LEADING A NEW WORLD ORDER

Meeting the Challenges to U.S. Power in the 21st Century

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Executive Summary

Today’s world is one of threats and challenges to the United States and the liberal international order. Some of these challenges, including the increasing power of non-state actors and a rising China poised to overtake the United States, will require creativity and flexibility. On the other hand, some of the present threats are more familiar: a belligerent Russia, anti-Americanism, and instability in the Middle East. In the face of a myriad of challenges to U.S. power in a new world order, this report provides recommendations to U.S. policymakers to maintain U.S. leadership for the benefit of the United States and the world.

Pillar 1: International Economic System

Pillar 1 explains how the United States can best uphold the international economic system, and why it should do so. The weaknesses and shortcomings of the international economic order as it stands today have created fertile ground for the rise of populism that threatens the existence of this order. To save this order from the protectionism and mercantilism promised by populists, several major changes are necessary to address these weaknesses and shortcomings. Implementing these changes requires global leadership, and while this leadership does not necessarily have to come from the United States, it is in the United States’ best interest to step into this leadership position rather than cede authority to other powers.

Recommendations: The United States should pursue an international agreement on the domestic distribution of gains from trade, promote a progressive trade policy, and accommodate new institutions and reforms based on rules.

Pillar 2: American Values and Soft Power

Pillar 2 expands upon the importance of promoting American values and soft power, and argues U.S. public diplomacy and foreign aid programs should be retooled to build an international environment receptive to U.S. policy. The United States can further assert global leadership through the strategic use of its soft power tools. While the United States remains an unparalleled military and economic power, its soft power will prove essential in achieving these goals with minimal resources and effort. A comprehensive U.S. strategy for global leadership should use public diplomacy and foreign development aid to demonstrate to both foreign publics and state officials that the United States will lead in supporting democratic values and human rights.
Pillar 3: Relationships Challenging U.S. Power: China, Russia, and the Middle East

Pillar 3 focuses on three important challenges to U.S. power and influence in the twenty-first century: China, Russia, and the Middle East. China presents long-term challenges to U.S. power, while Russia presents relatively short-term challenges. The United States needs to identify the paths forward with both of these states to best ensure the maintenance of American interests and regional stability. The Middle East is a region rife with challenges but ripe with opportunities; with carefully crafted, targeted policies with a long-term vision, the United States can mitigate short-term threats while also achieving long-term stability in the region.

Recommendations: For China, the United States should support integration based on liberal rules, stand firm in the South and East China Seas, strengthen ties to U.S. allies and partners, and reframe the narrative around U.S. leadership in Asia at both official and grassroots levels. With Russia, the United States should seek greater cooperation where national interests converge, manage conflict where national interests diverge, and pursue strategic patience while resolutely promoting U.S. values. In the Middle East, the United States should counter violent extremism through development initiatives, encourage space for legitimate opposition, and build relationships with non-violent political Islamist movements—including the Muslim Brotherhood.
Table of Acronyms

AIIB  Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN  Association of Southeast Asian Nations
FLEX  Future Leaders Exchange
FTA  Free Trade Agreement
GATT  General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
GVC  Global Value Chain
IMF  International Monetary Fund
ISIL  The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LNG  Liquefied Natural Gas
MFN  Most-Favored Nation
NAFTA  North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDCs  Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
PRC  People’s Republic of China
TPP  Trans-Pacific Partnership
TTIP  Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UN  United Nations
UNFCCC  United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC  United Nations Security Council
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WTO  World Trade Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Today’s world is one of threats and challenges to the United States and the liberal international order. Some of these challenges, including the increasing power of non-state actors and a rising China poised to overtake the United States, will require creativity and flexibility. On the other hand, some of the present threats are more familiar: a belligerent Russia, anti-Americanism, and instability in the Middle East. Addressing these threats requires taking policies that were successful in the past and retooling them for today’s security environment—as well as recognizing the limits of repeating policies and implementing more creative initiatives when necessary.

The best way to mitigate these threats is to maintain and strengthen the U.S.-led international system. This system not only reflects and serves U.S. interests, but also shapes the preferences and values of other states, cementing U.S. power worldwide.¹ The liberal international economic order that the United States led the world in establishing after World War II has weathered geopolitical tumult in an increasingly globalized world and has served to protect American primacy, ensuring that America truly does come first. It is crucial that this system remains resilient.

The United States can further fulfill its interests through international engagement and the use of soft power. In a world increasingly interconnected by technology, communication, and trade, maintaining the security of U.S. interests abroad—and at home—requires efforts to shape global opinion to be more amenable to American policy. In a friendlier international environment, the United States can better ensure the safety of its own citizens at home and abroad, and can more easily implement mutually beneficial deals and arrangements with other countries. But in unfriendly environments, the United States will have more difficulty leading negotiations and protecting its interests.

China, Russia, and the Middle East present formidable challenges to U.S. leaders. Strengthening U.S. leadership, maintaining the U.S.-led international system, and focusing on greater engagement through soft power will help address these challenges. China poses the most complex and comprehensive state-based challenge to U.S. power in the long term. Russia has mounted a determined and unrivaled direct challenge to American geopolitical interests and primacy. U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has traditionally privileged security over human rights, democratic norms, and political inclusion. While a focus on security may be an effective short-

term solution, without substantial governance reforms, security will likely worsen in the long term.

This paper provides recommendations to U.S. policymakers to maintain U.S. leadership in a new world order. The paper is divided into three main sections. Pillar 1 explains how the United States can best uphold the international economic system, and why it should do so. Pillar 2 expands upon the importance of promoting American values and soft power, and argues that public diplomacy and foreign aid programs should be retooled to build an international environment receptive to U.S. policy. Pillar 3 focuses on three regions presenting challenges to U.S. power and influence: China, Russia, and the Middle East.

