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#### Contention one is uniqueness.

#### American global commitments are unsustainable:

#### 1. Overstretch. The combination of global commitments and brittle supply chains makes short-term collapse likely.

Kathryn Levantovscaia 24. Deputy director, Forward Defense program, Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security; MA, International Relations, Webster University. “Overstretched and undersupplied: Can the US afford its global security blanket?” Atlantic Council. Jan. 5, 2024. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/overstretched-and-undersupplied-can-the-us-afford-its-global-security-blanket/.

In recent decades, US foreign policy has been beset by visions of the United States ensuring security throughout much of the world, but with little thought to the resources or resolve required or the second-order consequences. One would do well to remember the words of British writer Aldous Huxley: “good ends . . . can be achieved only by the employment of appropriate means.” This notion is specifically relevant when reflecting on the US defense ecosystem—one bearing an industrial base that had struggled to meet capacity long before conflict erupted in Ukraine and Israel in recent years. While maintaining regional stability across the globe is critical to US defense and national security objectives, simultaneously supplying major arms packages to Israel and Ukraine, at a time when the United States needs to prepare for the possibility of armed conflict with China, will stretch production lines and resources beyond sustainable limits, potentially jeopardizing all US-supported efforts.

Recently, the US response to conflict in the Middle East and to Russia’s war in Ukraine has brought to light growing concerns about US defense industrial capacity and about the spectrum of security cooperation the United States deploys. Limited resources within the Department of Defense are polarizing debates in Washington and beyond about which country needs help more: Israel or Ukraine? The real answer is less simple than one or the other. While maintaining Israel’s and Ukraine’s sovereignty are both critical to US national security objectives, the size of the United States’ involvement in helping each could, in turn, gamble with many of the same security objectives.

The capabilities needed in Ukraine, Israel, and a potential conflict with China vary, which prompts many US commentators to argue that the United States can sustain all three. However, that presumption undermines alarms raised across the federal government. Both the administration and the Department of Defense have highlighted their concerns about vulnerabilities resulting from a dependence on a shrinking number of sub-tier providers and the disruption on US defense supply chains caused by geopolitical instability.

US defense industries are wheezing in fundamental categories of weapons production. Several decades of inadequate defense budgets compounded with poor management of major Department of Defense acquisition programs has left the nation with a force whose inventory of vital weapons is smaller, older, and less ready for combat. The hollowing out of the broader US manufacturing base has made defense companies dependent on supply chains originating in, of all places, China. From electronic components to gallium, Chinese companies export unconscionable percentages of indispensable subcomponents and materials on which US production lines depend.

To put this into perspective, US stocks of precision-guided munitions are perilously low. If the United States were to engage in a Pacific conflict, the US military would run out of these munitions within three to ten days. Meanwhile, Israel is in an existential fight, running through its inadequate weapons reserves as Ukraine commands $44.2 billion to date in US military assistance just to stay afloat. Frankly put, the US defense industrial base is a fraction of what it was when the United States codified commitments to Israel. Despite the immense strain on domestic manufacturing capacity, Washington continues to put greater investment in mounting commitments abroad than in the health of the US industrial base. There are no plans in place for a major expansion nor the significant budget increases required.

Make no mistake, this does not call for the abandonment of Ukraine or Israel. Ukraine is a critical regional strategic partner whose territorial integrity is key to both US and international security. Further, allowing Ukraine to fight Russia is arguably a more favorable alternative than forcing NATO to do so. On a similar token, US support to Israel emerged not in a flash, but from decades of step-by-step US-Israel alliance building and consideration of the dilemma created by the United States selling weapons to Arab states. Israel has been the cornerstone of US strategy in the Middle East since the Cold War, and as the leading Western influence in the region, the United States relies heavily on Israel’s sustained and protected existence. Regardless, careful mind must be paid to the true cost of US security commitments and their impact on longstanding partnerships and alliances.

Moving into an election year in the United States, a rise in exports of US military assistance while the domestic defense ecosystem withers could reignite skepticism and scrutiny among key US decision makers toward NATO. Reverting back to the previous administration’s disdain for multilateralism risks bringing down the entire security edifice that US statesmen erected in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East during the twentieth century.

Prioritizing US strength helps US allies and partners

While US leadership is critical, mounting world crises require a division of labor among allies. The United States carries the overwhelming load, and the US warfighter is dangerously stretched—so much so that the military’s standards for new recruits dropped significantly last year in a desperate attempt to fill ranks. Retainment is at an all-time low. China and Iran know it; hence, their galling military provocations from Taiwan to the Red Sea. US armed forces may be the strongest in the world, yet they are too small to handle the country’s many commitments abroad. As European allies continue to step up their support to Ukraine, the United States should take this pivotal opportunity to reinvest and rebuild US manufacturing prowess.

The United States prioritizing its own strength is the only sustainable path to support Ukraine and uphold every other commitment made by the country to allies and partners. US leaders and policymakers should be unwavering in their commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty. But in order to provide security assistance responsibly, they must first ensure a robust and well-resourced US defense industrial base, guaranteeing the United States’ long-term ability to support allies and partners while deterring adversaries.

NATO allies collectively enjoy an economy in excess of forty trillion dollars, top-tier military technologies, and a surplus of F-16 fighter jets, which, if provided in number, could make a large difference in Ukraine’s objective of recapturing its territory. Europeans not only have the fighter-bombers, but also the complex logistical and training networks to get Ukrainian pilots in the air quickly and create conditions for breaking the current stalemate. Decisions like these, however, require alignment on both sides of the pond. The US administration only recently provided the green light for Europe to provide Ukraine’s pilots with F-16 aircraft and training, which Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall deemed a key capability for Ukraine’s long-term defense.

Pursuing regional stability in Europe and the Middle East simultaneously are critical and costly endeavors. Doing so at the current pace in light of capacity limitations could backfire and damage not only Ukraine but also NATO. At the same time, the United States lacks the requisite focus to take on a Chinese threat to Taiwan and to defend its Pacific position because the US military and defense industrial base are stretched thin. This problem must be addressed now—a time when the United States’ European allies’ continued support for Ukraine affords the opportunity to do so.

#### 2. Resolve gap. Credibly signalling that we care as much as adversaries about hotspots is impossible.

Dr. Stephen Walt 24. Robert and Renée Belfer professor, international relations, Harvard University; PhD, Political Science, Berkeley. “America Is Suffering From a Resolve Gap.” Foreign Policy. Jan. 30, 2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/01/30/biden-america-foreign-policy-middle-east-jordan-china/.

U.S. foreign policy in recent years can look like a series of misadventures—failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, bungled peace efforts in the Middle East, growing nuclear capabilities in some rival powers, and any number of other embarrassments. And the latest setback—the deaths of three U.S. soldiers in Jordan in a drone attack by a pro-Iranian militia—raises new questions about what U.S. forces are doing in these turbulent areas and whether it makes sense to keep them there.

It’s tempting to blame these recurring failures on inept U.S. leadership (in both political parties) or an ill-chosen grand strategy—I’ve written plenty of that sort of criticism myself—but U.S. efforts to shape world politics face a deeper structural problem that we sometimes overlook. U.S. initiatives sometimes fail not because U.S. strategy is necessarily bad or because public officials are less skilled than one might wish, but because adversaries have a greater stake in the outcome and are willing to make greater sacrifices than we are to get their way. In these situations, America’s superior power may be overcome by an opponent’s superior resolve.

This problem arises in good part because the United States is far and away the most secure great power in modern history. It has no serious rivals anywhere near its own territory; has a large, sophisticated, and diverse economy; possesses thousands of nuclear weapons; and enjoys a highly favorable geography. Its present level of security and prosperity may not last forever, but no other country (and certainly no major power) is in an equally fortunate position today.

The result is a paradox: The United States can roam the world and intervene in lots of distant problems because it doesn’t have to worry about defending its own soil against armed attack. But these favorable circumstances also mean that what happens in these far-flung regions is rarely critical for U.S. survival and may be only loosely related to its long-term prosperity. Among other things, this means that nearly every major foreign war fought by the United States is, to some degree, a war of choice. States facing a hostile invader or a rapidly deteriorating security situation may have no option but to fight to retain their independence, but the United States hasn’t faced these problems since the 19th century. Even U.S. entry into both world wars may not have been strictly necessary: Although I believe intervening in both of these conflicts was the right decision on strategic and moral grounds, U.S. involvement was hotly debated at the time—and for understandable reasons.

Since then, the United States has frequently found itself fighting adversaries far from its shores and either close to its opponents’ territory or on their home ground. A vastly weaker China intervened in the Korean War because U.S. forces were approaching the Chinese border, and Mao Zedong was willing to sacrifice more than a hundred thousand troops to keep the U.S. and its allies from controlling the entire Korean Peninsula. The United States cared enough about Vietnam to send more than 2 million troops there and lose more than 58,000 of them, but the North Vietnamese cared even more than we did, endured far more serious losses, and eventually prevailed. Americans were more than willing to go after al Qaeda in Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks, and they were even willing to stay on for years trying to keep the Taliban from regaining power. In the end, however, the latter cared more about the fate of that country than we did. Similar circumstances are also apparent in Ukraine: The United States and others have been willing to send money and arms and take other costly steps to help Kyiv, but Russia’s leaders are willing to send soldiers to fight and die there and Ukraine’s foreign backers are not. Not because Western leaders are pusillanimous, but because it’s a bigger issue for Moscow (and for Ukraine) than it is for the rest of the world. The same uncomfortable problem lurks in debates about Taiwan: No matter how often U.S. officials and defense experts stress that Taiwanese autonomy is a vital U.S. interest, it is hard to be confident that they care more about this issue than Beijing does.

Please note: The fact that adversaries may have more skin in the game and thus greater resolve does not mean that the United States should not take on global commitments or intervene in distant conflicts. One may not need equal resolve to deter an opponent from taking some risky action, for example, because they can’t be sure one won’t respond and impose costs they don’t want to bear. Nor does it mean that more resolved adversaries necessarily win, as the confrontations with Iraq in 1991, Serbia in 1999, and the Islamic State in Iraq demonstrate. But the fact that the United States is typically operating far from home and that its opponents will therefore tend to have greater resolve is a recurring feature of the broader strategic environment.

#### 3. Political backlash. Polarization and rising isolationism ensures support for global engagement will dry up.

Christopher Preble 24. Senior Fellow and Director, Stimson Center; former co-director, New American Engagement Initiative, Atlantic Council; PhD, History, Temple University. “A Credible Grand Strategy: The Urgent Need to Set Priorities.” Stimson Center. Jan. 2024. https://cesmar.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Grand-Strategy-Report-WEB-1.pdf.

The Constraints on U.S. Power

This strategy begins with a careful look at constraints, the heaviest of which is the domestic political context and how that affects the United States’ ability to craft a credible and consistent foreign policy that advances the interests of the American people.

To be sure, this is not a new problem. The idea that politics in the United States stops at the water’s edge is mostly a myth. But partisanship and severe polarization has derailed nearly every recent attempt to reform U.S. domestic policy, from immigration to the debt. Foreign policy is hardly immune to these pressures. Elected officials will struggle to find common ground.

For example, drawing on results from its 2023 Survey of Public Opinion on Foreign Policy, the Chicago Council reported that Democrats and Republicans have different foreign policy priorities and different ideas about the best ways to achieve their respective goals. According to the Chicago Council’s polling, “Republicans (82 percent) are far more likely than Democrats (49 percent) or Independents (55 percent) to emphasize military strength,” and six out of ten Republicans would “prioritize the United States being a leader in manufacturing (62 percent)” versus just 44 percent of Independents and 41 percent of Democrats who agree.”

