

# DEFENSE DOSSIER

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# AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

*Explaining the World. Empowering Policymakers.*



# DEFENSE DOSSIER

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the October 2024 issue of AFPC's *Defense Dossier*. Whoever wins the presidency in November, the next administration will face an extraordinarily complex global landscape. The challenges are myriad, from a resurgent China seeking to reshape the international order to an increasingly unstable Middle East to emerging opportunities and challenges across Africa. The next president will need to effectively guide U.S. policy on multiple fronts.

In this issue of *Defense Dossier*, we examine six key areas demanding attention from the next administration. Our contributors offer policy recommendations for strengthening American leadership in space, engaging strategically in the Global South, reinvigorating relations with European allies, competing effectively with China, redefining our approach to the Middle East, and building meaningful partnerships across Africa. Together, these analyses provide a roadmap for advancing U.S. interests globally for the next occupant of the White House. We hope you find these articles insightful and informative.

All the best,

Ilan Berman  
Chief Editor

Richard M. Harrison  
Managing Editor



# Winning the New Space Race: Advice for the Next Administration

*Richard M. Harrison and Peter A. Garretson*

The Apollo program of the 1960s and early 1970s demonstrated American ingenuity and served as the foundation for accessing and exploring the great unknown. Unfortunately, over the past several decades, space has not carried the same prominence in America. In fact, until very recently, government space projects have languished, been given low priority, and even become partially dependent on competitors and hostile foreign powers (such as Russia).

Why the lack of interest and investment? The national decline in space can be attributed to a variety of factors, among them: a persistent lack of political will; the absence of a clear goal to accomplish; risk averseness and fear of failure; the substantial cost of space access; and government contractors being disincentivized from developing technology quickly. Shockingly, total space funding today is less than one percent of the federal budget, as compared to approximately two percent during the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

Yet while the U.S. government's space efforts have been flagging in recent years, those of the private sector are gathering steam. Today, the U.S. government can proudly rely on private American corporations (such as Elon Musk's SpaceX) for access to space. Corporations in the United States are developing expertise and capacity quickly—and that may help foster commercial activities and opportunities in space.

The U.S. private sector understands that space has a lot to offer economically. Conversely, the policymaking community has been concentrating predominantly on understanding the nature, scope, and implications of adversary military threats in space, as well as the importance of maintaining a safe space environment for the United States to conduct operations. As a whole, however, Washington has struggled to grasp the major economic benefits of developing space.

## CAPITALIZING ON A THRIVING SPACE ECONOMY

Today, space has become essential for modern society. Satellites enable near-instantaneous and ubiquitous communication, high-precision global navigation, rapid financial transactions, and improved weather forecasting, among many other innovations that society now relies on. The U.S. military, meanwhile, has reaped the benefits of space for secure global communications, intelligence collection, ground forces positioning, and weapons guidance—all because of robust satellite architecture. However, these developments in space barely scratch the surface of what is achievable. NASA spinoffs, or technology derived from space missions, have brought significant benefits to society over the years, ranging from firefighter suits to memory foam to water filtration to technology found in computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the advent of reusable rockets and advancements in artificial intelligence, 3-D printing, robotics, and other emerging technologies have steadily made space more accessible and open for business.

The space economy, in other words, is primed for development. Major financial institutions forecast that the space economy will be in the trillions of dollars annually by 2040.<sup>3</sup> The significance of the advent of reusable rockets cannot be understated, as it has slashed the cost of carrying cargo into space by 85 percent over the past two decades.<sup>4</sup> In turn, as launch prices continue to fall, it will lower the barrier of entry and increase the amount of possible space services.

New space services will transform the space economy. For example, when the new SpaceX Starship is able to launch with regularity it could enable point-to-point travel. This would drastically reduce flight time, enabling people and cargo to be transported around the world for

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commercial and military benefit (for example, a traditional 15-hour flight from New York City to Shanghai will take only 40 minutes). Another benefit to low launch costs would be to pursue technologies that foster in-space servicing, assembly, and manufacturing (ISAM). And placing into orbit satellites capable of conducting a wide array of missions, ranging from in-space refueling to in-space assembly and manufacturing, would allow for larger, more complicated and durable structures.

The vast resources of Earth's Moon will be the natural starting place to begin ISAM, before moving on to harvest the millions of asteroid feedstocks. The ability to make use of Lunar feedstocks to build new industries and enable space industrialization is one reason why NASA has been directed to return to the Moon, and specifically to its South Pole. The Lunar South Pole contains water and ice in its craters, and Lunar regolith (dirt) contains aluminum, oxygen, iron, and other materials. Accessing these resources will be integral to NASA's Artemis program, which has set its sights on returning boots to the

largest market and use for space mining will be the construction of very large satellites, large space stations, factories, server farms, and power stations.

The most promising and economically impactful application of the confluence of reusable space access, ISAM, Lunar development, and asteroid mining is space solar power (SSP). Citigroup estimates that the SSP industry will amount to \$23 billion annually by 2040.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps the most encouraging technology for improving the quality of life on Earth, to steward the biosphere, and to access the vast abundance of the solar system. Unlike terrestrial solar power, solar collectors in space (and beyond the shadow of the Earth) will collect constant powerful sunlight and then beam it wirelessly via radio waves, around the clock, to antenna receivers on the ground. SSP appears to be able to scale to meet global energy demand several times over and provide energy with minimal environmental impact. As a report by McKinsey & Company and the World Economic Forum lays out, "Moving industries like power production into

orbit could play a role in reducing global warming and ensuring that Earth can continue to sustain human life."<sup>7</sup>

**The space economy is poised to be worth over a trillion dollars annually within two decades. That explosive growth can also benefit the U.S. economy; by 2040, the U.S. space economy will grow to approximately \$460 billion and support over 925,000 private-sector jobs.**

While solar energy is crucial for successful space development, it is only one piece of the energy puzzle. Power and propulsion are fundamentally enabling us to reach deeper into space, undertake ambitious missions, and build a space economy. Any sort of civilization in space will require significant amounts of power for industrial processes, for habitats, and for transportation. Solar power has many advantages when relatively close to the Sun (such as in Earth orbit) and when unobstructed by shadow. However,

surface of the Moon by 2026, and thereafter establishing a permanent presence on the South Pole.<sup>5</sup>

However, the Moon isn't the only space object that has desirable resources. The mineral wealth resident in the belt of asteroids between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter has an unfathomable value measured in the quintillions of dollars. Space-mined materials can be utilized for in-space manufacturing of rare valuable items. The

wherever sunlight is not constant (such as on the Moon and Mars) or is weak (such as on Mars and in the asteroid belt), or where multiple reliable power sources are essential to life (such as in any human habitat), there are many reasons to prefer nuclear power. Similarly, in situations that require moving significant mass at great speed (such as human transport to Mars, interception of a dangerous



asteroid or comet, or a rapid military response between distant bodies), possessing space nuclear propulsion is analogous to the difference between a jet engine and a propeller. As such, the nation that leads in space nuclear power and propulsion is likely to become the leader in space exploration, space development, and space settlement. Moreover, space reactors can provide heat and electrical power to space vehicles and space stations, and power highly efficient electric thrusters on spacecraft.