In integrating these recommendations into policy, policymakers should be aware that implementing all recommendations may not be feasible due to resource limitations, either as single initiatives or as a complete package. Further, policymakers must recognize that there are tradeoffs between the recommendations, for example, between promoting American values and handling difficult state-to-state relationships with pragmatic action. However, policymakers should be certain to address all three of these pillars to meet the challenges to U.S. power in the twenty-first century.

**PILLAR 1: INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

The liberal economic order has been intertwined with U.S. strategic interests since its inception following World War II, as the architects behind U.S. postwar strategy protected and strengthened the links between Europe’s ability to trade with the United States and the latter’s strategic interests. The Marshall Plan operationalized this conviction: rather than hoarding the benefits of the peace dividend that resulted from the Allied victory and the United States’ largely unscathed domestic infrastructure, the Truman administration saw value in allocating over $12 billion² (approximately $120 billion in 2017 dollars)³ for the reconstruction of the European continent, including of defeated powers like Germany. Far from conceiving of this as an act of charity, then-Secretary of State George C. Marshall drew a clear link between U.S. aid to Europe and American strategic interests by stipulating that only governments friendly to the American vision of a postwar order would receive aid.⁴

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Similarly, then-Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson emphasized that U.S.-led efforts to establish the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and to expand the capacity of the Export-Import Bank were first and foremost to promote U.S. interests and ensure U.S. national security.\(^5\) Humanitarianism was only a secondary concern. In a 1945 *Foreign Affairs* piece explaining the Bretton Woods process, moreover, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. drew a direct parallel between economic stability and political stability. “Political and economic security from aggression are indivisible,” he advised, “and a sound program for peace must achieve both.”\(^6\)

The mainstream foreign policy consensus in Washington has continued through recent years to link the liberal economic order to U.S. power. The primary objective of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, was to reward pro-U.S. governments—not to gain significant economic advantages for the United States.\(^7\) The United States pursued Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) for similar purposes: with Jordan, to strategically balance its FTA with Israel; with Oman, in response to attacks of September 11, 2001, despite the absence of a compelling economic incentive; and with Singapore, which already had few meaningful barriers to trade.\(^8\) The primary motivation for all of these FTAs was strategic rather than economic. Most recently, in discussing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said that he considered the agreement to carry the same national security significance as an additional aircraft carrier.\(^9\)

The weaknesses and shortcomings of the international economic order as it stands today have created fertile ground for the rise of populism that threatens the existence of this order. Moreover, as the global economic landscape has shifted towards multipolarity, U.S. economic strategy needs to accommodate other centers of wealth and power. To save this order from the protectionism promised by populists and the challenge of rising powers, several major changes are necessary to address the system’s weaknesses and shortcomings. Implementing these changes requires global leadership, and while this leadership does not necessarily have to come from the

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\(^7\) Andrew Shoyer, partner and co-chair for international trade practice, Sidley Austin LLP, in-person interview with Benjamin Linden, February 23, 2017.

\(^8\) Ibid.

United States, it is in the United States’ best interest to step into this leadership position rather than ceding authority to China or other powers.

Our recommendations therefore seek to address current weaknesses in an economic order that has benefited American interests for more than seventy years. The first major shortcoming is the failure of the current global economic system to adequately facilitate domestic distribution of gains from trade amidst continued trade liberalization. We propose addressing this through an international agreement to coordinate the domestic distribution of gains from trade. The second shortcoming is the failure of this system to accommodate the rise of emerging economies. This can be addressed by accommodating new global economic institutions and focusing on how they impact global rules and openness. The final shortcoming is the failure of the system to adapt to the evolution of the global value chain (GVC).10 We suggest addressing this by negotiating regional agreements with like-minded partners and focusing on deeper regulatory integration.

The United States should pursue an international agreement on the domestic distribution of gains from trade, promote a progressive trade policy, and accommodate new institutions and reforms on the basis of rules.

Pursue an international agreement on the domestic distribution of gains from trade.

The United States must begin treating the distribution of gains from trade as a primary concern, not as an afterthought to negotiated trade agreements. The international community must treat the domestic distribution of gains from trade as a systemic issue in need of an internationally-coordinated response, on par with other transnational issues like environmental degradation, human

10 We define the global value chain as the basket of all the individuals involved in the production of a good or service.
trafficking, terrorism, and the spread of infectious disease. Isolated national-level approaches have failed; a new multilateral approach is required to monitor and enforce the distribution of gains from trade.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as adopted in December 2015, provides a useful model for such a multilateral approach to the domestic distribution of gains from trade. The UNFCCC uses Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to which states commit and enforce at the national level. The NDCs thus serve as voluntary commitments for domestic policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The arrangement uses a public registry to track NDCs and relies on pressure from within the countries and reputational factors from the international community, including naming and shaming, to hold parties to account.\(^\text{11}\)

Such a model could be applied to the domestic distribution of gains from trade. Parties to such an agreement would be required to present a plan to distribute a portion of the gains from trade from the industries that benefit most to the stakeholders in the sectors, industries, and geographical locations most vulnerable to economic injury from trade liberalization. The forms of this distribution would depend entirely on the domestic policies and politics of the country in question, and as such will be sensitive to those countries’ political and bureaucratic realities—but the distribution mechanisms would have to be transparent.

For the distribution of gains from trade to be effective under a UNFCCC model, there would have to be an emerging global consensus that this issue represents a global public good, much like efforts to combat human trafficking, terrorism, and the spread of infectious disease. This consensus would take time to form, but it could be facilitated by responsible leaders who effectively communicate the importance of both free trade and the distribution of gains from trade.

While some would consider such an agreement to be a violation of national sovereignty, it is worth emphasizing that this agreement, like the UNFCCC, is voluntary on the part of its members. Furthermore, much more intrusive international institutions with legally binding authority, from the WTO to the International Criminal Court, have gained widespread acceptance over time.

