

## **Advancing the National Interest: The Intersection of Domestic Politics and American Foreign Policy**

Readying her 2020 presidential campaign, Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that, “the United States can no longer maintain the comfortable assumption that its domestic and foreign policies are separate.”<sup>1</sup> On that much, she and President Donald Trump likely agree. Warren and Trump share a sense that U.S. foreign policy has become detached from the national public interest and now benefits a narrow elite at the expense of the broader American electorate. The sense of disconnectedness is one of the factors that has prompted a serious reevaluation of U.S. interests. As Walter Russell Mead declared in 2016, “not since Franklin Roosevelt’s administration has U.S. foreign policy witnessed debates this fundamental.”<sup>2</sup>

At stake is America’s role in the world. Will the United States continue to support free trade and multilateral institutions? Will it continue to exert global leadership amongst democratic allies? For the past 74 years, U.S. foreign policy has been guided by a relatively consistent set of answers to these questions. There appeared to be a consensus that it was in America’s interest to develop and lead a rules-based international order. Yet, over these same years, social, economic, and political changes slowly created a perceived gap between American foreign policy and American interests. The gap is sometimes expressed in material terms (the 1% vs the 99%) and sometimes as an identity rift (elites vs regular Americans), with those on top not only benefitting from the postwar order at the expense of the rest but also abandoning traditional American values. Apparent economic and cultural divisions have eroded the postwar consensus.

How will these divisions shape the future of American foreign policy? Any future bipartisan agreement that addresses these differences could simply lead to a new isolationist consensus against free trade, multilateral institutions, and military commitments abroad (whether the policies that followed would benefit most Americans is an open question). But the gap between top and bottom is not the only divide. Other, often related, identity-based divisions have grown increasingly salient, not least of which is partisan identity, which may thwart any possible consensus and usher in a prolonged period of fractious debate and foreign policy incoherence. This paper first examines different conceptualizations of the national interest and then describes the postwar consensus and its subsequent erosion. The paper concludes with an assessment of the potential for the emergence of a new consensus or the continuation of divisive debate.

### **The National Interest and Foreign Policy**

The purpose of foreign policy is to advance the national interest. But what are America’s national interests and where do such interests come from? Over time, the official U.S. National

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Warren, “A Foreign Policy for All: Strengthening Democracy—at Home and Abroad,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-11-29/foreign-policy-all>.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April, 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-01-20/jacksonian-revolt>.

Security Strategy has been remarkably consistent in the goals it identifies: security, prosperity, strength, values, alliances, global rules, and an open global economy.<sup>3</sup> Some of these goals, such as security, prosperity, and strength seem exogenously endowed upon states by their nature and position in an anarchic international system. Others may be more contingent, deriving from America's position and character as a hegemonic capitalist democracy. Past debates over these interests occurred on the margins. Should the United States protect or promote its values? Should the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) be preserved or expanded? Must the United States always follow the rules of the international order or is it exceptional, in at least some circumstances? To what extent should the United States align with undemocratic states? For decades, such debates did not frontally challenge the perceived priorities that underwrote the rules-based international order.

Yet momentous changes in the international environment eventually sparked broad, divisive arguments about national goals. With the end of the Cold War, a flurry of projects arose to redefine America's national interests.<sup>4</sup> Other international shifts in power and influence soon followed. The global environment is in flux today as America's power declines relative to that of China, as democracy declines or stagnates around the world, and as global growth slows. These external pressures have exacerbated discordant home-grown trends, including that of political partisanship. According to Joseph Nye, "[i]n a democracy, the national interest is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world."<sup>5</sup> But nearly all of America's longstanding interests are now questioned in more profound ways than ever before. Even security and prosperity, interests that appear timeless, might be challenged by asking, "security and prosperity for whom?"

One conception of the national interest equates it with the "common good."<sup>6</sup> It assumes a certain level of unity amongst the citizenry. According to Samuel Huntington "[e]fforts to define national interest presuppose agreement on the nature of the country whose interests are to be defined. National interest derives from national identity."<sup>7</sup> When the national interest is advanced, it should benefit "the people" broadly defined. However, different definitions of "the people" may privilege some segments of the population at the expense of others. In this case, the national interest may be "defined by those societal interests who have the power to work within the political system (i.e. maneuver in federal institutions and the party system to build winning coalitions) to translate their preferences into policy."<sup>8</sup> In this definition, division and competition

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see U.S. National Security Strategies from 1988, 2006, 2015, and 2017 at the U.S. National Security Strategy Archive: <http://nssarchive.us/>.