Considering the myriad potential opportunities that space has to offer, it's clear that the investment is worth the upfront expense. Even today, U.S. investment in space is paying major dividends. GPS, now operated by the U.S. Space Force, annually generates about \$70 billion – or nearly five times the FY 2021 Space Force budget. Furthermore, NASA technology has produced 2,000 spinoff technologies in the past 40 years. The space economy is poised to be worth over a trillion dollars annually within two decades. That explosive growth can also benefit the U.S. economy; by 2040, the U.S. space economy will grow to approximately \$460 billion and support over 925,000 private-sector jobs.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, space experts have failed to articulate the great benefits of space industrialization—the manufacturing of structures in space, the development of space solar power satellites, the generation of nuclear power systems, and space mining—or explain that valuable space activities cannot be achieved without focused investment and government prioritization. What is needed is a broadening of the policy debate to consider space as an integral part of a peacetime strategic offensive designed to expand U.S. economic and industrial power in the context of great power competition.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE CHINESE SPACE VISION

More recently, the United States, as a result of the While America's space efforts have been narrowly focused, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has laid out and begun

**While America's space efforts have been narrowly focused, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has laid out and begun to implement a sweeping national space strategy—one that could, over time, severely and adversely impact U.S. economic and military security.**

to implement a sweeping national space strategy—one that could, over time, severely and adversely impact U.S. economic and military security. China's effort is driven by a singular purpose, buttressed by a state-run economy and political decision-making processes that ensure its rapid implementation.

China is a space power on the rise. It is currently the number-two global power in space by all available metrics, and if its upward trajectory continues, the PRC will be poised to surpass the U.S. China's plans for space are far reaching and include: supporting the Belt and Road Initiative, economic as well as foreign policy development, mining for critical resources, exploration of the Moon and Mars, and the establishment of its own space stations and bases. These priorities, moreover, are synergistic. For example, the so-called "space silk road" (天基丝路) can provide financial support for the space programs of assorted African powers, thereby advancing China's soft power on that continent.

China's development of space infrastructure is far from purely economic, and its civilian and military programs are blended. The engineering, research, development, manufacturing, satellite or missile control, and launch facility infrastructure that support space activities is the same as that which supports the PRC's ballistic missile



and warhead development. China has a significant focus on space for several military applications. For instance, it has established a wide-ranging system of ground-based interceptors, directed energy weapons, and space-based systems for anti-satellite operations. Moreover, the CCP has a deep mistrust of the United States and its motivations in space. Meanwhile, China's own successes in this domain have been aided by espionage and weak export controls in the United States. Unfortunately, American scientific cooperation with the PRC has aided the Chinese military and helped to create both a threat and a competitor.

The CCP is preparing to contest the United States in space by developing techniques for asteroid mining, the creation of nuclear-powered shuttles for space exploration, and the industrialization of the Moon to fabricate satellites that can harness energy in space and serve as a base for further deep space exploration. Beijing, in other words, is beginning to exploit space to achieve its great power ambitions. And more is yet to come.

China's government has laid out concrete milestones in this domain, envisioning its space efforts culminating in an Earth-Moon economic zone generating \$10 trillion annually by the year 2050.<sup>9</sup> Beijing, moreover, is making serious progress toward that goal. The PRC sees space as a general enabler of its national power, and as a way to improve its economic and military posture. Three elements are essential for space dominance: space nuclear power, propellant, and space-based solar power. China is now investing in all three. The pronounced difference between the U.S. and Chinese space programs is that central planning has allowed China to construct a plan that will lead it to surpass the United States as the world's premier space power.

#### DEFINING, AND SUPPORTING, AN AMERICAN SPACE AGENDA

When it comes to space, one major difference between China and the United States is a clarity of vision. With a grand plan and the benefits of a military-civil fusion strategy, China has outlined more concrete steps to achieving sustained spacepower. It is high time for the United States to develop a comprehensive strategy that

serves its economic, societal, and military interests. It will be imperative to devote resources to nuclear power and propulsion systems. Solar energy will be indispensable for further development in space, as well as to provide power to Earth. Asteroid and Lunar mining, along with in-space manufacturing, will provide the resources needed to fully realize all that space has to offer humanity. To be successful, private-sector space companies, NASA, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense, Congress, and the White House, along with other federal agencies, will need to work together to unlock the limitless potential in space.

The United States needs to structure its approach to space to ensure that it can meet or surpass PRC timelines. The pace of U.S. efforts will be driven by politics, policy, and the seriousness with which we seek to address great power competition in this emerging domain. It is time to widen the U.S. lens vis-à-vis space from mere exploration to a comprehensive strategy that serves American economic, societal, and military interests. America needs to articulate a space vision committed to a path of space economic and industrial development and to guarantee the protection of such commerce. To compete successfully against China, the United States will need to go on the strategic offensive before it is too late.

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## Charting a Path Forward with China

*Michael Sobolik*

The day before Russian president Vladimir Putin launched his “special military operation” against Kyiv in February of 2022, Gary Kasparov, the famed Russian chess grandmaster and political dissident, held forth in a private gathering about the policy failures that led to war in Ukraine. The famed Putin critic condemned the naivete that deluded Washington and many European capitals for decades. “Francis Fukuyama,” Kasparov boomed, “forgot a simple lesson of history: the evil doesn’t die... the moment we lose our vigilance, the moment we turn to be complacent, it sprouts out.” The charged reference to Fukuyama, a political scientist who naively predicted “the end of history” shortly after the Berlin Wall collapsed,<sup>1</sup> stems in large part from Kasparov’s own story: multiple arrests in Russia, physical abuse from Putin’s thugs, and subsequent alienation from the country he called home. That is the choice tyranny forces dissidents to make: death at home, or alienation abroad.

Americans only understand this dilemma abstractly. To be an American is to be safe from our own government. They enjoy the dual luxuries of security and freedom. Many people on Earth can only pick one – or, more accurately, one is chosen for them.

The United States is on the cusp of an era, however, when Americans can no longer take their good fortune for granted. The cost of being a free American is about to rise precipitously. Correspondingly, the cost of preserving a world conducive to liberty will also spike. Putin is a threat, yes, but a secondary one. America’s primary adversary in the twenty-first century is Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party. Beijing’s ambitions are global, and Xi has counted up the cost of achieving them. According to key indicators—the mobilization of reservists, wartime criminal code adjustments, increased military recruiting, and the construction of air-raid shelters—Xi is already preparing China for war.<sup>2</sup> That is, after all, a

primary objective of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Xi’s pet foreign policy project: softening the political terrain to minimize blowback from Western countries if and when Xi gives the order to take Taiwan.

But the BRI stretches far beyond China’s near-abroad. It is a gambit for imperial domination on Beijing’s terms that stretches from Eurasia and Africa to the Americas and the Arctic. The CCP is trying to do more than displace the United States as a hegemon. Beijing is creating a world safe for tyranny and unsafe for democracy. That means, among other things, exporting the party’s style and system of government, which in turn strengthens despots and attacks liberty. The vast majority of Americans are concerned about China and view Beijing as a threat, but few understand that the success of the party’s foreign policy depends on the failure of the American-led world order and the weakening of America’s political system.