*Promote a progressive trade policy.*

U.S. trade diplomacy should focus on creating deeper trade agreements beyond the issues of market access. The United States should work with like-minded partners and allies to create a

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trade agreement framework that governs issues of cross-border data protection, labor protection, environmental regulation, intellectual property, and dispute settlement. Setting the bar high will be a first in historical trade negotiations, which have failed to approach these areas comprehensively in a way that reflects changes in the global production chain. Currently, the U.S. economy is relatively open in terms of tariffs, foreign direct investment, and offshoring compared to other economies, while other economies are relatively closed. Taking the lead in shaping global standards on these issues would reinvigorate leadership in expanding the global economic architecture.

This approach is manifested in previously negotiated deals such as the TPP and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In the current political context, returning to both options may be unfeasible. At the same time, negotiation efforts only pointed at bilateral agreements are outdated given that global value chains operate in multi-country networks. The best option would be to negotiate deals using similar language in the TPP and TTIP among a handful of partners from smaller developing economies in addition to developed economies or security allies. Working with developing economies is particularly key in this context to avoid future criticism that the negotiated deal is irrelevant in their context.

*Accommodate new institutions and reforms based on rules.*

The United States should accommodate leadership by emerging economies and reorganize global institutions to accommodate their rise. This is best manifested in a two pronged-approach that firstly encourages leadership and participation by emerging economies in global economic governance and, secondly, focuses on ensuring that new countries do not undermine the rules-based, open economic system.

Specifically, the United States should continue previous diplomatic efforts that shift high-level discussions of global economic governance from the G7 to the G20. Although switching from a G7/G8 framework to a G20 framework has arguably made consensus building more difficult, U.S. commitment in upgrading the G20 discussion to a leader’s summit has allowed for effective policy responses and maintained stability in the global financial system.

The United States should also continue to advocate and lead efforts for stronger rules in new global economic agreements, World Trade Organization (WTO) mechanisms, trade remedies, and financial regulations. U.S. economic diplomacy has followed a traditional rules-based approach
over unilateral action in forcing other countries to change economic policies. While effective, this effort should be bolstered by stronger enforcement mechanisms and multilateral consultations on economic policies to strengthen the rules-based order. Although it is recognized that forcing other economies to change policies is difficult, the U.S. should continue to exert pressure during negotiations and continue to participate in bilateral and multilateral economic dialogues to monitor progress.

Finally, the United States should praise and encourage efforts made by China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) while emphasizing the necessity of open governance, transparency, and a rules-based approach. Recognizing the need for additional development funding globally, the United States should act in an advisory role and provide a check on corrupt borrowing. A zero-sum U.S. response to AIIB that condemns the new institution challenges U.S. legitimacy in leading the global economic system. In this context, the United States should return to emphasizing the principles of an open, rules-based order through measured support for AIIB.

**PILLAR 2: AMERICAN VALUES AND SOFT POWER**

U.S. leadership in championing human rights norms and democratic reforms will be a critical component in asserting U.S. global leadership in the future and countering revisionist powers. The global trend towards democratization, typified by Samuel Huntington’s description of the third wave of democratization in 1991 and Francis Fukuyama’s forecast of the “end of history” in 1992, has stalled in the twenty-first century.\(^\text{12}\) According to Freedom House, 2016 marked the eleventh consecutive year of overall declines in global freedom.\(^\text{13}\) The rise of communist China and its increasing economic power, as well as of illiberal democracies such as Russia, pose increasingly influential alternatives to the liberal democratic Western model.

U.S. rhetoric regarding human rights and democratic reform has not always aligned with its actions. This mixed record of upholding individual freedoms hinders U.S. credibility, invites accusations of hypocrisy, and ultimately decreases U.S. power and influence. The United States must claim its role as a global leader through consistent, concerted efforts to uphold universal freedoms and encourage citizens’ participation in choosing their political leaders. While the United States remains an unparalleled military and economic power, its soft power will prove essential in


achieving these goals with minimal resources and effort.

Soft power tools, in particular public diplomacy and foreign aid, have formed critical components of American soft power since World War II. During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers increasingly realized the strategic value of providing authentic and transparent news and public relations through public diplomacy. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, public diplomacy took on new importance for the United States. These attacks served as a wake-up call for the United States, reminding us that perception, as well as policy, matters. Since then, the United States has devoted significant additional resources to public diplomacy and has re-calibrated its public diplomacy budget to accurately reflect foreign policy priorities.

Alongside public diplomacy, foreign aid has proven a potent tool in the United States’ soft power arsenal. The Truman Doctrine, which President Truman first articulated in a speech before Congress in 1947, laid out a general framework for foreign aid; any country threatened by Soviet communism would receive American support. The Marshall Plan, as discussed in Pillar 1, represented a critical operationalization of this doctrine and demonstrated the linkage between foreign aid and American power.

Yet foreign aid has always run the risk of prioritizing security—as defined in terms of American interests—over support for American values of democracy and human rights. For example, Cold War-era support for authoritarian regimes in Latin America continues to haunt the United States, giving ammunition to anti-American governments that seek to paint any U.S. intervention as a form of neo-imperialism. U.S. financial support for authoritarian Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi further reflects the risks of a security-focused approach toward aid. The United States first gave aid to Egypt, to the tune of $1.3 billion, to support the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Agreement. The United States offered Israel $3.2 billion in military aid to support that same agreement. Even though both parties no longer require aid to adhere to the agreement, the United States still transfers over $4.5 billion to these states annually. This is over 75% of all foreign military aid the United States offers. Yet these funds have provided the United States little


leverage with the Sisi government, which continues to stifle political opposition.

U.S. policymakers often note the existing tensions between promoting democratic reform and ensuring regional strategic interests, particularly security and stability. However, these issues are converging in many parts of the world. Harsh government crackdowns on domestic civil society and opposition movements within a state will adversely impact the long-term security of that state by forcing opposition activists underground. Many of these individuals will see violent struggle as the only viable means through which to exercise opposition to the state. U.S. policymakers therefore need to rethink the relationship between democratic values and strategic interests. A comprehensive U.S. strategy for global leadership should use public diplomacy and foreign development aid to demonstrate to both foreign publics and state officials that the United States will lead in supporting democratic values and human rights.

