



## ANALYSIS

# The 2016 presidential campaign and the crisis of US foreign policy

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October 2016

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2016 US presidential election is the most consequential election for international order since the Second World War. America's status as a liberal superpower is on the ballot. To understand Donald Trump's foreign policy, we must distinguish between his three core beliefs that he has held for many decades and rarely if ever waived from, the central themes of his campaign, and other issues. His core beliefs are opposition to America's alliance arrangements, opposition to free trade, and support for authoritarianism, particularly in Russia. If he is elected president and governs in a manner consistent with these beliefs, the United States will be transformed from the leader of a liberal international order into a rogue superpower that withdraws from its international commitments, undermines the open global economy, and partners with Putin's Russia.

Hillary Clinton, by contrast, would be a president in the traditional internationalist mould. Every president is unique and different from their predecessors and she will be too. To understand her foreign policy, we should examine the emerging democratic critique of President Obama. This critique faults Obama for prioritising progress on global issues over regional disorder. It recommends a modest shift in US foreign policy towards what might be termed 'geopolitical regionalism', whereby the United States re-engages with its traditional allies and seeks to bolster regional order in East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Even if Clinton wins, the 2016 election has raised real doubts about the future of American internationalism. Clinton's toughest task will be to re-convince the American people as to the merits of increased US engagement to strengthen both the security and economic components of the liberal international order.

The US presidential election of 2016 is the most important American election since 1860, when Abraham Lincoln became president. It is also the most important for world order since the Second World War. For 70 years, the United States has led and sustained a liberal international order. Every president has had a foreign policy consistent with this broad objective. What makes 2016 especially significant is that for the first time one of the two major party nominees for the presidency, Donald Trump, is campaigning on a platform of weakening the core elements of the international order, including the US alliance system and an open global economy. He promises instead to partner with Russia to fight Islamic State and to create a mercantilist economic system where the United States uses tariffs and economic leverage to exact favourable terms of trade. The overall effect of Trumpism would be to transform the United States from a leader of the liberal international order to a rogue superpower.

Trump's surprising rise and endurance has shocked the US political establishment and the rest of the world. It is widely believed that a Trump presidency would likely lead to a series of rolling international crises as major powers adjust to life after American hegemony. The day after a Trump victory, allies would have to plan for the withdrawal of US security guarantees, rivals would look for ways to exploit the shift in US strategy, and markets would be rocked by the prospect of a new era of protectionism. The United States could also be hit by seismic domestic crises, including in civil-military relations and between Congress and the executive branch.

Even if Trump loses, this election has raised real doubts about whether the United States will remain willing to serve as a liberal superpower on the world stage. For the first time since the Second World War, a sizeable number of Americans have shown themselves to be receptive to a message of isolationism. Perhaps a nationalist who is politically savvy and of sounder mind could succeed where Trump had failed. Perhaps the rising tide of nationalism will constrain future administrations.

The furore around Trump's candidacy has also crowded out analysis of the foreign policy of the person most likely to become the 45th president of the United States. Hillary Clinton is one of the most famous people on the planet. She has served as President Barack Obama's Secretary of State, as a Senator from New York, and as First Lady of the United States. She is, by all accounts, a traditional liberal internationalist who believes strongly in American exceptionalism and in maintaining a US-led liberal order. It is difficult to ascertain from her campaign statements how she would differ from President Obama since she has a political incentive not to draw clear contrasts with him. However, there is an emerging democratic critique of Obama's foreign policy that is consistent with Clinton's record and may well be the path she chooses if she is elected president. In essence there would be a shift in emphasis away from

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prioritising global challenges and downplaying regional disorder towards a foreign policy that views addressing regional threats as central to US interests and maintaining the liberal international order.

This Analysis looks at the implications of the 2016 election for US foreign policy. It explains how and why Trump poses a unique threat to the US-led liberal international order and outlines what a Trump administration's foreign policy might look like. It provides a critique of Obama's foreign policy being made by some Democrats and shows how it might provide a template for Hillary Clinton's presidency, if she wins. Finally, it identifies several metrics that can be used to ascertain whether the populism of 2016 will constrain US foreign policy even if Trump loses and Clinton is elected.

