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MEMORANDUM FOR The 73rd SCUSA Panel
SUBJECT: Foreign Policymaking in Politically Polarized Times

1. **Issue:** This memo assesses the impact of polarization on U.S. foreign policy and proposes methods to minimize its impact on overall foreign policy effectiveness.
2. **Strategic Analysis.** A new period of polarization disrupts the foreign policy-making process by amplifying existing cracks in U.S. foreign policy traditions. The two-party system has recently experienced a shift in foreign policy preferences, creating more divergent foreign policy ends. Colliding interests of the Republican and Democratic parties decrease options for U.S. foreign policymaking. This polarization occurs in a wider system existing between agencies, states, nations, and peoples. Small-scale and large-scale solutions need to be implemented to insulate U.S. foreign policy from polarization. Failure to insulate American foreign policy results in the negative reinforcement cycle of eroding U.S. soft power and misallocated hard power. Seeing this instability, allies lose faith in American stewardship and adversaries are emboldened in their own policies abroad.
3. **Relevant National Interests** There are two main objectives: to insulate the U.S. foreign policy-making process from the polarized election cycle (1) improve the consistency of foreign policy decisions and (2) mitigate domestic polarization to restore faith in the U.S. democratic system and electoral process.
4. **Strategic Options** There are two broad courses of action to insulate foreign policy from polarization. A maximalist approach assumes that domestic polarization can be solved over time through immediate and direct domestic policy. This approach will likely lead to a higher volume of lasting change in the credibility and global perception of U.S. foreign policy; however, it will require more time and resources in order to restructure the relationship between the federal government and the American people.

A minimalist approach assumes domestic political polarization is unable to be solved over time through immediate and direct domestic policy. An emphasis is placed on dynamic cooperation between federal agencies. This approach aims to implement the course of action that most heavily mitigates the impact of domestic political polarization on U.S. foreign policy while keeping domestic policy and the democratic system as relatively unchanged as possible

5. **Recommendation and Implementation** To manage non-partisan policy communication, we recommend (1) mitigating the polarizing effect of bias-confirming social media algorithms by passing congressional legislation that grants the Federal Communication Commission the power to regulate the use of political preference and party identification in content recommendation and targeted advertisement, solidifying existing public-private partnership

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since the 2016 presidential election and (2) directing existing government informational infrastructure via Executive Order and congressional legislation to communicate foreign policy interests in a non-normative manner to increase understanding of ongoing diplomatic objectives without partisan bias.

To pilot basic media and political economy education and adult vocation training to reduce polarization, we recommend (1) task the Department of Education to design a pilot high school-level curriculum recognizing Mis-, Dis-, and Malinformation (MDM) and political economy. To incentivize state adoption of such a curriculum, the government would provide additional federal funding and (2) increase funding, through congressional budgetary oversight, to the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. This will provide a pilot program of low-cost vocational training in technology and other in-demand hard skills to provide disgruntled blue-collar workers with viable job training, reducing their vulnerability to radicalization.

To incentivize non-partisan service commitments to decrease political polarization, we recommend using congressional legislation to provide Peace Corps and AmeriCorps civil servants with G.I. Bill benefits upon completion of service to increase civic participation and foreign policy understanding.

6. **Conclusion** Domestic political polarization has decreased the stability, effectiveness, and perception of U.S. foreign policy, decreasing the U.S.'s reliability and perception abroad. By implementing domestic policies that directly target the root causes of polarization that contribute to domestic political polarization, the U.S. will be able to mitigate polarization to increase the stability and credibility of U.S. foreign policy to foreign and domestic observers.
7. The point of contact for this memorandum is CDT Amy Eleogram at amy.eleogram@westpoint.edu or 901-490-8103.

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