**Public Diplomacy**

As the United States navigates an interconnected geopolitical landscape, it is vital that U.S. interests and values are well received abroad in order to develop a strong foundation for advocating U.S. policy. By pursuing a robust public diplomacy strategy while simultaneously cultivating ties between governments, the United States can take both top-down and bottom-up approaches toward promoting policy. These two levels work in tandem, as the public can influence cooperation at the executive level. Furthermore, recent events such as the Arab Spring, Brexit, and the spread of populism in Europe highlight the need for transparent communication in the post-9/11 era. As citizens fight for influence over the proceedings of their governments, it is imperative that the United States engages with foreign publics.

Despite the possibility for long-term returns on investment, public diplomacy continues to draw a small fraction of funding from the U.S. government. In fiscal year 2015, the combined budget for core public diplomacy efforts and the activities of the Broadcasting Board of Governors amounted to $1.849 billion, 3.56% of the entire International Affairs Budget.\(^\text{16}\) While this is a marginal increase from previous years, it provides a limited framework in which public diplomacy practitioners both in Washington and abroad are expected to foster mutual trust and promote U.S. values with foreign publics. In order to maintain positive influence abroad, it is imperative that the U.S. government continues to support public diplomacy. The United States should encourage

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mutual understanding between countries and foster the spread of liberal values by supporting public diplomacy exchanges, including both bringing foreign students and professionals to the United States and sending Americans abroad.

However, this is not to say that public diplomacy is the answer for all diplomatic crises, nor is the government the only purveyor of American values. Successful public diplomacy is predicated upon good policy, and when American foreign policy is not well-received, Hollywood can be more successful in broadcasting the American brand than the Public Affairs Section of an embassy. Citizen diplomacy is also a valuable tool for furthering U.S. values abroad, as private individuals often have more resources and less restrictions than the government. It should also not be assumed that direct engagement with the United States will lead to favorable consideration abroad. Rather, by carrying out public diplomacy, the U.S. is signaling that it has something unique to offer the global community that can be communicated through authentic and transparent engagement.

The United States should continue to facilitate study to the United States and should support exchanges for targeted audiences.
Continue to facilitate study to the United States.

The United States is a top destination for international students, and education remains a major source of foreign attraction to the United States. Opening the United States to foreign youth is an opportunity for authentic exposure to American culture and values and allows students to develop an informed opinion of the United States. Once students return to their home countries, they will likely share their experiences, multiplying the distribution of American values.

Through education, the United States is able to not only target youth abroad, but also build cooperative relationships with foreign governments and industry. For China, the 328,547 students studying in the United States have created a foundation of mutual interest that has paved the way for otherwise untenable civil society partnerships.\textsuperscript{17} EducationUSA, overseen by the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, collaborates with Chinese media to publish information about upcoming events, thereby penetrating the closed media market. Furthermore, EducationUSA utilizes social media to directly interact with Chinese students and families and serves as a trusted resource for educational opportunities in the United States. Therefore, the United States should continue to use education to exert influence over foreign youth, and view study in the United States as a means of directly and authentically disseminating American values.

Support exchanges for targeted audiences.

U.S.-funded exchanges have enjoyed great success on the international stage, with many influential leaders among their alumni. Continued support of youth and professional exchanges allows the U.S. Government to engage with targeted populations on collaborative issues, fostering global ties and encouraging future cooperation.

Many public diplomacy exchanges target emerging leaders with the hope that they will rise to prominence in their countries, presumably with a favorable view of the United States. Department of State alumni records attest that 565 heads of foreign governments, 105 Pulitzer Prize winners, 82 Nobel Prize winners, 89 members of the U.S. Congress, 26 heads of international organizations, and 58 ambassadors to the UN have taken part in U.S. Government-sponsored exchanges.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, it is essential that the United States continue its strategic engagement with prominent individuals, further tying U.S. public diplomacy interests to foreign policy priorities.


Foreign Aid

Foreign aid promotes national security by helping to defeat the root causes of conflict, including fighting terrorism, stabilizing weak states, and promoting regional-level security and global stability. Foreign aid promotes prosperity and self-reliance by encouraging economic development and private enterprise in aid-recipient countries, as well as opening and developing international markets for the United States. America’s commitment to foreign aid reflects not only the nation’s moral character, but also its economic and strategic interests. American taxpayers contributed $5.9 billion in foreign military financing in 2014, per the government’s Foreign Assistance report.\(^\text{19}\) Israel ($3.1 billion) and Egypt ($1.3 billion) received roughly three-quarters of all foreign military aid money the United States distributed last year. This amounts to only 4% of all United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assistance, with most funds assisting universities, NGOs, and contractors.\(^\text{20}\)

Approximately 76% of the world receives some form of economic assistance from the United States. Currently, the majority of recipients are in Africa and the Middle East, but depending on future geopolitical events, this allocation is subject to change. However, the approximate $33 billion in requests in aid follow a similar geographic allocation. The United States should reevaluate

\(^{19}\) Congressional Budget Justification—Foreign Assistance (Washington, DC: United States Department of State, 2015).

its foreign aid allocation practices to ensure that aid works to serve U.S. foreign policy objectives and functions as a source of soft power.

The United States should focus on the implementation and enforcement of conditionality clauses and prioritize programs that target non-governmental partners and foreign publics.

Focus on the implementation and enforcement of conditionality clauses.

Our aid agreements with foreign regimes often include conditionality clauses that focus on issues such as democracy promotion, human rights, open market economic policies, and free speech. Congress can withhold aid or revoke assistance if it determines that these conditions are not met—however, this rarely occurs. While the United States often has strategic interests in making security assistance available to authoritarian regimes with counterterrorism concerns, especially in volatile regions, Washington must put a higher premium on American values. Without serious enforcement of conditionality, the United States risks losing a powerful leverage point, credibility, and flexibility.

