say the United States is a less powerful and important world leader than it was 10 years ago, while 21% say it is more powerful, and 31% say it is about as powerful as it was then.

U.S. seen as leading economic, military power. The share saying the U.S. has become less powerful has declined since 2013, from 53% to 46%, but is among the highest numbers expressing this view in the past four decades. These attitudes also are divided along partisan lines: Republicans (67%) remain more likely than independents (48%) or Democrats (26%) to say that the U.S. has become less powerful and important.

However, although many Americans believe the U.S. has become less powerful than it was in the past, the predominant view among the public is that the United States is the world's leading economic and military power.

In a separate Pew Research Center survey conducted April 4 to 24 among 1,003 U.S. adults, a majority of Americans (54%) say the United States is the world's leading economic power, with China a distant second at 34%. This is the first time, in surveys dating back to 2008, that more than half of the public has named the United States as the leading economic power.³¹

2016 Chicago Council on Global Affairs Report

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

Over the past year, Donald Trump has been able to channel the anxieties of a significant segment of the American public into a powerful political force, taking him to the doorstep of the White House. These public anxieties stem from growing concerns about the effects of globalization on the American economy and about the changing demographics of the United States.

Although Trump has been able to mobilize many of those who are most concerned about these developments, their motivating concerns are not new. They existed before Donald Trump entered the race, and they are likely to persist even if he loses the election in November 2016. Yet, uniquely among the candidates running for president this cycle, Trump has given voice to this group of Americans, notably through his tough stances on immigration and trade.

At the same time, while this segment of the American public has given Donald Trump traction in the presidential race, his views on important issues garner only minority support from the overall American public. While they are divided on expanding a wall on the US border with Mexico, Americans overall support continued immigration into the United States and favor reform to address the large population of unauthorized immigrants already in the country. Americans overall think globalization is mostly good for the United States, and they see many benefits to free trade. And the American public as a whole—including the core supporters of Donald Trump—still favors the country's traditional alliances, a shared leadership role for the United States abroad, and the preservation of US military superiority....

While Trump's views on immigration and trade clearly resonate with his core supporters, some of his other criticisms of US foreign policy are less popular among his base. For example, core Trump supporters are somewhat more cautious than other Americans of alliances and an active US role in world affairs, but in most cases they continue to favor international engagement. This serves as a reminder that despite divides on issues such as immigration and trade, the American public finds a great deal of common ground on American leadership in the world and how to achieve American goals....³²

2016 Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest Survey

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

³¹ Pew Research Center, "Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World," May 5, 2016.

³² Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, and Craig Kafur, *America in the Age of Uncertainty, American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy*, 2016 Chicago Council Survey, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, pp. 2, 6.

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

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

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

Poll results show:

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

- When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made Americans more or less safe, a majority (52%) said less safe. Just 12% said more, while one quarter said U.S. foreign policy had no impact on their level of safety.
- When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made the world more or less safe, 51% said less safe, 11% said more, and 24% said safety levels had stayed the same.
- These findings are largely the same as results from a joint CKI-CFTNI October [2016] poll.

Americans Favor Peaceful Engagement Over Military Intervention:

- More than two-thirds of respondents (70%) agreed with the statement, “The U.S. should work with existing governments and heads of state to try to promote peace” rather than seeking to oust government by force.
- When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, 49% said prioritizing diplomacy over military intervention while just 26% said prioritizing military power over diplomacy. Another 25% were not sure.
- When asked whether the U.S. government should increase U.S. military spending, decrease it, or keep spending the same, a plurality (40%) wanted to increase spending, while nearly half either wanted to keep it the same (32%) or cut it (17%). Another 12% were not sure.
- When asked which of two options would make the United States safer, only 20% said making more attempts at regime change would improve safety, while 45% said cutting the number of U.S. attempts at regime change would improve safety. 35% were not sure.
- More than half (54%) said working more through the United Nations would improve U.S. safety, while only 26% thought working less through the United Nations would be better. 24% were not sure.
- When asked broadly about what would make the United States safer, respondents preferred expanding U.S. alliance commitments (50%) to reducing U.S. alliance

commitments (27%). However, Americans did not see U.S. commitments as necessarily unconditional. Only 26% of the respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement, “In a military conflict between Russia and Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia, the United States should automatically defend that country with American military forces.” Thirty-two percent either somewhat or strongly disagreed.