## DONALD TRUMP'S WORLD VIEW

*The most common thing said about Donald Trump's world view is that he does not have one.*

The most common thing said about Donald Trump's world view is that he does not have one. To many observers, he appears to be on every side of every issue. He is ignorant about vast areas of policy. By his own admission, he does not rely heavily on advisers and does not read widely, if at all, preferring instead to watch cable television.<sup>1</sup> The notion that Trump is something of a blank slate allowed some supporters to argue that he would learn on the job and use his unique experience as a businessman to negotiate deals on behalf of the American people. His senior advisers have briefed foreign ambassadors to the United States that Trump would be an internationalist in office but he would seek better terms on trade and alliances.<sup>2</sup> However, Trump is not a blank slate nor is he malleable. He has displayed no capacity to evolve on complicated foreign policy issues the more he is exposed to them.

Trump's overall world view, which he now calls 'America First', is a perfect fusion of domestic and foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> Trump believes that the United States is in a steep decline because of its activities on the world stage, in particular its support for alliances. He believes that the US-led liberal international order has failed Americans. He wants others to do more and pay more. And he wants the United States to focus on a very narrow set of national interests, rather than the broader notions of liberal order that have shaped US strategy since the Second World War.

There are three elements to understanding Trump's world views. The first is his core beliefs — those impulses that he has held to consistently over many decades, namely opposition to America's alliance arrangements, support for a mercantilist global economic system, and support for authoritarian regimes, particularly Russian authoritarianism. The second is major promises he has made on the campaign trail, some of which predate the campaign by a few years, and on which he has been broadly consistent. Finally, there are other issues on which he holds contradictory positions, including China and nuclear proliferation.

Trump, who is now 70 years old, is likely to be unyielding on his core beliefs. He has held them for three decades and has stuck with them even when there is a high political cost. Trump's core beliefs are the views to which I now turn.

#### OPPOSITION TO ALLIANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The issue about which Donald Trump is most passionate, and which has dominated his thinking for almost three decades, is that the United States is getting a raw deal from its alliances with other nations. In 1987, when he was 41 years old, Trump spent US\$95 000 on a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe* to publish an open letter to the American people titled "There's Nothing Wrong with American Foreign and Defense Policy that a Little Backbone Can't Cure".<sup>4</sup> The letter began, "For decades, Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the United States" and it proceeded to call on the United States to make its allies pay for the full cost of "the protection we provide". It was almost identical to the message he would articulate nearly three decades later. Throughout the 2016 campaign, Trump has criticised US allies in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East along the same lines.

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There has been some confusion as to whether Trump wants US allies to carry a bit more of the burden or if he opposes alliances on principle. His advisers have claimed the former but Trump's rhetoric is often uncompromising and absolute. To understand exactly what Trump's view is, we must take a closer look at his interpretation of US interests and the cost of the alliance commitments. Trump believes that the United States has no intrinsic interest in being forward deployed in other nations or in having alliances. In an interview with *The Washington Post* editorial board in April 2016, when asked if he believed the United States gains anything by having bases in East Asia, Trump responded: "Personally I don't think so. I personally don't think so."<sup>5</sup> He has repeatedly argued that NATO's traditional mission is obsolete and outdated and he has made it clear that the United States would be better off if it were out of the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> This is in stark contrast to the bipartisan consensus that has prevailed since the Second World War that the United States has a vital interest itself in maintaining the alliance system in Europe and East Asia.

Some people have drawn a false equivalence between President Obama's complaint that US allies do not do enough and Trump's view. Both want a more equitable sharing of the burden. But this radically understates Trump's intentions. Trump's problem is not with the percentage of GDP that allies spend on defence or how much they pay for host nation support. He believes that America's allies in Asia and Europe should pay for the entire cost of the US military presence in those regions, or they should pay what it would cost them to fully fund it themselves. In other words, for example, Asian allies ought to pay for the

Seventh Fleet. Europe ought to pay for the US nuclear deterrent. In his foreign policy speech at the *Center for the National Interest*, Trump said:

“We have spent trillions of dollars over time on planes, missiles, ships, equipment, building up our military to provide a strong defense for Europe and Asia. The countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense, and if not, the US must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

The only way to calculate the figure of trillions of dollars is by looking at the cost of the forward military presence, which is what Trump emphasises — “the cost of this defense”.<sup>8</sup>

If elected, Trump will demand that allies pay an exponentially greater sum for US military support. He has repeatedly claimed that he would be willing to walk away from the alliances in order to extract the best bargain possible. But his past criticism of alliances also suggests he will be happy if US allies are unable to meet his demands, which would provide him with a pretext to withdraw US support.