It is also critical not to lose track of why aid, especially military aid, is proposed in the first place. If aid is offered to support a foreign policy outcome, the aid conditions must continue to address that outcome. For aid to be most effective, it needs to be flexible and conditional. In the same vein, crafting conditional policies that are realistic, achievable, and measurable will allow recipients a chance to show progress. Egypt provides an example of an approach in need of reevaluation. Originally intended to support the nascent and fragile Egyptian-Israeli Peace Agreement in 1979, annual U.S. aid has not diminished despite sustained Egyptian-Israeli peace. Aid to Egypt is conditional on Cairo’s adherence to the peace agreement, but also on democracy promotion, human rights, and economic liberalization. While Egypt continues to cooperate with Israel, there has been a marked decline in all other conditions. Previous years have seen especially poor performance on all fronts, with a failing economy, significant human rights abuses, and a repressive political climate.

Prioritize programs that target non-governmental partners and foreign publics.

Foreign governments are traditionally the main recipients of U.S. foreign aid—especially

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security assistance. However, military aid should be balanced with economic aid to better promote American values. With economic aid, the government is the right partner for some initiatives, but not for all, and citizens, not just the state, have valid ideas about how to develop and improve their country. By working more closely with non-governmental partners, the United States can greatly expand the reach of foreign aid and bolster the United States’ reputation in the public eye.

A focus on providing aid and programming to the most vulnerable populations (as opposed to the business or elite classes), increases U.S. legitimacy as an honest broker in development matters and enables the United States to leverage its reputation. USAID reaches more publics around the world than any other U.S. government agency. The United States should communicate the purpose and nature of U.S.-funded initiatives to foreign publics whose governments and civil societies receive aid. Clearly and consistently communicating how and why the United States offers assistance helps combat anti-Americanism in the media.

PILLAR 3: RELATIONSHIPS CHALLENGING U.S. POWER

The United States should reevaluate its relationships with China, Russia, and the Middle East region. China presents long-term challenges to U.S. power, while Russia presents relatively short-term challenges, and it is necessary to identify the paths forward with both of these states to best ensure the maintenance of American interests and regional stability. The Middle East is a region rife with challenges but ripe with opportunities; with carefully crafted, targeted policies with a long-term vision, the United States can mitigate short-term threats while also achieving long-term stability in the region.

RISING CHINA

China poses the most complex and comprehensive state-based challenge to U.S. power in the long term. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the United States has struggled to incorporate a newly powerful state into its vision for world order.

Three events have defined modern U.S.-China relations. The first was President Nixon’s 1972 visit to China, which ended twenty-five years of reciprocal diplomatic boycotts. With the U.S. engagement in a global Cold War and the quagmire of Vietnam, a productive U.S.-China relationship was essential.23 The second was the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square. The event

set back a decade and a half of bilateral engagement. Human rights concerns began to color all aspects of the relationship. 24 Tiananmen undermined U.S. hopes that China would democratize, and some in Washington reverted to a Cold War mentality of containment.

The third event was China’s accession to the WTO. Despite the massacre of the Tiananmen, the idea of engagement continued to influence U.S. policy, especially after China joined the WTO in 2001. Engagement policy was best captured by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick’s 2005 speech calling on China to be a “responsible stakeholder.” 25 The idea of the responsible stakeholder set the tone for a decade of bilateral relations that were characterized by mutual recognition of the benefits of engagement, despite constant economic and geopolitical tensions.

However, in recent years some have called the “responsible stakeholder” model into question. China has begun to challenge the United States—and indeed the U.S.-led international order—in ways the engagement model failed to predict.

In the economic sphere, China’s export-based economy, integration into supply networks, and huge domestic market mean that world GDP growth is contingent upon China’s GDP growth. 26 However, China’s economic system relies on market protection, state-owned enterprises, and limitations on investment and ownership. The lack of transparency brings greater complexity and risk to the economic order, while the success of China’s economic model calls into question the principles of economic liberalism that the Bretton Woods institutions embody.

In the strategic sphere, China is poised to challenge U.S. preeminence in Asia. Since World War II, the hubs-and-spokes alliance system has upheld Asia’s peace and security. In contrast, China appears to desire a sphere of influence in Asia, which China’s 2015 Defense White Paper reflects. 27 China has undergone a rapid military modernization, increasing its military budget by around 10% per year to $214.7 billion a year. The military modernization has increased China’s capability to

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deny U.S. freedom of action in the Pacific theater, while China has built and militarized dredged islands in the South China Sea. China has also heavily criticized U.S. military alliances in Asia, and has attempted to lure partners such as the Philippines away from U.S. influence.

Finally, China is challenging the United States for regional and global leadership. China has called for an “Asia for Asians,” deeming the U.S. alliance system an anachronism of the Cold War; created alternative institutions such as the AIIB; and rejected major tenets of international law after the July 2016 ruling on the South China Sea. While these actions are concrete challenges to U.S. leadership, conflict also occurs on a rhetorical level. Recently, China has attempted to capitalize on a more isolationist U.S. administration by openly defending globalization and the Paris agreement on climate change.

This is far from contending that China is attempting to overturn the world order, however, China does pose an economic, strategic, and leadership challenge to U.S. preeminence in Asia.

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28 This strategy is formally known as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD); see McCarthy, Christopher J, “Anti-Access/Area Denial: The Evolution of Modern Warfare,” https://www.usnwc.edu/Lucent/OpenPdf.aspx?id=95.


The United States should support economic integration based on liberal rules, stand firm in the South and East China Seas, strengthen ties to U.S. allies and partners, and reframe the narrative around U.S. leadership in Asia at both official and grassroots levels.

Support economic integration based on liberal rules.