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

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

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

Americans Want Washington to Exercise Restraint Abroad:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- When asked whether the Trump administration should strengthen the U.S. military's relationship with Saudi Arabia, only 20% said it should while 23% suggested the United States should loosen its ties with Saudi Arabia. One third (33%) said the relationship should be kept as is, while another 24% were not sure.
- When asked whether President-elect Trump should respect, renegotiate, or walk away from the Iran deal that lifted international sanctions on Iran in exchange for more scrutiny of their nuclear facilities, 32% said renegotiate, 28% said respect, 17% said walk away, and 23% were not sure.³³

Comments from Observers

In a June 2016 blog post, one foreign policy specialist stated:

Few things make professors happier than thinking that the public has finally begun to agree with them. No surprise, then, that John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard open their article in *Foreign Affairs*³⁴—in which they propose a new “grand strategy” for the United States—by observing that “[f]or the first time in recent memory, a large number of Americans” are saying they want the same thing. The ideas Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt propose—big cuts in defense spending, withdrawals from Europe and the Middle East, a focus on China as our only real rival—deserve the discussion they will surely get. But let's put the policy merits to one side. Are the professors right to say they've now got the people behind them?

The data say no. Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt rely on an April Pew poll that found that 57% of Americans want the U.S. “to deal with its own problems.” But this is what most Americans always say, no matter what “grand strategy” their leaders follow. In 2013, 80% of Pew respondents wanted to “concentrate more on our own national problems.” Twenty years earlier, 78% said the same thing. And 20 years before that, 73%. On this particular question, the number today (it's dropped to 69% since 2013) is lower than it has been “in recent memory,” but it's always high....

Pew's pollsters, of course, ask many different questions, and the results don't always seem entirely consistent. Still, one trend is very clear: Fewer Americans are saying they want a less activist foreign policy. Three years ago, 51% said the U.S. did “too much in helping solve world problems.” This year, 41% did. This pattern—a 10-point drop in three years—holds among Democrats, Republicans, and independents.

Ask questions with a sharper policy focus, and the result is steady—sometimes growing—support for a strong U.S. global role. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents favor policies that would keep the U.S. “the only military superpower.” Mr. Mearsheimer and Mr. Walt, by contrast, want to cut defense spending. Only 24% of Americans agree. (That share, also, is down from five years ago, and support for an increase has almost tripled, from 13% to 35%.) The professors want to pull all U.S. forces out of Europe and let our allies handle Russia on their own. Fine, but 77% of the American public thinks that NATO is good for the United States, and almost as many Americans (42%) view Russia as a “major threat” as see China that way (50%).³⁵

³³ Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest, “Poll: This Holiday, Americans Wish For A More Peaceful Approach to Foreign Policy, Results show voters favor an emphasis on diplomacy and trade and are skeptical of military intervention abroad,” December 22, 2016, accessed June 21, 2017, at <https://187ock2y3ejr34z8752m6ize-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/12.22.16-Charles-Koch-TNI.pdf>.

³⁴ This blog post at this point includes a link to John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2016.

³⁵ Stephen Sestanovich, “Do Americans Want a New ‘Grand Strategy’ or Less Overseas Engagement?” *Wall Street Journal (Washington Wire/Think Tank)*, June 16, 2016.

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

Every 20 years or so—the regularity is a little astonishing—Americans hold a serious debate about their place in the world. What, they ask, is going wrong? And how can it be fixed? The discussion, moreover, almost always starts the same way. Having extricated itself with some success from a costly war, the United States then embraces a scaled-down foreign policy, the better to avoid overcommitment. But when unexpected challenges arise, people start asking whether the new, more limited strategy is robust enough. Politicians and policy makers, scholars and experts, journalists and pundits, the public at large, even representatives of other governments (both friendly and less friendly) all take part in the back-and-forth. They want to know whether America, despite its decision to do less, should go back to doing more—and whether it can.

The reasons for doubt are remarkably similar from one period of discussion to the next. Some argue that the U.S. economy is no longer big enough to sustain a global role of the old kind, or that domestic problems should take priority. Others ask whether the public is ready for new exertions. The foreign-policy establishment may seem too divided, and a viable consensus too hard to reestablish. Many insist that big international problems no longer lend themselves to Washington’s solutions, least of all to military ones. American “leadership,” it is said, won’t work so well in our brave new world....

Polls suggested [in 2016] that [the public], too, was open to new approaches—but unsure how to choose among them. In May 2016, the Pew Research Center reported that 70 percent of voters wanted the next president to focus on domestic affairs rather than foreign policy. In the same poll, Pew found that majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents favored policies that would keep the United States “the only military superpower.” Not for the first time, it seemed that Americans wanted to have it all....