Among Democrats, on the other hand, nearly eight in ten would “prioritize combating climate change (79 percent), [and] human rights (78 percent)” and Democrats “are also distinctly more likely to say that it is very important for the United States to be a world leader in humanitarian assistance (56 percent).” Only 28 percent of Republicans agree.

With respect to the nature of America’s global role, the Chicago Council notes that 57 percent of all Americans prefer that the United States “take an active part in world affairs” while over four in ten (42 percent) “say it would be best to stay out.” The result, the Council explained, “continues a steady decline in support for international engagement in recent years and is among one of the lowest levels of support recorded in the 49-year history of the Chicago Council Survey.” An Associated Press-National Opinion Research Center (AP/NORC) poll taken in November 2023 found similar results: 45 percent of all respondents wanted the United States to take “a less active role in solving the world’s problems,” whereas fewer than one in five (18 percent) would have the United States take “a more active role.”\*\*

The perception of a decisive turn against global engagement might derive from how different Americans interpret the phrase “an active role.” In fact, many Americans agree that the United States should engage with the rest of the world—but not assume most of the burdens of managing it. Republicans and some Independents are particularly concerned about collective security. Although “a plurality of Americans (42 percent) want the United States to maintain its level of engagement in international organizations on issues of collective security,” according to a poll taken by the Eurasia Group Foundation (EGF), 34 percent of Republicans and 37 percent of Independents favor less engagement; 37 percent of Democrats favor more.’ This was more starkly highlighted in the Chicago Council’s latest polls. “Republicans, in particular,” the Council noted, “have grown more doubtful of the value of continued U.S. engagement overseas. For the first time in nearly 50 years. . .. a majority of Republicans (53 percent) think the United States should stay out of world affairs rather than play an active part.”"”

LACKLUSTER SUPPORT FOR PRIMACY

These findings are particularly pertinent to the role of the military in U.S. foreign policy. For decades, US. foreign policy elites have often viewed the use of force and coercion as the sine qua non of America’s influence. Foreign policy pundits have been most critical of U.S. presidents when they have been unwilling to use force. This elite agreement extends to funding the military. Passing large Pentagon budgets is the one thing on which Republicans and Democrats seem to agree. Even opponents of more Pentagon spending admit there is not much debate on the matter—or, when there is, they lose. “That sets the tone for more, more, more for the military,” explained Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA), a member of the House Armed Services Committee.’\* In this environment on Capitol Hill and throughout Washington, DC, the view prevails that U.S. military dominance must be maintained in order for the United States to continue to be safe and prosperous at home and a leader globally.

Many Americans beyond the Beltway are increasingly skeptical of this claim, however. A mere 16 percent believe that the United States should spend more on its military, while 34 percent favor cutting the Pentagon’s budget. For the latter group, the top rationale for favoring less defense spending is the desire to see those funds reallocated to “domestic priorities.” And the prospects for mobilizing public support for considerably higher Pentagon budgets in the future are particularly dim. Americans aged 18-29 are nearly twice as likely to support cutting military spending as those over 65 (43 percent to 23 percent).””

As expected, party affiliation matters, too. Democrats and Republicans sharply disagree over the wisdom or folly of higher military spending, and whether we use it too much, or too little. “Twice as many Independents and Democrats support a decrease in the defense budget as an increase,” EGF reported in October 2023, whereas “Republicans are about evenly split” between wanting to send more or less money to the Pentagon.”

Partisan differences are also revealed in the single largest foreign policy expenditure in 2022 and 2023: aid to Ukraine. In this case, however, Republicans want to spend less. A poll taken in November 2023, for example, found 59 percent of Republicans believe that the United States is spending too much on Ukraine aid, whereas nearly half of Democrats said that Ukraine is receiving the right amount. Overall, only 14 percent of respondents thought that the United States is providing too little support to Ukraine.”\*

Supporters of an ambitious U.S. foreign policy, and the costly forward-deployed military forces necessary to execute such a strategy, therefore, are sailing into strong headwinds. They believe that the United States must spend far more on the military than it does today—and are confident that the country can do so without sacrificing necessary investments at home or threatening the overall health of the U.S. economy.” At times, the Biden administration seems to agree, calling for higher military spending even as it also plans to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on everything from physical infrastructure to green energy.

The United States has certainly spent more on its military as a share of its economy in the past. Whereas military spending constituted the lion’s share of U.S. federal government expenditures before the Great Society programs of the 1960s, it comprises less than 20 percent of all such spending today. That also means, however, that any additional increment of Pentagon spending must now cut into broadly popular domestic programs—or be offset by higher revenues. Neither seems likely.

PERSISTENT DEFICITS AND LOOMING DEBT

Of course, the United States could just go deeper into debt. That, too, carries risks. During the Cold- War-era, U.S. military spending to contain and deter the Soviet Union was mostly paid for by current taxes. Large and persistent federal budget deficits were rare, and total public debt as a percentage of GDP averaged 37.6 percent of GDP between 1970 and 1990. In contrast, the average debt-to-GDP since the second quarter of 2008 is 98.3 percent and has hovered at or above 100 percent of GDP since 2012. And the situation has mostly gotten worse in the last few years. In the last three quarters of 2022, for example, the U.S. debt-to-GDP ratio averaged 119.2 percent, and although the first quarter of 2023 saw a decrease to 117.3 percent, the following two quarters saw the increase return with 119.5 percent and 120.0 percent, respectively.

U.S. debt levels will soon rival those at the end of World War II and over the longer term will reach unprecedented levels absent increased revenues (see Figure 1). In August 2023, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the federal budget deficit in the first 10 months of the fiscal year was $1.6 trillion, more than twice the shortfall from the same 10-month-period in the previous year.

The true scale and significance of the U.S. fiscal imbalance remains hotly contested. Pro-spending economists once pointed to low inflation and low interest rates to refute the claim that debt levels are unsustainable. But inflation worries now dominate public perceptions of the state of the U.S. economy. In a bid to tame rising prices, the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates seven times in 2022 and four times in 2023; the Federal Funds Rate as of this writing is as high as 5.5%, its highest level in 17 years. Inflation has cooled, but after the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank’s annual Economic Policy Symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in August 2023, Reuters reported, “Most officials do think the economy will slow, as tight policy and stringent credit are more fully felt and pandemic-era savings are spent down.”

A rising current account deficit, increased protectionism, and a strong dollar could cause a crisis for those developed countries that have borrowed in dollars. The risk is even more serious for Washington if the United States is seen as printing its currency indiscriminately. Such a perception, coupled with the United States’ accumulating high debt, might eventually sour investors on the dollar. The decision by the rating agency Fitch to downgrade U.S. debt from AAA to AA+, the first such downgrade since 2011, is a worrisome sign of investors’ anxiety.

The U.S. federal government’s deficit spending is enabled, in part, by the willingness of foreign bondholders to buy up this debt. Moreover, a leading purchaser of U.S. debt has been China—the very nation that much of this additional spending is aimed at thwarting. The entity that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once called “America’s banker” is unlikely to gladly finance a massive increase in U.S. military spending if relations continue to worsen and the risk of conflict grows more acute. And, indeed, China’s purchases of U.S. debt have fallen dramatically in the past decade. A rational strategy would assume that Beijing will not, to paraphrase a famous dictum, help Washington to buy the rope with which it aims to hang China.

THE DECLINING UTILITY OF U.S. MILITARY POWER

Even if U.S. debt remains attractive to foreign buyers, thus allowing for massive increases in Pentagon spending, this strategy assumes that the United States’ ability to maintain a decisive military advantage over any and all possible rivals will still attenuate. Attempting to restore this decisive advantage would almost certainly fail.

Meanwhile, most Americans believe in U.S. international engagement, but they prefer that the United States share the responsibilities and burdens of global leadership with other states. A Gallup poll taken in February 2023 found that only one in five Americans wants the United States to “take the leading role in world affairs,” while 45 percent favor “a major role but not the leading role.” Taken together, the percentage of Americans favoring a leading or major U.S. role has been mostly falling for the last two decades, down from a high of 79 percent in 2003.” This strategy takes account of these facts, recognizing that there is little public support for attempting to dominate the planet militarily, but there might be support for continued active global engagement. Absent a major and imminent threat to the U.S. homeland, however, Americans simply will not tolerate the levels of spending and taxes necessary for deterring all malign actors in all major regions simultaneously. Yet, that is the assumption upon which most strategies are constructed today.

Another assumption guiding this strategy pertains to the technological trends that privilege defense over offense. These very technologies have made it difficult for a military superpower like the United States to decisively defeat even small and weak adversaries, from Saddam Hussein loyalists in Iraq to the Taliban in Afghanistan. More recently, these technologies have enabled an outmanned and outgunned Ukraine to thwart Russia’s war aims. A strategic environment characterized by advanced sensor networks, robotics, and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as miniaturized explosives, greatly complicate the ability of America’s exquisite military platforms to penetrate and conduct offensive operations. However, many of these same technologies allow U.S. allies and partners to maintain a regional balance in their respective areas without relying on U.S. power-projection capabilities many thousands of miles away from the continental United States.”

Finally, seeing U.S. power only through a static military lens has distorted many analysts’ perceptions of threats. Military tools have failed to protect the United States from a host of dangers. The obsession with jihadist terrorism after 9/11, for example, diverted attention and resources that might have been useful against the COVID-19 pandemic, or to avert the growing damage from climate change. Moreover, adversaries have resorted to asymmetric warfare, such as cyberattacks, against which traditional military tools—from ships and planes to infantry and artillery—are irrelevant.

In short, an overemphasis on great-power military competition could make the United States less protected against all these other threats. The further overmilitarization of U.S. foreign policy, effectively ignoring the lessons from two decades of inconclusive wars, would amount to doubling down on failure.

INTENSE COMPETITION FOR RESOURCES

Some claim that public opinion on foreign policy is not a reliable guide to what is possible. Nonetheless, grand strategy should take public sentiment into account—and especially the public’s willingness to expend additional sums to sustain the status quo. As political commentator Walter Lippmann famously advised in 1943, “Foreign policy consists in bringing into balance, with a comfortable surplus of power in reserve, the nation’s commitments and the nation’s power.” When he wrote that, the American people were accustomed to sacrifice and privation. The memory of the Great Depression was still fresh, and the United States was fighting a two-front war against both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Millions of American men had been drafted into the military, hundreds of thousands would be killed, and many more would be severely injured. Meanwhile, mobilization at home was upsetting long-established norms. Rationing and wage-and-price controls had become the norm. Millions of American families planted victory gardens. And the top income tax rate was 94 percent. During World War II, there was broad and deep consensus behind what the United States was doing overseas and a willingness to sacrifice to see those two wars to a successful conclusion.

Today, the situation could not be more different. A tiny fraction of Americans have served in the military. Tax rates are low, and political activity is mostly focused on lobbying for more domestic spending, including for countless programs that did not exist in 1943, from Medicare for seniors to student loan forgiveness for the youngest voters. A grand strategy without a durable domestic foundation risks writing checks that the body politic will not cash.

The competition for resources between foreign and domestic priorities is not always so stark. After World War II, living standards for a wide swathe of Americans rose, even as the U.S. military maintained a global presence unlike anything previously attempted. This was possible, in part, because the U.S. economy grew at an average annual rate of 5 percent in the 1960s. In contrast, in the 30 years since the end of the Cold War, growth has averaged barely 3 percent and a meager 2.3 percent since the financial crisis of 2008-2009 (see Figure 2). And although U.S. GDP has more than doubled since 1999, median household income, after adjusting for inflation, has grown by just 6.6 percent. The Congressional Budget Office projects that annual U.S. economic growth will average 1.8 percent between 2023 and 2033.