<sup>4</sup> For example see: W. David Clinton, *The Two Faces of National Interest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2, no. 3 (1996), 275-318; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Erosion of American National Interests," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, no. 3 (September/October 1997), 28-49; Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); H.W. Brands, "The Idea of the National Interest," *Diplomatic History*, 23, no. 2 (1999), 239-261; Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, 78, no. 4 (1999), 22-35; Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, 79, no. 1 (2000), 45-62; Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002). There was even a self-styled "Commission on America's National Interests" that produced two reports to address America's drifting sense of its own interests after the Cold War. See: Graham Allison (Executive Director), "America's National Interests," *The Commission on America's National Interests*, July 1996 and July 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Nye, "Redefining the National Interest," 23.

<sup>6</sup> Clinton, "The Two Faces of the National Interest," 50-55.

<sup>7</sup> Huntington, "Erosion," 28.

<sup>8</sup> Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest*, 4.

within the nation help determine which groups define and advance a “national interest” that may not be in the interest of all Americans.

Using either conception, one might assume that American democracy would fare poorly at framing and conducting foreign policy. Indeed, Huntington’s concern was that a multicultural America would lack a common identity, which he considered a prerequisite for coherent national interests and foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> As for “societal interests... maneuvering in federal institutions,” this may entail powerful elites capturing the government (as Warren and Trump imply), or frequent vacillations as competing groups alternate their hold on power. The claim that American democracy is bad at foreign policy goes back at least to Alexis de Tocqueville’s tour of America, after which he wrote, “in their conduct of foreign relations, democracies appear to me decidedly inferior to other governments.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, others counter that democratic institutions *strengthened* American foreign policy in the post-World War II era.<sup>11</sup> American national identity was sufficiently unified, the coalitions of subnational interests were relatively stable, and the international environment was conducive to the policies of the rules-based international order. This enabled U.S. foreign policy to advance a consistent set of interests that yielded benefits for a large cross section of the population.

## **The Postwar Consensus**

As World War II ended and the Cold War began, the United States was unified in opposition to *illiberal* and adversarial, i.e., communist, “Others.”<sup>12</sup> Richard Hofstadter captured the fusion of American identity with liberal ideas in saying, “[i]t has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one.”<sup>13</sup> Other “consensus school” historians of the postwar era also argued that America had always been guided by a “liberal tradition.”<sup>14</sup> With a varying degree of influence over time, two liberal strands of thought came to dominate foreign policy in the postwar era: Wilsonianism, committed to defending (and advancing) democracy abroad, and Hamiltonianism, committed to opening markets around the world.<sup>15</sup> Both strands relied on international institutions to keep the peace and allow commerce to thrive. Both strands emphasized America’s centrality in these institutions and argued that U.S. leadership in them advanced America’s interests.

The Wilsonian and Hamiltonian arguments made sense to many Americans during this period and enjoyed support within broad political and socio-economic coalitions. The Soviet threat unified the U.S. public, creating a common sense of identity and bolstered its willingness to bear the costs of overseas military engagements and alliances. In the economic sphere, a long-running debate between economic sectors over isolation or internationalism gave way to an internationalist coalition of U.S. banking, along with parts of the manufacturing and agricultural

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 174.

<sup>10</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in: Michael Mastanduno, “The United States Political System and International Leadership: A ‘Decidedly Inferior’ Form of Government?” in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Ed. G. John Ikenberry (New York: Pearson, 2005), 249.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 261-263.

<sup>12</sup> Huntington, “Erosion,” 29.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Hofstadter, quoted in Huntington, “Erosion,” 29.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955).

<sup>15</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 99-173.

industries, with overseas interests.<sup>16</sup> In the decades after World War II, the extent to which industries benefitted from protectionism decreased, and the United States pursued policies that fostered free trade.

An important factor that made international economic engagement acceptable to Americans was the development of a “social bargain.”<sup>17</sup> Economists and politicians recognized that opening the U.S. market would subject American workers to competition from abroad and the vicissitudes of the global economy. Their solution to this problem was the creation of the welfare state and the utilization of supportive labor market policies.<sup>18</sup> Such “embedded liberalism” was embraced by democracies around the world to protect against economic disruption.<sup>19</sup> These measures ensured that the gains from trade would be broadly shared, thus working against inequality and social instability.