... the two halves of Trump’s formula worked together better than critics appreciated. He sensed that the public wanted relief from the burdens of global leadership without losing the thrill of nationalist self-assertion. America could cut back its investment in world order with no whiff of retreat. It would still boss others around, even bend them to its will. Trump embraced Bernie Sanders’s economics without George McGovern’s geopolitics. Of self-identified conservative Republicans, 70 percent told Pew last year that they wanted the U.S. to retain its global military dominance. “Make America Great Again” was a slogan aimed right at them.

Trump’s more-and-less strategy also helped him with those who wanted a bristly, muscular America but did not want endless military involvements. Rejecting “nation building” abroad so as to focus on the home front was Trump’s way of assuring voters that he knew how to avoid imperial overstretch. He offered supporters the glow of a Ronald Reagan experience—without the George W. Bush tab.³⁶

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

With the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, the American public opted for change. A new poll from the Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest on America and foreign affairs indicates that the desire for a fresh start may be particularly pronounced in the foreign policy sphere. In many areas the responses align with what Donald Trump was saying during the presidential campaign—and in other areas, there are a number of Americans who don’t have strong views. There may be a real opportunity for Trump to redefine the foreign policy debate. He may have a ready-made base of support and find that other Americans are persuadable.

³⁶ Stephen Sestanovich, “The President Is Preventing the Foreign-Policy Debate America Needs To have,” *Defense One*, April 13, 2017.

Two key questions centering on whether U.S. foreign policy has made Americans more or less safe and whether U.S. foreign policy has made the rest of the world more or less safe show that a majority of the public is convinced that—in both cases—the answer is that it has not. 51.9 percent say that American foreign policy has not enhanced our security; 51.1 percent say that it has also had a deleterious effect abroad. The responses indicate that the successive wars in the Middle East, ranging from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya, have not promoted but, rather, undermined a sense of security among Americans.

The poll results indicate that this sentiment has translated into nearly 35 percent of respondents wanted a decreased military footprint in the Middle East, with about 30 percent simply wanting to keep things where they stand. When it comes to America's key relationship with Saudi Arabia, 23.2 percent indicate that they would favor weaker military ties, while 24 percent say they are simply unsure. Over half of Americans do not want to deploy ground troops to Syria. Overall, 45.4 percent say that they believe that it would enhance American security to reduce our military presence abroad, while 30.9 percent say that it should be increased.

That Americans are adopting a more equivocal approach overall towards other countries seems clear. When provided with a list of adjectives to describe relationship, very few Americans were prepared to choose the extremes of friend or foe. The most popular term was the fairly neutral term “competitor.” The mood appears to be similarly ambivalent about NATO. When asked whether the U.S. should automatically defend Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia in a military conflict with Russia, 26.1 percent say that they neither agree nor disagree. 22 percent say that they disagree and a mere 16.8 percent say that they agree. Similarly, when queried about whether the inclusion of Montenegro makes America safer, no less than 63.6 percent say that they don't know or are not sure. About Russia itself, 37.8 percent indicate they see it as both an adversary and a potential partner. That they still see it as a potential partner is remarkable given the tenor of the current media climate.

The poll results underscore that Americans are uneasy with the status quo. U.S. foreign policy in particular is perceived as a failure and Americans want to see a change, endorsing views and stands that might previously have been seen as existing on the fringe of debate about America's proper role abroad. Instead of militarism and adventurism, Americans are more keen on a cooperative world, in which trade and diplomacy are the principal means of engaging other nations. 49 percent of the respondents indicate that they would prioritize diplomacy over military power, while 26.3 percent argue for the reverse. 54 percent argue that the U.S. should work more through the United Nations to improve its security. Moreover, a clear majority of those polled stated that they believed that increasing trade would help to make the United States safer. In a year that has been anything but normal, perhaps Trump is onto something with his talk of burden sharing and a more critical look at the regnant establishment foreign policy that has prevailed until now.³⁷

In December 2016, two Australian foreign policy analysts, stated:

The 2016 presidential election demonstrated the rise of a “restraint constituency” in American politics that openly questions Washington's bipartisan post-Cold War pursuit of a grand strategy of primacy or liberal hegemony. This constituency has been animated by the return of the Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy, most notably in the candidacy of Donald Trump, which directly questions the benefits of alliance relationships as well as U.S. underwriting of an open global economic system. It also stresses the need for the United States to act unilaterally in defense of its core foreign

³⁷ TNI [The National Interest] Staff, “Is Trump's Foreign Policy the New Mainstream?” *National Interest*, December 22, 2016.

policy interests. The resurgence of the Jacksonian tradition will make it difficult for the next President to reestablish a foreign policy consensus and combat perceptions of American decline.”³⁸

Some scholars have suggested that the Jacksonian tradition in U.S. foreign policy mentioned in the quote above has had “a long history of political struggles with liberal internationalism...”³⁹ Jacksonianism, in this view, embodies a tradition reflecting an idea of the United States and its people being freed from the burdens of global leadership.

