

# Now What?

The American Citizen, World Order, and Building a New Foreign Policy Consensus



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# In order for the United States to adapt to current and future international challenges, it needs a foreign policy that can unite the American public and bring back bipartisan consensus on America's role in the world.

Americans are mired in disagreements. They are politically divided, with many preferring to identify as independent and significant rifts clear even within the Democratic and Republican parties. But party polarization is only one measure of what separates them. Myriad considerations — age, gender, race, religion, region, class, and education — factor into the differences in how Americans view the world.

Bipartisan consensus has often found its strongest roots in foreign policy and defense. The United States has a raucous history of democratic debate and disagreement on the use of military force and other national security questions. Since the end of World War II, however, most Americans have shared the belief that their prosperity and security are advanced by the United States pursuing a leading role in world affairs.

This bipartisan consensus on the U.S. role in the world has grown brittle. Disagreements permeate U.S. foreign policy on issues as varied as the Iran nuclear deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, and comprehensive immigration policy. Policy differences have existed throughout American history, but today's challenge is more fundamental. The exercise of American leadership globally is growing more vulnerable to challenges overseas. Moreover, the deep U.S. political divisions are obfuscating genuine differences over policy, substituting partisan action-reaction cycles. Rejections of the status quo in 2016 galvanized the success of presidential candidates who positioned themselves outside the foreign policy mainstream. The election and foreign policy of Donald Trump have further frayed the consensus. The president's preference for chaos, alternately wearing and shedding the mantle of global engagement in equal rhetorical measure, threatens the durability of a unified vision for America's role in the world.

The weakening of the U.S. foreign policy consensus reflects a failure to adjust effectively to changes at home and abroad, with resulting confusion and dismay about the nation's direction and role. The fraying in turn weakens America's ability to adapt to current and future challenges. An acknowledged consensus in favor of American engagement in the world provides the domestic foundation on which

to advance U.S. interests out in the world. Such a renewed and necessarily broad consensus on the importance of a global leadership role will not resolve the disagreements or eliminate the challenges that have brought the United States to this point. But rejuvenating the consensus will aid U.S. credibility abroad, reassuring allies while deterring rivals, and strengthen the nation from within.

To build an effective foreign policy that most Americans can support, one must first understand the variety of factors shaping Americans' opinions (and U.S. government direction) on foreign policy. Some factors are tied to personal and community circumstances, others to a broader domestic political and policy context. Moreover, American views are increasingly shaped by the international arena where foreign policy is largely executed. These domestic and international factors are intertwined, at times mutually reinforcing points and other times in tension. Working from the outside in, this essay briefly explores foreign and domestic forces affecting Americans' evolving views about foreign and security policy. It assesses the foundation for an engaged American foreign policy despite evidence of fracturing support. It then draws out three touchstones for devising foreign policy and concludes by offering three actionable priorities to secure American interests in this era.

## The Global Context

Americans are inundated with troubling news from overseas, much of which they feel unable to control. Six challenges to U.S. interests in the international system are noteworthy for their current and potential effect on American foreign policy:

- Capable nation-state adversaries
- Weak, unstable, and collapsing states
- Terrorism
- Enabling information and technology
- Long-term climate, resource, and demographic trends
- Threats to democratic norms

## Nation-State Adversaries

More than 25 years after the Cold War ended, military opportunism and provocation from states seeking to challenge the United States are fully awakened. Four powers are particularly noteworthy as potential adversaries: China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. A U.S. military conflict with any of these countries would have profound consequences.

China is poised to be the most significant long-term competitor to the United States. Beijing is investing substantial resources in its military, developing capabilities clearly designed to prevent others from opposing its will in East Asia and, increasingly, beyond the region. China is also challenging basic norms of international order by using its might to claim and build out land features in the South and East China Seas. Ample

economic manipulation, corruption, conventional military harassments, nuclear saber-rattling, cyberattacks, and information warfare, including using active measures to affect the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Playing for reputational points abroad but also largely to a domestic audience, President Vladimir Putin appears set on a course toward serving, at best, as a spoiler of Western interests and, at worst, as a direct military aggressor.

For more than 60 years, war on the Korean Peninsula has been a concern for Washington. Under Kim Jong Un, this long-standing worry has become far graver. Korea's rapid missile and nuclear development, coupled with its jingoistic propaganda and provocations and its apparent disinterest in nuclear negotiations, raise the specter of a conflict that could embroil not only South Korea and Japan but also the United

States, China, and Russia.

Kim might seek military conflict in desperation during a regime collapse or by foolishly attempting territorial or other gains. More likely is the possibility that North Korea and the United States or its allies will miscalculate the other side's capability and resolve, with a subsequent inability or unwillingness to control crisis dynamics.

Finally, Iran poses a substantial challenge to American interests. The United

States and its regional partners possess far greater conventional military capabilities than Iran, but Tehran's preferred tactics involve seeking to destabilize its enemies by employing proxy forces, providing substantial support to terrorist groups, harassing maritime traffic, using cyber and information warfare, and developing its missile arsenal. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — popularly known as the Iran nuclear deal — if adhered to would help forestall Iran's development of nuclear capability. But economic sanctions were lifted as part of the deal, and U.S. vigilance will be needed to curb Iranian elements from seeking to invest newly available resources in military, paramilitary, or proxy forces.

## Americans are inundated with troubling news from overseas, much of which they feel unable to control.

evidence of intellectual property theft and unfair trade practices, alongside its human rights record and increasing foreign investments, raise further concerns. Meanwhile, China is the world's second-largest economy and a significant trading partner of the United States and most U.S. allies. The United States has a strong interest in seeing China evolve as an economically vibrant, non-hostile, and less autocratic nation that contributes to peace and stability.