In addition to goods and services, *people* increasingly began to cross national boundaries. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed racial quotas from America’s immigration policies, opening the door to many new immigrants from Asia and Africa.<sup>20</sup> That same year, the United States began phasing out the Bracero Program, which was a guest worker agreement with Mexico that opponents saw as “an exploitative labor regime on par with sharecropping.”<sup>21</sup> Ending Bracero set the stage for permanent, rather than temporary, Mexican migration to the United States.<sup>22</sup> Some legislators may not have fully foreseen the demographic shifts set in motion by these policies, but at least some were motivated by genuine egalitarianism as the ethos of the civil rights movement increasingly influenced the liberal consensus.<sup>23</sup>

America’s postwar consensus not only made sense at home but abroad as well. The United States emerged from World War II as the unequivocal economic hegemon in the world. The Cold War bifurcated the world, but the United States had far greater global influence than the Soviets. Many states in Europe and Asia, devastated by war, welcomed or acceded to American economic and military influence.<sup>24</sup> The international environment was ripe for Wilsonian and Hamiltonian ideas under American leadership. America’s predominance in the security sector derived first from its leadership in the United Nations, and later through the creation of defense pacts which incorporated almost 70 countries.<sup>25</sup> America led the way towards a more open economic order by creating the Bretton Woods system for monetary control and the Global

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Rise and Fall in the Twentieth Century* (New York: WW Norton and Co, 2007) 146.

<sup>17</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 174-179.

<sup>18</sup> Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, “The Liberal World Order is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June, 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-04-17/liberal-order-rigged>.

<sup>19</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization* 35, no. 2 (Spring 1982), 393.

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel J. Chin, “The Civil Rights Revolution Comes to Immigration Law: A New Look at the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,” *North Carolina Law Review* 75, no. 1 (November 1996), 273-346.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America,” *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1, (March 2012), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, it was later attempts to curb immigration from Mexico that, when combined with the end of the Bracero Program, led to the rise in permanent, illegal immigration from Mexico. See: Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences,” 2-5.

<sup>23</sup> Chin, “The Civil Rights Revolution,” 300. See also: Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences,” 2.

<sup>24</sup> Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 23, no. 3 (September 1986), 263-264 and 268-270.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Taylor, “Map: The U.S. is bound by Treaties to Defend a Quarter of Humanity,” *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/05/30/map-the-u-s-is-bound-by-treaties-to-defend-a-quarter-of-humanity/>.

Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT – later named the World Trade Organization), as well as many other institutions designed to lower barriers to trade. America spearheaded the creation of other multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and a host of other institutions to regulate trade, diplomacy, and international peace and security around the world. Each of these aspects of American foreign policy advanced U.S. interests in terms of security, prosperity, strength, values, alliances, global rules, and an open global economy.

## **The Consensus Erodes**

Over time, social, political, and economic changes, both at home and abroad, slowly eroded the postwar consensus. One major factor has been globalization, briefly defined as the increase in global trade and monetary flows. Globalization was driven by new technologies that lowered the cost of shipping and communication, and by policies that lowered the cost of moving goods, services, money, and labor across national boundaries.<sup>26</sup> While all Americans may benefit as consumers from such fundamental change, capital has generally fared better than labor as many manufacturing jobs have moved overseas. The social bargain was meant to shield American workers from globalization's negative economic impacts by providing a social safety net. However, since at least the 1980s, neoliberal policies of deregulation and less progressive taxation have frayed the web of protections. Meanwhile, new technology not only made it cost-effective to transfer manufacturing jobs abroad but also to reduce human labor altogether by automating production.

Globalization, a weakening social safety net, and automation combine to increase economic inequality and a sense of class division in the United States. This was most clearly articulated by the Occupy movement's slogan, "We are the 99%." Right-wing populists are also aware of growing socio-economic inequality but tend to express their concerns in less stark class-oriented terms such as "haves and have-nots," preferring instead the language of identity that contrasts "elites" and "regular Americans."<sup>27</sup>

Another major change since World War II was the end of the Cold War, which prompted a flurry of projects to redefine the national interest.<sup>28</sup> Prominent amongst them was Samuel Huntington's argument that the end of the Cold War embodied a new threat, namely, the loss of America's adversarial "Other." Huntington and other scholars have claimed that an "Other" is a necessary precondition for the formation and maintenance of a national identity (an "Us") and for the effective pursuit of national interests.<sup>29</sup> Without a unified identity, America's consensus over national interests would "erode."