Some commentators have suggested that in the United States a series of crises has “destroyed [public] confidence in the competence and probity of financial, economic, and policy-making elites,” and that belief in the fairness of the postwar international system has been seriously eroded.⁴⁰ In a May 2017 blog post, one foreign policy specialist stated:

Over a period of decades, the American people and their elected representatives funded defense expenditures far greater than what would have been necessary simply to protect the continental United States. They faced up to the idea that American troops might fight and die to defend faraway frontiers. And they accepted—often reluctantly—the notion that Washington should take primary responsibility for leading the global economy, U.S. alliances, and international institutions, despite the myriad costs and frustrations involved.

Americans accepted these costs not out of any special altruism, of course, but because they believed the benefits of living in—and leading—a stable, prosperous, and liberal world order were ultimately greater. But if the postwar era was thus characterized, as G. John Ikenberry and Daniel Deudney write, by a “bipartisan consensus...on the paramount importance of American leadership,” then the 2016 presidential election and its results surely called into question whether that consensus still exists....

So, was the 2016 election merely an aberration within the long history of American internationalism? Or does Trump’s victory indicate deeper and perhaps more irrevocable changes in American attitudes on foreign affairs? As it turns out, there are two plausible interpretations of this issue, and they point in very different directions....

If political support for American internationalism was plummeting, one would expect to see unambiguous downturns in public opinion toward U.S. alliances, international trade, and other key initiatives. Yet while there certainly are signs of public alienation from American internationalism — as discussed subsequently — most recent polling data tells a different story.

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

³⁸ Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, “Understanding the Return of the Jacksonian Tradition,” *ORBIS*, Vol. 61, Issue 1, Winter 2017: 13-26. (The quotation is from the article’s abstract.)

³⁹ See for example, Taeshuh Cha, “The Return of Jacksonianism: The International Implications of the Trump Phenomenon,” *The Washington Quarterly*, 39:4, Winter 2017, pp. 83-97.

⁴⁰ Martin Wolf, “The Long and Painful Journey to World Disorder,” *Financial Times*, January 5, 2017.

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

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

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

As one comprehensive analysis of the survey data thus concluded,⁴¹ at present there is just not overwhelming evidence—in the polls, at least—to suggest a broad-gauged public rejection of internationalism: “The American public as a whole still thinks that the United States is the greatest and most influential country in the world, and bipartisan support remains strong for the country to take an active part in world affairs.”...

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

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

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

⁴¹ The blog post at this point includes a hyperlink to the 2016 Chicago Council Survey report cited in footnote 32.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And this point, in turn, illuminates a final strain that Trump’s rise so clearly highlighted: the growing sense that American internationalism has become unmoored from American nationalism. American internationalism was always conceived as an enlightened expression of American nationalism, an approach premised on the idea that the wellbeing of the United States was inextricably interwoven with that of the outside world. But the inequities of globalization have promoted a tangible feeling among many voters that American elites are now privileging an internationalist agenda (one that may suit cosmopolitan elites just fine) at the expense of the wellbeing of “ordinary Americans.” Likewise, insofar as immigration from Mexico and Central America has depressed wages for low-skilled workers and fueled concerns that the white working class is being displaced by other demographic groups, it has fostered beliefs that the openness at the heart of the internationalist project is benefitting the wrong people. “Many Jacksonians,” writes Walter Russell Mead of the coalition that brought Trump to power, “came to believe that the American establishment was no longer reliably patriotic.”

What does all this tell us about the future of American internationalism? The answer involves elements of both interpretations offered here. It is premature to say that a “new isolationism” is taking hold, or that Americans are systematically turning away from internationalism, in light of the idiosyncrasies of Trump’s victory and the fact that so many key aspects of internationalism still poll fairly well. Yet no serious observer can

contend that American internationalism is truly healthy given Trump's triumph, and the 2016 election clearly revealed the assorted maladies that had been quietly eroding its political vitality. American internationalism may not be slipping into history just yet, but its long-term trajectory seems problematic indeed.⁴²

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

On the one hand, it is easy to make the case that Trump's election was more of a black-swan, anomalous event than something that tells us much about the state of public opinion on foreign policy. The election campaign was dominated not by deeply substantive foreign policy debates, in this interpretation, but by the historic unpopularity of both candidates. And of course, Trump was decisively defeated in the popular vote by a card-carrying member of the U.S. foreign policy establishment—and he might well have lost decisively in the electoral college, too, if not for then-FBI Director James Comey's intervention and a series of other lucky breaks late in the campaign.