As a power in decline rather than on the rise, Russia does not have China's long-term potential. But the Kremlin still commands a nation with a substantial nuclear arsenal, a sizable conventional military, and the skill and affinity to execute full-scale political warfare that challenges the traditional weaknesses of open societies. Russia is working to revise the international order to its advantage. Its invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014 is a stand-out example, but there are others. Russia has postured aggressively against the West and expanded its military role in Syria. The Kremlin's playbook has included energy and

## Weak, Unstable, and Collapsing States

Although they often do not receive the same attention as nation-state threats, the failures of governments in Yemen, Afghanistan, Central America, and elsewhere manifest into security challenges that can hurt Americans at home. Security implications that can emanate from chronically weak states include, but are not limited

to, terrorism, migration, transnational crime, weapons proliferation, piracy, and cross-border health threats.

Syria's population has sat tragically astride some of the world's most complex geopolitical dynamics. The repressive Assad government's brutal crackdowns on peaceful protestors have led to a chain reaction that leaves the country incapacitated. More than 6 million Syrians are internally displaced; 5 million others have fled to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and into Europe.<sup>1</sup> Key nations are on opposing sides of Syria's civil war, with Iran and Russia backing the Assad regime and the United States, Europe, and Gulf states seeking a negotiated peace settlement that could remove Assad from power. (Under the Trump administration, the U.S. government's position on the ultimate disposition of the Assad regime is unclear.) The U.S.-led coalition fights the Islamic State inside Syria and Iraq. Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government claim to do the same while also striking at opposition forces supported by the coalition. The battle space in and around Syria is fraught with risk.

## Terrorism

Terrorism tops many Americans' list of national security concerns.<sup>2</sup> Terrorist movements can grow in repressive and supportive states alike, in places where local governance may be inadequate to address political and societal discord. The rise of the Islamic State in Syria, its rapid territorial gains there and in Iraq, and its transformation into a global movement has provided a focal point for these concerns in recent years. The U.S.-led coalition has steadily weakened the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. However, major ISIL cells are now operating out of Afghanistan, Libya, and Yemen. Islamic State and related online propaganda aim to inspire terrorism around the world. Authorities have cited ISIL as an inspiration for several attempted attacks in the United States perpetrated by U.S. citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the Islamic State grew in the shadow of al-Qaeda, so too is the Islamic State likely to generate prominent follow-on movements. Terrorist movements motivated by other political causes include white nationalists, separatists, and anarchists. Regardless of their aims, these groups can have strategic effect at relatively low cost, aided by social media and the Internet as well as tactics such as mass shootings, using vehicles as weapons, planting car bombs, or employing more advanced capabilities.

## Enabling Information and Other Technology

Terrorists are just one subset of actors enabled by the spread of information and development of critical technologies. Thanks to the growth of biotechnology, cheaper material and forms of manufacturing, such as 3-D printing, as well as the rapid proliferation of commercial and military drones, it is easier than ever for individuals, small groups, and less powerful states to achieve high-end capabilities. The increasing ease of arms sales further accelerates this trend. Whatever might be said about the U.S. approach to arms sales and technology transfer, it is guided by a body of law and established norms intended to mitigate advanced technology proliferation and end-use risks. The same cannot be said for Russia, which accounts for 23 percent of major arms exports, and China, the world's fastest-growing arms exporter.<sup>4</sup>

The implications of technology diffusion are perhaps most profound in the information domain. At the military-industrial level, the information revolution is enabling increased precision and actionable information and improving cyber and space capabilities. At the broader societal level, the information revolution has brought profound changes affecting the daily lives of people across the planet.

In early 2017, the Pew Research Center estimated that 77 percent of Americans owned their own smartphone.<sup>5</sup> Americans (and Europeans) may be ahead in the information race, but they are far from

<sup>1</sup> ECHO, "European Commission ECHO Factsheet," *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations*, September 2017, [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Dina Smeltz and Karl Friedhoff, "US Public Not Convinced That Trump's Policies Will Make America Safer," *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, September 2017, [https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report\\_ccs2017-terrorism\\_170908.pdf](https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report_ccs2017-terrorism_170908.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For example, on the early and rapid rise in digital identity theft, see *Identity Theft — Prevalence and Cost Appear to be Growing*, GAO-02-363 (Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, 2002), 51; on the early digital success of al Qaeda, see Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond al-Qaeda — Part 1* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), xxvii, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND\\_MG429.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG429.pdf); on the white supremacists use of the Internet, see Jeff Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Kate Blanchfield, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, "The State of Major Arms Transfers in 8 Graphics," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2017/state-major-arms-transfers-8-graphics>.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Smith, "Record Shares of Americans Now Own Smartphones, Have Home Broadband," *Pew Research Center*, January 12, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>.

alone. There are an estimated 4.6 billion mobile phone subscriptions globally.<sup>6</sup> By these estimates, mobile subscriptions have surpassed the number of active fixed-line subscriptions worldwide, and it is conceivable that the overall number of devices connected to the internet — the Internet of Things — will reach at least 20 billion by 2020.<sup>7</sup> Much of that connectivity growth is poised to occur in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

This revolution in information accessibility drives gains in innovation and productivity. At its best, it has also promoted good governance, enabling the connectivity of people united in common peaceful causes. But this era will also be defined by the weaponization of this connectivity. Al-Qaeda, criminals, and white supremacists were among the most successful early adapters on the digital battlefield.<sup>8</sup> Nations have also leveraged the tools of modern connectivity to achieve security aims, both through internal control and external manipulation. Examples include North Korea's hack of Sony Pictures, Iran's cyber intrusions into Saudi Aramco, and Chinese theft of U.S. government employee data from the Office of Personnel Management.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, disagreements between Qatar and its Gulf Cooperation Council partners have played out in attempts to embarrass one another with leaked and falsified emails.<sup>10</sup> But no actor has as spectacularly advanced the potential to weaponize the current information domain for political ends as Russia, both in creating disinformation and in deploying that information in well-orchestrated campaigns enabled by artificial intelligence and humans.