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<sup>26</sup> Alan V. Deardorff and Robert M. Stern, "What You Should Know about Globalization and the World Trade Organization," *Review of International Economics* 10, no. 3 (2002), 406.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see: Josh Hawley, "The Promise of the Republic," Speech delivered at the National Conservatism conference, July 14-16, 2019, <https://nationalconservatism.org/presenters/josh-hawley/>. For a critique of Hawley's (and right-wing populism's) emphasis on identity over economics see: David Sessions, "The Right's Phony Class War," *Jacobin*, August 7, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/08/national-conservatism-right-politics-james-burnham-josh-hawley-managerialism>.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>29</sup> Huntington, "Erosion." 28.

Huntington also saw threats to the national interest and identity from Hispanic immigration (if unaccompanied by assimilation) and multiculturalism.<sup>30</sup> He argued that American identity derives from “culture and creed.” The creedal component consists of the liberal tradition identified by the “consensus school” historians. The cultural component consists partially of those values, but also of the ethnic and religious traditions that he believed produce those values. For Huntington, if the culture is undermined, so too is the creed, and American identity erodes. This position echoed arguments from the consensus school while placing greater emphasis on the importance of ethnonationalism. For some observers, Huntington inadvertently exposed the inherent contradiction of a theory of a liberal consensus coexisting with attitudes supportive of Jim Crow laws. Indeed, the mainstream postwar identity that celebrated consensus was deeply flawed as an expression of authentic egalitarianism.

Changes in U.S. immigration policies since 1965 produced real demographic changes.<sup>31</sup> However, scholars dispute Huntington’s claim that Hispanic immigrants were less prone to assimilation. In terms of language, religion, and inter-marriage rates, the descendants of Hispanic immigrants have been assimilating.<sup>32</sup> To critics, Huntington’s work contributed to the “Latino threat narrative” that exaggerated Hispanic immigration as a national security crisis and inspired increasingly restrictive immigration policies.<sup>33</sup> This narrative gained traction beginning in the 1970s as wealth inequality increased.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Huntington predicted (and regrettably seemed to endorse)<sup>35</sup> a strong nativist reaction to increasing immigration, especially under economic hard times.<sup>36</sup> His predictions seem prescient given contemporary explanations for the rise of populism after the 2008 financial crisis that combine “economic grievance” with “cultural backlash” arguments.<sup>37</sup>

Despite Huntington’s worries about the erosion of American identity and the weakening of consensus on U.S. national interests, the main ideas underlying American foreign policy remained intact throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Although an intense discussion erupted after 9/11 about whether the U.S. response should be multilateral or unilateral, it was essentially a debate among Wilsonians.<sup>38</sup> The dominance of the Wilsonian-Hamiltonian alliance over American foreign policy continued into the era of the Iraq War. Yet difficulties in establishing a stable democratic government and ending the insurgency in Iraq began to discredit the unilateralist Wilsonians, while the unsatisfying intervention in Libya harmed the multilateralist Wilsonians. Hamiltonian ideas were not left unscathed; they were seriously damaged by the 2008 financial crisis. While the specific causes of the crisis seemed opaque to many Americans,

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<sup>30</sup> Huntington, *Who are We?* 141-177.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 22 on the irony of anti-immigration policies producing this effect.

<sup>32</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “The Real Threat: An Essay on Samuel Huntington,” *Contemporary Sociology*, 34, no. 5, (September 2005), 480-481.

<sup>33</sup> Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 24-42, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>34</sup> Massey and Pren, “Unintended Consequences,” 4.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Wolfe, “Native Son - Samuel Huntington Defends the Homeland,” *Foreign Affairs*, 83, no. 3, (May/June, 2004), 125. “Huntington concludes that ‘white nativist movements are a possible and plausible response to these trends, and in situations of serious economic downturn and hardship could be highly probable.’ The word ‘plausible’ catches the eye. To say that something is possible or probable is to make a prediction; to call it plausible is to endorse it.”

<sup>36</sup> Huntington, *Who are We?* 309-316.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 132-167.

<sup>38</sup> Mead, “Jacksonian Revolt,” 2.

political forces on both the left and the right cast blame on financial elites – the same elites from the banking and industrial sectors that aligned after World War II to push for an open trading order. Given these military and financial setbacks, the Wilsonian and Hamiltonian schools of thought faced increasing critical scrutiny.