To be fair, no one can know for sure how the U.S. economy will perform in 2024, let alone 2034 or 2054. But no prudent foreign policy can be built on an assumption of unlimited resources. The U.S. economy is still the largest in the world by most measures, but growth has slowed, and the already-intense debates over how to allocate scarce taxpayer dollars will only increase. In particular, given urgent domestic priorities, additional resources are unlikely to be made available for much higher military spending. This, too, should be a reason for a cautious U.S. strategy that does not rely primarily on the use of force and coercion. Even if the U.S. economy grows faster than current projections expect it to, increased government revenues from the boosted growth could well end up being reinvested in greater domestic spending, including in a stronger safety net. Medicare and Social Security face bankruptcy in the early 2030s absent an infusion of additional revenues and, for many in Congress on both sides of the aisle, maintaining these programs is as vital as a strong defense.

Either way, intergenerational tension is likely. Retirees or those nearing retirement will clamor to retain the benefits they were promised, even as the relatively less-affluent young and middle-aged populations struggle to adapt to a global economy rushing headlong toward digitalization. Inequality has been and remains a debilitating worry, particularly the broadly held sense by various groups that “the deck is stacked against them.” Studies have shown that where individuals live and their parents’ incomes are more critical to success than their own abilities.

A highly skilled workforce is needed more than ever, and American society is becoming stratified according to differing levels of educational achievement. Even more, in the face of rapid technological change, many young people doubt they have the skills to compete. Their parents agree. A survey in March 2023 found that nearly four in five Americans (78 percent) were not confident that life for their children’s generation will be better than their own.\* Americans who lack self-confidence about the future, and for whom the American dream seems out of reach, will not support an ambitious foreign policy that spends vast sums of money half a world away.

Unsurprisingly, given the country’s lackluster economic prospects, Americans’ sense of their own wellbeing has taken a hit. But it is not just about money; people also worry about their lives. Although much of the rest of the world started from a lower baseline, life expectancy has increased elsewhere, but peaked for Americans in 2014. This has occurred despite Americans spending more on healthcare relative to other advanced economies.

U.S. health challenges and declining life expectancy pre-dated COVID-19. Important research by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton detailed how “mortality rates from drugs, alcohol, and suicide have been rising” for more than two decades.\*” A subsequent study conducted in 2022 confirmed that there has been “a progressive increase in deaths attributable to suicide, drug overdose, and alcohol- related liver disease in the USA in the last two decades.” These deaths “have sent USA life expectancy falling for several years, making it a public health concern.” Indeed, one could say it is national security concern because such “deaths of despair” now claim far more American lives each year than all U.S. wars since Vietnam. A record number of people—at least 49,499—died by suicide in the United States in 2022.” Another 109,680 died from drug overdoses, also a record.

FIX THE HOMEFRONT

In short, untangling domestic problems is not a distraction from U.S. objectives abroad: It is a necessary precondition to any credible U.S. grand strategy. It also presents an opportunity. The past few years have been hard on U.S. standing in others’ eyes. The publics in key U.S. allied countries no longer believe that the United States is a full democracy. A solid majority of Americans agree; they do not see the U.S. political system as a good model for others to follow.

#### 4. Trump. He will win in 2024.

Aaron Zitner 4-2. Reporter and Editor. “Trump Leads Biden in Six of Seven Swing States, WSJ Poll Finds.” Wall Street Journal. Apr. 2, 2024. https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/trump-biden-poll-swing-states-ad594acb.

Donald Trump is leading President Biden in six of the seven most competitive states in the 2024 election, propelled by broad voter dissatisfaction with the national economy and deep doubts about Biden’s capabilities and job performance, a new Wall Street Journal poll finds.

The poll of the election’s main battlegrounds shows Trump holding leads of between 2 and 8 percentage points in six states—Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina—on a test ballot that includes third-party and independent candidates. Trump holds similar leads when voters are asked to choose only between him and Biden.

The one outlier is Wisconsin, where Biden leads by 3 points on the multiple-candidate ballot, and where the two candidates are tied in a head-to-head matchup.

Overall, the poll shows substantial unhappiness with Biden among voters who will have the most influence in the outcome of the election, as expanded one-party dominance in states has left just a few as politically competitive.

Biden pulled off a remarkable feat in 2020, winning three states—Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin—in the industrial North, which had been slipping from Democrats’ grasp and had backed Trump in 2016. He won by even narrower margins in Georgia and Arizona, two fast-diversifying states in the South and Southwest where Democrats had long-unfulfilled hopes of victory.

Two more states are also viewed as in play: Nevada, which Biden won but where Democratic margins have narrowed, and North Carolina, the state that backed Trump by the slimmest margin in 2020.

Both campaigns will spend hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising and turnout efforts in these seven states, which account for 93 electoral votes out of the 270 needed to win. The Journal will focus on these swing states in a series of stories over the coming months.

In every state in the survey, negative views of the president’s job performance outweigh positive views by 16 percentage points or more, with the gap topping 20 points in four states. By contrast, Trump earns an unfavorable job review for his time in the White House in only a single state—Arizona—where negative marks outweigh positive ones by 1 percentage point.

Both candidates carry a tarnished image into the race, but voters view Biden more unfavorably. Asked to choose which candidate has the better physical and mental fitness to handle the White House, 48% pick Trump and 28% say Biden. One result is that Biden is having a harder time holding together his 2020 coalition, with declining support among Black, Hispanic and young voters.

#### Structural advantages guarantee Trump victory.

Dr. Robert Kagan 23. Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Brookings Institution; editor at large, Washington Post; PhD, American history, American University. “A Trump dictatorship is increasingly inevitable. We should stop pretending.” Washington Post. Nov. 30, 2023. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/11/30/trump-dictator-2024-election-robert-kagan/.

Let’s stop the wishful thinking and face the stark reality: There is a clear path to dictatorship in the United States, and it is getting shorter every day. In 13 weeks, Donald Trump will have locked up the Republican nomination. In the RealClearPolitics poll average (for the period from Nov. 9 to 20), Trump leads his nearest competitor by 47 points and leads the rest of the field combined by 27 points. The idea that he is unelectable in the general election is nonsense — he is tied or ahead of President Biden in all the latest polls — stripping other Republican challengers of their own stated reasons for existence. The fact that many Americans might prefer other candidates, much ballyhooed by such political sages as Karl Rove, will soon become irrelevant when millions of Republican voters turn out to choose the person whom no one allegedly wants.

For many months now, we have been living in a world of self-delusion, rich with imagined possibilities. Maybe it will be Ron DeSantis, or maybe Nikki Haley. Maybe the myriad indictments of Trump will doom him with Republican suburbanites. Such hopeful speculation has allowed us to drift along passively, conducting business as usual, taking no dramatic action to change course, in the hope and expectation that something will happen. Like people on a riverboat, we have long known there is a waterfall ahead but assume we will somehow find our way to shore before we go over the edge. But now the actions required to get us to shore are looking harder and harder, if not downright impossible.

The magical-thinking phase is ending. Barring some miracle, Trump will soon be the presumptive Republican nominee for president. When that happens, there will be a swift and dramatic shift in the political power dynamic, in his favor. Until now, Republicans and conservatives have enjoyed relative freedom to express anti-Trump sentiments, to speak openly and positively about alternative candidates, to vent criticisms of Trump’s behavior past and present. Donors who find Trump distasteful have been free to spread their money around to help his competitors. Establishment Republicans have made no secret of their hope that Trump will be convicted and thus removed from the equation without their having to take a stand against him.

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But Trump will not only dominate his party. He will again become the central focus of everyone’s attention. Even today, the news media can scarcely resist following Trump’s every word and action. Once he secures the nomination, he will loom over the country like a colossus, his every word and gesture chronicled endlessly. Even today, the mainstream news media, including The Post and NBC News, is joining forces with Trump’s lawyers to seek televised coverage of his federal criminal trial in D.C. Trump intends to use the trial to boost his candidacy and discredit the American justice system as corrupt — and the media outlets, serving their own interests, will help him do it.

Trump will thus enter the general-election campaign early next year with momentum, backed by growing political and financial resources, and an increasingly unified party. Can the same be said of Biden? Is Biden’s power likely to grow over the coming months? Will his party unify around him? Or will alarm and doubt among Democrats, already high, continue to increase? Even at this point, the president is struggling with double-digit defections among Black Americans and younger voters. Jill Stein and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have already launched, respectively, third-party and independent campaigns, coming at Biden in the main from the populist left. The decision by Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) not to run for reelection in West Virginia but instead to contemplate a third-party run for the presidency is potentially devastating. The Democratic coalition is likely to remain fractious as the Republicans unify and Trump consolidates his hold.

Biden, as some have pointed out, does not enjoy the usual advantages of incumbency. Trump is effectively also an incumbent, after all. That means Biden is unable to make the usual incumbent’s claim that electing his opponent is a leap into the unknown. Few Republicans regard the Trump presidency as having been either abnormal or unsuccessful. In his first term, the respected “adults” around him not only blocked some of his most dangerous impulses but also kept them hidden from the public. To this day, some of these same officials rarely speak publicly against him. Why should Republican voters have a problem with Trump if those who served him don’t? Regardless of what Trump’s enemies think, this is going to be a battle of two tested and legitimate presidents.

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Trump enjoys some unusual advantages for a challenger, moreover. Even Ronald Reagan did not have Fox News and the speaker of the House in his pocket. To the degree there are structural advantages in the coming general election, in short, they are on Trump’s side. And that is before we even get to the problem that Biden can do nothing to solve: his age.

Trump also enjoys another advantage. The national mood less than a year before the election is one of bipartisan disgust with the political system in general. Rarely in American history has democracy’s inherent messiness been more striking. In Weimar Germany, Hitler and other agitators benefited from the squabbling of the democratic parties, right and left, the endless fights over the budget, the logjams in the legislature, the fragile and fractious coalitions. German voters increasingly yearned for someone to cut through it all and get something — anything — done. It didn’t matter who was behind the political paralysis, either, whether the intransigence came from the right or the left.

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And just wait until the votes start pouring in. Will the judges throw a presumptive Republican nominee in jail for contempt of court? Once it becomes clear that they will not, then the power balance within the courtroom, and in the country at large, will shift again to Trump. The likeliest outcome of the trials will be to demonstrate our judicial system’s inability to contain someone like Trump and, incidentally, to reveal its impotence as a check should he become president. Indicting Trump for trying to overthrow the government will prove akin to indicting Caesar for crossing the Rubicon, and just as effective. Like Caesar, Trump wields a clout that transcends the laws and institutions of government, based on the unswerving personal loyalty of his army of followers.

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#### His second term will be worse than the first. Constraints will be removed.

Ian Bond 24. Deputy Director, Centre for European Reform; MA, Classics, Oxford University. “Europe and the US Election: Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst.” Centre for European Reform. Jan. 22, 2024. https://www.cer.eu/insights/europe-and-us-election-hope-best-prepare-worst.

To be fair to EU leaders, Trump himself did not expect to win in 2016. It took him time to assemble a team. He did not come into office with a coherent programme, but with a set of instincts. Over the intervening years, his instincts have if anything become more violent and undemocratic, but as Charles Grant and I heard in Washington at the end of last year, there are now people in influential think-tanks and elsewhere working to ensure that Trump’s ideas can be turned into implementable policies. This time, Europe might not be able to rely on Trump’s chaotic approach to governance, which meant that in his first term many policy announcements never led to action. Sometimes, his ideas got nowhere because they were blocked by the so-called grown-ups in the room – people from outside Trump’s circle, like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defence Secretary James Mattis. Trump is unlikely to appoint such independent figures this time.