## Resources, Climate Change, and Urbanization

U.S. foreign policy will also confront important shifts in natural resources, demography, and climate. The United States has largely achieved its goal of being “energy independent” insofar as it is a net exporter of natural gas and the world’s largest exporter of refined petroleum products.<sup>11</sup> But the world market has become more “energy interdependent.” This is due in part to the increased number of important suppliers beyond OPEC, including the United States. It is also because energy politics are increasingly driven by issues associated with the effects of energy use, namely climate change.<sup>12</sup> Energy independence, as long thought of, is valuable for U.S. foreign policy, but acknowledging the world’s energy interdependence and acting upon it are equally important to American security.

Climate change poses a variety of security-related challenges. Shipping lanes in the Arctic Ocean are expected to open by mid-century due to warming.<sup>13</sup> This will place a premium on patrol and search-and-rescue assets that can operate in the austere environment, and resource competition in the region could heighten tensions among vying nations. Rising sea levels are another major threat, particularly in the Pacific. The warming of oceans is also creating more and worse storms.<sup>14</sup> As the 2017 hurricanes affecting Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands demonstrated, the economic and human toll of major weather events is substantial. Already in the United States, more than 90 coastal communities face chronic flooding, which the Union of Concerned Scientists defines as “the kind of

<sup>6</sup> Rani Molla, "Mobile Broadband Subscriptions Are Projected to Double in Five Years," *Recode*, June 18, 2017, <https://www.recode.net/2017/6/18/15826036/smartphone-subscriptions-basic-phones-globally-ericsson>.

<sup>7</sup> Rob van der Meulen, "Gartner Says 8.4 Billion Connected Things' Will Be in Use in 2017, Up 31 Percent From 2016," *Gartner*, February 7, 2017, <http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3598917>.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Dienst, David Paredes, and Joe Valiquette, "Three Men Charged With Plotting ISIS-Inspired Attack in New York," *NBC News*, October 6, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/man-plotted-isis-inspired-attack-new-york-concerts-say-officials-n808321>; James Comey, "Director Comey Remarks During May 11 'Pen and Pad' Briefing with Reporters," Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Press Conference, May 14, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/director-comey-remarks-during-may-11-2018pen-and-pad2019-briefing-with-reporters>; Paul Brinkmann, "Pulse gunman's motive: Plenty of theories, but few answers," *Orlando Sentinel*, June 4, 2017, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/pulse-orlando-nightclub-shooting/omar-mateen/os-pulse-omar-mateen-motive-20170512-story.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Peterson, "The Sony Pictures Hack, Explained," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/12/18/the-sony-pictures-hack-explained/>; Nicole Perlroth, "In Cyberattack on Saudi Firm, U.S. Sees Iran Firing Back," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/24/business/global/cyberattack-on-saudi-oil-firm-disquiets-us.html>; David Sanger and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Hacking Linked to China Exposes Millions of U.S. Workers," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/05/us/breach-in-a-federal-computer-system-exposes-personnel-data.html>.

<sup>10</sup> David Kirkpatrick and Sheera Frenkel, "Hacking in Qatar Highlights a Shift Toward Espionage-for-Hire," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/world/middleeast/qatar-cyberattack-espionage-for-hire.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Ladislaw, Adam Sieminski, Frank Verrastro, and Andrew Stanley, *U.S. Oil in the Global Economy: Markets, Policy, and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2017), [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170508\\_Ladislaw\\_OilGasWorkshop\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170508_Ladislaw_OilGasWorkshop_Web.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Jason Bordoff, "America's Energy Policy: From Independence to Interdependence," *Horizons Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 8 (Autumn 2016), <http://www.cirsd.org/files/000/000/002/43dde28fd7d04cca8e84e00cc3467ae17fc5aa2188.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Jugal K. Patel and Henry Fountain, "As Arctic Ice Vanishes, New Shipping Routes Open," *The New York Times*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/03/science/earth/arctic-shipping.html>.

<sup>14</sup> "Climate Change Indicators: Weather and Climate," Environmental Protection Agency, accessed September 2017, <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/weather-climate>.

flooding that's so unmanageable it prompts people to move away.”<sup>15</sup> The number is expected to reach 170 communities in the next 20 years.<sup>16</sup>

Food and water crises sit at the intersection of resource and climate-change challenges. Drought, exacerbated by military conflicts, has intensified the plight of more than 20 million people enduring famines in Somalia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen.<sup>17</sup> Underlying mismatches in projected population and food productivity portend continuing food scarcity. By 2050, the world population is projected to increase from 7.3 billion to 9.7 billion, with more than half of this growth in Africa. Over this same period, meat consumption is projected to rise nearly 73 percent and dairy consumption by 58 percent from 2010 levels. Yet while output of food, feed, fiber, and fuel will most likely continue to rise in coming decades, total food production is not on pace to meet this demand.<sup>18</sup> Projected shortages of clean water are also daunting.<sup>19</sup>