The decline of the Wilsonian-Hamiltonian alliance and the resurgence of Jacksonianism in 2016 prompted Walter Russel Mead to remark that today's foreign policy debate is more "fundamental" than any since World War II.<sup>39</sup> In one sense, this debate is fueled by a clash of ideas represented by competing schools of thought. In another, it is the collision of economic interests. But to fully understand Jacksonianism's surge one must also take issues of identity into account. Mead tells us that "Jacksonian America felt itself to be under siege, with its values under attack and its future under threat."<sup>40</sup> Here the perceived threats were those factors identified by Huntington: immigration and multiculturalism under conditions of economic insecurity. It may be social changes that have most profoundly undermined America's consensus over its national interests.

Changes in the international environment also deepened domestic divisions in America. The populist challenge is hardly limited to the United States. Many European societies saw the rise of populist movements of their own in response to the financial crisis of 2008 as well as an influx of refugees and migrants. These pressures spurred conservative changes in the conceptualization of national identity in "old" as well as "new" Europe. Many European populists embrace a more insular identity and bristle at "multilateral overreach" – the perception that international institutions were encroaching on their sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> In line with this sentiment, populists and aligned groups are often less willing to participate in the rules-based order created by the United States and its allies after World War II. Another impactful change in the international environment is the decline of U.S. power and the rise of China and other emerging powers. These shifts in power offer another explanation for why some states may now be less receptive to American military and economic influence.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the end of the Cold War and foreign policy setbacks led many in the United States to reassess the logic of having America bear much of the cost of global alliances. Similarly, support for an open trading order began to falter among those groups who saw the United States as a liberal hegemon in decline.<sup>43</sup> In short, the international and domestic environments now work to undermine the postwar consensus. What does that mean for the future of U.S. foreign policy?

## **A New Consensus?**

The widening social, economic, and political divisions in the United States seem to suggest that America faces a prolonged period of debate over its national interests and attendant foreign policy. On the other hand, the alienation felt by Americans on both the left and right of the political spectrum may lay the foundation for a new consensus. According to Walter Russell

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Colgan and Keohane, "The Liberal World Order is Rigged," 42.

<sup>42</sup> Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation," 273-275.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Krasner argues that it is not in the interest of a declining hegemon to support an open-trading system: Stephen D. Krasner, "State Power and the Structure of International Trade," *World Politics*, 28, no. 3 (April 1976), 317-347.

Mead, “Jeffersonian-Jacksonian opposition to mainstream American foreign policy cuts oddly across ideological lines.”<sup>44</sup> Might Americans reimagine their country’s role in the world as one based on careful self-limitation, edging away from its earlier position as the defender of the rules-based international order?

Many Realist international relations scholars criticize American foreign policy for its pursuit of “liberal hegemony,” arguing instead for “restraint.”<sup>45</sup> They may be able to claim plausibly that a Realist foreign policy of this sort “would be closer to what the American people actually want.”<sup>46</sup> The Trump administration had initially seemed poised to enact such a policy by disengaging U.S. forces from nation-building and pursuing greater burden-sharing and load-shedding in terms of the costs of European defense.<sup>47</sup> (Senator and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has been similarly critical of the commitment of the U.S. military to Iraq and Afghanistan and has struggled to differentiate his position on funding NATO from Trump’s.<sup>48</sup>)

Although Trump, in office, has been reluctant to turn his back entirely on the military commitments of his predecessors, it is not far-fetched to imagine the United States pulling out of Afghanistan and eschewing future nation-building projects altogether.<sup>49</sup> Counterterrorism remains the focus of on-going Afghan peace talks and the public consistently ranks it as a top priority.<sup>50</sup> While a new consensus may eschew nation-building in places like Libya or Yemen, it probably will continue to embrace counterterrorism. Might the United States withdraw still further by pulling back on commitments to NATO and other allies in Asia and the Middle East? NATO remains popular with the public,<sup>51</sup> but further expansion to include Ukraine or Georgia seems. Furthermore, shifting to an “over-the-horizon”<sup>52</sup> (as opposed to a forward deployed) strategy could free up budgetary space for popular domestic spending programs such as infrastructure improvement or higher education cost offsets.

Shifting to free trade, after decades of bipartisan support for expanding global commerce, the 2016 election saw leaders in both parties reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership. As the 2020 election unfolds, Democrats may struggle to distinguish themselves from the Trump administration on trade, with both camps critical of past arrangements and skeptical of future ones.<sup>53</sup> U.S. public opinion is mixed on whether to maintain support for a system of global trade.

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<sup>44</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 175.