There is, moreover, substantial polling data to suggest that American internationalism is doing just fine. According to surveys taken during the 2016 campaign, 65 percent of Americans believed that globalization was "mostly good" for the United States, and 89 percent believed that maintaining U.S. alliances was "very or somewhat effective at achieving U.S. foreign policy goals." Support for U.S. military primacy and intervention against threats such as the Islamic State also remained strong, as did domestic backing for the United Nations and the Paris climate change accords.

As an extensive analysis of this polling data by the Chicago Council concluded, there does not seem to be any wholesale public rejection of American internationalism underway: "The American public as a whole still thinks that the United States is the greatest and most influential country in the world, and bipartisan support remains strong for the country to take an active part in world affairs." And indeed, insofar as Trump has had to roll back some of the more radical aspects of his "America first" agenda since becoming president—tearing up the North American Free Trade Agreement, declaring NATO obsolete, launching a trade war with China—he seems to be adjusting to this reality.

That's the good news. But on the other hand, American internationalism simply cannot be all that healthy, because Trump did win the presidency by running on the most anti-internationalist platform seen in decades. American voters may not have been voting for that platform itself, but at the very least they did not see Trump's radical views on foreign policy as disqualifying. And as one digs deeper into the state of American internationalism today, it becomes clear that there are indeed real problems with that tradition—problems that Trump exploited on his road to the White House, and that are likely to confront his successors as well.

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

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

Second, although U.S. internationalism has proven very valuable in shaping a congenial international system, it is undeniable that aspects of that tradition—such as nation building missions in Afghanistan and Iraq—have proven costly and unrewarding in

⁴² Hal Brands, "Is American Internationalism Dead?" *War on the Rocks*, May 16, 2017.

recent years. Not surprisingly, many Americans are thus questioning if the resources that the country devotes to foreign policy are being used effectively. This disillusion has shown up in public opinion polling: Whereas 29 percent of Americans believed that promoting democracy should be a key foreign policy objective in 2001, only 18 percent thought so in 2013.

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

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

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

The bottom line is that American internationalism is not dead yet, but that it faces serious longterm maladies that could, perhaps, ultimately prove fatal.⁴³

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

⁴³ Hal Brands, “Can U.S. Internationalism Survive Trump?” *Foreign Policy*, May 25, 2017. Similarly, this same foreign policy specialist, along with a co-author, state in a June 21, 2017, that

making such a commitment [i.e., a commitment to actively influence global affairs] requires confronting the question of whether the American public is willing to sustain such a role. There are many reasons it should be willing to do so; U.S. engagement has been vital to shaping an international order in which America has been relatively secure and enormously prosperous. Yet the public mood is nonetheless ambivalent. Whether a consensus in support of a robust American internationalism can be resolidified remains to be seen. What is clear is that supporters of that tradition will have to go back to first principles if they are to make a compelling case; they must once again articulate the basic logic of policies that American internationalists have long taken for granted.

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

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the bipartisan foreign-policy establishment was united in seeing a historic opportunity to deepen the liberal order and extend it into the rest of the world. Yet the public had always been skeptical about this project. Jacksonians in particular believed that American global policy was a response to the Soviet threat, and that once the threat had disappeared, the U.S. should retrench.

After World War I, and again at the start of the Cold War, Americans had held great debates over whether and how to engage with the world. But that debate didn't happen after the Soviet collapse. Elites felt confident that the end of history had arrived, that expanding the world order would be so easy and cheap it could be done without much public support. Washington thus embarked on a series of consequential foreign-policy endeavors: enlarging the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include much of Central and Eastern Europe, establishing the World Trade Organization in the mid-'90s, promoting a global democracy agenda whenever possible.

American voters have never shared the establishment's enthusiasm for a foreign policy aimed at transforming the post-Cold War world. When given the choice at the ballot box, they consistently dismiss experienced foreign-policy hands who call for deep global engagement. Instead they install untried outsiders who want increased focus on issues at home. Thus Clinton over Bush in 1992, Bush over Gore in 2000, Obama over McCain in 2008, and Trump over Clinton in 2016.

Today the core problem in American foreign policy remains the disconnect between the establishment's ambitious global agenda and the limited engagement that voters appear to support. As Washington's challenges abroad become more urgent and more dangerous, the divide between elite and public opinion grows more serious by the day.

The establishment is now beginning to discover what many voters intuitively believed back in the 1990s. Building a liberal world order is much more expensive and difficult than it appeared in a quarter-century ago, when America was king. Further, Washington's foreign-policy establishment is neither as wise nor as competent as it believes itself to be.

Meantime, the world is only becoming more dangerous.... And the U.S. still lacks a strong consensus on what its foreign policy should be.