Among demographic trends of note for U.S. shapers of foreign policy, one that stands out as underexplored is urbanization. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, two-thirds of the world’s population will live in urban environments, with about one-third — some 2 billion people — living in slum-like conditions.<sup>20</sup> All regions are expected to urbanize further over the coming decades, but Africa and Asia, home to the most rural regions remaining, are urbanizing faster than others. The combination of rapid expansion and poor living conditions creates governance challenges for cities’ ecosystems, including water, power, and green space. Slum-like conditions contribute to the rapid spread of diseases. Many such growing urban areas will be situated along waterways, making them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels and

more severe natural disasters. Particularly in less developed areas, cities will likely be strained to meet the security needs of citizens as population density, inadequate governance, and poverty create conditions for criminal activity and civil unrest.<sup>21</sup>

### **Threats to Democratic Norms**

Many of these trends are culminating in support for anti-democratic policies and governance models. The Syrian crisis is a leading cause of the largest forced population displacement since the aftermath of World War II, with reverberations throughout the Levant, Europe, and beyond.<sup>22</sup> These refugee flows have fueled concerns about sovereignty and terrorism in many parts of the world, a concern reinforced by recent terrorist incidents in Europe, Australia, and the United States. Together with weak economic performance in many Western-style democracies and the use of propaganda and disinformation, the stage has been set for rising nationalism and a renewal of autocracy around the world. The U.S.-based think tank Freedom House released a report this year showing that, while the gains from non-free states are small, 2016 marked the eleventh year in a row in which the share of free countries had declined and the share of “not free” countries grew.<sup>23</sup> This trend, alongside tested norms regarding state sovereignty, chemical weapons use, nuclear proliferation, and the Geneva Conventions, is a direct challenge to the postwar international order built by the United States and its allies.

### **U.S. Domestic Context**

This brief synopsis of major challenges in the world misses much, but it underscores how activity beyond U.S. borders will shape America’s ability to

15 Erika Spanger-Siegfried, Kristina Dahl, Astrid Caldas, Shana Udvardy, Rachel Cleetus, Pamela Worth, and Nicole Hernandez Hammer, *When Rising Seas Hit Home: Hard Choices Ahead for Hundreds of US Coastal Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Union of Concerned Scientists, July 2017), <http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2017/07/when-rising-seas-hit-home-full-report.pdf>.

16 Ibid.

17 Jeffrey Gettleman, “Drought and War Heighten Threat of Not Just 1 Famine, but 4,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/world/africa/famine-somalia-nigeria-south-sudan-yemen-water.html>.

18 Margaret Zeigler and Ann Steensland, *2016 Global Agricultural Productivity Report: Sustainability in an Uncertain Season* (Washington, D.C.: Global Harvest Initiative, October 2016), [http://www.globalharvestinitiative.org/GAP/2016\\_GAP\\_Report.pdf](http://www.globalharvestinitiative.org/GAP/2016_GAP_Report.pdf).

19 “Sound Water Management, Investment in Security Vital to Sustain Adequate Supply, Access for All, Secretary-General Warns Security Council,” *United Nations*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12856.doc.htm>.

20 *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2014), 1, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/publications/files/wup2014-highlights.Pdf>.

21 Kathleen Hicks, “New Security Challenges Posed by Megacities,” *World Economic Forum*, November 2014, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-strategic-foresight/kathleen-hicks-csis-new-security-challenges-posed-by-megacities/>.

22 *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015* (New York/Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, June 20, 2016), <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>.

23 Arch Puddington and Tyler Roylance, *Freedom in the World 2017: Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2017), [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_FIW\\_2017\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FIW_2017_Report_Final.pdf).

advance its prosperity and security. The domestic context for U.S. foreign policy is equally important and far too often ignored by security analysts.

There are, in fact, multiple domestic contexts: The United States is divided along a variety of dimensions that are creating challenges for envisioning and executing a coherent foreign policy. Some of the foreign policy divide may be explained by cultural differences; this includes variations in regional, national, racial, party, gender, military, and religious identity.<sup>24</sup> Economic factors may also explain some of it.<sup>25</sup> Although the United States has the world's largest gross domestic product and is a leading source of innovation across multiple sectors, in 2015 it had the world's third-largest income gap.<sup>26</sup> Divisions in the U.S. electorate on issues of trade and immigration illuminate how various cultural and economic factors, and doubtless other causes, are shaping the prospect of consensus on foreign policy.

In April 2016, 49 percent of general public respondents to Pew polling indicated that they believed U.S. involvement in the world economy was a "bad thing" that lowered wages and cost jobs, while 44 percent of such respondents believed it was a "good thing."<sup>27</sup> That poll marked the bottoming out of a downward slide in positive views of trade, a slide that began roughly at the beginning of President Barack Obama's second term. By the time of the 2016 presidential election, trade proponents were chastened by the strong negative reaction to their arguments.

Yet just a few months into 2017 support for U.S. trade in the same Pew poll had rebounded

to 52 percent of respondents.<sup>28</sup> This should not be surprising, given that the United States is the world's top exporter of foods and agricultural products (which account for more than 20 percent of U.S. agricultural production).<sup>29</sup> As consumers, Americans depend on a global supply chain from airplanes to smartphones to big-box retailers. Popular wisdom holds that the U.S. manufacturing sector opposes free trade, but consider this endorsement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) from the National Association of Manufacturers:

NAFTA went into effect in 1994, and since then, the United States has sold three times as much to Canada and Mexico. In 2016, the two countries alone purchased one-fifth of all manufactured goods made in the United States. This is a big deal for manufacturing workers and their families because those sales support jobs here at home — a lot of well-paying jobs. Sales of manufactured goods to Canada and Mexico, made possible through NAFTA, support the jobs of more than 2 million manufacturing workers.<sup>30</sup>