<sup>45</sup> On “liberal hegemony” see: Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018). On “restraint” see: Barry Posen, “The Case for Restraint,” *The American Interest*, 3, no. 2, (November 1, 2007), <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2007/11/01/the-case-for-restraint/>.

<sup>46</sup> Walt, “Hell,” xii.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “The Tragedy of Trump’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, (March 5, 2019), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/05/the-tragedy-of-trumps-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>48</sup> Bernie Sanders, “Ending America’s Endless War: We Must Stop Giving Terrorists Exactly What They Want,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-24/ending-americas-endless-war>.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Igielnik and Kim Parker, “Majorities of U.S. veterans, public say the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not worth fighting,” Pew Research Center, July 10, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/majorities-of-u-s-veterans-public-say-the-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-were-not-worth-fighting/>.

<sup>50</sup> On negotiations see: Mujib Mashal, “U.S. and Taliban Agree in Principle to Peace Framework, Envoy Says,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/28/world/asia/taliban-peace-deal-afghanistan.html?module=inline>. On public opinion see: Pew Research Center, “Conflicting Partisan Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy,” November 29, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/11/29/conflicting-partisan-priorities-for-u-s-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>51</sup> Pew Research Center, “Large Majorities in Both Parties Say NATO is Good for the U.S.,” April 2, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/04/02/large-majorities-in-both-parties-say-nato-is-good-for-the-u-s/>.

<sup>52</sup> Posen, “The Case for Restraint.”

<sup>53</sup> Ana Swanson, “Democrats Pledge to Alter Trade. Problem: Trump Beat Them to It,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2019.



Some surveys show majorities favor it, but support weakens significantly when survey questions raise the specter of potential loss of jobs.<sup>54</sup> Popular attitudes differ by party, with Democrats now more pro-trade, but data trends suggest opinion is responsive to partisan cues.<sup>55</sup> If trade skeptics remain influential in both parties, a new consensus, one that opposes free trade, may emerge.

Regarding multilateral institutions in general, a new consensus may be harder to achieve. Bipartisan support for pulling back from some security and economic commitments is certainly conceivable. But institutions concerned with international law, human rights, and climate face partisan disagreements as to their importance to U.S. interests. Nevertheless, much of the world may be lining up against “multilateral overreach.”<sup>56</sup> The relative decline in overall U.S. power, coupled with a perceived deterioration in benefits from trade, may accelerate this international development, drawing the United States into its orbit.

### Foreign Policy Whipsaw

While there is the potential for a new consensus, another possibility is a prolonged debate with foreign policy “whipsawing” wildly from one presidential administration to the next.<sup>57</sup> The growing rifts in American identity may have laid the groundwork for this result. Of the various alternations in identity in recent decades, perhaps the most damaging for effective policymaking is the sharpening of partisan identity. The influence on political behavior of social markers like sex, class, religion, and race pale in comparison to the influence of partisan identity.<sup>58</sup> In recent decades, the public has “sorted” into the party better aligned with their ideology, leaving fewer issues on the table for bipartisan agreement. One effect of partisan sorting has been an increase in “bias, activism, and anger” as party identity has become more intense and salient.<sup>59</sup> A corresponding effect has been congressional gridlock, leading to an increase in executive prerogative in foreign policy. Here the possible future is one of wild policy vacillation between administrations, creating a world where “only the credulous will consider U.S. commitments credible.”<sup>60</sup>

Consider the numerous Obama administration policies that have been reversed under President Donald Trump. Referring to President Barack Obama’s opening to Cuba, Trump observed that it “was done through executive order, which means they (*sic*) can be undone and that is what I intend to do.”<sup>61</sup> While Trump’s policy reversal on Cuba may be better characterized as “rollback,”<sup>62</sup> America’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords and the Iran nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), both of which were executive

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<sup>54</sup> Alan S. Blinder, “The Free-Trade Paradox: The Bad Politics of a Good Idea,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/free-trade-paradox>.

<sup>55</sup> Bradley Jones, “Support for free trade agreements rebounds modestly, but wide partisan differences remain,” Pew Research Center (April 25, 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/25/support-for-free-trade-agreements-rebounds-modestly-but-wide-partisan-differences-remain/>.

<sup>56</sup> Colgan and Keohane, “The Liberal World Order is Rigged,” 42.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Drezner, “This Time is Different: Why U.S. Foreign Policy will Never Recover,” *Foreign Affairs*, (May/June, 2019), 98, no. 3, 10-17.

<sup>58</sup> Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identity of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 3.

<sup>59</sup> Lilliana Mason, “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 59, no. 1 (January, 2015), 128.