In the economic realm, the United States should promote a free, fair, and open trade system with high labor and environmental standards, as discussed in Pillar 1. Further, the United States should support China’s efforts to positively engage in this international economic order; IMF reform, the AIIB, and One Belt One Road initiatives can meet broad American objectives for international development as long as development is not tied to political compliance. However, support for China’s economic initiatives should be coupled with strong pressure to engage in fair trade practices, including: higher levels of economic transparency, decreased protectionism of domestic businesses, and promotion of intellectual property rights. By using the leverage of support for PRC initiatives, the United States can strengthen China’s integration into the international economic order while reducing the moral hazard in China’s economy.

Stand firm in the South and East China Seas.

The South and East China Seas are critical litmus tests for U.S. credibility in protecting the liberal order from military threat. In these disputed areas, the United States should demonstrate its resolve in both words and deeds. The United States should continue to emphasize to all parties that claims should be made in compliance with international law, while conflicts should be resolved without resort to force. At every public and private opportunity, the United States should encourage Chinese behavior consistent with these principles. To demonstrate U.S. commitment to maritime law, the U.S. Navy should regularly complete freedom of navigation operations within twelve miles of China’s dredged islands. The United States should partner with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to negotiate the protection of sea-lanes and resource-sharing throughout the South China Sea; resisting China’s coercive tactics is key to negotiating an agreement. In the East China Sea, it is imperative that the United States continue to reiterate that islands under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands, fall under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Defense Treaty to deter provocative Chinese actions while demonstrating U.S. credibility to its allies. Finally, the United States should continue to concentrate forces in the region to emphasize
that the United States is a Pacific nation and a leader on regional security.

*Strengthen ties to U.S. allies and partners.*

To sustain the hubs-and-spokes system, which has served as a cornerstone of peace, stability, and prosperity of the region for nearly seven decades, the United States must strengthen cooperation and coordination with its allies and partners. First, the United States should strengthen economic, military, and cultural ties to traditional regional allies, with actions such as a FTA with Japan and arms sales to Taiwan. It is especially important to reinvigorate ties with the Philippines given its strategic importance and involvement in the South China Seas disputes; the United States must find ways to work with President Duterte. Second, the United States should encourage meaningful collaboration and policy coordination between its partners in Asia, especially between South Korea and Japan. Third, the United States should seek to strengthen ties with its Southeast Asian countries through trade and counterterrorism initiatives. Finally, the United States should resist Chinese attempts to turn Southeast Asia into “China’s Caribbean” by enhancing security cooperation with Vietnam and Indonesia. Strengthened ties to U.S. allies and partners will be essential in maintaining U.S. influence in Asia.

*Reframe the narrative around U.S. leadership in Asia.*

Resetting the narrative surrounding U.S. leadership in Asia is vital to winning hearts and minds across the region while preventing China from setting the standard for public discourse. In official settings, the United States should consistently state its status as a Pacific power that underwrites Asia’s security with a long-standing commitment to the region. Further, diplomatic efforts should emphasize that the United States seeks to strengthen an international order based on the rule of law with an unbending commitment to liberal values. On the grassroots level, the United States should support professional and educational exchanges in China, focusing on programs that develop lasting ties like the International Visitor Leadership Program and Fulbright. To build a foundation for China’s full integration into the U.S.-led liberal order, professional and educational exchanges are a powerful tool to help build mutual confidence and understanding with China’s future leaders. Further, such ties strengthen the narrative that China’s full incorporation into the liberal international order will benefit the development, prosperity, and stability of China itself.
Resurgent Russia

Russia represents the greatest short-term geopolitical threat to the United States. Russia has mounted a determined and unrivaled direct challenge to American geopolitical interests and primacy. The United States faces several geopolitical challengers across the world—China, Iran, North Korea—but only Russia has managed to use conventional, hybrid, and cyber warfare to successfully undermine U.S. institutions and frameworks and counter American policy priorities.

Since 2014, Russia has annexed Crimea, supported Ukrainian separatists, propped up the Assad regime in Syria, interfered in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, supported anti-establishment political parties in Europe, counseled authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, and sought to undermine the concepts of democracy and liberalism through the spread of propaganda and fake news in Western countries. Russia remains a considerable global power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with extensive natural resources, an impressive nuclear arsenal, and the world’s second-best military. President Vladimir Putin’s domination of Russia’s authoritarian political structure reinforces Russian revanchism despite economic stagnation and a declining power status.

The evolution of U.S.-Russian relations during the twenty-five years since the end of the Cold War provides guidance to American policymakers. In the 1990s, Russia was too weak to challenge U.S. interests, and begrudgingly acquiesced to the expansion of NATO into Central Europe and U.S. military campaigns in the former Yugoslavia. The turn of the century and arrival of new administrations in Moscow and Washington invited cooperation and hopes for a constructive partnership. In June 2001, George W. Bush asserted that he had gotten a “sense of [Vladimir Putin’s] soul” and expressed optimism for improved relations with Russia. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the two countries increased military cooperation and signed landmark nuclear arms control treaties.

Despite such progress, increasingly divergent national interests and a boom in commodity prices inspired the Kremlin to challenge U.S. hegemony. The invasion of Iraq without a UN mandate in 2003 and expansion of NATO to Russia’s borders in 2004 irked Moscow. Russian acquiescence to U.S. actions ended in August 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia following NATO’s support for eventual NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit.

31 “The End of Globalization or a more Multipolar World?” Credit Suisse, September 2015, 41.
The Obama administration maintained aspirations for a “reset” of relations. In their first meeting in March 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov with a literal “reset” button, unfortunately, but appropriately, mistranslated into Russian as “overload.”

Despite early enthusiasm for a constructive relationship, divergent interests in Libya, Syria, and, most importantly, Ukraine, led to a rapid deterioration of relations between the United States and Russia. Russia has developed a narrative that unilateral U.S. actions ignore Russian interests and undermine global stability.

The United States must respond to Russian actions in order to defend the existing international liberal order and protect U.S. interests and values. Based on the evidence of divergent interests and failed “resets,” the United States should pursue a pragmatic, transparent and patient Russia policy. A grand bargain with Russia is not desirable—the United States should not give up critical interests or compromise on longstanding values for the sake of cooperation with Russia—but a principled yet respectful approach could stabilize relations and limit Russian influence.