In the face of this threat, America’s leaders in Washington are badly missing the mark. Many, like President Biden and his advisors, believe that evil can be neutered and tamed, civilized and modernized. Contrary to their own protestations, they are reprising America’s decades-long effort to transform the CCP into a “responsible stakeholder.”<sup>3</sup> Such is the strength of their belief in progressivism. Simultaneously, many conservatively inclined tycoons have made a fortune in China and are now opposing any effort to counter Beijing’s predations. They ignore not only the CCP’s true nature (a brutal Leninist party led by a thug), but also China’s imperial past. They dismiss the objective of Chinese foreign policy that spans millennia—matching its civilizational greatness with political power—because they care about their bottom line more than national security.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, many across America recognize evil sprouting back. They see the CCP for what it is—and

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where it is. The party has infiltrated our universities, businesses, communities, and government. It has shaped the fiduciary interests of Fortune 500 companies and harnessed supply chains for critical technologies. By “following the market,” many American companies have become complicit in gross human rights violations inside China. Beijing is exploiting America, as well as our allies and partners—and they are changing us.

These two problems—CCP malign influence and American culpability in atrocities—must be addressed and resolved. Doing so is an undertaking that will be measured in years, not months. American universities must value students above their own institutional interests, because CCP influence bastardizes education by teaching young Americans what to think about China, not how to think about it. Business executives should prize morality above cheap supply chains, because “never again” requires more than moralizing press releases.

This is all necessary work to blunt Beijing’s bid to rule the world. It is also, however, insufficient. Good housekeeping is the bare minimum, not the apex, of great power competition. America cannot “edit-undo” our way into strategic advantage. If the United States is to turn the tables on the Chinese Communist Party and win this new cold war, policymakers in Washington must force Beijing to react to American gambits. The U.S. must set the tenor and tempo of competition on favorable strategic terrain for America. Practically, this means identifying Beijing’s weaknesses and exploiting them. It means performing calculated tests of the CCP’s “red lines” to learn about the party’s rhetoric and resolve. It means adopting a view of Xi and the regime he leads not as a problem to tame, but a threat to mitigate. America’s pol-

icymakers should aim to weaken Beijing and degrade its ability to achieve those of its key interests that threaten the United States and our allies. The question for America, now, is whether its leaders will pull the lever and test our advantage. Should they do so, Americans may be surprised to find how exposed and weak Xi Jinping and his comrades actually are.

What exactly, though, does winning look like? How will Washington strategists know if their net assessments are accurate and their competitive strategies are working?

Economically, sanctions on corrupt, BRI-affiliated state-owned enterprises (SOEs) should weaken China’s commercial advantage abroad.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, we should expect to see Beijing winning fewer contracts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Eurasian trade routes that run through Xinjiang would also collapse as countries withdraw from the project altogether and de-risk their supply chains. Over time, we should expect these competitive actions to materially impact China’s economy. Xi Jinping refuses to liberalize China’s market and continues to leverage SOEs for political control. A successful competitive strategy would further depress China’s economic growth forecast. America should not apologize for pursuing this outcome. International politics, to quote former Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI), is not a “polite tennis match.”<sup>6</sup>

Informationally, successful policies would shift perceptions and media narratives within host countries and force the CCP to defend its record of exploitation. Over time, fewer heads of state from the Global South would make the pilgrimage to Beijing because doing so would imperil them politically at home. Indeed, the optics of reduced attendance at Belt and Road summits are already embarrassing for the party. Over time, these factors could suggest that the Middle Kingdom does not, in fact, rule over “all under heaven.”<sup>7</sup> This development could threaten the party’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people.

These trends, combined with dedicated and persistent U.S. operations to weaken the CCP’s internal censorship apparatus, should yield higher spending by China on internal security. Counterintuitively, that resource allocation could be a positive sign

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for America, provided that increased attention at home distracts Xi and the Politburo Standing Committee from focusing on Taiwan. A more objective measure of success would be an uptick of political protests throughout China that question the party's efficacy and legitimacy.

No doubt some may balk at such brinksmanship as destabilizing and dangerous. Mindless hawkism, after all, is no less a betrayal of prudent statesmanship than pacifist appeasement. Let us be clear, though. The Chinese Communist Party, not the United States, terrorizes its own people and exports its internal instability around the world. Healthy governments do not behave this way. It is not incumbent on representative democracies like the United States to make allowances for the CCP's pathologies. Doing so would amount to strategic codependency. Nor is it America's responsibility to change China politically; only the Chinese people can do that. What Washington can do, however, is distract Beijing from its dangerous agenda, lull it into stagnation, and, hopefully, head off the CCP's rise. Washington need not adopt a policy of regime change across the world to do this. The failures of that approach are well documented.

The CCP has adopted a foreign policy of imperialism. It cannot help but do so. Imperialism is baked into China's identity and sense of story.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, imperialism has a way of stretching tyranny and exposing its weak underbelly. From corruption and propaganda to censorship and genocide, the CCP has revealed itself to be brittle and susceptible to outside pressure.<sup>9</sup> America can win this struggle for the twenty-first century without going to war with China.

Honesty, though, requires a full accounting. Competing to win against the CCP will come at a cost. Politicians in Washington will need to put country before party, because we cannot tear down the CCP's "Great Firewall" if we are tearing each other apart. The American people need Republicans and Democrats to cooperate and legislate for strategic advantage, not partisan wins. Nor can we credibly condemn Beijing's predatory foreign policy if we do not agree on what America stands for in the world.

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Our allies and friends are depending on us. They will not accept any meaningful risk with China that the United States itself is unwilling to assume. We cannot count on our partners to crack down on BRI corruption or corresponding atrocities if Washington remains unwilling to systematically target them.

The price, in other words, is high. It is essentially a peacetime mobilization of national power harnessed to secure an outcome: victory, short of war. It may be tempting for some to dismiss this framing and suppose that we can have peace without paying a price. History suggests this delusion is common among democracies. It is, as the late historian T.R. Fehrenbach put it, "the abiding weakness of free peoples... their governments cannot or will not make them prepare or sacrifice before they are aroused."

The CCP is counting on this weakness to delay the United States long enough for Beijing to lock in its strategic gains. That is the true purpose of the BRI, and the PRC's broader foreign policy: make the world safe for the Chinese Communist Party. If America is to keep the world safe for freedom, Washington must target the BRI's asymmetric weaknesses. More broadly, it must clearly define its strategic objective vis-a-vis Beijing.

Policymakers could do worse than borrowing Ronald Reagan's simple vision during the first Cold War: "We win. They lose."<sup>10</sup>



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## Toward A More Competitive in the “Global South

*Thomas S. Sexton*

Historically, U.S. foreign policy has given distinctly short shrift to the “Global South,” as the seventy-seven countries of the developing world are collectively known. Admittedly, this has begun to change, as more and more attention is paid to China’s inroads into regions such as Latin America and Africa via its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Indeed, China’s enormous ambitions—and its deft combination of economic, political, and military strategies—pose the most significant challenge to American standing in the Global South.

This new challenge, in turn, necessitates new thinking. By crafting more innovative approaches to the tried-and-true approaches of economic engagement, defense cooperation, and soft power strategies, the U.S. has the power to reposition itself as a vital partner for countries in the Global South and adopt a more competitive posture there.