Washington's foreign policy needs more than grudging acquiescence from the American people if it is to succeed. How to build broad support? First, the Trump administration should embrace a new national strategy that is more realistic than the end-of-history fantasies that came at the Cold War's conclusion. The case for international engagement should be grounded in the actual priorities of American citizens. Second, Mr. Trump and other political leaders must make the case for strategic global engagement to a rightfully skeptical public.

For much of the establishment, focusing on the Trump administration's shortcomings is a way to avoid a painful inquest into the failures and follies of 25 years of post-Cold War foreign policy. But Mr. Trump's presidency is the result of establishment failure rather than the cause of it. Until the national leadership absorbs this lesson, the internal American crisis will deepen as the world crisis grows more acute.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Walter Russell Mead, "A Debate on America's Role—25 Years Late," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2017.

Appendix C. Selected Articles: Debate over Future U.S. Role

This appendix presents some examples of articles dating back to January 2014 (with one additional citation from 2012) concerning the debate over the future U.S. role in the world, with the most recent on top.

Articles in 2017

Colum Lynch, “Nikki Haley and Trump’s Doctrine of Diplomatic Chaos,” *Foreign Policy*, June 28, 2017.

Andrew Natsios, “Tillerson Wants to merge the State Dept. and USAID. That’s a Bad Idea.” *Washington Post*, June 28, 2017.

Daniel Runde, “Foreign Aid Is About U.S. Interests,” *Foreign Policy*, June 26, 2017.

Richard Wike, et al., “U.S. Image Suffers as Public Around World Question Trump’s Leadership,” Pew Research Center, June 26, 2017.

Michael Gerson, “Trump’s Embrace of Strongmen is a Very Bad Strategy,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2017.

Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, “America and the Geopolitics of Upheaval,” *National Interest*, June 21, 2017.

Kate Bateman, “Wanted: A Trump Team Foreign-Policy Plan with Democratic Values,” *National Interest*, June 5, 2017.

H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017.

Brett D. Schaefer, “Trump’s Budget Grasps What Congress Doesn’t: America’s Global Leadership Doesn’t Come Free,” Heritage Foundation, May 29, 2017.

Andrew J. Bacevich, “The Beltway Foreign-Policy ‘Blob’ Strikes Back,” *American Conservative*, May 26, 2017.

Colin Dueck, “This Is the Key to a Successful Trump Foreign Policy,” *National Interest*, May 25, 2017.

Elliott Abrams, “Does Trump Care About Human Rights?” *Politico*, May 24, 2017.

Colin Powell, “Colin Powell: American Leadership—We Can’t Do It for Free,” *New York Times*, May 24, 2017.

Daniel Larison, “Realism Doesn’t Need to Be ‘Reclaimed,’” *American Conservative*, May 23, 2017.

Ted R. Bromund, Michael Auslin and Colin Dueck, “Reclaiming American Realism,” *American Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 184-198. (Also published as Michael Auslin, Ted R. Bromund, and Colin Dueck, “Reclaiming American Realism,” American Enterprise Institute, May 22, 2017.)

Walter Russell Mead, “A Debate on America’s Role—25 Years Late,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2017.