#### SUPPORT FOR A MERCANTILIST INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

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Trump’s second core belief is that the United States is getting a raw deal from the global economy, in particular on trade. Again, this is not new. Trump has been making some version of this point since the mid-1980s. There is no record of him supporting a trade deal signed by the United States. Unlike some politicians who oppose these trade deals out of political expediency, he has consistently done so over three decades. In this campaign, Trump has promised to pull the United States out of the North American Free Trade Agreement, abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and withdraw from the World Trade Organization.<sup>9</sup> Trump has gone well beyond opposition to specific trade deals. He has proposed the use of punitive tariffs of 45 per cent on China, the world’s second-largest economy, and 35 per cent tariffs on Mexico. As the campaign has progressed, he has repeatedly said that a trade war is nothing to be afraid of, suggesting that it had already begun and the United States should proactively fight and win it.<sup>10</sup>

Trump’s trade policy must be looked at in the context of his overall economic world view. Trump views the global economy as a zero sum game. He believes the United States can use its economic leverage to negotiate favourable bilateral trade deals that are disproportionately advantageous to it. He also favours using the security goods the United States provides to other nations as leverage in economic negotiations. As Adam Davidson of *The New York Times* has observed, Trump’s economic world view eschews the notion of mutually beneficial arrangements and embraces the model of a rentier economy, one that derives its wealth from a scarce resource such as land or energy.<sup>11</sup> In a normal market economy, the very idea of dealmaking is marginal to success. As Davidson noted:

“The key issues at play in a national or global economy (inflation, currency-exchange rates, unemployment, overall growth) are impossible to control through any sort of deal. They reflect underlying structural forces in an economy, like the level of education and skill of the population, the productivity of companies, the amount of government spending and the actions of the central bank.”<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, a rentier economy is all about good and bad deals — who controls limited resources.

Trump’s targets are not just foreign countries. He is also deeply hostile to international economic integration. “Globalization”, Trump said in a speech in June 2016 in Monesson, Pennsylvania, “has made the financial elite who donate to politicians very wealthy but it has left millions of our workers with nothing but poverty and heartache ... This wave of globalization has wiped out the middle class”.<sup>13</sup> This is one of his favourite themes on the campaign trail and it is why he promises to restore manufacturing jobs and stop outsourcing. He has promised to punish US corporations that move jobs offshore. It is unclear how far Trump would push this as president but he would certainly seek to roll back economic openness, which would have the likely effect of introducing a more nationalist and mercantilist world economic system.

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#### SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS, IN PARTICULAR VLADIMIR PUTIN

Trump has a long-standing admiration for authoritarian strongmen that has most recently manifested itself in strong support for Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 1990 Trump visited Moscow and came back disillusioned with what he saw as President Mikhail Gorbachev’s weakness. In an interview with *Playboy* magazine, he said that Gorbachev did not have a firm enough hand. Asked whether that meant he favoured China’s crackdown on students, he said:

“When the students poured into Tiananmen Square, the Chinese government almost blew it. Then they were vicious, they were horrible, but they put it down with strength. That shows you the power of strength. Our country is right now perceived as weak ... as being spit on by the rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

This fondness for authoritarianism has emerged many times during the 2016 campaign. Trump has regularly praised Putin and even had favourable things to say about the way that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein dealt with their enemies.<sup>15</sup>

The support for Putin is particularly important and consistent. In 2013, Trump tweeted that he found an op-ed by Putin criticising US foreign policy and American exceptionalism to be “a masterpiece for Russia and

a disaster for the US. He is lecturing to our President. Never has our Country looked to [sic] weak".<sup>16</sup> In late 2015, Putin praised Trump as "very colourful" and "talented".<sup>17</sup> Trump responded by welcoming the praise, exaggerating it (Trump would claim Putin called him a genius), and dismissing any criticism of Putin as an authoritarian leader who repressed his own people and threatened his neighbours. Trump's pro-Russia comments provoked a firestorm in the Republican Party. Trump refused to change his position although he did tone down his rhetoric for several months. However, the issue re-emerged in the public debate after he secured the nomination.

Trump's campaign intervened in the drafting of the Republican Platform 2016 to water down the language on supporting Ukraine, removing a long-standing party policy that called for lethal assistance to the Ukrainian Government.<sup>18</sup> Trump called on Russian intelligence to hack and release Hillary Clinton's emails, saying at a press conference, "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30 000 emails that are missing".<sup>19</sup> He said he would consider lifting of sanctions on Russia and recognising the annexation of Crimea.<sup>20</sup> He repeatedly said he intended to have good relations with Russia while also criticising America's NATO allies.