Not all trade is good, but many Americans do not believe that all trade is bad, and in numbers greater than many foreign policy elites have assumed.<sup>31</sup>

Immigration has played an even more divisive role in U.S. politics. About 15 percent of the U.S. population is immigrant, the same share as in 1920 but higher than it was for much of the post-World War II period.<sup>32</sup> Roughly 75 percent of that

<sup>24</sup> For insightful examinations of two such dimensions, see Sam Tabor and Dina Smeltz, "The Urban-Suburban-Rural "Divide" in American Views on Foreign Policy," *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, May 2017, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/urban-suburban-rural-divide-american-views-foreign-policy/>; and Douglas L. Kriner and Francis X. Shen, "Battlefield Casualties and Ballot Box Defeat: Did the Bush-Obama Wars Cost Clinton the White House?," (June 2017), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2989040](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2989040).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Hal Brands, "Is American Internationalism Dead? Reading the National Mood in the Age of Trump," *War on the Rocks*, May 16, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/is-american-internationalism-dead-reading-the-national-mood-in-the-age-of-trump/>.

<sup>26</sup> "The World's Biggest Economies," World Economic Forum, 2015, [https://assets.weforum.org/editor/8T1VYR\\_rQ04Dqsi98YcbpvWBSSJCMdeNRxaltXbNf00.png](https://assets.weforum.org/editor/8T1VYR_rQ04Dqsi98YcbpvWBSSJCMdeNRxaltXbNf00.png).

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Poushter, "American Public, Foreign Policy Experts Sharply Disagree Over Involvement in Global Economy," Pew Research Center, Oct. 28, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/28/american-public-foreign-policy-experts-sharply-disagree-over-involvement-in-global-economy/>.

<sup>28</sup> Bradley Jones, "Support for Free Trade Agreements Rebounds Modestly, But Wide Partisan Differences Remain," Pew Research Center, April 25, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/25/support-for-free-trade-agreements-rebounds-modestly-but-wide-partisan-differences-remain/>.

<sup>29</sup> "Infographic: Agricultural Trade Matters," United States Department of Agriculture: Foreign Agricultural Service, May 17, 2017, <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/infographic-agricultural-trade-matters>.

<sup>30</sup> Jay Timmons, "NAFTA: A Win for Manufacturing Workers," National Association of Manufacturers, August 16, 2017, <http://www.shopfloor.org/2017/08/nafta-win-manufacturing-workers/>.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Busby, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Monten, Dina Smeltz, and Jordan Tama, "How the Elite Misjudge the U.S. Electorate on International Engagement," *RealClear World*, November 7, 2016, [http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2016/11/07/how\\_the\\_elite\\_misjudge\\_the\\_us\\_electorate\\_on\\_international\\_engagement\\_112112.html](http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2016/11/07/how_the_elite_misjudge_the_us_electorate_on_international_engagement_112112.html).

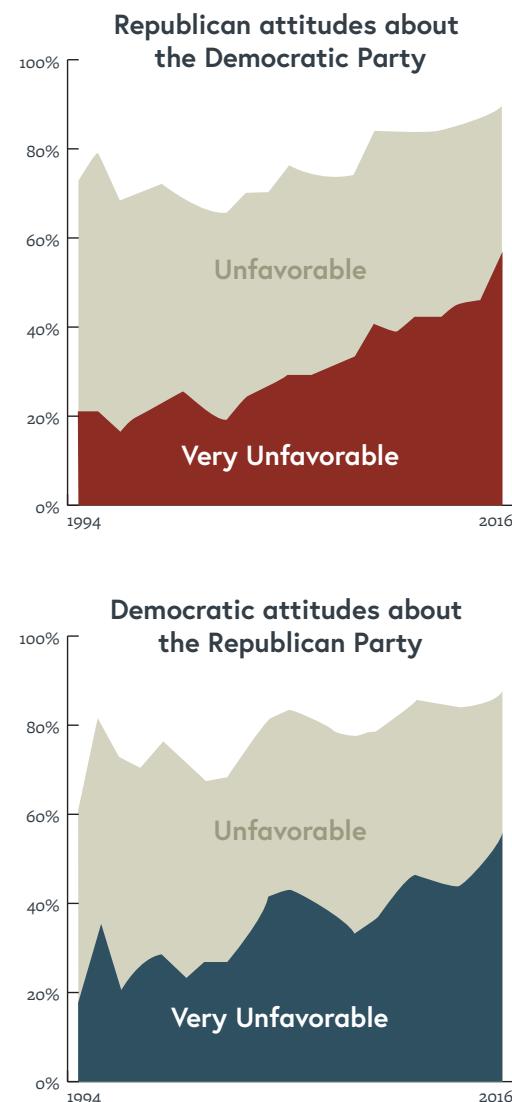
<sup>32</sup> "U.S. Immigrant Populations and Share Over Time, 1850-Present," Migration Policy Institute, 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time>.

immigrant population is estimated to be here legally.<sup>33</sup> Of those here illegally, most overstayed with expired temporary visas rather than illegally crossed borders.<sup>34</sup> About 45 percent of respondents told Pew shortly before the 2016 election that having more immigrants hurts American workers, while 42 percent said having more immigrants helps — the deepest division of opinion Pew captured on the issue over the last decade, caused by an increase in the number of respondents who react *positively* about immigration's effects on American workers.<sup>35</sup>

Although support for internationalism is evident even on issues as divisive as trade and immigration, the divisions among Americans should not be underestimated. They are likely to be further exacerbated by automation, which could put 38 percent of U.S. jobs at risk by the early 2030s, according to one recent estimate.<sup>36</sup> Urbanization, too, will create economic opportunities but exacerbate divides between the “global elite” and those who feel left behind. Income inequality and associated urban-rural divides are creating different American experiences.