### (ECONOMIC) UPDATE IN PROGRESS

Many countries in the Global South have not yet achieved their economic potential. This is a fact China realized early on, and hailed itself as the leader of the Global South and promoted its BRI projects around the globe. These projects focus mostly on highways, railroads, bridges, and other basic infrastructure. In other words, these initiatives are predominantly 20th century initiatives. In today’s rapidly advancing technological age, however, countries in the Global South have much more to gain (and desire) from more modern projects where cyber and tech dominate.<sup>1</sup>

There are still tremendous economic rewards to be reaped from digital development, especially in telecommunications sectors. For example, data indicates that, as of early 2024, only about 37% of Togolese citizens have access to the Internet.<sup>2</sup> Developing telecommunications networks thus presents an opportunity to gain substantial economic gains—a fact that officials in have suggested.<sup>3</sup>

And the United States has the potential to facilitate such a digital revolution. Investing in digitizing key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, logistics, and financial services, can create more skilled and lucrative jobs, boost the local economy, and foster a robust data ecosystem. It could also make the United States a more favored partner in the Global South as a whole.

Above and beyond development through digitization are the capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI). Countries in Southeast Asia are already emerging as regional hubs for technology and AI-driven economic growth. Digital technologies like AI are being used to improve agricultural yields and efficiency in Indonesia, for instance. These efforts, which include mobile connectivity, AI, and cloud computing, are transforming how food is produced and managed.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. can partner with these nations to develop robust digital ecosystems and better address challenges in agriculture, healthcare, and education. For example, AI technologies can optimize crop yields, monitor environmental conditions, and mitigate the impact of climate change.

Healthcare presents another key area where the U.S. can offer high-tech solutions. In countries where rural areas often lack access to medical services, AI-powered telemedicine can bridge the gap, improving health outcomes for underserved populations.<sup>5</sup> Through partnerships with local governments and healthcare providers, the U.S. can help expand telemedicine platforms, scaling them to meet the growing healthcare needs of these regions. By investing in digital literacy and local tech ecosystems, the U.S. can support the development of homegrown talent, empowering countries to lead their own digital transformations and in the process reducing dependence on external actors like China.

The digital revolution and AI-driven growth, in other words, offer a pivotal opportunity for the U.S. to reassert its influence in the Global South. Promoting entrepre-



neurship and digital education will enable local nations to harness human capital and take ownership of their respective technological futures—something that would be a significant departure from China’s BRI model, which focuses heavily on infrastructure development while creating dependencies on Chinese companies and technology. America, by contrast, should prioritize empowering local businesses and innovators, offering a sustainable growth model that aligns with localization and self-reliance.

### GUNS AND BUTTER

Diplomatic engagement with the Global South must focus on bolstering regional partnerships and security cooperation with the United States. China’s bilateral agreements—often struck in exchange for political influence and natural resources—have created asymmetrical relationships, with many nations finding themselves saddled with unmanageable debt. The United States, on the other hand, can promote a multilateral approach, working through regional organizations to address the root causes of instability and build resilience in governance.

In West Africa, for instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provides a platform for regional trade, conflict resolution, and democratic governance, and has already played a significant role in stabilizing conflicts and facilitating economic cooperation.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. can enhance these efforts by supporting cross-border trade initiatives and helping to strengthen regional security mechanisms that reduce reliance on external actors like China. In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) serves as a stabilizing force, promoting regional security and economic integration. By deepening its engagement with ASEAN, the U.S. can likewise offer a counterbalance to China’s growing influence in the South China Sea and across Southeast Asia. These types of regional organizations will, first and foremost, set the tone for the localization of diplomacy and security, with the United States serving as a broker.

Critically, however, U.S. policy must move away from traditional state security paradigms toward a human security approach. Unlike state security, which focuses on protecting national borders and regime stability, human security emphasizes the protection of civilians, the pro-

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motion of good governance, and development initiatives that improve the well-being of entire populations.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, together with its Congressional analogue, the Global Fragility Act, provides a blueprint for U.S. engagement in this area, addressing the underlying causes of instability, such as poverty, inequality, and political disenfranchisement.<sup>8</sup>

U.S. defense cooperation should further be reoriented to prioritize civilian needs and not focus exclusively on traditional military-to-military partnerships. In the Global South, many countries face complex threats that go beyond strictly military challenges, among them natural disasters, public health emergencies, and humanitarian crises. These non-military threats require security forces that are trained not only to defend national borders but also to protect civilian populations and respond to emergencies.

In other words, America must lead in bolstering regional cooperation in the Global South as well as addressing both military and non-military security threats. Issues such as pandemics, environmental degradation, and climate change disproportionately impact the world’s most vulnerable populations, and the U.S. is in a position to offer the necessary expertise, resources, and training to mitigate their effects. By shifting its defense cooperation to focus more on human security, we can position ourselves as a trusted partner that prioritizes long-term stability, human rights, and democratic governance—and draw a clear contrast with China’s more traditional, state-centric security model, which often supports authoritarian regimes and exacerbates existing social inequalities.



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#### PLAYING SOFT

While economic and defense cooperation are critical components of engagement, America's potential to posture itself more competitively in the Global South also lies in its soft power. American culture—through music, technology, fashion, and film—continues to exert a significant influence, especially among younger populations in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. This cultural appeal forms a crucial pillar of U.S. soft power, shaping positive perceptions of American values such as liberalism, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship. Programs like the Fulbright Program and the Peace Corps have a long history of promoting U.S. soft power around the world. In Africa in particular, the Mandela Washington Fellowship (MWF) and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) have already made substantial inroads in building lasting connections between the U.S. and emerging leaders.<sup>9</sup> To further capitalize on this foundation, such programs should be expanded to incorporate digital literacy, creative industry partnerships, and entrepreneurship development, all of which are vital to empowering the next generation of leaders to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Moreover, by partnering with local tech firms and universities, the U.S. can help cultivate a culture of creativity and innovation that aligns with American values. This approach contrasts sharply with China's model,

which often emphasizes state control over creativity and freedom of expression, limiting the organic growth of local industries. By championing individual empowerment and market-driven innovation, Washington can foster ecosystems that not only benefit local economies but also generate goodwill toward American ideals. Cultural exchanges and expanded educational initiatives can further leverage the "coolness" factor of American culture. Our music, films, and fashion represent more than just entertainment; they embody a narrative of innovation and opportunity. That, integrated with the development technical skills, can help provide young leaders with the tools to lead their nations into the future while simultaneously fostering a connection to American values.

#### REPOSITIONING U.S. LEADERSHIP

As America seeks to reposition itself in the Global South, it must offer a practical and effective alternative that aligns with the region's aspirations. By focusing on economic engagement that empowers local innovation, defense cooperation that prioritized human security, and soft power that resonates with younger generations, the U.S. can optimize its influence and strengthen relationships in the Global South.

To that end, the next administration must adopt a holistic strategy that not only counters China's influence but also empowers countries to chart their own path toward self-sufficiency, democratic governance, and inclusive growth. In doing so, the U.S. can establish itself as a key partner in shaping the future of the Global South.

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## Africa Matters, and the Next President Can't Afford to Ignore It

*Lilly Harvey*

As the U.S. presidential election inches closer, foreign policy is—predictably—getting decidedly short shrift. Nevertheless, the next president's foreign policy agenda promises to be a full one, and among the most important priorities facing the next White House will be reversing the longstanding drift in U.S.-Africa relations. The need to do so is urgent, because neglecting Africa endangers American interests both at home and abroad.