The Trump campaign has also been dogged by accusations of links to Russia. Prior to entering the presidential election, Trump pursued a number of business interests in Russia and stated his intention of developing close ties to Putin. Several of Trump's top aides and advisers, including his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and foreign policy adviser Carter Page, have business ties to Russia.<sup>21</sup> Russian intelligence is suspected to have been behind the hacks of the Democratic National Convention that led to sensitive documents finding their way to WikiLeaks.<sup>22</sup> While there is no allegation that the Trump campaign was involved, the evidence is mounting that he is the Kremlin's preferred candidate.

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## TRUMP'S OTHER VIEWS

Trump's core beliefs are his touchstone. He has been remarkably consistent on them over several decades. However, these three core beliefs are narrow and do not cover much ground. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of Trump's world view, it is useful to recognise two other categories — views that he has made a part of his 2016 campaign and other policy issues on which he has expressed an opinion.

Trump's 2016 foreign policy platform includes building a wall along the Mexican border, opposition to the Iran deal, banning Muslim immigrants, and indifference to climate change. Although he has been relatively consistent on these issues during the campaign, he either has no track record on them prior to the campaign or he has been inconsistent over a longer time span. For example, in 2013 he signed a letter calling for action

on climate change.<sup>23</sup> He even deviated from his anti-immigration message in August and September 2016, suggesting that he may not seek to deport illegal immigrants before tacking back to his original position.<sup>24</sup>

It is difficult to predict what a Trump foreign policy would look like. It can be expected with some certainty that he will be driven by his core impulses. But no one has any idea if Trump will stick to his campaign promises and there are already signs that he is trying to create some wiggle room. Then there are those issues on which he really has no opinion or knowledge, including the nuclear triad (the three pillars — strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and submarine launched ballistic missiles — of US nuclear forces), Brexit, and disputes in the South China Sea. On these issues, he will say one thing one day and another the next.

## IF TRUMP WINS

If Trump wins the presidency, America's global role as the leader of a liberal order will immediately be cast into doubt. Although the world will have realised such a result was possible, the reaction will still be one of shock. In the days after the 8 November election, many nations will be trying to assess the implications of a Trump presidency for their security. Some countries — Russia, North Korea, and perhaps China — will see opportunity. Most others, including all US allies, will be anxious. European nations will fear that the United States will side with Russia and effectively withdraw its support for NATO's collective defence commitment under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. East Asian allies will worry about a US deal with China and a withdrawal of security guarantees, including the nuclear umbrella. Israel will worry about a US withdrawal from the Middle East and a general deterioration of conditions in the region.

One question that would arise in the wake of a Trump victory would be whether mainstream Republican foreign policy experts would be willing to serve and if so, whether they would be chosen. Hundreds of Republicans, many of whom would be candidates for senior positions under normal circumstances, have openly denounced Trump. Some would continue to oppose him while others would ask themselves if it is better to exercise influence from within or continue from without. For his part, Trump would have to decide whether to appoint people who had previously opposed him or to reward those who backed him in the campaign or remained silent. The latter camp includes Walid Phares, who sees US relations with the Muslim world very much in terms of a clash of civilizations, retired Army Lieutenant-General Michael Flynn, an outspoken critic of the Obama administration and 'radical Islam', former CIA Director James Woolsey, and current and former politicians such as Senator Jeff Sessions and Newt Gingrich.

If Trump appoints senior figures from the Republican establishment who have criticised him, they will surely try to smooth over the very rough

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edges of Trump's world view and marginalise the true believers. Trump could go along with this scenario although there is another possibility. Faced with gridlock on the domestic side, he may turn to foreign policy because it has fewer checks and balances. He will struggle to implement his domestic agenda because of opposition in Congress and the constraints of the law. He will have a freer hand internationally. There is no body or law that can prevent him from aligning himself with Putin, ignoring an ally, or shaking things up with a far-reaching foreign policy statement. And, as we have seen, grievance against the rest of the world is not just a part of Trump's ideology, it is at its very core. So the second scenario is that Trump seeks to govern as he campaigned by appointing his current advisory team to senior positions and instructing them to extract the United States from its international commitments and to build a partnership with Putin's Russia.

Regardless of which scenario unfolds, a Trump administration would be an enormous shock to world politics.

## HILLARY CLINTON'S INTERNATIONALISM

Hillary Clinton's path to the Democratic nomination was much harder than anticipated. Bernie Sanders' strong showing revealed a leftwards shift in the Democratic Party, particularly among young people. Although Sanders' world view is different from Trump's in fundamental ways, both candidates tapped into the same anxieties about globalisation and America's place in the world. Bernie Sanders promised to focus inward and do less overseas.<sup>25</sup> He largely ignored the rest of the world, in stark contrast to Barack Obama's 2008 campaign which offered a new vision of international leadership. Instead, Sanders would ask others to take on more of the burden. Towards the end of his campaign, Sanders articulated a foreign policy that was to the left of President Obama in that it called for a retrenchment from overseas military commitments and a withdrawal from the global economy.