These and other divisions are reflected and reinforced in the U.S. political system. Consider Pew Research Center’s assessment of rising partisan antipathy. As Figure 1 illustrates, since 1994, the share of Republicans and Democrats who hold unfavorable or very unfavorable views of the other party has risen more than 20 points. Within this overall increase, the share holding very unfavorable views of the other party has climbed even higher, by about 30 percentage points in just over 20 years. Partisans are not just divided; increasingly, they do not like or respect each other. This poll was completed before the 2016 election, and the mutual antipathy it found — with implications for dividing American politics and society — almost certainly has deepened.

FIGURE 1:<sup>37</sup>



Political polarization is affected not only by true differences in Americans’ viewpoints but also by issues inside the U.S. political structure and process, including gerrymandering, campaign finance practices, and changes in congressional norms and

33 Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, *Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, September 2016), 47, [http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/09/31170303/PH\\_2016.09.20\\_Unauthorized\\_FINAL.pdf](http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/09/31170303/PH_2016.09.20_Unauthorized_FINAL.pdf).

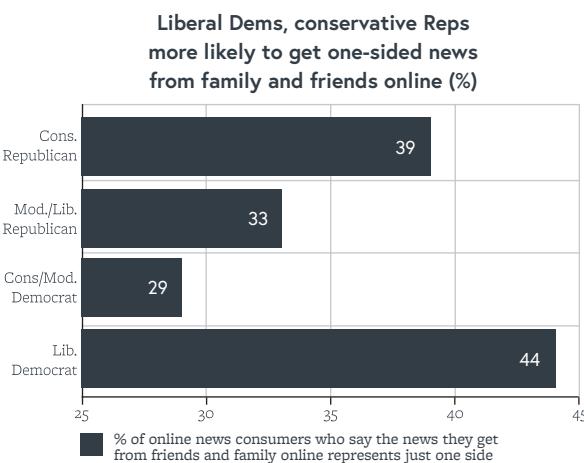
34 Robert Warren and Donald Kerwin, “The 2,000 Mile Wall in Search of a Purpose: Since 2007 Visa Overstays Have Outnumbered Undocumented Border Crossers by a Half Million,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* (2017), Center for Migration Studies, <http://cmsny.org/publications/jmhs-visa-overstays-border-wall/>.

35 Lee Rainie and Anna Brown, “Americans Less Concerned Than a Decade Ago Over Immigrants’ Impact on Workforce,” Pew Research Center, October 7, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/07/americans-less-concerned-than-a-decade-ago-over-immigrants-impact-on-workforce/>. See also Busby et al.

36 Richard Berriman and John Hawksworth, “Will Robots Steal Our Jobs? The Potential Impact of Automation on the UK and Other Major Economies,” *UK Economic Outlook*, March 2017, <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/ukeo/pwcuexo-section-4-automation-march-2017-v2.pdf>.

37 “Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016,” Pew Research Center, June 22, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>.

processes.<sup>38</sup> The current period of polarization is also occurring against a backdrop of ubiquitous information, which many Americans cope with by creating increasingly fragmented and self-selected media environments. Polling from Pew Research Center suggests that six in 10 Americans get their news from social media.<sup>39</sup> As Figure 2 shows, Pew data also indicate that many Americans' social media feeds are built around networks of family and friends who share a common perspective, narrowing the range of views to which they are exposed. This trend is particularly noteworthy at the far ends of the political spectrum, as is the perspective that such "one-sided" news is okay.

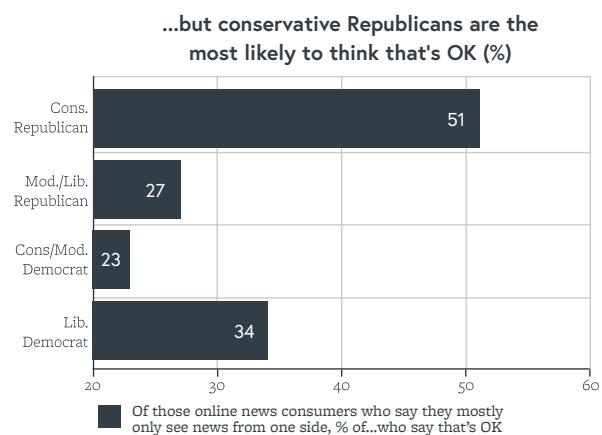
FIGURE 2<sup>40</sup>

These divisions affect U.S. security by altering the way the United States, and particularly the stability and effectiveness of its political system, are viewed overseas and by driving changes in the way Americans perceive their role in the world.

### Foundations of an Effective American Foreign Policy

It can be tempting for the U.S. foreign policy community to throw up its hands in frustration in the face of this set of circumstances, but these challenges are not unprecedented in their magnitude, either at home or abroad. Blindly holding to the past is no longer viable. Change is coming too quickly. The United States must adapt to secure its interests and in ways that build domestic support. Three factors are particularly important to helping the nation navigate effectively in the current environment.

First, the United States must acknowledge that while it can probably remain the world's sole superpower for at least the next 15 years, its ability to shape events beyond its borders is diminishing. The effectiveness of American foreign policy and how much power the nation chooses to wield will vary by region and type of issue. Non-state problems are particularly difficult to tackle with traditional American strengths such as state-to-state trade, massed military force, and government-to-government diplomacy. They also test the United States where it is weakest, trying Americans' impatience, tendency toward unilateralism, and dislike and distrust of most government spending. These weaknesses inhibit the U.S. ability to



undertake generational investments toward long-term solutions.