Doing so won't be easy, however. Historically, U.S. engagement with Africa has oscillated between neglect and merely superficial interaction. From the Barbary Wars of the early 19th century to more recent military interventions, U.S. actions have frequently prioritized strategic interests over genuine partnership, leaving many African nations caught in a cycle of instability and underdevelopment—and opening the door for their exploitation by other strategic actors.

### A HISTORY OF NEGLECT

The Barbary Wars, fought between 1801 and 1805 and again in 1815-1816, marked America's first military involvement in Africa. Notably, they were motivated primarily by commercial concerns, rather than by diplomatic ties with the countries of the continent. This pattern continued during World War II, when U.S. engagement in North Africa was driven by a strategy to defeat the Axis powers and secure crucial resources, such as oil and access to the Suez Canal. In both instances, American intervention was reactive, aimed at responding to immediate wartime needs rather than fostering long-term political or economic development in Africa itself.

During the Cold War, Africa became a crucial battleground for ideological influence between the United States and the Soviet Union, as newly independent nations sought to shape their political futures. To prevent

the spread of communism, the U.S. employed foreign aid and selective military intervention, aiming to tether these nations to the West. Economic assistance was used to build infrastructure and modernize economies, often with (usually unrequited) expectations of resulting political loyalty and alignment with capitalist values. Additionally, military support and covert operations targeted pro-Soviet movements, sometimes backing authoritarian regimes in the process.

But as the Cold War waned, American involvement declined sharply. Throughout the 1990s, U.S. foreign policy toward Africa became characterized by limited engagement, a state of affairs that contributed to conditions that allowed anti-democratic elements to gain traction in various countries. While America's disengagement was not the sole cause of Africa's ills, Washington's retraction created critical gaps in support for the broadening and strengthening of democratic institutions, thereby leaving room for the spread of local instability and creating an opening for engagement by authoritarian actors, such as Russia and China.

In recent years, U.S. policy toward Africa has reflected this persistent tradition of disengagement. During the Trump administration, America's relations with the countries of the continent were marked by a business-centric approach that prioritized commerce over strategy. To be sure, efforts like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the Prosper Africa Initiative sought to boost economic ties and leverage the continent's strategic value. The administration focused as well on counterterrorism cooperation with regional states as part of its broader strategy to combat Islamic extremism. But overall, these efforts were undermined by a glaring lack of diplomatic and democratic support to local governments. In turn, this minimalism—manifested through the absence of a single presidential visit during

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the Trump era, as well as and controversial policies such as troop withdrawals and proposed cuts to foreign aid—painted a negative picture of U.S. commitment to the continent.

For its part, the Biden administration has focused more on diplomatic outreach to the continent via such initiatives as the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, rejoining the Paris Agreement, and support programs like AGOA and climate initiatives. However, these efforts have often been disjointed and superficial, leaving many African nations skeptical of larger U.S. intentions. With a focus on global health challenges, particularly COVID-19, and an emphasis on bolstering ties with the African Union, the current Administration likewise appears to be more reactive than proactive. A presidential visit to the continent has also been lacking during the Biden administration, and delays in climate finance and vaccine distribution have further fueled concerns about the sincerity of U.S. engagement.

This sporadic involvement falls far short of meaningfully countering the growing influence of China and Russia, both of which have made major inroads into the continent in recent years.<sup>1</sup> It also serves as a cautionary tale for the next occupant of the White House, because Africa is assuming greater geopolitical significance than ever before.

## WHY AFRICA MATTERS

When it comes to Africa, the future has well and truly arrived. The continent boasts some of the fastest growing economies in the world,<sup>2</sup> and this trend is poised to continue. Africa is home to the world's fastest-growing population, with over 60% of its citizens under the age of 25, making it the youngest continent in the world.<sup>3</sup> This demographic represents a transformative force that will shape global dynamics in the coming decades. But it also poses a unique opportunity and challenge for powers with competing interests. In one regard, this youthful population represents a significant workforce that can be harnessed through education and job creation to drive innovation, productivity, and economic growth throughout Africa, and subsequently abroad. However, the continent faces the challenge of keeping up with this rapidly growing population in terms

of infrastructure, healthcare, and access to education. These pressures require substantial investments, leaving African leaders shopping for partners that will prop up their efforts—a list from which Washington, at least for the moment, is conspicuously absent.

The rise of Africa's young workforce is coupled with the growth of the continent's middle class, which has tripled to over 310 million in the last 30 years.<sup>4</sup> As disposable incomes increase, so too does consumer demand for goods and services, creating new opportunities for businesses and investors alike. These trends indicate that Africa will increasingly play a crucial role in the global economy. The continent's continued development is expected to create vibrant markets, open for mutually beneficial investments in sectors such as technology, agriculture, renewable energy, and manufacturing. For countries and companies, understanding the social, political, and economic landscape of Africa is essential to tapping into its vast potential.

In geopolitical terms, too, Africa is all-important. It has emerged as a formidable force shaping contemporary migration patterns, climate resilience, and security challenges.<sup>5</sup> Africa's roles as both a source and a transit point for migration will heavily influence regional stability in adjoining regions, from Europe to the Middle East. Furthermore, Africa's vulnerability to climate change makes the continent's progress inherently fragile, and greater investments are needed to foster resilience in highly agriculture-dependent regions in order to avert food insecurity, displacement, and conflict. In terms of

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security, the threat picture confronting the continent is complex, ranging from terrorism and insurgency to piracy at sea.

All of these challenges have propelled regional governments to seek assistance from external actors. For their part, China and Russia have recognized these trends and decided to put skin in the game—albeit in different ways.

China has emerged as Africa's largest economic partner, with annual trade now exceeding \$200 billion.<sup>6</sup> Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the PRC has helped to dramatically improve infrastructure across the continent. Furthermore, China's financial aid often comes with fewer conditions than that of its Western counterparts, expanding its appeal and crowding out American businesses. By positioning itself as a reliable partner focused on development, China has effectively shaped public opinion on the continent, portraying the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as more favorable and generous than Western powers.<sup>7</sup> This narrative resonates deeply with many African nations, fostering a sense of gratitude and partnership that contrasts sharply with the often critical views of Western intervention.

In contrast, Russia has employed familiar Cold War-era tactics to extend its presence and influence in Africa. In recent years, Moscow has used the Wagner Group (now rebranded the Africa Corps) to support unstable regimes, gaining both diplomatic leverage and access to critical resources in the process. Arms sales and

mercenary deployments forge deeper ties with local governments, securing defense agreements and promising ongoing military cooperation in exchange for strategic alignments.<sup>8</sup> Economically, Russia focuses on resource extraction—particularly diamonds, gold, and uranium—as payment for its services. These assets have gone on to empower the Kremlin's foreign adventurism elsewhere, such as bankrolling Vladimir Putin's war of choice against Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, Russia has busied itself building alliances with African nations, leveraging historical ties, economic partnerships, and military cooperation to build sympathy in multilateral institutions (such as the UN) and to create a bloc of supportive African nations. Like Beijing, Moscow has worked to position itself as a development partner, contrasting its approach

to that of Western governments, which it frames as neocolonial. Meanwhile, Russian media outlets, such as RT and Sputnik, engage in sophisticated disinformation campaigns that emphasize themes of independence and anti-colonialism, systematically undermining Western influence and consolidating Russia's geopolitical standing.<sup>10</sup>

## OPPORTUNITY WITHIN ADVERSITY

Within this bleak overall picture, however, there is still room for the United States to assume a competitive posture. The incoming administration has a unique opportunity to cultivate a dynamic partnership with Africa that transcends conventional diplomacy, intensifies economic ties, balances security commitments, and revitalizes development efforts—all while championing democracy and human rights.