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Hillary Clinton's victory in the Democratic primary ensured that traditional internationalism would be on the ballot in November and offered the prospect of continuity in US foreign policy. It is clear that the things that unite President Obama and Hillary Clinton on foreign policy are far more important than the things that divide them. Both believe in a US-led liberal international order. Both are committed to multilateralism. Both see national power as encompassing civilian as well as military power. Both care about transnational challenges, such as climate change and pandemic disease. Both are more interested in domestic than international transformation. However, every president is unique and has their own approach. Clinton will too.

It is difficult to ascertain what Clinton might do differently by looking at her record as Secretary of State or at her campaign statements. She has a political incentive to paper over differences with the Obama

administration. This leaves something of a conundrum. Poring over the fine detail of her every utterance would run the risk of overstating the significance of relatively minor statements. A better approach is to look at what Democratic foreign policy experts who may serve in or influence a Clinton administration say about Obama's track record and what should be done next.

There will be much continuity between the Obama administration and a Clinton administration, in particular when compared with Trump. However, there is likely to be a subtle but significant shift in emphasis in how the United States thinks about the international order. President Obama worries more about global threats and challenges, such as counterterrorism, climate change, and nuclear non-proliferation, than regional challenges. At the regional level, especially in the Middle East and Europe, he prefers to focus on economic and diplomatic opportunities and seeks to pass the burden of providing security and addressing local threats on to allies.

Over the past few years, there has been an emerging critique of Obama's foreign policy from among some Democrats that has not been articulated by Clinton but is consistent with her track record. This view — what might be termed 'geopolitical regionalism' — expresses alarm at the deterioration of order in the Middle East and Europe and tends to view Chinese foreign policy primarily through the prism of its assertiveness in East Asia. Geopolitical regionalism would have the United States return to a traditional understanding of US interests and the liberal international order as being rooted in stable regional security orders. This would mean the United States would do more to address disorder at the regional level. Clinton will continue to work on global issues but it is unlikely that they will define her foreign policy approach, as they have Obama's. This shift will have profound implications for how the United States defines its interests, distributes its resources, and conducts its diplomacy.

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#### OBAMA'S GLOBAL APPROACH

Obama sees it as America's responsibility to uphold the liberal international order; however, he is also of the view that the United States was prone to overextending itself in pursuit of that goal. Recently he told Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*:

"There's a playbook in Washington that presidents are supposed to follow. It's a playbook that comes out of the foreign-policy establishment. And the playbook prescribes responses to different events, and these responses tend to be militarized responses. Where America is directly threatened, the playbook works. But the playbook can also be a trap that can lead to bad decisions."<sup>26</sup>

For Obama, the United States is a relatively secure country. The long-term trends domestically are positive and there is plenty of good news in

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the world. Yes, the Middle East may be in chaos but America has new opportunities in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Yes, there are threats, such as Islamic State and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but they are not existential and the greatest risk they pose is that they could elicit an overreaction. Moreover, these threats can outweigh global threats that are truly existential. As Obama told Goldberg: “ISIS is not an existential threat to the United States. Climate change is a potential existential threat to the entire world if we don’t do something about it.”<sup>27</sup>

Obama is also conscious of the fact that other nations do not carry their weight in upholding the international order, acknowledging that “free riders aggravate me”.<sup>28</sup> In his view, they should take the lead for dealing with their own regional security issues, particularly in Europe and the Middle East. He has said that “one of the reasons I am so focused on taking action multilaterally where our direct interests are not at stake is that multilateralism regulates hubris”.<sup>29</sup>

Obama’s Deputy National Security Advisor Benjamin Rhodes described Obama’s mindset to *Politico Magazine*, explaining:

“The default view in Washington is that if there’s a challenge in the Middle East, the US has to solve it. Our basic point has been, no, sorry, we learned the opposite lesson from Iraq. It’s not that more US military engagement will stabilize the Middle East. *It’s that we can’t do this.*”<sup>30</sup>

President Obama was, according to Rhodes, “trying to cabin our engagement so it doesn’t lead to an overextension” and so the United States could focus on potential opportunities such as climate change and Latin America.<sup>31</sup>