- Robert D. Kaplan, “The Return of Marco Polo’s World and the U.S. Military Response,” Center for a New American Security, undated but posted at the CNAS website ca. May 12, 2017.
- Eliot A. Cohen, “Rex Tillerson Doesn’t Understand America,” *The Atlantic*, May 5, 2017.
- Anne Applebaum, “How trump Makes Dictators Stronger,” *Washington Post*, May 4, 2017.
- Joshua Keating, “Trump and Tillerson’s Shortsighted Contempt for Human Rights,” *Slate*, May 4, 2017.
- “What Rex Tillerson Gets Right About American Values—and What He Gets Wrong,” *Washington Post*, May 4, 2017.
- Philip Rucker, “Trump Keeps Praising International Strongmen, Alarming Human Rights Advocates,” *Washington Post*, May 1, 2017.
- James M. Roberts and Brett D. Schaefer, “Panic Over Foreign Aid Budget Could Use Some Perspective,” Heritage Foundation, April 28, 2017.
- Karen DeYoung, “Trump Takes a Selective Approach to the Promotion of Human Rights,” *Washington Post*, April 25, 2017.
- Joseph S. Nye, “Trump Has Learned a Lot. But He’s Neglecting a Huge Part of American Leadership,” *Washington Post*, April 25, 2017.
- Stephen Sestanovich, “The President Is Preventing the Foreign-Policy Debate America Needs To Have,” *Defense One*, April 13, 2017.
- Noam N. Levey, “Trump Pushes Historic Cuts in Global Health Aid, Stoking Fears of New Disease Outbreaks and Diminished U.S. Clout,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2017.
- Doyle McManus, “Has the United States Abandoned Its Commitment to Human Rights?” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 2017.
- Shannon N. Green, “When the U.S. Gives Up on Human Rights, Everyone Suffers,” *Foreign Policy*, April 4, 2017.
- Peter Baker, “For Trump, a Focus on U.S. Interests and a Disdain for Moralizing,” *New York Times*, April 4, 2017.
- Mercy A. Kuo, “Statecraft and Grand Strategy: Assessing the US and China,” *The Diplomat*, March 31, 2017.
- George Fujii, “The End of American Liberal Internationalism?” *ISSF Policy Series*, March 30, 2017.
- Uri Friedman, “What a World Led by China Might Look Like,” *The Atlantic*, March 29, 2017.
- Theodore R. Bromund, “Donald Trump is Right To Cut the State Department’s Budget,” Heritage Foundation, March 27, 2017.
- Tom Malinowski, “What America Stood For,” *The Atlantic*, March 25, 2017.
- Hal Brands, “U.S. Grand Strategy in an Age of Nationalism: Fortress America and Its Alternatives,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2017, 73-93.
- Robert C. Rubel, “Exporting Security: China, the United States, and the Innovator’s Dilemma,” *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2017: 11-29.
- Nicolas Bouchet, “Is This the End of America’s Role As a Defender of Freedom?” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2017.

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Colum Lynch, “Trump’s Budget Blueprint: Pulling Up the Diplomatic Drawbridge,” *Foreign Policy*, March 16, 2017.

Heather Timmons, “The Trump Presidency is Systematically Destroying Any Global Moral High Ground the US Had left,” *Quartz*, March 13, 2017.

Wahab Raofi, “U.S. Must Change Foreign Aid Tactics,” *Huffington Post*, March 12, 2017.

Alissa J. Rubin, “Allies Fear Trump Is Eroding America’s Moral Authority,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2017.

Al Mariam, “Trump’s Suspicion of Foreign Aid to Africa Is Right on The Money” *The Hill*, March 9, 2017.

Christian Caryl, “Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy Is Already Undercutting Human Rights Around the World,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 2017.

George Fujii, “This is What Nationalism Looks Like,” *ISSF Policy Series*, March 8, 2017.

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Paul Miller, “Reassessing Obama’s Legacy of Restraint,” *War on the Rocks*, March 6, 2017.

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- Denny Roy, "A More-Selective US Grand Strategy," *Pacific Forum CSIS*, June 29, 2016 (PacNet #53).
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- John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing," *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016.
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Jim Mattis, “A New American Grand Strategy,” *Defining Ideas (Hoover Institution)*, February 25, 2015.

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Bryan McGrath, "Unconstrained Grand Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, October 28, 2014.

Michael Page, "Is 'Restraint' a Realistic Grand Strategy?" *Cicero Magazine*, October 21, 2014.

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Chad Pillai, "The Return of Great Power Politics: Re-examining the Nixon Doctrine," *War on the Rocks*, March 27, 2014.

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Bruce W. Jentleson, "Strategic Recalibration: Framework for a 21st Century National Security Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2014, 125-136.

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William C. Martel, "Why America Needs a Grand Strategy," *The Diplomat*, June 18, 2012.

Appendix D. Selected Articles: Allies and Alliances

This appendix presents some recent examples of articles, with the most recent on top, providing perspectives on the value of allies and alliances to the United States.

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Kori Schake, “NATO Without America?” *American Interest*, May 25, 2017.

Christopher A. Preble, “Should the United States Wage War for Friends?” *National Interest*, December 15, 2016.

Barry R. Posen, “The High Costs and Limited Benefits of America’s Alliances,” *National Interest*, August 7, 2016.

Charles Lane, “The Logic Behind Our Alliances,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 2016.

Jim Talent, “Why Alliances Matter,” *National Review*, July 27, 2016.

Jeremy Shapiro and Richard Sokolsky, “How America Enables Its Allies’ Bad Behavior,” *Order from Chaos (Brookings Institution)*, May 4, 2016.

Walter Russell Mead, “The Global Vote of No Confidence in Pax Americana,” *American Interest*, April 5, 2016.

Frank Hoffman, “Manning the Frontier: Allies and the Unraveling of the World Order,” *War on the Rocks*, March 7, 2016.