Moreover, the best solutions to many security challenges require a combination of strengths, but the United States struggles to adapt and integrate across its instruments of national power and with partners overseas. Problems such as trade, terrorism, or climate issues are seldom solvable in only one sphere, or by acting alone. When facing an assertive military competitor — such as China, Russia, North Korea, or Iran — traditional U.S. security strengths are more influential. Even in these cases, however, the United States has had difficulty deterring a range of provocations and coercive actions.

A second factor that needs to ground the vision for future U.S. foreign policy is the thread of constancy in public support of international engagement. If one American grand strategy has persisted for the

38 For an excellent overview of existing research on possible causes of polarization, see Michael Barber and Nolan McCarty, "Chapter 2: Causes and Consequences of Polarization," in *Negotiating Agreement in Politics*, eds. Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2013), 19–53, [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dtlingley/files/negotiating\\_agreement\\_in\\_politics.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dtlingley/files/negotiating_agreement_in_politics.pdf).

39 "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016," Pew Research Center, May 25, 2016, [http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/pj\\_2016-05-26\\_social-media-and-news\\_0-01/](http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/pj_2016-05-26_social-media-and-news_0-01/).

40 "The Modern News Consumer," Pew Research Center, July 6, 2016, [http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/pj\\_2016-07-07\\_modern-news-consumer\\_7-02/](http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/pj_2016-07-07_modern-news-consumer_7-02/).

past 70 years, it is to advance U.S. interests by taking a leading role in the world. This may seem to run counter to the 2016 election results; Donald Trump won under an “America First” foreign policy banner that included pointed criticism of U.S. allies and overseas military operations and posture. Across the political spectrum, there are important limits to Americans’ willingness to lead on the world stage. But the share of Americans that are truly isolationist — preferring the United States have no role in world affairs — is around only 4 percent, while more than 70 percent believe the United States should have a major or leading role. Demonstrating the stability of an internationalist consensus, these figures from February 2017 are roughly the same as Gallup’s February 2001 polling.<sup>41</sup>

This likely reflects broad recognition that the most important interests the United States seeks to secure in the world require American engagement and leadership. Republican and Democratic administrations have generally described America’s world interests in remarkably consistent ways since the end of World War II: ensuring the security of U.S. territory and citizens; upholding treaty commitments, to include the security of allies; ensuring a liberal economic order in which American enterprise can compete fairly; and upholding the rule of law in international affairs, including respect for human rights. Each administration has framed these interests somewhat differently, and pursued its own path to secure them, but the core tenets have not varied significantly.

Predictability and stability of position are not hallmarks of this administration, but there has been enough overseas activity, spending, and rhetoric in this first year to assess that President Trump’s “America First” is not Charles Lindbergh’s. Although an isolationist sentiment will always exist in U.S. politics, it is unlikely to upend the basic consensus view that what happens elsewhere in the world can affect Americans at home.

By no means is the American predilection for internationalism unchecked. Indeed, Americans have generally preferred to pursue a selective approach to engagement. Yes, a majority support international engagement, but the United States has never desired to act everywhere in the world, all the time, or with the same tools of power. Polling before the 2016 election showed that 70 percent of Americans wanted the next president to focus

more on national than international problems, a trend that has only strengthened since the peak of military activity in Iraq and Afghanistan, in 2007.<sup>42</sup>

Americans have always had to weigh the risks and opportunity costs of foreign activities and needed to prioritize investments. The projected budget environment only worsens the dilemmas. In the latest Congressional Budget Office outlook, total discretionary spending would fall to about 5.4 percent of gross domestic product by 2047 as social security, major medical programs, the deficit, and net interest on the deficit rise. All national security spending — defense, diplomacy, development, intelligence, and homeland security — and spending on everything from transportation and infrastructure to environmental protection and national parks would compete for fewer discretionary dollars.<sup>43</sup>

Importantly, the track record for democracies, including the United States, is one of remarkable unpredictability when it comes to the use of force to secure interests. Policymakers need to understand this and not expect to count on an iron-clad template that governs when and where the nation’s political leaders will use force. Rather, they should work to frame choices on use of force using their best experience and help leaders reduce the risks of miscalculation that such unpredictability can pose.

## **Foreign Policy Priorities: The Now What**

So, if American policymakers have the benefit of superpower status but are generally less able to wield it effectively; if Americans generally agree that leading or at least engaging abroad is important to protect U.S. interests; and if resource constraints, national character, and other factors limit us from seeking to aggressively or even consistently act overseas, especially with military forces, what imperatives should form the core of U.S. foreign and security policy? Three stand out.

Of foremost importance is avoiding the hazards of domestic political polarization. It is unlikely in this deeply dysfunctional period of governance that even a united foreign policy community could catalyze a resolution to these issues on its own. Still, the community has an important role to play in consistently and vociferously warning about

<sup>41</sup> Gary J. Gates, “Americans Still Support Major Role for US in Global Affairs,” *Gallup News*, March 6, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/205286/americans-support-major-role-global-affairs.aspx>.

<sup>42</sup> “America’s Global Role, U.S. Superpower Status,” Pew Research Center, May 5, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/2016/05/05/1-americas-global-role-u-s-superpower-status/>.

<sup>43</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *The 2017 Long-Term Budget Outlook*, March 2017, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/115th-congress-2017-2018-reports/52480-ltbo.pdf>.

the national security dangers posed by domestic political dysfunction.