The situation in East Asia has been somewhat different. Obama identified East Asia as the region where the United States was underinvested and which presented great opportunities. Obama therefore deepened relations with America’s East Asian allies and partners, particularly in the military sphere. He negotiated the TPP and he pushed back against Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and East China Sea. However, even in East Asia there are tensions between the regional and the global. For example, the White House reportedly limited its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea so as not to jeopardise the Paris talks on climate change.<sup>32</sup>

#### THE GEOPOLITICAL REGIONALISM CRITIQUE

One critique of President Obama’s foreign policy approach is that he underestimates the risk that regional disorder poses to US interests. Consider the Middle East. Obama believes that disorder in the Middle East can be contained so it does not threaten core US interests. However, over the past four years, the war in Syria has grown immeasurably worse, as has the situation in Libya. These conflicts have dragged in outside

powers and created massive refugee flows that threaten the stability of the European Union. Meanwhile, as bad as the post Arab Spring Middle East is, it would be much worse if large Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, failed, fractured, and descended into civil war. Given the risk that the situation could get much worse, many Democratic-leaning foreign policy experts argue that the United States should re-engage with the Middle East with a view to stabilising the region. This means re-engaging with America's Arab allies, particularly the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Some would do this with no preconditions. Others would try to insist on political and economic reform in exchange for US re-engagement. Both groups advocate a greater US role in the region.

Geopolitical regionalists make a similar argument in relation to Europe. Obama was frustrated that Europeans were not providing for their own security. He sought to shift the burden onto European nations during the Libya intervention of 2011. He was slow to see the connection between refugee flows and the stability of the European Union. He was also relatively uninterested in playing a significant role in internal European discussions on the euro crisis and integration, as many of his predecessors had done. For geopolitical regionalists, the European Union was originally a US project and each major step of integration has been supported by the United States. They argue that the United States must fully engage in Europe to prevent democratic backsliding, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, to stabilise Ukraine, to deter Russia, and to stabilise the European Union.

East Asia is something of an exception. The Obama administration's rebalance to Asia has included many of the elements favoured by geopolitical regionalists. Here their critique can be summarised as: 'more and with greater haste'. They would have the United States build on the rebalance, including increasing freedom of navigation operations, deepening military cooperation, and encouraging US allies to cooperate more with each other. The geopolitical regionalists are also strongly in favour of the TPP. Clinton's opposition to the TPP did not emanate from a change of heart on the part of Democratic experts on Asia — cynics see it as motivated by politics while those who take her statements at face value see it as reflecting the legitimate concerns of domestic constituencies, such as labour unions.

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The geopolitical regionalists also have some fundamental disagreements with the Obama administration. The most significant is in relation to how it approaches coercive diplomacy. They criticise the president and Secretary of State John Kerry for engaging in negotiations without leverage. In Syria and in Ukraine, the United States could have taken steps to increase its leverage with rival powers and actors but the president was reluctant to do anything that increased the risk of a military intervention.

So, what is the evidence that Hillary Clinton will pursue this approach? There is little hard evidence, nor should we expect there to be. However, geopolitical regionalism is emerging as the most plausible alternative approach to the Obama administration's foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> It is largely consistent with Clinton's track record. She was among the first to warn of Putin's return to power and to call for a shift in policy to deter Russia in Europe. She described Putin's annexation of Crimea as reminiscent of Hitler.<sup>34</sup> She supported steps to shape events on the ground in Syria, including arming mainstream rebel forces. She warned that the Iran nuclear deal would only work "as part of a larger strategy toward Iran" that contained its influence in the region.<sup>35</sup> And she has long been more willing to tend to alliance relationships than President Obama.

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There is another important distinction. Clinton is far more comfortable with the US foreign policy establishment than either Obama or Bush. In many ways, she is a creature of it. She calls on the major think tanks and Washington luminaries for advice. During the campaign, she received the formal backing of dozens of Republican foreign policy experts and practitioners as well as the whole Democratic foreign policy elite. This may provide her with an opportunity to build a bipartisan foreign policy team if elected. Clinton is much more likely to harness the power of the foreign policy establishment than to do battle with them.

It is clear Clinton will pursue an internationalist foreign policy. It is not clear what brand of internationalism she will adopt. However, the likelihood is that if she departs from President Obama's world view, it will be to place a greater priority on geopolitical competition and the future of regional orders. This is not to say that she will do less on global issues. She will build on the Obama administration's approach to climate change, counterterrorism, and nuclear non-proliferation but it will be through the prism of geopolitics rather than the prism of global issues.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF A CLINTON FOREIGN POLICY FOR ASIA AND EUROPE

Asia is the region where Clinton's and Obama's approaches converge. The United States will continue to increase its engagement with, and presence in, Asia, in particular with its allies in the region. Australia and Japan will be major beneficiaries given the close ties between both countries and the Clinton team. There may be an opportunity for Clinton to co-opt some Republican foreign policy experts, such as former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage who backed her in the primary. With regard to China, a Clinton administration will be intent on sending a firm message early on about America's persistent role in preserving the rules-based order in the South China Sea. We are likely to see increased and continuing freedom of navigation operations as well as other measures to demonstrate that the United States is committed to preserving its influence in the region.