Such a partnership needs to start with an understanding that Africa is not simply a battlefield, but an increasingly important actor in international relations. This requires moving beyond the tired narrative that Africa might matter "someday" to an understanding that African countries are, in fact, present-day partners whose needs and aspirations the United States should take into account. Doing so requires prioritizing the promotion of inclusive economic policies that empower local businesses and championing fair trade practices that enable African nations to compete on the global scale.



All of the above needs to be accomplished through transparency, accountability and equal partnership.

In the security realm, too, the U.S. can do much more to ensure regional stability. By supplying real, meaningful counterterrorism assistance, the United States can help regional nations secure their sovereignty without needing to resort to help from Moscow or Beijing (and the predatory practices that will inevitably ensue). In much the same way, values-based trade can draw a clear contrast with the current economic dominance of China on the continent—and encourage ethical practices in business. By establishing collaborative frameworks that prioritize technology transfer, capacity building, and sustainable development, the U.S. can position itself as a trusted partner in Africa's growth story. In turn, such an approach can help promote democracy, stability, and prosperity across the continent.

The stakes are high. A failure to act decisively risks relegating the United States to the sidelines of great power competition, allowing others to shape Africa's future and redefine global trade and development. To do that, however, we need to stop thinking about Africa as a battleground, and understand that the continent is increasingly a linchpin of both U.S. national interests and global commerce. The next president will need to grasp this reality, and commit to a far deeper strategic engagement with the continent.

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# Trans-Atlantic Relations: A Primer for Our New President

*E. Wayne Merry*

In a year of numerous elections around the globe, many Europeans are watching ours with greater concern than even their own, and with good reason. Whatever the outcome of the Harris-Trump presidential contest, it will be of great importance for both sides in the trans-Atlantic relationship, not least because the two candidates take very different views of our country's role in European security affairs and especially in response to Russia's invasion of its Ukrainian neighbor.

Throughout the decades of the Cold War, Moscow time and again took actions which pushed Europe and America together despite many and frequent rivalries. Will that happen again with the new U.S. president?

## THE LONG ARC OF TRANS-ATLANTIC TIES

The United States has played a decisive role in Europe for over a century: in the First World War, Second World War, the Cold War and now in what can be reasonably characterized as the Second Cold War.

For this discussion, we can assume that a new Trump Administration would formulate its trans-Atlantic policy—in both security and economic fields—based on the preferences enunciated by Trump during his first four years in the White House, and that a Harris administration would more or less constitute a continuation of the Biden Administration in relations with Europe. In short, a second Trump presidency would be very skeptical toward both NATO and the EU, and adopt an essentially transactional relationship toward European states, both individually and collectively. In contrast, a Harris presidency would seek to maintain and strengthen the Atlantic security alliance within NATO plus pursue various forms of economic partnership with Brussels and EU members.

For either administration, though, China and the

status of Taiwan would occupy key national priorities. A Harris team would seek to engage Europe in support of Taiwan, while a Trump Administration would likely substitute China policy in its priorities for Europe. A basic question would be whether the United States would downgrade its support for Ukraine in order to enhance its partnership with Taiwan or would see Ukraine and Taiwan as complementary partnerships for the United States. Here, the balance of political forces in Congress will be critical, but not nearly as much as the worldview of the new president.

Tensions in trans-Atlantic dynamics are nothing new, however. For more than a century, Europeans have regarded the American Republic as an offspring of Europe and little more than a servant for European interests, only to encounter a genuinely nationalist self-perception in the United States. In 1917, for example, the British and French governments assumed incorrectly that American soldiers would simply be fed into their own force structures to alleviate their combat losses, in contrast to Canadian and Australian troops which fought under their own flags and officers. Many European leaders were actually offended when informed that American soldiers would fight within their own formations and under U.S. command and colors. To a considerable extent, this basic European perception of America as servant of Europe continued through World War II and into the First Cold War.

The collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union confronted Americans with a fundamental question: should the U.S. proclaim “mission accomplished” and go home? Indeed, with the onset of the Yugoslav wars, some prominent European leaders declared “the hour of Europe,” and asked the United States not to intervene. Sadly, that option quickly proved a flop, more for reasons of



political leadership within Europe than operational capacity. The West European powers had ample forces to subdue civil conflicts in the Balkans, but they could not agree on who would be in charge. Once again, the Americans were invited (i.e. required) to do the Alliance's dirty work. In Washington, the policy debate soon settled on pursuit of a "global NATO" in which the Alliance would need to "go out of area or out of business." The consequence, despite considerable doubts among populations on both sides of the Atlantic, was an ever-expanding NATO with its leadership still in Washington.

A decisive moment came at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, where the U.S. delegation led by President George W. Bush insisted, against considerable European reluctance and strong German and French opposition, that NATO commit itself in writing to future membership for both Ukraine and Georgia. (Notably, Russian President Putin was present as a guest of the Alliance.) This was done despite opinion samples in Ukraine which showed large popular majorities there against NATO membership and broad support for the provision in Ukraine's 1996 constitution that the country should become a "permanently neutral state that does not participate in military blocs." After NATO acquiesced to Washington's pressure at Bucharest, Putin responded later that year with the use of military force in Georgia and with even larger actions in 2014 against Ukraine.

The Bush policy of NATO expansion was maintained by the Obama administration, but encountered significant reservations under Trump, whose policy reluctance

on Ukraine contributed to his first impeachment. In parallel, the American public was increasingly fatigued by the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as involvements in Somalia, Syria and elsewhere, and then by the new proxy war in Ukraine. The debate was not so much about American bloodshed but rather why the American taxpayer should still shoulder the financial burden of European security generations after Europe was more than wealthy enough to pay for its own defense—and was in fact an economic giant in comparison with post-Soviet Russia. Given that Trump's view of international relations has been consistently transactional, it is hardly surprising that his overt impatience with Europe and its consistent falsehoods about burden sharing should result in trans-Atlantic tensions during his presidency.

By contrast, President Biden made improving relations with Europe and restoring the leading U.S. role within NATO, and not just support for Ukraine, a top national and personal priority. This focus can reasonably be expected to continue under a Harris presidency, albeit with difficulties on Capitol Hill regarding funding for Ukraine. On NATO more broadly, there remains significant bipartisan support on the Hill. Indeed, if Trump sought to exercise the U.S. right under Article XIII of the 1949 Treaty to leave NATO, he could encounter a serious constitutional challenge from Congress.

#### A DEEPER DIVERGENCE

The growing tensions in trans-Atlantic relations are by no means limited to security issues and the future of Ukraine. The European Union pursues economic and financial policies that are extraordinarily statist by American standards. While Europe has allowed its security role in the world to wither, the Brussels establishment aggressively pursues international regulatory structures and policies which are near-anathema on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley. The EU is the product of a post-War Franco-German economic philosophy that is antithetical to Anglo-American classical liberalism, and even more so to recent American libertarianism.