Biden has been far from perfect, from a European point of view. He has been slower than many would have liked to provide military support for Ukraine. He is no fan of free trade. He only belatedly considered the interests of America’s allies in offering subsidies to industries involved in combating climate change, such as those manufacturing batteries for electric vehicles, to encourage them to invest in the US – which many EU leaders fear will come at the expense of investment in Europe. But in general, Biden represents democracy at home and a belief that America must remain fully engaged in the world, including on issues such as climate change where US action or inaction can have a disproportionate impact on what happens in the rest of the world; Trump represents authoritarianism at home, coupled with extreme unilateralism in the conduct of foreign policy. Some of his most vocal supporters in Congress espouse isolationism of a kind that had been marginalised in the US political establishment since World War II.

#### Err AFF. You are psychologically primed against the risks of a Trump presidency. In truth, there are no intervening actors.

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If Trump does win the election, he will immediately become the most powerful person ever to hold that office. Not only will he wield the awesome powers of the American executive — powers that, as conservatives used to complain, have grown over the decades — but he will do so with the fewest constraints of any president, fewer even than in his own first term.

What limits those powers? The most obvious answer is the institutions of justice — all of which Trump, by his very election, will have defied and revealed as impotent. A court system that could not control Trump as a private individual is not going to control him better when he is president of the United States and appointing his own attorney general and all the other top officials at the Justice Department. Think of the power of a man who gets himself elected president despite indictments, courtroom appearances and perhaps even conviction? Would he even obey a directive of the Supreme Court? Or would he instead ask how many armored divisions the chief justice has?

Will a future Congress stop him? Presidents can accomplish a lot these days without congressional approval, as even Barack Obama showed. The one check Congress has on a rogue president, namely, impeachment and conviction, has already proved all but impossible — even when Trump was out of office and wielded modest institutional power over his party.

Another traditional check on a president is the federal bureaucracy, that vast apparatus of career government officials who execute the laws and carry on the operations of government under every president. They are generally in the business of limiting any president’s options. As Harry S. Truman once put it, “Poor Ike. He’ll say ‘do this’ and ‘do that’ and nothing at all will happen.” That was a problem for Trump is his first term, partly because he had no government team of his own to fill the administration. This time, he will. Those who choose to serve in his second administration will not be taking office with the unstated intention of refusing to carry out his wishes. If the Heritage Foundation has its way, and there is no reason to believe it won’t, many of those career bureaucrats will be gone, replaced by people carefully “vetted” to ensure their loyalty to Trump.

What about the desire for reelection, a factor that constrains most presidents? Trump might not want or need a third term, but were he to decide he wanted one, as he has sometimes indicated, would the 22nd Amendment block him any more effectively from being president for life than the Supreme Court, if he refused to be blocked? Why should anyone think that amendment would be more sacrosanct than any other part of the Constitution for a man like Trump, or perhaps more importantly, for his devoted supporters?

A final constraint on presidents has been their own desire for a glittering legacy, with success traditionally measured in terms that roughly equate to the well-being of the country. But is that the way Trump thinks? Yes, Trump might seek a great legacy, but it is strictly his own glory that he craves. As with Napoleon, who spoke of the glory of France but whose narrow ambitions for himself and his family brought France to ruin, Trump’s ambitions, though he speaks of making America great again, clearly begin and end with himself. As for his followers, he doesn’t have to achieve anything to retain their support — his failure to build the wall in his first term in no way damaged his standing with millions of his loyalists. They have never asked anything of him other than that he triumph over the forces they hate in American society. And that, we can be sure, will be Trump’s primary mission as president.

Having answered the question of whether Trump can win, we can now turn to the most urgent question: Will his presidency turn into a dictatorship? The odds are, again, pretty good.

It is worth getting inside Trump’s head a bit and imagining his mood following an election victory. He will have spent the previous year, and more, fighting to stay out of jail, plagued by myriad persecutors and helpless to do what he likes to do best: exact revenge. Think of the fury that will have built up inside him, a fury that, from his point of view, he has worked hard to contain. As he once put it, “I think I’ve been toned down, if you want to know the truth. I could really tone it up.” Indeed he could — and will. We caught a glimpse of his deep thirst for vengeance in his Veterans Day promise to “root out the Communists, Marxists, Fascists, and Radical Left Thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our Country, lie, steal, and cheat on Elections, and will do anything possible, whether legally or illegally, to destroy America, and the American Dream.” Note the equation of himself with “America and the American Dream.” It is he they are trying to destroy, he believes, and as president, he will return the favor.

What will that look like? Trump has already named some of those he intends to go after once he is elected: senior officials from his first term such as retired Gen. John F. Kelly, Gen. Mark A. Milley, former attorney general William P. Barr and others who spoke against him after the 2020 election; officials in the FBI and the CIA who investigated him in the Russia probe; Justice Department officials who refused his demands to overturn the 2020 election; members of the Jan. 6 committee; Democratic opponents including Rep. Adam B. Schiff (Calif.); and Republicans who voted for or publicly supported his impeachment and conviction.

But that’s just the start. After all, Trump will not be the only person seeking revenge. His administration will be filled with people with enemies’ lists of their own, a determined cadre of “vetted” officials who will see it as their sole, presidentially authorized mission to “root out” those in the government who cannot be trusted. Many will simply be fired, but others will be subject to career-destroying investigations. The Trump administration will be filled with people who will not need explicit instruction from Trump, any more than Hitler’s local gauleiters needed instruction. In such circumstances, people “work toward the Führer,” which is to say, they anticipate his desires and seek favor through acts they think will make him happy, thereby enhancing their own influence and power in the process.

Nor will it be difficult to find things to charge opponents with. Our history is unfortunately filled with instances of unfairly targeted officials singled out for being on the wrong side of a particular issue at the wrong time — the State Department’s “China Hands” of the late 1940s, for instance, whose careers were destroyed because they happened to be in positions of influence when the Chinese Communist Revolution occurred. Today, there is the whiff of a new McCarthyism in the air. MAGA Republicans insist that Biden himself is a “communist,” that his election was a “communist takeover” and that his administration is a “communist regime.”

It’s therefore no surprise that Biden has a “pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) agenda,” as the powerful chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), put it this year, and is deliberately “ceding American leadership and security to China.” Republicans these days routinely charge that their opponents are not just naive or inadequately attentive to China’s rising power but are actual “sympathizers” with Beijing. “Communist China has their President … China Joe,” Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) tweeted on Biden’s Inauguration Day. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) has called the president “Beijing Biden.” The Republican Senate nominee in New Hampshire last year even called Republican Gov. Chris Sununu a “Chinese Communist Party sympathizer.” We can expect more of this when the war against the “deep state” begins in earnest. According to Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), there is a whole cabal determined to undermine American security, a “Uniparty” of elites made up of “neoconservatives on the right” and “liberal globalists on the left” who are not true Americans and therefore do not have the true interests of America at heart. Can such “anti-American” behavior be criminalized? It has in the past and can be again.

So, the Trump administration will have many avenues to persecute its enemies, real and perceived. Think of all the laws now on the books that give the federal government enormous power to surveil people for possible links to terrorism, a dangerously flexible term, not to mention all the usual opportunities to investigate people for alleged tax evasion or violation of foreign agent registration laws. The IRS under both parties has occasionally looked at depriving think tanks of their tax-exempt status because they espouse policies that align with the views of the political parties. What will happen to the think-tanker in a second Trump term who argues that the United States should ease pressure on China? Or the government official rash enough to commit such thoughts to official paper? It didn’t take more than that to ruin careers in the 1950s.

And who will stop the improper investigations and prosecutions of Trump’s many enemies? Will Congress? A Republican Congress will be busy conducting its own inquiries, using its powers to subpoena people, accusing them of all kinds of crimes, just as it does now. Will it matter if the charges are groundless? And of course in some cases they will be true, which will lend even greater validity to a wider probe of political enemies.

Will Fox News defend them, or will it instead just amplify the accusations? The American press corps will remain divided as it is today, between those organizations catering to Trump and his audience and those that do not. But in a regime where the ruler has declared the news media to be “enemies of the state,” the press will find itself under significant and constant pressure. Media owners will discover that a hostile and unbridled president can make their lives unpleasant in all sorts of ways.

Indeed, who will stand up for anyone accused in the public arena, besides their lawyers? In a Trump presidency, the courage it will take to stand up for them will be no less than the courage it will take to stand up to Trump himself. How many will risk their own careers to defend others? In a nation congenitally suspicious of government, who will stick up for the rights of former officials who become targets of Trump’s Justice Department? There will be ample precedents for those seeking to justify the persecution. Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus, the Wilson administration shut down newspapers and magazines critical of the war; Franklin D. Roosevelt rounded up Japanese Americans and placed them in camps. We will pay the price for every transgression ever committed against the laws designed to protect individual rights and freedoms.

How will Americans respond to the first signs of a regime of political persecution? Will they rise up in outrage? Don’t count on it. Those who found no reason to oppose Trump in the primaries and no reason to oppose him in the general are unlikely to experience a sudden awakening when some former Trump-adjacent official such as Milley finds himself under investigation for goodness knows what. They will know only that Justice Department prosecutors, the IRS, the FBI and several congressional committees are looking into it. And who is to say that those being hounded are not in fact tax cheaters, or Chinese spies, or perverts, or whatever they might be accused of? Will the great body of Americans even recognize these accusations as persecution and the first stage of shutting down opposition to Trump across the country?

The Trump dictatorship will not be a communist tyranny, where almost everyone feels the oppression and has their lives shaped by it. In conservative, anti-liberal tyrannies, ordinary people face all kinds of limitations on their freedoms, but it is a problem for them only to the degree that they value those freedoms, and many people do not. The fact that this tyranny will depend entirely on the whims of one man will mean that Americans’ rights will be conditional rather than guaranteed. But if most Americans can go about their daily business, they might not care, just as many Russians and Hungarians do not care.

Yes, there will be a large opposition movement centered in the Democratic Party, but exactly how this opposition will stop the persecution is hard to see. Congress and the courts will offer little relief. Democratic politicians, particularly members of the youngest generation, will yell and scream, but if they are not joined by Republicans, it will look like the same old partisanship. If Democrats still control one house of Congress, they will be able to blunt some investigations, but the odds that they will control both houses after 2024 are longer than the odds of a Biden victory. Nor is there sufficient reason to hope that the disordered and dysfunctional opposition to Trump today will suddenly become more unified and effective once Trump takes power. That is not how things work. In evolving dictatorships, the opposition is always weak and divided. That’s what makes dictatorship possible in the first place. Opposition movements rarely get stronger and more unified under the pressures of persecution. Today there is no leader for Democrats to rally behind. It is difficult to imagine that such a leader will emerge once Trump regains power.

But even if the opposition were to become strong and unified, it is not obvious what it would do to protect those facing persecution. The opposition’s ability to wield legitimate, peaceful and legal forms of power will already have been found wanting in this election cycle, when Democrats and anti-Trump Republicans threw every legitimate weapon against Trump and still failed. Will they turn instead to illegitimate, extralegal action? What would that look like?

Americans might take to the streets. In fact, it is likely that many people will engage in protests against the new regime, perhaps even before it has had a chance to prove itself deserving of them. But then what? Even in his first term, Trump and his advisers on more than one occasion discussed invoking the Insurrection Act. No less a defender of American democracy than George H.W. Bush invoked the act to deal with the Los Angeles riots in 1992. It is hard to imagine Trump not invoking it should “the Communists, Marxists, Fascists, and Radical Left Thugs” take to the streets. One suspects he will relish the opportunity.

And who will stop him? His own handpicked military advisers? That seems unlikely. He could make retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if he wanted, and it is unlikely a Republican Senate would decline to confirm. Does anyone think military leaders will disobey commands from their duly elected, constitutionally authorized, commander in chief? Do we even want the military to have to make that call? There is every reason to believe that active-duty troops and reservists are likely to be disproportionately more sympathetic to a newly reelected President Trump than to the “Radical Left Thugs” supposedly causing mayhem in the streets of their towns and cities. Those who hope to be saved by a U.S. military devoted to the protection of the Constitution are living in a fantasyland.