Clinton will likely use Trump's unexpected success to ask allies to do more. She will argue for greater cooperation between Asian allies, particularly Japan and South Korea, as well as for increased defence spending and more efforts by allies to upholding the regional order beyond each country's vital interests. She may argue that failure to do this will ensure that alliances remain controversial, and therefore vulnerable, in the US political debate.

The fate of the TPP under a Clinton administration is unclear. Asian allies can take some comfort in the fact that Clinton is aware of the importance of the agreement for America's influence in Asia. If the TPP is not ratified in the lame duck session of Congress, it will become an early litmus test of Clinton's foreign policy. It will be difficult for Clinton to reverse herself on the TPP but it may be possible to link the agreement to progress on other economic issues — particularly currency — so it addresses some of the concerns raised in the course of the campaign.

A Clinton presidency would be very familiar to Europeans. Clinton has a greater emotional attachment to the transatlantic alliance than President Obama, largely because she comes from a generation that saw Europe as central to US security but also as she has close ties to the region from her time as Secretary of State. The Clinton team sees European integration as a long-term US interest that is now endangered, so we can expect them to look for constructive ways of increasing US engagement with the European Union — on Brexit, refugees, and Russia. As in Asia, Clinton is likely to use the shock of 2016 to press European nations to increase defence spending and to play a more active role in the world — something that will be particularly difficult to accomplish given the level of introspection that will follow the Brexit vote. Perhaps the most important measure of success will be whether a Clinton administration can succeed where the Obama administration failed and persuade Germany to prioritise economic growth over fiscal austerity and balanced budgets. The 2017 German election may provide an opportunity.

*Clinton will likely use Trump's unexpected success to ask allies to do more.*

## HAS SOMETHING CHANGED IN AMERICA?

Perhaps the most important question arising from the 2016 election is whether the surge in populism and nationalism will have a lasting impact on the United States, even if Clinton wins. Are we returning to a pre-World War II mindset where the United States questions its global role and seeks to divest itself of the commitments it has accumulated over seven decades? Certainly there is reason to believe that the populist phenomenon is greater than Trump. Ted Cruz was the first candidate in the Republican primary to describe his foreign policy as 'America First' and take a decidedly nationalist position. In the Democratic Party, Bernie Sanders wanted to reduce America's role in the world and criticised President Obama for doing too much. Most importantly of all, Obama has pursued a foreign policy that deliberately sought to place greater limits on US engagement. All of these approaches — Trump, Cruz, Sanders, and

Obama — are dramatically different but they share one thing in common. None of them seek to significantly increase America’s role in upholding the international security order. And, there is a significant portion of the public that agrees. In 2016, the Pew Research Group found that just 37 per cent of Americans say the US “should help other countries deal with their problems”, while a majority (57 per cent) say the nation should “deal with its own problems and let other countries deal with their problems the best they can”.<sup>36</sup>

This desire to limit US engagement in the world should not be treated as such a great surprise. It is deeply rooted in the American political tradition, even if it is not well represented in the foreign policy establishment. The mystery may be why it took so long to re-emerge. The invasion of Iraq, the global financial crisis, and low levels of growth may well have caused Americans to have a change of heart. Trump’s foreign policy is crude and rough around the edges but it resonates because it reflects these concerns. And this is the question that much of the rest of the world will be asking: is 2016 evidence of decreasing US commitment to upholding the international order? It is, of course, impossible to predict. However, there are some signs to watch out for.

*This desire to limit US engagement in the world ...is deeply rooted in the American political tradition...*

The first is the tone of the presidential rhetoric in the world. One of the most common criticisms of Obama by those who want him to do more internationally is that he is in a feedback loop with the American people. He tells them that there are limits to what the United States can do and engagement in Syria or some other crisis spot is hopeless. They believe him. He can then point to the fact that he has public support. The critics say that a president who makes a clear case for action is capable of building and sustaining popular support for it. There is certainly support for this argument in American history. If Clinton is elected, she is more likely to explicitly make the case for increased US engagement so we will find out if the argument continues to hold.