Beyond this deeply entrenched conceptual difference (in which Brussels can be as distant from Washington as is Beijing), there is a broad Euro-

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pean unease with the fundamental American pursuit of innovation. In American English, the very word “innovation” enjoys almost entirely positive connotations, while in French and German the term often conveys negative implications (such as challenging, disruptive and risk-oriented). Contemporary innovation culture is broadly associated in Europe, and indeed almost everywhere in the world, with youth and with America. In consequence, for many years most EU regulatory penalties have been targeted against American companies whose product innovations are viewed in Brussels as disruptive and as destructive to traditional elements of the European economy.

This is nothing recent. Over half a century ago, one of the most influential books in post-War Europe was *Le Defi Americain* (“The American Challenge”) by the French journalist J.J. Servan-Schreiber, which contrasted a Europe based on established and collaborative industries with the innovation and disruption of American firms like IBM and Boeing. Ever since, European governments and the institutions of the European Union have viewed their trans-Atlantic security ally in often negative economic terms, and in need of supervision and even control by European regulatory structures. Indeed, only weeks ago, a major report by the former head of the European Central Bank and Prime Minister of Italy Mario Draghi sounded the alarm to the dangers posed by firms like Microsoft, Apple, Google, and most recently Nvidia. Today, the pros-

pects of AI combined with American corporate finance are seen in Europe as fundamental dangers requiring European-centered regulations with global applications to inhibit American innovation engines.

Not surprisingly, this European mentality is often seen in Silicon Valley and Wall Street as inherently reactionary and problematic for the future. Of parallel concern has been the industrial policies of the Biden administration, with their statist and supervisory aspects. Indeed, the industrial policies of “Bidenomics” resemble European rather than traditional American approaches to the role of government toward innovative technologies and products. Not surprisingly, some prominent American entrepreneurs have felt more at ease with Trump’s economic philosophies than with those of Biden (and likely those of Harris). Thus, beyond the U.S. role in the Ukraine conflict, perhaps the most basic contrast between Trump and Harris in trans-Atlantic relations would be their view toward the application of statist subsidies and government regulations toward things like Artificial Intelligence and its pending applications.

### NEAR-TERM CHALLENGES

The most pressing issues facing the new U.S. president in relations with Europe in the immediate future are the following:

*Russia’s war in Ukraine and the coordination of American and European policies in this proxy conflict.* Moscow almost certainly will adjust its European policies and its military strategies to the outcome of the American election. Will the United States — which in Russian perceptions itself played the central role in bringing on this conflict — provide Ukraine with the wherewithal to maintain its sovereignty and independence, even if not to restore its former territorial integrity?

*Multilateral cooperation in effecting some kind of settlement for Israel and the Palestinians.* There may not be a Middle East peace anytime soon (or anytime at all), but both America and Europe cannot avoid conflicts in the Middle East as they often do in parts of Africa, in Latin America or Central Asia. The U.S. will certainly take the lead, but Europe cannot avoid major participation.

*Multilateral cooperation in limiting illegal mass*

**Whoever is next in the Oval Office will need to communicate to the European elites and publics that the American Republic is no longer willing to accept a role as Europe's servant. The American demographic has altered dramatically in the aftermath of the two European world wars. Europe is no longer a mother country for most Americans, and especially for our youth.**



*migration, which is perhaps the greatest international challenge facing all developed countries in the years ahead.* For European countries, this is more difficult because their demographics are so comparatively weak while their experience of integrating outsiders into their societies has been so poor. Then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel was very wrong when she proclaimed a decade ago “wir schaffen das” (we can handle this) concerning mass migration from the Syrian civil war and Afghanistan. As recent regional elections in eastern Germany alone show, they cannot. Look at Sweden, which has tried over many years to manage large-scale cross-cultural migration and failed; it now faces what it says will be a decade just to control the resulting crime wave.

### RESETTING THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Whoever is next in the Oval Office will need to communicate to the European elites and publics that the American Republic is no longer willing to accept a role as Europe’s servant. The American demographic has altered dramatically in the aftermath of the two European world wars. Europe is no longer a mother country for most Americans, and especially for our youth. The shared identity which took American Doughboys and GIs to Europe is a thing of the past.

Rather, whoever inhabits 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue next year must think in terms of “America First,” even if they not enunciate it, because the U.S. electorate outside the Washington Beltway thinks that way.



## Reengaging the Middle East

*Lawrence J. Haas*

America's next president will face a war-torn Middle East in which the battlelines between our allies and adversaries are more clearly delineated than ever. That will create both peril and possibility for the United States, requiring the new administration to dispense with tired shibboleths and engage in fresh thinking about the region if it hopes to navigate the evolving landscape successfully.

At the moment, our closest ally (Israel) is besieged by our fiercest adversary (Iran) and its "axis of resistance." Israel and Iran have clashed more directly in a military sense than ever before while threatening one another in increasingly apocalyptic terms,<sup>1</sup> raising the chance of all-out war between the two. Meanwhile, Tehran continues to inch closer to a nuclear capability that would upend regional dynamics in profound ways. While Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza will wind down in the coming months, what's next for Gaza, its Palestinian civilians, and Israelis who live near its border remains unclear. Israel's burgeoning war with Hezbollah is expanding well beyond the Israeli-Lebanese border, bringing bloodshed and destruction to more parts of both nations, while Yemen's Houthis continue to fire missiles into the heart of the Jewish state.

In geopolitics as in other areas of life, however, problems nurture opportunities—and, amid war and turmoil across the region, the opportunities are sizable for Washington. A more brazen Iran is drawing the Gulf states closer to one another, and to Israel. Saudi-Israeli "normalization," which Washington is working to foster, could prove a regional game-changer, opening the floodgates to wider Arab-Israeli peace and a more robust multilateral counterweight to Iran. And if Washington can help cultivate a new generation of Palestinian leaders to replace the blood-soaked Hamas and the corrupt Pal-

estinian Authority, the United States could make progress on two key goals: (1) nourish a Palestinian governing structure for Gaza to replace Hamas that Israel might be willing to accept, and (2) put Israelis and Palestinians on a true path to peace, as Riyadh demands as a condition for normalization.

But achievements of this kind will require a new U.S. perspective about the region and its players that is based in reality, rather than wishful thinking. The next president's strategy should include at least the following four elements: 1) more public support for Israel, 2) more persistent pressure on Iran, 3) more collaboration with Saudi Arabia, and 4) more accountability from the Palestinians.

### GREATER SUPPORT TO ISRAEL

Lest anyone has forgotten, it was Hamas—a genocidal terror group—that launched the latest war in Gaza more than a year ago by slaughtering 1,200 Israelis in barbaric fashion, engaging in horrific sexual violence, seizing more than 200 hostages, and, since then, executing some hostages and threatening to kill the rest if Israel tries to rescue them. Nor has Hamas been chastened by Israel's military response. To the contrary, its leaders have pledged to launch as many more October 7-like attacks as necessary to ensure Israel's destruction.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, President Biden has condemned Hamas in unmistakable terms and, with Congress, provided Israel with sizable financial and military support to prosecute the war. But Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and other top officials have repeatedly criticized Israeli military tactics and delayed the delivery of some powerful weaponry in order to pressure Jerusalem to ease or alter its operations. While chastising Prime Minister



Benjamin Netanyahu for not doing enough to reach a deal with Hamas to release the hostages, Biden and other U.S. officials have blamed Israel for rising Palestinian casualty numbers that, we must remember, are issued by Gaza's Hamas-controlled Health Ministry and which do not distinguish between terrorists and civilians. At the same time, officials pay short shrift to the brutal reality that both Hamas and Hezbollah imbed their fighters and weapons in dense civilian areas (in or near homes, schools, and hospitals) for the explicit purpose of boosting civilian casualties and, in turn, subjecting Israel to the resulting public opprobrium.<sup>3</sup>

Washington's public carping about Jerusalem and its military and diplomatic strategies is morally wrong and geopolitically flawed. Morally, the United States should stand by Israel as the victim of terror and—as it seeks to prevent future slaughter by defanging Hamas and Hezbollah—not chastise it as the perpetrator of unnecessary civilian death. Geopolitically, U.S. criticism of Israel emboldens Tehran and its terrorist network by raising prospects that Washington will pressure Jerusalem to quickly “de-escalate” in the aftermath of almost any attack on its soil.