America's deep divisions are a major strategic weakness. There is no stable understanding of the resources available to secure America's role in the world, which cripples the ability to plan and act strategically. A dysfunctional political system can make others doubt the reliability of U.S. commitments. Worse, polarizing opinions around the strength of U.S. commitments to allies creates greater agency for forces within the countries that seek opportunities to forge a path distinct from the United States and potentially antithetical to American security interests. If nations begin to routinely act independently from Washington's preference, Americans will avoid some free riding, but they will also lose say over issues that affect their security and prosperity. Political dysfunction also hampers America's core cultural appeal — the dream of the American political system as a "city on a hill."<sup>44</sup> In such an environment, alternative models of economics and governance gain greater

## America's extensive alliance and partner network is among its most important geostrategic advantages.

resonance, notably anti-capitalist and anti-democratic, undermining enduring U.S. interests. The slight rise in global authoritarianism noted by Freedom House may reflect this decline in perceived Western effectiveness.

Finally, political dysfunction creates problems in civil-military relations. It feeds a sense of separateness in the can-do military culture, where senior members struggle to understand why the political caste cannot put aside politics to make important decisions. In fact, Americans and their elected leaders seem to be turning toward those in uniform to overcome perceived weaknesses in civilian governance. At the least, this is disheartening. More alarmingly, it is corrosive to good civilian control, a central tenet of the U.S. Constitution.

A second imperative is to focus significant leadership energy and sufficient investment on problem prevention. The nation requires capable and agile non-military instruments, such as diplomacy and development. These sectors have had difficulty convincing political leaders and the public of the value they can provide. The State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and similar organizations are unlikely to ever exert the political power of the military-industrial complex. Nevertheless, they can get better at wielding diplomacy, development assistance and promoting private, foreign government, and international efforts that align with U.S. policy goals. Importantly, they can also improve on their ability to measure and communicate their pennies-on-the-dollar value. These sectors can take credit for contributing to tremendous gains made in the U.S.-led international order since World War II, from a substantial decline in global poverty to improvements in global life expectancy.<sup>45</sup> The United States should build on these successes to advance its interests in climate change mitigation and adaptation, global health improvements, and conflict resolution.

America's extensive alliance and partner network is among its most important geostrategic advantages. Alliances can require a lot of work and money with little to show. (From its allies' perspective, so too can the United States.) It is important to get the cost-benefit balance right. By and large, the United States has managed that well throughout the postwar period and needs to continue adapting its alliances to meet the demands of an evolving security environment. Policymakers should not let imprudent comments undermine the enterprise.<sup>46</sup>

A third imperative is to improve U.S. tools for deterrence and response to provocations that fall short of war. The United States has an excellent record of deterring existential threats. But potential adversaries are attacking U.S. interests in ways that fall below the threshold of traditional state-based military power; see Chinese coercion in the South and East China Seas, Russian subversion in its "near abroad" and within the United States, and Iranian asymmetric tactics, especially through proxies.

This phenomenon is as old as warfare itself. But it is an area of increasing risk, particularly with regard to the potential for miscalculation. In

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Reagan, "A Vision for America," The White House, November 3, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85199>.

<sup>45</sup> On global poverty, see "Measuring Poverty," The World Bank, accessed, September 27, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty>. On increased life expectancy, see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2017), 7, [https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017\\_KeyFindings.pdf](https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017_KeyFindings.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen H. Hicks, Michael J. Green, and Heather A. Conley, "Donald Trump Doesn't Understand the Value of U.S. Bases Overseas," *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/07/donald-trump-doesnt-understand-the-value-of-u-s-bases-overseas/>.

some cases, such as cyber and space operations, escalation ladders and legal frameworks are not yet well-established. In territorial coercion, those frameworks are being actively tested. This trend creates a heightened risk of conflict not so much from intent — although as events with North Korea have demonstrated, that is possible — but from an increased chance that potential adversaries will inadvertently misinterpret U.S. willingness and capability to respond to provocations even when the precipitation of war is unintended.

In the current environment, policymakers must pay special attention to how they can best shape the considerations of states that wish to test America's response to ambiguous challenges. This will mean clearly communicating U.S. interests and its willingness and capability to defend them. It also means carrying out threats when deterrence fails. Effective messaging is not nearly as straightforward as it may sound, especially in an era when multiple messages sometimes compete. For instance, deterring future chemical weapons challenges was likely at the heart of the advice President Trump received before he ordered Tomahawk strikes on Syria in April 2017. However, the U.S. signaling may have been murky, coming less than one week after U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and other administration officials signaled acceptance of the Assad regime, after which the regime carried out chemical attacks. It did not take long to go from a green light to a red line on Syria but too late to prevent Assad's undesirable action.

Improving America's toolkit for countering provocations will rely on many of the same multilateral and cross-functional integrative approaches on which effective problem prevention also rests. A fundamental rethink is required to improve the national security enterprise's ability to move with agility ahead of the pace of world events, the information environment, and the expanding array of adversary tactics and other challenges.

## **Conclusion**

Discerning the shifting nature of the international system and designing an effective set of security tools within it are monumental but not unprecedented tasks. Those who shaped the post-World War II international system, who Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas nicknamed “the wise men,”<sup>47</sup> faced the same task. Circumstances today are equally daunting, requiring a similar re-examination of U.S. strategies and capabilities. Success will depend on

attributes not normally associated with the current U.S. administration or Washington's broader political climate: political consensus on foreign policy; long-term, preventative, multidisciplinary, and multinational responses wherever possible; and improved deterrence of “gray area” challenges to prevent miscalculation or other reasons for escalation. Yet hope can be found in the nation's foundational strengths, especially its indefatigable spirit of change and adaptation. The “now what” era of American foreign policy is upon us. President Trump is unlikely to provide the vision needed to rejuvenate U.S. foreign policy. It is time for a new generation of wise women and men to act. ↗

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47 See Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).