Resistance could come from the governors of predominantly Democratic states such as California and New York through a form of nullification. States with Democratic governors and statehouses could refuse to recognize the authority of a tyrannical federal government. That is always an option in our federal system. (Should Biden win, some Republican states might engage in nullification.) But not even the bluest states are monolithic, and Democratic governors are likely to find themselves under siege on their home turf if they try to become bastions of resistance to Trump’s tyranny. Republicans and conservatives throughout the nation will be energized by their hero’s triumph. The power shift at the federal level, and the tone of menace and revenge emanating from the White House, will likely embolden all kinds of counter-resistance even in deep-blue states, including violent protests. What resources will the governors have to combat such attacks and maintain order? The state and local police? Will those entities be willing to use force against protesters who will likely enjoy the public support of the president? The Democratic governors might not be eager to find out.

Should Trump be successful in launching a campaign of persecution and the opposition prove powerless to stop it, then the nation will have begun an irreversible descent into dictatorship. With each passing day, it will become harder and more dangerous to stop it by any means, legal or illegal. Try to imagine what it will be like running for office on an opposition ticket in such an environment. In theory, the midterm elections in 2026 might hold hope for a Democratic comeback, but won’t Trump use his considerable powers, both legal and illegal, to prevent that? Trump insists and no doubt believes that the current administration corruptly used the justice system to try to prevent his reelection. Will he not consider himself justified in doing the same once he has all the power? He has, of course, already promised to do exactly that: to use the powers of his office to persecute anyone who dares challenge him.

This is the trajectory we are on now. Is descent into dictatorship inevitable? No. Nothing in history is inevitable. Unforeseen events change trajectories. Readers of this essay will no doubt list all the ways in which it is arguably too pessimistic and doesn’t take sufficient account of this or that alternative possibility. Maybe, despite everything, Trump won’t win. Maybe the coin flip will come up heads and we’ll all be safe. And maybe even if he does win, he won’t do any of the things he says he’s going to do. You may be comforted by this if you choose.

What is certain, however, is that the odds of the United States falling into dictatorship have grown considerably because so many of the obstacles to it have been cleared and only a few are left. If eight years ago it seemed literally inconceivable that a man like Trump could be elected, that obstacle was cleared in 2016. If it then seemed unimaginable that an American president would try to remain in office after losing an election, that obstacle was cleared in 2020. And if no one could believe that Trump, having tried and failed to invalidate the election and stop the counting of electoral college votes, would nevertheless reemerge as the unchallenged leader of the Republican Party and its nominee again in 2024, well, we are about to see that obstacle cleared as well. In just a few years, we have gone from being relatively secure in our democracy to being a few short steps, and a matter of months, away from the possibility of dictatorship.

Are we going to do anything about it? To shift metaphors, if we thought there was a 50 percent chance of an asteroid crashing into North America a year from now, would we be content to hope that it wouldn’t? Or would we be taking every conceivable measure to try to stop it, including many things that might not work but that, given the magnitude of the crisis, must be tried anyway?

Yes, I know that most people don’t think an asteroid is heading toward us and that’s part of the problem. But just as big a problem has been those who do see the risk but for a variety of reasons have not thought it necessary to make any sacrifices to prevent it. At each point along the way, our political leaders, and we as voters, have let opportunities to stop Trump pass on the assumption that he would eventually meet some obstacle he could not overcome. Republicans could have stopped Trump from winning the nomination in 2016, but they didn’t. The voters could have elected Hillary Clinton, but they didn’t. Republican senators could have voted to convict Trump in either of his impeachment trials, which might have made his run for president much more difficult, but they didn’t.

Throughout these years, an understandable if fatal psychology has been at work. At each stage, stopping Trump would have required extraordinary action by certain people, whether politicians or voters or donors, actions that did not align with their immediate interests or even merely their preferences. It would have been extraordinary for all the Republicans running against Trump in 2016 to decide to give up their hopes for the presidency and unite around one of them. Instead, they behaved normally, spending their time and money attacking each other, assuming that Trump was not their most serious challenge, or that someone else would bring him down, and thereby opened a clear path for Trump’s nomination. And they have, with just a few exceptions, done the same this election cycle. It would have been extraordinary had Mitch McConnell and many other Republican senators voted to convict a president of their own party. Instead, they assumed that after Jan. 6, 2021, Trump was finished and it was therefore safe not to convict him and thus avoid becoming pariahs among the vast throng of Trump supporters. In each instance, people believed they could go on pursuing their personal interests and ambitions as usual in the confidence that somewhere down the line, someone or something else, or simply fate, would stop him. Why should they be the ones to sacrifice their careers? Given the choice between a high-risk gamble and hoping for the best, people generally hope for the best. Given the choice between doing the dirty work yourself and letting others do it, people generally prefer the latter.

A paralyzing psychology of appeasement has also been at work. At each stage, the price of stopping Trump has risen higher and higher. In 2016, the price was forgoing a shot at the White House. Once Trump was elected, the price of opposition, or even the absence of obsequious loyalty, became the end of one’s political career, as Jeff Flake, Bob Corker, Paul D. Ryan and many others discovered. By 2020, the price had risen again. As Mitt Romney recounts in McKay Coppins’s recent biography, Republican members of Congress contemplating voting for Trump’s impeachment and conviction feared for their physical safety and that of their families. There is no reason that fear should be any less today. But wait until Trump returns to power and the price of opposing him becomes persecution, the loss of property and possibly the loss of freedom. Will those who balked at resisting Trump when the risk was merely political oblivion suddenly discover their courage when the cost might be the ruin of oneself and one’s family?

We are closer to that point today than we have ever been, yet we continue to drift toward dictatorship, still hoping for some intervention that will allow us to escape the consequences of our collective cowardice, our complacent, willful ignorance and, above all, our lack of any deep commitment to liberal democracy. As the man said, we are going out not with a bang but a whimper.

### commitment trap – 1ac

#### Contention two is the commitment trap.

#### Collapsing power projection makes the traditional strategy of strategic “ambiguity” underlying our global commitments untenable. Adversaries and allies perceive changing balance of power and test our commitments in response.

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The election of Lai Ching-te as Taiwan’s president will reawaken old debates about “strategic ambiguity.” The Biden administration has stuck with its approach of keeping vague any scenarios for intervention in a conflict with China over the island. Advocates say this enigmatic ploy keeps Beijing and Taipei on their toes, deterring the former while ensuring the latter does not act rashly. Critics suggest that “strategic clarity,” meaning spelling out when the United States might act, would do more to deter Beijing. President Joe Biden himself has spread confusion, promising in public that the U.S would intervene to support Taiwan and leaving his officials scrambling to explain that official policy has not changed.

This question of ambiguity then brings into focus a wider challenge over the nature of U.S. security guarantees in an era of rising geopolitical friction. Washington’s alliance network—it has more than 50 formal such relationships—is a formidable asset in its tussle with China. It has a number of quasi-allies, too, such as Taiwan, as well as close partners, like India, Singapore, and Vietnam. All of these come with commitments, either explicit or implied.

Yet Washington’s credibility to deliver on them is under growing pressure in the eyes of adversaries and allies alike. It is likely to have to demonstrate its capabilities more often—in effect making its guarantees less ambiguous—putting further strain on an already overstretched U.S. military.

The fact that the United States risks overstretch should be clear from recent developments. Biden brims with confidence about Washington’s ability to meet its global obligations. But the combination of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the ongoing crisis in the Middle East raises obvious questions about distraction and stretched resources. Recent attempts to calm relations with China speak to a strong desire to ensure Asian calm, especially in a U.S. election year.

Examples of anxious Asian allies are not hard to find. The Philippines is one. Manila has tangled of late with China in the South China Sea. Beijing has tried to block missions to resupply a rusting World War II-era ship in Second Thomas Shoal, which Manila grounded to mark its territory in 1999. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has asked the United States to give guarantees that attempts by China to retake the shoal would trigger U.S. alliance commitments, which Washington has duly done. In recent weeks, the United States deployed a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, to sail with the Philippine Navy.

South Korea is another case, given fretting in Seoul about threats from the north. Not long ago, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol mused that Seoul might need to develop a nuclear deterrent, a signal of unhappiness about Washington’s nuclear umbrella. Last April, the United States and South Korea signed the Washington Declaration, a pact that, among other things, promised to strengthen and make more explicit U.S. extended deterrence commitments. The deal involves the United States sending a nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea for the first time in a generation, along with nuclear-capable bombers.

The fact that the United States often has to demonstrate capabilities—and thus reassure allies by actions, not promises—is not exactly new. Under President Barack Obama, the United States grappled with how to respond to China’s campaign of artificial island-building in the South China Sea. This followed a tense standoff between China and the Philippines after Beijing seized Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Sensing that its credibility was under threat, Obama’s administration began freedom of navigation operations, sailing military vessels close to disputed maritime features, simply to prove that it could. These maneuvers are now a core part of U.S. strategy to reassure the region. Two were conducted by the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet last November, for example, in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, respectively.

Yet three factors suggest the United States will now need to demonstrate similar capabilities more often, the first being a deteriorating global and regional military balance. In the decades after the Cold War, Washington enjoyed undeniable military superiority, and thus rarely had to show it off. Now in Asia, it must contend with China’s vast military buildup. This is especially so in the maritime domain, where China now boasts a substantially larger navy as measured by number of vessels.

The second factor reflects a change in U.S. strategy. Biden’s team talks a lot about “allies and partners.” This often means asking close allies, such as Australia and Japan, to do more to contribute to collective deterrence and security. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan recently wrote about developing a “self-reinforcing latticework of cooperation,” in which U.S. friends cooperate more with one another, as well as with Washington.

The nature of U.S. security ties in the Indo-Pacific is therefore changing. Rather than following a NATO-like approach, U.S. links in Asia were set up with a “hub and spoke” model. These narrow bilateral agreements were originally designed in part to constrain pro-Western but potentially trigger-happy autocrats in countries like the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. Today, to cope with China, the United States is being forced to create a more collective model of security, interspersed with new mini-laterial groupings, such as AUKUS and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The more important all of these relationships become, the more incentive China also has to test what the United States is willing to do to support those within them, in addition to its formal alliances.

The third factor is perhaps the most obvious: Donald Trump. This year will be one of rising anxiety in Asia about U.S. credibility, given the prospect of the former president’s return. Many in Asia were supportive of Trump’s tough approach to China. But they also remember his combative approach to allies, too. Viewed from Manila, Seoul, and Tokyo, the year ahead will raise all kinds of doubts about whether existing U.S. commitments will still stand if he retakes office. They will want less ambiguity, and more clarity, as a result.

All of this requires a tricky balancing act. Making ambiguous commitments more explicit is no panacea. On Taiwan, Biden’s team shows no signs of being persuaded that “strategic clarity” is wise. Both ambiguity and clarity can create perverse incentives. An ambiguous policy can push China to test to see what the red lines underneath really are. More explicit guarantees might even reduce deterrence, as former White House official Ivan Kanapathy has noted, as such guarantees can give China something to aim at, too. The “conditionalities in such a declaration, by circumscribing geographic and political limits, would invite China to exploit those very seams, challenging U.S. credibility,” he wrote in Foreign Policy in 2022.

Either way, a world in which allies want the United States to show, not tell, implies greater demands on an already stretched military. This suggests two broad options for Washington. One is to focus resources, in effect offering fewer guarantees to fewer people, and thus bolstering the credibility of those that remain. Historian Paul Kennedy recently predicted this path in an essay reflecting on the 35th anniversary of the publication of his book The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. “The American security blanket will be tighter, smaller, limited to those well-known places such as NATO-Europe, Japan, Australia, Israel, Korea, maybe Taiwan, and not much else,” he wrote in the New Statesman.