That is a recipe for a wider conflict. The best way to promote regional peace for the long term is for Washington to stick by its ally publicly and give it the capabilities it needs to finish the job. Doing so would give Tehran and its proxies more reason to pause before escalating with Israel on other fronts.

**The next administration needs to view the Middle East through clear eyes, not rose-tinted glasses. It should treat Israel as the victim of terror, not its perpetrator. It should recognize Iran as an implacable adversary, not a partner for peace. It should consider Saudi Arabia a bigger partner for regional peace and prosperity, not a pariah.**

## MORE PRESSURE ON IRAN

Ever since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, presidents of both parties have sought a rapprochement with the radical regime in Tehran. Such efforts reached their high-water mark under President Obama, who sought to rebalance the U.S. posture in the Middle East by reaching out to Iran's leaders, expressing respect for their nation's regional rise, and offering cooperation on matters of joint concern. Most notably, Obama spearheaded the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the global nuclear agreement that restricted some Iranian nuclear activities but that was plagued by massive loopholes regarding inspections of Iranian sites and other key matters.

“Hope springs eternal,” as Alexander Pope wrote, and that is especially true in Washington when it comes to trying to coax Tehran into regional cooperation. But hope is not a policy. The new president must recognize that, fueled by aggressive, expansionist, anti-Israeli, and anti-U.S. ardor, Tehran is an inherently adversarial actor that works to undermine U.S. interests in the region and beyond. Hostility to the United States is built into the regime's DNA. No sweet talk or, in the case of the JCPOA, global sanctions relief will change the sentiments of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei or the hardline clerical class over which he presides.<sup>4</sup> Nor have Tehran's longstanding geopolitical goals changed; it seeks to destroy Israel, drive America out of the region, and expand its revolution across the Middle East and beyond.<sup>5</sup> Directly and through its proxies, Tehran already exerts enormous influence over the governments of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. The Islamic Republic, moreover, is pursuing a nuclear weapons capability while continuing to expand the reach and sophistication of its ballistic missiles.

The new president should view the regime clearly and proceed accordingly. Washington should eschew efforts to revive the problematic JCPOA. It should expand sanctions against both the Iranian regime and its key players over its nuclear proliferation, regional expansionism, terror sponsorship, human rights abuses, and other malevolent activities. It should continue to demonstrate its commitment to Israel by sending important signals at key moments, such as Biden's decision to send two aircraft carriers and accompanying warships to the region in August after Israel assassinated



senior Hamas and Hezbollah members and braced for an Iranian response. And it should put more muscle behind the longstanding American vow not to allow Tehran to develop nuclear weapons by, for instance, coordinating more closely with Israel on planning for possible attacks on Iran's nuclear sites.

The new president should take these steps, moreover, with a clear recognition that the path to containing Iran is through strength, not persuasion.

### GREATER OUTREACH TO RIYADH

Saudi-Israeli normalization, coupled with a U.S.-Saudi defense treaty, would bring significant benefits for all three parties. Washington would get more military access to Saudi Arabia and limit the latter's military cooperation with China. Jerusalem would get an official new ally that could inspire wider Arab-Israeli peace, as well as a stronger coalition against Iran. Riyadh would get a defense guarantee from the United States and support for its civilian nuclear program.

Yet Riyadh's current demand for Palestinian statehood<sup>6</sup> as a condition of normalization, rather than its prior demand only that Israel commit to pursue statehood, could prove a bridge too far for Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Congress could reject a U.S.-Saudi defense pact if it is not accompanied by normalization between the Kingdom and the Jewish state. Nevertheless, the next president can strengthen U.S. ties to Riyadh even in the absence of either.

Washington, for instance, could expand ongoing U.S.-Saudi military exercises, which would further both

U.S. and regional efforts to deter Iran. It also could encourage more U.S. defense firms that do business with Saudi Arabia to open offices there or partner with local firms, as Riyadh is now demanding. Boeing and Lockheed Martin have established such partnerships and RTX (formerly known as Raytheon) is exploring one as well.<sup>7</sup> Saudi Arabia's participation in the coalition of April that defended Israel against Iran's drone and missile attack showcases how multilateral military arrangements help Washington protect its interests far from home.

### MORE PALESTINIAN ACCOUNTABILITY

No one doubts that, under the right circumstances, Palestinian statehood would boost Israeli security, let Palestinians chart their own future, and undermine Iran and its proxies in their quest to prevent wider Arab-Israeli peace and destroy the Jewish state. But the right circumstances must include a dramatic change in the attitudes of Palestinian leaders as well as the Palestinian people when it comes to Israel and the "two-state solution." The next U.S. president should demand that change as a prerequisite for investing time, effort, prestige, and political capital in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

Needless to say, Hamas must have no future governing role in Gaza. But neither should the Palestinian Authority in its current form—whether in Gaza or the West Bank. The PA, a corrupt and sclerotic byproduct of the Oslo process, serves neither the Palestinian people nor the cause of peace. Like Hamas, it rules in authoritarian fashion, brooking no dissent. It encourages terrorism by paying stipends to the families of killed or imprisoned terrorists—the more Israelis that these terrorists kill, the higher the stipends. Across the West Bank, Palestinians at schools, in mosques, and on social media are taught to hate Jews and reject Israel's legitimacy. Not surprisingly, according to polls in November and December of last year, 72 percent of Palestinians supported the Hamas attack and 75 percent supported a "Palestinian state from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea"—that is, a Palestine that would replace Israel, rather than live alongside it.<sup>8</sup>

Such a state of affairs is simply unacceptable. The next president should demand a new Palestinian leadership that wants peace, accepts Isra-

**The next president's strategy should include at least the following four elements: 1) more public support for Israel, 2) more persistent pressure on Iran, 3) more collaboration with Saudi Arabia, and 4) more accountability from the Palestinians.**



el, and works to build support for a two-state solution among the Palestinian people.

### TAKING A SECOND LOOK

The next administration, in short, needs to view the Middle East through clear eyes, not rose-tinted glasses. It should treat Israel as the victim of terror, not its perpetrator. It should recognize Iran as an implacable adversary, not a partner for peace. It should consider Saudi Arabia a bigger partner for regional peace and prosperity, not a pariah. And it should pressure the Palestinian leadership, currently split between the bloodthirsty and the corrupt, to create the conditions that would enable its people to move beyond hostility and radicalism.

With the right strategy, Washington can make progress in containing Iran and its terrorist network, and in nurturing Israeli-Palestinian peace – but only if the next administration dispenses with old, tired, and fanciful notions about the region and its key players.

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