<sup>60</sup> Drezner. “This Time is Different,” 16.

<sup>61</sup> Amy Sherman, “Trump travel restrictions continue rollback of Obama’s Cuba policy,” *Politifact*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/trumpometer/promise/1378/reverse-barack-obamas-cuba-policy/>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

agreements, represented complete policy reversals. Regarding the credibility of U.S. commitments, reversals like that of the JCPOA may make adversaries and friends alike reluctant to consummate deals in the first place given the uncertainty of U.S. domestic politics. A similar message accompanied the termination of American membership in the Paris Climate Accords. And it is very likely that a future Democratic administration will reverse Trump's executive actions including the travel ban, border wall, and any number of immigration policies.<sup>63</sup> Given such domestic political division and oscillation, the U.S. government will be unable to make credible commitments, leading to a further decline in U.S. international standing and influence.

Partisanship also increasingly determines which states are considered allies or adversaries. In the Middle East, the Obama administration clashed with Israel and Saudi Arabia, both longtime regional allies of the United States, while seeking a path to normalized relations with a non-nuclear Iran through the JPCOA. Trump scrapped the JPCOA in favor of a policy of "maximum pressure" and embraced Israel and Saudi Arabia despite human rights abuses of different sorts in both countries. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed to throw his backing to the Republican Party by denouncing the JPCOA in a speech to Congress. In doing so, he may have further eroded the once-strong bipartisan support for Israel.<sup>64</sup> The tenor of U.S. relations with Israel could come to be seen as depending in large measure on which party occupies the White House.<sup>65</sup>

Relations with Russia also appear to be contingent upon partisan politics. Democrats favored confrontation after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its 2016 election meddling while most Republicans under Trump were more ambivalent. Ultimately, Republicans supported strong U.S. sanctions against Russia and over the past two years, public opinion about Russia has actually started to unite across party affiliation.<sup>66</sup> But that country is still poised to exploit social, economic, and political divisions within the United States through online disinformation and propaganda campaigns.<sup>67</sup> Although the Kremlin's efforts are unlikely to alter America's negative view of Russia, they may still strengthen divisions in the United States, making it more difficult to counter Russian provocations in the future.

America's European allies, like those in the Middle East, may increasingly and explicitly align more with a favored American political party than with the American state. Traditional U.S. allies like Germany and the U.K. are likely to view Democrats as natural partners.<sup>68</sup> Yet European states face internal divisions of their own; the domestic balance of political power will help determine which American party is viewed more sympathetically in these countries. If in power, right-leaning European populists may make common cause with President Trump or

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<sup>63</sup> Drezner, "This Time is Different," 15.

<sup>64</sup> Bernard Avishai, "Netanyahu and the Republicans," *The New Yorker*, February 4, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/netanyahu-republicans>.

<sup>65</sup> On a future where Israel and Saudi Arabia align with Republicans see: Drezner, "This Time is Different," 17.

<sup>66</sup> Jacob Poushter, "Six Charts on How Russians and Americans see Each Other," Pew Research Center, October 4, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/04/6-charts-on-how-russians-and-americans-see-each-other/>.

<sup>67</sup> Adam Entous, Craig Timberg, and Elizabeth Dwoskin, "Russian Operatives Used Facebook Ads to Exploit America's Racial and Religious Divisions," *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/russian-operatives-used-facebook-ads-to-exploit-divisions-over-black-political-activism-and-muslims/2017/09/25/4a011242-a21b-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/russian-operatives-used-facebook-ads-to-exploit-divisions-over-black-political-activism-and-muslims/2017/09/25/4a011242-a21b-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa_story.html).

<sup>68</sup> Drezner, "This Time is Different," 17.

other similarly styled Republicans. Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the U.K. has attempted to do this, though significant policy differences remain between him and Trump.<sup>69</sup>

China is an outlier to this inter-state partisan process. China is increasingly depicted in the United States as America's "Other," and has few supporters among Democrats or Republicans. President Trump has taken China to task for unfair trade practices, criticized its authoritarian system, and labeled it a political and military competitor.<sup>70</sup> Democrats largely agree.<sup>71</sup> There is some difference in emphasis on human rights issues (more of a concern for Democrats) and military competition (more of an issue for Republicans). There is also disagreement on how to counter what is seen as China's unfair economic trade policies, with the Trump Administration imposing tariffs and Democrats arguing for a multilateral approach. But both parties envision an increasingly hostile Sino-U.S. relationship, which may offer an alternative foundation for a new consensus. The policy variations between the parties might come to resemble the different "strategies of containment" the United States pursued against the Soviets.<sup>72</sup> Containment was one of the remarkably consistent, consensus-based foreign policies of the postwar era. Robert Keohane has suggested the "othering" of China as an authoritarian state antithetical to the American way of life as a way to rekindle the sort of shared identity and policy coherence America possessed during the Cold War.<sup>73</sup> China's rise is the most significant power shift in international politics since the end of the Cold War and it may impose discipline upon American foreign policy by unifying a broad coalition of Americans.