The United States should seek greater cooperation where national interests converge, manage conflict where national interests diverge, and pursue strategic patience with Russia and resolutely promote U.S. values.

Seek greater cooperation where U.S. and Russian interests converge.

In arenas where U.S. and Russian interests converge, the United States should seek greater cooperation with Russia. Potential avenues for cooperation lie in nuclear security, norm development in the Arctic, and combating terrorism.

First, as possessors of the two largest nuclear arsenals in the world, the United States and Russia should continue to enforce and expand bilateral nuclear arms control commitments. In this context, the United States should engage the same spirit of cooperation that created the Iran nuclear deal to enlist Russia’s help in containing North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.

Second, overlapping territorial claims in the Arctic necessitate cooperation. The United States should work with Russia and the six other Arctic Council member states to establish mutually beneficial policies and procedures in the region. The Arctic Council should capitalize on opportunities for cooperation to jointly protect shipping lanes, craft a unified disaster response, and promote mutual engagement on future energy resources.

Third, the United States and Russia both benefit from minimizing the influence of non-state terrorist groups that disrupt the existing world order. Both parties should therefore engage in greater information-sharing on terrorist networks and cooperate to constrain terrorist groups.

Manage conflict where national interests diverge.

Where U.S. and Russian national interests diverge, and particularly in Ukraine, Syria, Europe, and the realm of international norms, the United States should manage Russian revanchism and resolutely promote liberal institutions and values. In Ukraine, the greatest source of tension between the United States and Russia, the United States should insist that Russia terminate support to Ukrainian separatists and implement the Minsk II agreement. Without Russian cooperation, sanctions should remain in place. The United States should provide financial and institutional support to Ukraine to reinforce liberal institutions. In Syria, the United States should accept the limits of American influence and focus on combating ISIL and curbing refugee flows. The removal of President Assad should remain a long-term goal and is necessary for long-term stability in Syria,
but the United States should prioritize regional threats above regime change.

The United States must prioritize support to Europe to counter sustained Russian diplomatic and economic pressure. Europe must remain a privileged economic and military partner. The United States must reiterate an absolute commitment to NATO to reassure European allies. Without European support, sanctions against Russia would be ineffective. The United States should support European energy integration and promote U.S. LNG exports to curtail Russian influence over Europe’s natural gas market. The United States should also support European partners to limit Russian interference in European politics. Nevertheless, the United States should pressure NATO members to meet defense-spending obligations.

To blunt Russia’s asymmetric cyber and hybrid war capabilities, the United States should improve defensive capabilities and consistently embody liberal values. The United States should implement additional cyber security measures, including a two-step login process and mandatory computer safety training for all government and election campaign employees. The United States can best counter disinformation campaigns, spread through fake news and by trolls, by increasing political transparency and actively avoiding rhetorical entrapment by maintaining consistent policies; the United States is more susceptible to Russian disinformation campaigns when its statements or actions are inconsistent or hypocritical.

Pursue strategic patience with Russia and resolutely promote U.S. values.

The United States should pursue strategic patience as a long-term approach to Russia. American leaders should avoid the appeal of attempting another reset, and must understand that the bilateral relationship will not significantly improve in the short- to medium-term. Despite Russian opposition and subversion, the United States should resolutely promote liberal U.S. values through public diplomacy outreach to the Russian people while maintaining realistic expectations about U.S. influence over Russia. The United States should foster and nurture cultural and institutional ties with emerging Russian political and economic leaders through proven programs such as Fulbright English Teaching Assistantships, short-term journalist exchanges, the Russian FLEX program and EducationUSA Russia student exchanges. These cultural efforts may bear fruit in the long run due to the limited appeal of the rampant corruption and unaccountable authoritarian governance of the Putin regime.
Russia is neither a military nor an economic equal to the United States, and absent wrenching economic reforms, Russia will remain a volatile petro-state. The United States should not humiliate Russia by labeling it a regional power and should recognize the geostrategic implications of further eastward NATO expansion. The United States should continue to tailor sanctions regimes to prioritize Russia’s implementation of the Minsk II agreement and non-interference in Ukrainian affairs over the return of Crimea to Ukraine. Patient economic and diplomatic pressure on Russia, coupled with resolute support for established international norms and democratic and liberal values, might prevent a second Cold War.

Restive Middle East

U.S. strategy in the Middle East has long depended on continued engagement with authoritarian leaders. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and amidst the rise of ISIL and other extremist organizations, autocratic leaders in Arab states have arrested thousands of opposition members and increasingly cracked down on civil liberties and any form of oppositional political expression. The United States’ continued support for these regimes has slowly eroded U.S. relative power, influence, and legitimacy in the eyes of the Arab public. The erosion of U.S. influence is likely to continue as authoritarian leaders struggle to provide the subsidies and services that help ensure the political pacification of their people, as demographic changes put greater pressure on regimes to create new economic opportunities, and as Arab regimes enact more restrictive security measures and limits to civil liberties in the name of security and stability.

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has traditionally privileged security over human rights, democratic norms, and political inclusion. While a focus on security may be an effective short-term solution, without substantial governance reforms, security will likely worsen in the long term. Violent struggle will become a more attractive option if it becomes increasingly clear that peaceful institutional participation of individuals looking to reform the system either does not yield benefits or is prohibited. In a state of heightened repression, those opposed to their rulers will only find space to maneuver underground.

As discussed in Pillar 2, the United States has deployed foreign aid—perhaps most notably that given to Egypt—in support of secular autocrats throughout in the region, even as other U.S. efforts have sought to build democratic institutions. Aid that does circumvent these autocrats to
support the democratic opposition has traditionally bypassed Islamist parties in favor of liberal opposition movements. Today’s supercharged regional environment makes it even more crucial to assess whether this approach to foreign aid and to foreign policy in the region more broadly is working.