Perhaps. But so far Biden, at least, shows few signs of dialing back commitments. Quite the opposite, in fact. This leaves a second path, namely spending more on defense and demonstrating the results of that investment more often. Biden recently signed a new $886 billion military budget. Yet even this seemingly massive figure is much lower as a proportion of national income than during the last period of geopolitical rivalry during the Cold War. “The way in which the United States has conceived itself in terms of national security is no longer viable,” former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers told Bloomberg TV recently. “We are going to have to invest substantially more in all aspects of national security.”

The obvious risk is that the United States ducks this hard choice, neither paring back its commitments nor spending enough to meet them. That might work for a while. But Washington will still find itself under pressure to do more to reassure anxious allies concerned about overstretch, waning collective security, and political instability at home. Self-evidently, the United States cannot meet its obligations to 50 allies at once, much in the same way that a bank cannot return all its deposits in one go. Its ability to do so depends crucially on ensuring sufficient confidence to avoid the geopolitical equivalent of a bank run. That prospect is remote for now. But it would be still better to avoid even a hint of ambiguity about Washington’s determination to avoid it in the future.

#### In response, the U.S. is attempting to retain primacy “on the cheap” by daring adversaries to test nuclear deterrence. This wager is not credible, BUT the commitment trap it inevitably produces will force nuclear escalation.

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Living with Risk

If the United States is unwilling to devote significantly greater resources to defense but does not wish to invite the geopolitical instability and dangers associated with retrenchment, then a second option for dealing with strategic overstretch is simply to live with a greater degree of risk. This is, in fact, the strategy toward which the United States has been sliding—albeit implicitly—in recent years, as its commitments have come out of alignment with the available capabilities.69 It is also perhaps the default option for overstretched great powers that lack the will or the ability to make more difficult decisions associated with either increasing resources or rolling back obligations.

In today’s environment, a strategy of living with greater risk could take at least two different—though not mutually exclusive—forms. First, the United States could accept a higher level of risk with respect to its myriad global commitments, by wagering that even the most exposed commitments are unlikely to be tested because U.S. adversaries are relatively risk averse and are thus unwilling to start a war that might result in American intervention. In other words, the United States might not be able to defend Taiwan effectively, but the mere prospect that an invasion would lead to a Sino-American war would suffice to stay Beijing’s hand.

Second, the United States could accept a higher level of risk in another manner—by bridging the capabilities-commitments gap through riskier strategies that substitute the threat of escalation for additional resources. Most likely, this would entail relying more heavily on U.S. nuclear warfighting capabilities and the threat of nuclear retaliation to defend vulnerable allies in East Asia or Eastern Europe—the idea, for instance, would be to make Russia fear that an attack on Estonia would lead to either a tactical or strategic nuclear response. (Because U.S. allies are already covered by the American extended nuclear deterrent, in practice this approach would involve making nuclear threats and guarantees a more explicit part of U.S. declaratory policy, and integrating a greater reliance on nuclear weapons into U.S. operational plans.) Similarly, this approach could entail integrating the use, or threat of use, of powerful nonnuclear capabilities such as strategic cyber attacks against an enemy’s critical infrastructure for the same purpose—bolstering deterrence on the cheap, by raising the costs that a potential aggressor would expect to pay.70

Lest either of these approaches sound implausible, we might recall that both have a fairly distinguished historical pedigree. In the late 1940s, at the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Truman administration understood very well that the United States had virtually no chance of effectively defending Western Europe from a determined Soviet assault. But it was nonetheless willing to take on the security guarantees that were central to the alliance on the calculated gamble that the Soviets were unlikely to risk global war by mounting a near-term attack on U.S. allies, particularly during the period of the U.S. nuclear monopoly.71 As George Marshall, Truman’s secretary of state, somewhat caustically put it, American strategy essentially involved “playing with fire while we have nothing with which to put it out.”72 And in the 1950s, to control costs and address the continuing deficiency of U.S. and allied conventional forces, the Eisenhower administration relied heavily and explicitly on nuclear threats to deter aggression against exposed allies from Taiwan to West Germany.73 Throughout much of the Cold War, in fact, the United States compensated for conventional inferiority—particularly in Central Europe—by integrating an early recourse to nuclear weapons into its war plans. Accepting greater risk would simply mean, therefore, updating Cold War-era approaches for today’s purposes.

There is a certain logical appeal to this approach. Regardless of how a conflict over the Baltic states, Poland, or Taiwan might turn out, undertaking such an endeavor would still be incredibly risky—and potentially costly—for China and Russia. That risk just might be sufficient to induce a degree of caution. Moreover, even if the United States could not defend these allies by directly blunting an enemy assault, the threat of nuclear, cyber, or other escalation might make clear that any revisionist gains are not worth the price.74 If deterrence by denial is a luxury the United States can no longer afford, then perhaps deterrence by punishment will do the trick.

Yet like geopolitical retrenchment, the idea of substituting risk for cost contains serious liabilities. Simply hoping that exposed commitments will not be challenged might work—for a while. But this strategy carries an enormous risk that at some point those guarantees will, in fact, be tested and found wanting, with devastating effects on America’s reputation and credibility. The United States could experience its version of the “Singapore moment”—an episode, as when the Japanese captured that supposedly formidable British redoubt and sank much of its Far Eastern battle fleet along the way, when a great power’s strength and promises are revealed to be an empty shell, and its image as a strong and capable actor in a key part of the world never recovers. Along the way, a strategy of bluff would likely weaken deterrence and reassurance on the installment plan, as allies and adversaries perceive a shifting balance of power and understand that U.S. guarantees are increasingly chimerical. The United States could therefore end up with both the destabilizing consequences of retrenchment, along with the risk of conflict that comes from hanging on to preexisting obligations.

The second variant of this approach—embracing riskier and more escalatory approaches—has problems of its own, namely that it probably lacks credibility. Consider the use of threats to employ powerful strategic cyber attacks if a commitment to Taiwan or the Baltic states is challenged. The trouble with such threats is that, as U.S. officials such as former President Obama have publicly acknowledged, “open societies” such as the United States are “more vulnerable” to the danger of massive cyber attacks than are authoritarian rivals such as Russia or China.75 In other words, and particularly when confronting a great power challenger, the United States may simply lack the cyber escalation dominance needed to make a strategy of cyber retaliation believable.

This holds even truer in the nuclear realm. Threatening to respond to Communist aggression with nuclear weapons, whether tactical or strategic, might have been a fairly credible approach in the 1950s—when China lacked nuclear weapons, the United States had a massive nuclear advantage over the Soviet Union, and neither challenger could reliably target the U.S. homeland. (Even then there were doubts, including among officials within the Eisenhower administration, about whether the president would actually execute a strategy that entailed starting a nuclear war to defend commitments that were not themselves crucial to the global balance of power.76) But these conditions no longer hold today. Both of America’s great power rivals possess secure second-strike capabilities, and both can threaten to inflict horrific costs on the United States should nuclear escalation occur. (Both countries are also currently undertaking significant nuclear modernization programs, and Russia is integrating explicit and implicit nuclear threats into its statecraft to a greater degree than at any time since the Cold War.)77 Indeed, upon any sort of sustained reflection, it seems almost preposterous to suggest that if the United States were not willing to bear the fiscal costs associated with making its conventional defense commitments credible, it would somehow be willing to risk the astronomically higher costs associated with nuclear escalation.

This approach thus risks leading the United States into a trap where, if its interests are challenged, it is confronted with a choice between pursuing escalatory options that carry a severe and likely prohibitive price or simply acquiescing to aggression. Awareness of this dynamic may, in turn, make adversaries more likely to push in the first place, whether through conventional military aggression or the sort of “gray zone” or “salami slicing” approaches that have characterized recent Chinese and Russian statecraft.78 The idea of trading cost for risk may seem attractive in theory, then, but in practice, the risks may prove far higher and more dangerous than they initially seem.

#### Trump makes this dynamic particularly dangerous. In the face of inevitable nuclear crises, he will escalate instead of backing down.

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There is more. Various subsidiary questions should now be considered. “In what specific nuclear policy directions should Americans now position themselves?” Looking ahead to more-or-less inevitable US nuclear crises with North Korea, China, Russia, and prospectively Iran,[3] Trump-era derelictions could hasten irremediable harm to the United States. For the moment, interested Americans remain most visibly absorbed in Russia’s criminal war against Ukraine, but this egregious “crime against peace” could sometimes be worsened by various parallel crises involving North Korea and/or China.

It will take a very capable American president to deal with several ongoing Russian-created crises. In March 2023, Moscow halted all information exchanges with Washington that had been part of the New START treaty. Vladimir Putin suspended this last-remaining nuclear arms treaty because the US and its NATO allies openly declared their support for Ukraine against Russian military aggression. Simultaneously, Putin declared his plan to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. This more open reliance upon theatre nuclear forces stemmed from Russia’s starkly different doctrinal view of operational nuclear war thresholds.[4]

Whatever eventually happens in Ukraine and Belarus – and this could include a reciprocal American/NATO deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Poland – the always-unpredictable world of geopolitics will remain mired in a “state of nature.”[5] Inter alia, to survive within this bitterly corrosive state, the United States will require a president who can meet the inherently steep expectations of nuclear command authority. Together with appropriate advisors, this president should be capable of very intricate kinds of dialectical reasoning,[6] and, if necessary, to display such capacities in extremis.

What about US nuclear war command authority?

An Intellectual Imperative

How could the former president’s witting indifference to nuclear doctrine and nuclear strategy have passed muster with We the People? It was, after all, the reductio ad absurdum of Donald Trump’s-unambitious “intellectual life.”[7] Today, North Korea is expanding and accelerating its nuclear-related missile tests and applicable infrastructures. It seems that Pyongyang’s nuclear program was not deeply impacted by Trump’s clumsy declarations of “love” for North Korea’s supreme leader.

If America’s battered citizens have learned anything from the history of modern world politics – from the “balance of power”[8] that was put into place after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 – it is that any continuously unregulated system of competitive anarchy and “escalation dominance” leads to war and civilizational breakdown.[9] Though President Trump proudly favored “attitude” over “preparation,”[10] far more serious analytic thought deserves pride of place in the United States. A persistently unwinding “state of nature,” a global condition built upon intermittent aggression,[11] rancor, and belligerent nationalism,[12] has never succeeded. Even more ominously, this Hobbesian “state of war” displays no tangible signs of enhanced durability.[13]

Understanding Decisional Hazards

Serious questions continue to mount. What specific nuclear hazards now present themselves to the United States? To begin, it should finally be recognized that an inappropriate or irrational nuclear command decision by an American president is neither science fiction nor apocalyptic delusion. It is integral to the credible “texts” of history, logic, science, and mathematics.

Such a command decision is certainly conceivable. Though nothing conclusive can ever be said about the precise mathematical probability of any such fearful scenario,[14] there remain ample reasons for concern. After Trump (and possibly before Trump II), these reasons are evident and unambiguous.

There is more. In world politics, nothing ever happens ex nihilo. Americans should therefore inquire: “Might another unsteady, lawless, or deluded US president become subject to lethal forms of personal dissemblance and/or psychological debility?” Leaving aside the former president’s breathtaking venality as a person,[15] there can be no credible assurances of being able to avoid another such dissembling leadership. “Individuum est ineffable,” declares the poet Goethe, “The individual cannot be grasped.”