## Conclusion

The future of American foreign policy may be challenging. In the postwar period the United States successfully advanced its national interests because it was unified in defining those interests and also enjoyed a favorable international environment. But social, political, and economic changes have eroded America's shared sense of interests. Now, for many Americans, longstanding tenets of U.S. foreign policy no longer seem to be in their interest and the international environment may no longer be suited to the cluster of policies that shaped the international system in the post-World War II era. As Americans internally struggle to redefine their national identity and as the old coalitions of subnational interests breakdown, vacillation in foreign policy may be the unfortunate result.

A consistent set of interests may be necessary for a successful foreign policy, but it is not sufficient. A new consensus may not produce better or even equivalent results than those achieved by the preceding accord. For example, economists are largely in agreement over the benefits of trade.<sup>74</sup> Reducing international competition might increase production costs for U.S.

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<sup>69</sup> Tom McTague and Peter Nicholas, "Inside Donald Trump and Boris Johnson's Special Relationship," *The Atlantic*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/boris-johnson-needs-trump-does-trump-need-him-back/595006/>.

<sup>70</sup> United States, "A New National Security Strategy for a New Era," National Security Strategy, December, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>, 2, 25, and 48.

<sup>71</sup> Philip H. Gordon, "How Democrats Can Get Tough on China—Without Imitating Trump," *Foreign Policy*, June 25, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/25/how-democrats-can-get-tough-on-china-without-imitating-trump/>

<sup>72</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>73</sup> Colgan and Keohane, "The Liberal World Order is Rigged," 42.

<sup>74</sup> N. Gregory Mankiw, "Economists Actually Agree on This: The Wisdom of Free Trade," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/26/upshot/economists-actually-agree-on-this-point-the-wisdom-of-free-trade.html>.

companies and prices for consumers while doing little or nothing to address the issue of jobs lost to automation. Furthermore, many of the relatively recent, adverse impacts of trade were caused by trade with China, reflecting the integration of China's massive, developing economy into the global economy. This so-called "China Shock" has already transpired.<sup>75</sup> Efforts to "protect" U.S. workers now will come with significant costs and potentially no benefits. In terms of security affairs, strategists are not of one mind. But many worry that pulling back U.S. forces into an offshore balancing role would create power vacuums for adversaries to fill and increase the costs of reentry in the event of a crisis.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, it is possible that the fundamental debates over interests and identity of today yield neither a restrained or isolationist consensus, nor a period of wild vacillation between extremes. Instead the intensity of these debates may gradually dissipate as minor, but cumulative, adjustments and compromises are reached. Rather than a sudden, new, and radically different consensus, a modified consensus may emerge over time in which the United States seeks to "consolidate the gains" of the rules-based international order as it competes with rising authoritarian powers.<sup>77</sup> As has been the case so often in American history, external events may stimulate the emergence of effective bi-partisan leadership that generates a new consensus, but with still uncertain content.

The importance of an effective and coherent foreign policy is undeniable in a world where critical problems transcend national borders. This was one of the lessons that the post-World War II architects of U.S. foreign policy had taken from the 1920s and 1930s. Since then the list of transnational issues has grown. To adequately address these mounting challenges, U.S. policymakers and other American elites must generate the capacity to resolve or at least mitigate the domestic political conflicts and dilemmas examined above. Only then can the United States develop a foreign policy that more clearly reflects and serves the national interest.

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<sup>75</sup> Douglas A. Irwin, "The Truth About Trade: What Critics Get Wrong About the Global Economy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August, 2016), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-06-13/truth-about-trade>, 89.

<sup>76</sup> Patrick Porter, "Sharing Power? Prospects for a U.S. Concert-Balance Strategy," Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, (April 2013), 67.

<sup>77</sup> Jennifer Lind and William C. Wohlforth, "The Future of the Liberal World Order is Conservative," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-02-12/future-liberal-order-conservative>.