The United States needs a comprehensive, long-term strategy in the Middle East that looks beyond short-term security engagement with authoritarian regimes. A long-term strategy should consider the possibility of substantial governance shifts in these countries given increasing economic and demographic pressures and should work to rebuild U.S. legitimacy among Arab publics, who are likely to play an increasing role in the politics of their respective countries. Development plays a key role in this approach, as does engagement with both Arab rulers and all popular opposition movements to bolster U.S. legitimacy and create the conditions for strong governance institutions.

The United States should counter violent extremism through development initiatives, encourage space for legitimate opposition, and build relationships with non-violent political Islamist movements—including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Counter violent extremism through development initiatives.

As violent extremism and terrorism plague the Middle East, the United States has offered security aid and logistical assistance to kinetically end attacks and suppress extremist organizations. While such assistance is necessary, development must remain a foundational element of our relationship to governments in the region. The United States should establish policies that recognize that preventing radicalization is as important to counterterrorism as military operations and kinetic action. Development is far less costly and creates goodwill and a positive outlook toward the United States among the public.

Radicalization is rooted in a sentiment of relative deprivation due to the absence of expected opportunities, which in the Middle East and North Africa region is expressed along two central avenues: a lack of economic prospects, often despite educational achievement, and sociopolitical disenfranchisement. Jordan, for example, suffers from a youth unemployment rate of 28.8%, which the World Bank attributes to two factors: a mismatch in skills demanded by employers and those possessed by youth, and an insufficient amount of available jobs.34 An effective counter-

radicalization project will need to not only help youth bridge the skills gap, but will also need to provide them with assistance in creating their own job opportunities through entrepreneurship. This approach does not mandate that the United States oppose existing governments, but only that it should use its foreign policy and aid as incentives to encourage political reform aimed at improving governance standards and civil rights.

Encourage space for legitimate opposition.

Rather than frame engagement with the opposition as a means of democratic reform, U.S. officials should emphasize the security benefits rulers gain from creating spaces for civil society to operate. For example, Egypt’s post-2013 crackdown on forms of civic and social engagement renders potentially disruptive street activism as the only alternative to political quiescence. Egyptian President Sisi’s heavy-handed restrictions will not eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition forces entirely—history demonstrates that efforts at eliminating the Brotherhood simply forces it underground and pushes some of its members toward extremist groups, such as ISIL and Ansar Bait al-Maqdis. Thus, rather than eradicate the opposition, Sisi’s actions risk radicalizing it. Security will be better guaranteed if citizens with grievances can find an outlet through non-violent opposition movements rather than violent street or underground opposition movements.

Build relationships with non-violent political Islamist movements—including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Islamist political parties continue to play an important role in the civic life of many Arab citizens. Their promises to improve the religious character of its members through political participation holds significant sway in societies in which religion plays a central role. Consequently, policymakers should diversify their relationships by focusing on peaceful political Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and its various affiliates, that historically command significant public respect and support.

36 Brooke, Steven, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Social Outreach After the Egyptian Coup,” Brookings, August 2015.
A policy of engagement with political Islamists does not diminish the need to engage with more liberal, secular opposition in these countries. Rather, it bolsters the legitimacy of this engagement by demonstrating the United States’ commitment to supporting democratization, regardless of what policy position a political party may take. Despite decades of repression, the Muslim Brotherhood has continued to evolve not only within Egypt, but around the Muslim world. Democratic reform is now a hallmark of the Brotherhood’s political program. The United States should foster relations with these movements to facilitate mutual understanding and find points of common interest on which to build constructive cooperation and encourage their continued acceptance of democratic, pluralistic politics. Because these movements often garner support through anti-American rhetoric, U.S. policymakers may need to find ways in which this dialogue can be done quietly or initially through third parties.

**Conclusion**

The above recommendations require a commitment by the United States to assert a leadership role in strengthening a liberal economic order, in promoting fundamental values around the world, and in its relations with China, Russia, and the Middle East. Yet the United States’ ability to project power globally has limits. While this report argues that the United States can assert leadership through soft power at minimal cost, the current domestic environment increasingly favors isolationism over internationalism and nationalism over cosmopolitanism. Deep domestic divisions prompted the rise of a populist president who advocates isolationism and nationalism. The uneven distribution of wealth, systemic problems in the education and healthcare sectors, and perceived economic stagnation have fostered a U.S. public deeply skeptical of globalization and unnecessary foreign entanglement. Recent failures in Iraq have further engendered a preference for isolationism.

Yet the challenges associated with populism are not limited to the United States. While U.S. officials must address these domestic challenges if the United States seeks to maintain its global leadership, other countries must also grapple with their own populist movements. States around the globe have become increasingly tribal and skeptical of the utility of membership in liberal international institutions. Authoritarian leaders have begun to vocally question the merits of liberal governance while cracking down on domestic spaces for dissent. The global war on
terror has further entrenched the authoritarian preference for short-term security over basic human freedoms. These trends have created an international environment that makes exerting U.S. economic leadership and values increasingly difficult.

These are not insurmountable challenges. If anything, they further demonstrate the need for U.S. leadership as illiberal, non-democratic states increasingly challenge the status quo. Yet these challenges will require the concerted efforts of policymakers to communicate the benefits of U.S. leadership. U.S. policymakers must be more effective in communicating the importance of U.S. global leadership to the American people. They must begin to acknowledge short-term disruptions and accompany dislocations with viable, long-term solutions.

A strategy for maintaining U.S. influence must look beyond the short-term to the long-term benefits inherent in maintaining global trade systems and upholding a consistent global policy of promoting individual freedoms and democracy. Rather than accept a disjointed multipolar world, the United States should sustain and, where possible, expand U.S. leadership by upholding liberal institutions that serve its interests and by wielding soft power to garner popular support. U.S. influence will not be sustained through military power alone. In today’s complex world, the strategic use of non-military sources of power will ensure that the United States remains a global leader in the new world order.
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