The second is the fate of the two major political parties. If Trump is defeated, will Republicans recoil from his message and return to an internationalist world view? Or will the rising stars in the Republican Party conclude that Trump’s message, or some version of it, may be a winning one if the messenger was more politically adept and less self-obsessed? It is noteworthy that younger Republican politicians such as Senator Tom Cotton who were assumed to be neo-conservative in outlook backed Trump and claimed to even share his views on NATO.<sup>37</sup> Democrats have their own internal issues. Will the party support Clinton’s internationalism or will a nationalist successor to Sanders emerge with an inwardly focused foreign policy message and become a powerful force in the 2020 primary?

The third is how America’s allies react. The 2016 campaign should be a wake-up call. Successive administrations have called on allies to increase defence spending and to take on a greater share of the burden but with limited success. A Clinton administration will surely argue that the fact that

Trump did so well shows that alliances are now a political issue and cannot be taken for granted. If the allies step up, spend more on defence, cooperate more with each other, and play a proactive role in upholding the international order, future presidents can persuasively argue to the American public that the alliance system is working. If, on the other hand, allies do less, alliances will continue to be controversial.

The final sign is in relation to the international economic climate. If the global economy returns to robust and sustained growth, it will be easier for the US president, and other world leaders, to justify support for free trade and continued economic integration. If, on the other hand, growth is low or the world is faced with a new global financial crisis, the strain on internationalism will be severe. We may be headed for a new era of protectionism, with the predictable downward pressure effects on growth and renewed support within the United States for a foreign policy of retrenchment.

## CONCLUSION

As of October 2016, there is a virtual consensus in the foreign policy community in the United States and among US allies that Donald Trump poses a significant threat to US national security and to the international order. In astonishing and unprecedented scenes, dozens of Republicans who served at the highest levels of government have denounced their party's nominee. In a polarised society, this could only happen at a moment of great danger to American democracy and its national interest. Under no other circumstance could one imagine so many people crossing the aisle to vote for a member of the other party.

The effects of the 2016 election will play out over the next four years and perhaps longer. If Clinton wins, she will have an opportunity to build on the support she received from Republicans, especially on national security, to re-create the bipartisan consensus on foreign policy. Her toughest mission will be to re-convince the American people as to the merits of increased US engagement to strengthen both the security and economic components of the liberal international order.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Based on off-the-record conversations with four ambassadors of major US allies in Europe and Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Ted Cruz was the first candidate in 2016 to call his foreign policy an ‘America First’ approach. Several writers subsequently used the term to describe Trump’s world view. My article of January 2016 drew a parallel between Trump and the America First organisation associated with Charles Lindbergh: see Thomas Wright, “Trump’s 19th Century Foreign Policy”, *Politico Magazine*, 20 January 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-foreign-policy-213546?o=0>. Ian Bremmer used the term ‘America First’ in March 2016. Then David Sanger put it to Trump in an interview in April. The day after he heard it from Sanger, Trump began to use it on the stump.

<sup>4</sup> The letter appeared in all three newspapers on 2 September 1987: see <https://ak-hdl.buzzfed.com/static/2015-07/10/17/enhanced/webdr02/enhanced-12123-1436563120-13.png>.

<sup>5</sup> “A Transcript of Donald Trump’s meeting with the Washington Post’s Editorial Board”, *The Washington Post*, 21 March 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/21/a-transcript-of-donald-trumps-meeting-with-the-washington-post-editorial-board/>.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Gass, “Trump: US Better Off Ignoring the Middle East”, *Politico*, 21 April 2016, <http://www.politico.com/blogs/2016-gop-primary-live-updates-and-results/2016/04/trump-ignore-middle-east-222255>.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Trump, “Donald Trump Delivers Foreign Policy Speech”, Remarks to the Center for the National Interest, 27 April 2016, <http://cftni.org/recent-events/donald-trump-delivers-foreign-policy-speech/>.

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<sup>9</sup> Geoff Dyer, “Donald Trump Threatens to Pull US Out of WTO”, *Financial Times*, 25 July 2016, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d97b97ba-51d8-11e6-9664-e0bdc13c3bef.html#axzz4Ga7T5HJr>.

<sup>10</sup> Jesse Byrnes, “Trump: ‘Who the Hell Cares if There’s a Trade War?’”, *The Hill*, 19 May 2016, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/280640-trump-who-the-hell-cares-if-theres-a-trade-war>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> “Full Transcript: Donald Trump’s Jobs Plan Speech”, *Politico*, 28 June 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/full-transcript-trump-job-plan-speech-224891>.

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