Appendix E. Selected CRS Products: State Department, International Organizations, Foreign Assistance

This appendix presents a list of some CRS products providing overview discussions relating to the Department of State, U.S. participation in international organizations, and foreign assistance programs. These products include the following:

- CRS Report R44637, *Department of State and Foreign Operations Appropriations: History of Legislation and Funding in Brief*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Video WVB00053, *Reforming the State Department and QDDR 2.0*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10354, *United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding to the U.N. System*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10183, *U.S. Foreign Assistance*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10194, *U.S. International Food Aid Programs*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10261, *U.S. Agency for International Development: An Overview*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R40213, *Foreign Aid: An Introduction to U.S. Programs and Policy*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R40089, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1961: Authorizations and Corresponding Appropriations*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42827, *Does Foreign Aid Work? Efforts to Evaluate U.S. Foreign Assistance*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41072, *U.S. International Food Aid Programs: Background and Issues*, by (name redacted)

Additional CRS products not listed above provide discussions of specific issues relating to the Department of State and foreign assistance.

Appendix F. Selected CRS Products: Trade and International Economic Policy

This appendix presents a list of some CRS products providing overview discussions relating to trade and international economic policy. Products relating to trade include the following:

- CRS In Focus IF10156, *U.S. Trade Policy: Background and Current Issues*, by (name redacted), (name redacted), and (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL33944, *U.S. Trade Concepts, Performance, and Policy: Frequently Asked Questions*, by (name redacted) et al.
- CRS Report R44717, *International Trade and Finance: Overview and Issues for the 115th Congress*, coordinated by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R43291, *U.S. Trade in Services: Trends and Policy Issues*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10002, *The World Trade Organization*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44546, *The Economic Effects of Trade: Overview and Policy Challenges*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10161, *International Trade Agreements and Job Estimates*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41429, *Trade Preferences: Economic Issues and Policy Options*, coordinated by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10046, *Worker Rights Provisions in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10570, *Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers (TAA)*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RS20210, *Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10038, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA)*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL33743, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) and the Role of Congress in Trade Policy*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R43491, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA): Frequently Asked Questions*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

Products relating to international economic policy include the following:

- CRS Report R44717, *International Trade and Finance: Overview and Issues for the 115th Congress*, coordinated by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42019, *International Monetary Fund: Background and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42844, *IMF Reforms: Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R43242, *Current Debates over Exchange Rates: Overview and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted)

- CRS Report R44754, *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10154, *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41170, *Multilateral Development Banks: Overview and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41537, *Multilateral Development Banks: How the United States Makes and Implements Policy*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report RS20792, *Multilateral Development Banks: U.S. Contributions FY2000-FY2016*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R41589, *Economics and National Security: Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy*, coordinated by (name redacted)

Additional CRS products not listed above provide discussions of specific issues relating to trade and international economic policy.

Appendix G. Selected CRS Products: Defense Policy and Programs

This appendix presents a list of some CRS products providing overview discussions relating to defense policy and programs. These products include the following:

- CRS Report R44757, *Defense Primer: A Guide for New Members*, coordinated by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10485, *Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and U.S. Force Design*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44023, *The 2015 National Security Strategy: Authorities, Changes, Issues for Congress*, coordinated by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL33640, *U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44612, *How Big Should the Army Be? Considerations for Congress*, coordinated by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44366, *National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCF): Background and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted)

Additional CRS products not listed above provide discussions of specific issues relating to defense policy and programs.

Appendix H. Selected CRS Products: Homeland Security, Border Security, Immigration, Refugees

This appendix presents a list of some CRS products providing overview discussions relating to homeland security, border security, immigration, and refugees. These products include the following:

- CRS In Focus IF10024, *2014 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review: Evolution of a Strategic Review*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42969, *Border Security: Understanding Threats at U.S. Borders*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report R43975, *Barriers Along the U.S. Borders: Key Authorities and Requirements*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R43975, *Barriers Along the U.S. Borders: Key Authorities and Requirements*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44743, *Executive Authority to Exclude Aliens: In Brief*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10520, *Immigration*, coordinated by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42988, *U.S. Immigration Policy: Chart Book of Key Trends*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RL31269, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R44277, *Syrian Refugee Admissions and Resettlement in the United States: In Brief*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10611, *Global Refugee Resettlement: Selected Issues and Questions*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10259, *Europe's Migration and Refugee Crisis*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10177, *The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report RS22863, *Foreign Investment, CFIUS, and Homeland Security: An Overview*, by (name redacted)
- CRS In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Enforcement Efforts*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Report R42917, *Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted)
- CRS Insight IN10641, *Mexican-U.S. Relations: Increased Tensions*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)
- CRS Report 96-397, *Canada-U.S. Relations*, coordinated by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

Additional CRS products not listed above provide discussions of specific issues relating to homeland security, border security, and immigration.

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