Our worrisome national declension has certain identifiable beginnings. From 2016 to 2020, a grievously flawed American president served with inefficient and insufficient nuclear command constraints. This bold assertion is by no means mysterious or controversial. Any US presidential order to use nuclear weapons carries an inherent expectation of witting or even visceral compliance. While key figures along the operational chain of command could sometime choose to disobey such an extraordinary order, any implicit disobedience would be deemed unlawful on its face. On September 16, 2021, authoritative testimony by the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Miley, indicated just how substantially law-violating Trump’s final days had become.[16]

Derivatively generic questions ought now also to arise: “Should any future US president ever be granted extraordinary decisional authority over uncountable lives, a nuclear war-related grant that could never have been foreseen by the Founding Fathers?”[17] “Could such a lopsided allocation of nuclear decision authority faithfully represent what was originally intended by the American Constitution’s “separation of powers?” “Can anyone reasonably believe that such unhindered existential power could ever have been favored by the “Fathers”? “What about more general constraints of our wider global civilization?”[18]

At a minimum, citizens and analysts can extrapolate from Articles I and II of the Constitution that the Founders displayed primary and palpable concern about expanding Presidential power long before nuclear weapons. Such codified concern predates any science-based imaginations of apocalyptic possibility.[19] Today, in order to progress prudentially and sequentially on these issues, Americans should sincerely inquire: “What next?”

A Nuclear Scholar’s Intellectual Odyssey

It’s a question long pondered by the present writer. For me, it has represented a personal but analytic question. As an academic scholar and policy-centered nuclear strategist, I have remained involved with these core security issues (Israeli and American) for over fifty years. Some highlights of this half-century involvement may help clarify relevant elements of US nuclear military policy.

On 14 March 1976, in direct response to my query concerning the United States nuclear weapons launching authority, I received a letter from General (USA/ret.) Maxwell Taylor, a former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. The principal focus of this hand-written letter (attached hereto) concerned ascertainable nuclear risks of presidential irrationality.[20] Most noteworthy, in this communication, was the straightforward warning contained in General Taylor’s closing paragraph.

Ideally, Taylor cautioned wisely, presidential irrationality – an inherently grave problem – should be dealt with during an election process and not in the bewildering throes of any ongoing decisional crisis. At that point, the general understood, that it could already be too late. Hence, he concluded: “…. the best protection (against presidential irrationality) is not to elect one…”

By extrapolation, regarding America’s ongoing presidential nuclear security problem, our most compelling and still-observable lesson is not to elect “another Trump.” We must also inquire, with a more decidedly narrow but un-deflected focus: “What are actual US governing safeguards regarding the nuclear security issue?” Always, we could be more-or-less reassured, that there are redundant structural protections built into any presidential order to use nuclear weapons. These protections ought never to be disregarded.

Nonetheless, virtually all these sensible and reinforcing safeguards stop working “at the water’s edge.” They could become operative only at lower or sub-presidential nuclear command levels. Expressly and unambiguously, these safeguards do not apply to the American Commander-in-Chief.

So what should be done about the always prospective problem of presidential nuclear command authority?

Seemingly, there exist no permissible legal grounds to disobey a presidential order regarding the use of nuclear weapons. In principle, perhaps, certain senior individuals in the designated military chain of command could still choose to invoke authoritative “Nuremberg Obligations,”[21] but any such last-minute invocation would almost certainly yield to more recognizable and easily manipulated considerations of U.S. domestic law.[22]

Looking for Secure Nuclear Policy Directions

After the unprecedented Trump derangements, plausible and reasonable scenarios of nuclear war should be systematically postulated and expertly examined. For the moment, at least, if an incumbent American president operating within a chaos of his own making should issue an irrational or seemingly irrational nuclear command, the only way for the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the National Security Adviser and several possible others to obstruct this wrongful order would be “illegal” ipso facto. Under the best of circumstances, informal correctives might manage to work for a short time, but any too blithe acceptance of a “best case scenario” could hardly make realistic sense.

Such acceptance could never represent a smart or durable path to US nuclear security.

Post Covid, there are new concerns. Under the conceivably worst of possible strategic circumstances – conditions which could never simply be wished away by fiat – certain designated and authoritative decision-makers would be laid low by “biological” or disease-based adversaries. What then?

At a minimum, US strategic analysts ought to inquire promptly about more suitably predictable and promising institutional safeguards. These structural barriers could better shield Americans from a prospectively debilitated or otherwise compromised US president. “The worst,” says Friedrich Durrenmatt instructively, “does sometimes happen.”

The Swiss playwright’s assertion is unassailable.

There is more. The US is already navigating in “uncharted waters.” While President John F. Kennedy did engage in personal nuclear brinkmanship with the Soviet Union back in October 1962, he had calculated the odds of a consequent nuclear war as “between one out of three and even.” This crazily precise calculation, corroborated by JFK biographer Theodore Sorensen and by my private conversations with former JCS Chair Admiral Arleigh Burke (my lecture colleague and roommate at the Naval Academy’s Foreign Affairs Conference of 1977) suggests that President Kennedy was either (1) technically irrational in imposing his Cuban “quarantine;” or (2) wittingly acting out untested principles of “pretended irrationality.”

In markedly stark contrast to America’s barely-survived “Trump Moment,” JFK was operating with tangibly serious and intellectually capable advisors. He did not choose Adlai Stevenson to represent the United States at the United Nations because he was “glamorous” (an absurd standard of selection openly favored by former US President Donald J. Trump). Stevenson was chosen because he was intellectually gifted, educationally prepared, and diplomatically skilled.

In all likelihood, the most urgent threat of a mistaken or irrational U.S. presidential order to use nuclear weapons would flow not from any “bolt-from-the-blue” nuclear attack[23] – whether Russian, North Korean, Chinese or American (the last scenario assuredly expressed as a permissible preemption[24]) – but from sequentially uncontrollable processes of escalation. In 1962, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev “blinked” early on in the “game,” thereby preventing any irrecoverable nuclear harm. Going forward, Americans ought never to minimize or discount potentially unstable nuclear decision-making consequences.

“Escalation Dominance” and Nuclear War

An American president should always be made to understand the grave risks of being locked into any stubborn or refractory escalatory dynamic with an adversarial country. In such cases, the only available decisional options would be a presumptively abject American capitulation or some presently unpredictable form of nuclear warfighting. Though any US president could sometimes be well advised to seek “escalation dominance”[25] in selected crisis circumstances/negotiations, he/she would still need to avoid any catastrophic miscalculations. This overriding need would not even factor in any potentially intersecting problems of hacking intrusion, nuclear accident, or intellectual limitation/impairment.[26]

For the immediate future, imperatives concerning miscalculation avoidance could apply most directly to various plausible one-upmanship narratives involving North Korea’s Kim Jung Un.[27] In such narratives, much would depend upon more-or-less foreseeable “synergies” between Washington and Pyongyang and on difficult-to-control penetrations of cyber-conflict or cyber-war. Americans might sometime even have to acknowledge the bewildering interference of cyber-mercenaries, unprincipled/non-ideological third parties working only for personal or corporate compensation.

Whether Americans like it or not, and at one time or another, nuclear strategy is a challenging “game” that a US President will have to “play.” This will not be a contest for intellectual “amateurs” or for leaders lacking in requisite “will.”[28] To best ensure that a too-easily-distracted president’s strategic moves would remain determinedly rational, thoughtful, and cumulatively cost-effective, it would first be necessary to enhance the formal decisional authority of his/her most senior military-defense subordinates.

As an indispensable and expressly welcome corollary, any such enhancement would be at the calculable expense of pertinent presidential authority.

There are salient particulars. At a minimum, the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Advisor, and one or two others in appropriate nuclear command positions would need to prepare comprehensively and competently in advance. These figures would need to prepare to assume more broadly collaborative and secure judgments in extremis.[29]

Responsibilities of “The People”

Such proposed widening of nuclear authority could never be “guaranteed.” In the end, following General Maxwell Taylor’s letter to me of 14 March 1976 (attached), the best protection is still “not to elect” a president who is discernibly unfit for national leadership responsibility. Beyond any reasonable doubt (an evidentiary judicial standard that also fits well in this partially extra-judicial context), we are discussing an incomparable leadership responsibility. “The safety of the people,” intoned Cicero long before the nuclear age, “is the highest law.”[30]

There is something else. From the standpoint of correctly defining all relevant dangers, it is important to bear in mind that “irrational” does not necessarily mean “crazy” or “mad.” More specifically, prospectively fateful expressions of US presidential irrationality could take different and variously subtle forms.[31] These forms, which could remain indecipherable or latent for a long time, would include (a) a disorderly or inconsistent value system; (b) computational errors in calculation; (c) an incapacity to communicate correctly or efficiently; (d) random or haphazard influences in the making or transmittal of strategic decisions; and (e) internal dissonance generated by some structure of collective decision-making (i.e., assemblies of authoritative individuals who lack identical value systems and/or whose organizational arrangements impact their willing capacity to act as unitary national decision maker).

From the singularly critical standpoint of US nuclear weapon control issues (problematic issues[32] likely to be worsened by any continuous American strategic postures of “First Use” and/or “Launch on Warning,”), legitimate reasons to worry about future American presidencies do not hinge on expectations of “craziness.” Rather, looking over the above list of five representative decisional traits, there is already good reason not for worry per se (which by itself could never represent a rational or purposeful US reaction), but for suitably non-partisan objectivity and more consistently calculable prudence. To be sure, it won’t be easy to make tangible progress along this front, and it won’t necessarily succeed longer-term by electing a different president.[33] But for the United States, there are no recognizably sensible alternatives.

For the indefinite future, US national security and US survival will require the prompt and law-based restraint of any patently flawed American president. It follows further that the security benefits of such needed restraints would confer security benefits on the world as a whole. In principle, at least, the full importance of any such corollary or “spillover” benefit could prove substantial.

The United States must take heed. If Americans should ever decide to abide another blatantly law-violating[34] and science-averse president, perhaps even a Trump-return in 2024, they could be risking nothing less than national survival. Accordingly, there can be no more urgent task than to clarify and refine America’s nuclear command authority.[35] To fail in this indispensable task[36] could never represent a tolerable policy outcome.

#### History demonstrates that the U.S. cannot avoid draw-in even if it embraces full isolationism.

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Former U.S. President Donald Trump’s recent “invitation” to Russian President Vladimir Putin to have his way militarily against NATO allies falling short of their burden-sharing goals was not only mean-spirited—it was downright dangerous. Not only for them but for us as well.

It is entirely possible that Putin could interpret Trump’s comments literally and, should Trump win reelection this fall, attempt an attack on an American ally next year. Perhaps he would test Norway’s northern border with a probing attack. Or he could fire missiles at Belgium or the Netherlands, two more countries that fall well short of the NATO minimum standard of spending 2 percent of GDP on their militaries—and thus qualifying for Trump’s wrath. Or in an echo of an earlier confrontation almost a decade ago, but this time with roles reversed, maybe he would authorize a shootdown of a Turkish aircraft patrolling near Russian airspace. Or maybe Putin would attack a neighboring Baltic state even though Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all do meet the 2 percent threshold, concluding that Trump’s contempt for NATO is so profound that he wouldn’t respond there either.

If any of these kinds of things were to happen, Trump would then face enormous pressure to defend the aggrieved ally. And he himself might conclude that Putin was no longer quite the friend he previously believed. If at that point the United States did respond directly to the attack, as the NATO Treaty’s Article V effectively requires under the alliance’s mutual-defense pledge, the United States with its allies could be at war against Russia. Just as Harry Truman might have thought the odds of war against North Korea were very low on June 24, 1950, but changed his mind immediately and dramatically after the North’s invasion of South Korea the next day (along with almost all the rest of the country), Trump could undergo an analogous change of heart once he stared naked Russian aggression in the face. He would have to worry that it might not stop where it started, when seeing opportunity due to an impetuous and irresolute American president.

In fact, Trump and others who feel like him might consider revisiting a short history of deterrence failure in American foreign policy. NATO has prevented attacks on U.S. allies for 75 years now. Before we had it, and in places of the world where we haven’t had such formal alliances backed up by ironclad American security guarantees, war has often resulted. And often, we have subsequently been dragged in, one way or another.

World War I occurred when the United States had a tiny military and no European allies. Germany thought it had an opportunity to defeat France (and the neighboring low countries) in the west, then swing its forces quickly to the east to fight with Austria-Hungary against Russia. Four years later, after America had remilitarized and entered the fray—and after 20 million total deaths on both sides—peace was finally restored. America changed its own position on the war once it eventually felt threatened itself.

And that peace would not last for long. The United States still had no alliances in Europe and only very miserly standing military forces throughout the 1920s and 1930s. That was not how Woodrow Wilson wanted it. He had plans for a strong security architecture to keep stability in Europe and the Far East. Alas, World War II resulted after the defeat of the League of Nations in the U.S. Senate in the 1920s again left an underprepared United States untethered to Eurasian security.

Finally, after 60 million died in World War II, we had learned the hard way not to leave Europe and Asia to their own devices, since it appeared we would inevitably be drawn into any major war that developed in the industrial heartlands of Western Europe or the Western Pacific region. So NATO and, soon, the U.S.-Japan alliances were created.

Alas, that didn’t quite do the trick because of what we left out of those early-Cold War alliance systems. The Korean War occurred after U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, in a major speech, explicitly excluded the Korean Peninsula from the security perimeter that America would help defend against communism. Kim Il Sung then got the permission from Beijing and Moscow that had previously been denied him to launch the North Korean attack on South Korea which eventually led to American and Chinese intervention as well.

Fast forward to the next decade. Vietnam was not a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization during its Cold War existence. There was no binding commitment of U.S. military power to South Vietnam’s defense—yet again, once a major war broke out there, we felt we had little choice but to intervene. That may have been a mistake. But it is the kind of thing that happens in American history; even if we try to avoid a war, when the stakes get high enough, we often change our collective minds.

Two more examples: The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 happened after U.S. Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie had earlier told Saddam Hussein that the United States had no position on inter-Arab border disputes. Osama bin Laden attacked us out of Afghanistan after going on the record with his view that the United States was a paper tiger militarily that wouldn’t trouble itself seriously with such a faraway place.

Then there is perhaps the most relevant case of all: Ukraine. Under President George W. Bush back in 2008, the United States joined the rest of NATO in promising Ukraine membership in the alliance … someday. Then Presidents Barack Obama, Trump, and Biden failed to make that happen. We left Ukraine in a strategic no man’s land. Put differently, we painted a bullseye on its back, since Russia saw it had an opportunity to attack—and perhaps prevent Ukraine from ever joining NATO—before membership could take effect. Whether one blames the original decision to offer membership or the failure to complete the process, it’s pretty clear that the net effect contributed to a failure of deterrence. Withdrawing Article V pledges from a current member of the alliance could produce a similar type of strategic limbo, with similar risks of deterrence failure—and war.

Trump is not just being unseemly and rhetorically belligerent. History shows he is playing with fire.

#### No-first-use solves the commitment trap.

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We are witnessing in real time how statements and veiled threats of nuclear use – “fire and fury such as the world has never seen” (Baker and Choe 2017) – can have lasting consequences. Statements by President Trump suggesting a willingness to use nuclear weapons first in a crisis with North Korea has exacerbated the risks of accidental nuclear escalation. But in even calmer times, such vague threats are ill advised. For example, US officials apparently believe that repeatedly stating or demonstrating America’s willingness and ability to use nuclear weapons in response to many kinds of nonnuclear threats can be reassuring. Japan might imagine that references to nuclear weapons use, such as an American president announcing that “all options are on the table” in response to nonnuclear options might deter China or North Korea from initiating a conventional attack and make war less likely. But China and North Korea are well aware that the US has nuclear weapons; there is no need to make explicit threats. Anything that would be interpreted by them – or by Japan – as a direct commitment to make a nuclear threat in response to anything but the use of nuclear weapons create what has been called “a commitment trap” (Sagan, 2000). In these cases, the United States and Japan may feel compelled to follow through with a nuclear response, even if they believe it was unwise and might trigger a catastrophic an otherwise avoidable response. If we are fighting and likely to prevail in a conventional war on the Korean peninsula, using nuclear weapons could lead to a move devastating nuclear attack by the North on South Korea and stalemate any conventional conflict. Yet, failing to respond could expose past commitments to use nuclear weapons as a bluff and the call into question the credibility of the United States on all security and military matters.

That is why President Obama and many past presidents have sought to limit the conditions under which the United States might use nuclear weapons so as to not create a commitment trap that may force it into an unnecessary use of nuclear weapons.

This concern, however, extends to the stated willingness to use nuclear weapons first in most scenarios. Suggesting that the United States might want or need to use nuclear weapons first in response to a conventional or some other nonnuclear threat undermines the credibility of our commitment to nuclear retaliation. It is not supported by the nature of the threat facing the alliance today, nor is it likely to in the future. Nuclear threats also do not address the driver for the pursuit of nuclear or biological weapons in the first place, since North Korea and likely China although the later to a lesser degree as time goes on, faces a conventional inferiority that drives their need to consider nonnuclear options. The threat for the United States as the conventional superior to use nuclear weapons first also calls into question US conventional capabilities, because full confidence in those would eliminate the need to threaten the use of nuclear weapons in response to anything but a nuclear attack.

Conventional preparation for conventional war

The fact that nuclear threats cannot deter most conventional attacks, and that there is no sensible use for nuclear weapons in response for such attacks, does not mean that conventional attacks cannot be deterred or prevented, or that the United States is not committed to do so.

The United States and Japan must plan on deterring and defeating conventional aggression through conventional means. They cannot and should not rely on the magic of a nuclear umbrella, because the umbrella will not be effective under these circumstances.

A pledge of no-first-use by the United States would not signal any reduction in the commitment of the United States to the security of Japan. Instead, by recognizing that nuclear weapons cannot deter most nonnuclear attacks, and by taking steps to acquire the conventional capabilities required to deter and respond to them, the security of both countries would be enhanced.

### plan – 1ac

#### The United States should adopt a nuclear no-first-use policy.

### europe – 1ac

#### Contention three is Europe.

#### Collapse of extended deterrence makes EU rearmament inevitable in the long-run.

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Europe’s Diplomatic Posture and Message

Transatlanticists would likely take a different approach to a potential second Trump administration. A Trump election victory would create a sense of crisis among European transatlanticists that could stimulate dramatic efforts to strengthen the European Union’s ability to stand up for its interests and values globally. This could mean Europe not only undertaking dramatic steps on defense, but also pursuing a more active and coordinated foreign policy abroad—particularly by seeking to uphold international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

The European Union would also likely try to be stronger and more confident than it was during Trump’s first term. Americans often characterize Europe as weak, feckless, and unable to follow through; Europeans would try to change that narrative. To do so, they would need strong policies that put the European Union on a firm footing, particularly on defense. For Americans to associate Europe with strength, confidence, and unity, Europe needs to demonstrate strength, confidence, and unity. Instead of performative confrontations that have little policy purpose, Europe could seek to prove its usefulness to the United States, with the goal of being seen as a more respected actor by a more isolationist Washington. However, engaging with President Trump will be more of an art than a science and may inevitably prove fruitless for committed transatlanticists. However, there are several diplomatic approaches that Europe could take.

First, Europeans could convey to a Trump administration that the war in Ukraine has changed them, making them take defense seriously and prompting them to reduce reliance on the United States. They could highlight to Washington how important Ukraine is to European security and how they have stepped up and are providing a majority of the support. The European Union might emphasize its massive purchases of U.S. products—particularly, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and weaponry. The United States made up 46 percent of the European Union’s total LNG imports in 2023. European defense spending has increased nearly one-third since 2014, with EU collective spending now amounting to €240 billion in 2022. Much of that spending is going to U.S. defense companies to acquire high-end systems, such as Lockheed Martin’s F-35 fighter jet.

Second, Europe might emphasize its importance in standing up to China. While the European Union does not have an essential military role in the Indo-Pacific, it is a critical actor in addressing China on geoeconomic issues. The EU market is massive, equivalent in size to either China or the United States, meaning U.S. sanctions and export controls are significantly more effective when done in tandem with the European Union. The bloc is also increasingly cohesive on China policy. For instance, it was President von der Leyen who first advanced the concept of “de-risking,” rather than decoupling, Western ties with China. The European Union is also confronting China over subsidies of electric vehicles and has developed an anti-coercion instrument to respond to Chinese efforts to bully or retaliate against individual European states for their trade or diplomatic policies. The new U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council launched by the Biden administration reflects this notion that aligning U.S. and European approaches on geoeconomic issues would help shape the global economic landscape and “box in” China.

Third, Europeans might remind Trump of the size of their economy and the importance of transatlantic trade. While a Trump administration may care little for NATO, it might (somewhat surprisingly) have a lot more time for the European Union. The traditional skepticism of the European Union among many conservative foreign policy hands, most notably former national security advisor John Bolton, might not be shared by Trump and his advisors, who might respect its strength on trade and economic issues. In 2017, a trade war erupted between the United States and the European Union, with the Trump administration placing tariffs on European steel and aluminum. However, Brussels responded strongly, imposing reciprocal tariffs and targeting U.S. products—such as Harley-Davidson motorcycles, jeans, and bourbon—in important political battleground states. Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Commission president at the time, came to the White House (a rare occurrence) for tense talks over trade and held his own. Juncker’s strong approach signaled to the Trump administration that the European Union could impose reciprocal costs and prevented the trade war from escalating.

Fourth, European leaders with closer personal relationships with Trump could convey policy on behalf of the European Union. For instance, while former German chancellor Angela Merkel had a terrible relationship with President Trump, French president Emmanuel Macron had a much more cordial one. In addition, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg developed a working relationship with the Trump administration, something the next secretary general may try to replicate. Furthermore, conservative or right-wing European leaders—perhaps Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni—may be willing to serve as interlocutors on behalf of the European Union. Whether Meloni or other far-right leaders can gain the trust of EU leaders to play such a role is an open question. The key challenge for Europe will be finding an interlocutor who can establish a rapport with Trump while still maintaining the trust of other EU leaders. Some on Europe’s far right may succeed in doing the former, while failing in the latter. Additionally, as demonstrated by Juncker’s surprisingly productive engagements, it can be hard to predict who might connect with President Trump. Thus, the European Union will not be able to preselect a designated Trump whisperer but will inevitably first go through a trial and error period as they engage Washington.

Fifth, Europe would likely attempt to stay united in its engagement with the United States. This will be difficult for the European Union since far-right leaders such as Hungary’s Viktor Orbán would seek to cultivate bilateral relations with a new administration, thereby undermining European unity. However, Brussels could use its leverage internally to deter such defections from agreed-upon policy positions.

Finally, Europeans might also seek to strengthen their relationships outside of Washington. During the first Trump administration, European leaders and governments developed close ties with some individual states, such as California, that were taking strong action on climate policy. Additionally, European leaders could increasingly engage at the subnational level and leverage EU-based companies—which are major investors in the U.S. market, supporting jobs throughout the country—to build links with governors in both Republican and Democratic states in an effort to maintain positive relations.

How Europe Might Approach Defense, China, and Trade and Climate

NATO and Defense

If Trump wins, Europe will have to come to terms with the new administration’s disinterest in NATO and European security. Trump sees the U.S. security commitment to Europe as enabling Europeans to underinvest in defense; in this view, the only way for Europe to take defense seriously is for the United States to disengage from NATO and European security. This will put the onus on Europeans to organize themselves to provide for European security.

The problem, however, is not just spending, but that European defense is organized and managed by the United States through NATO. Defense in Europe is a national competency, and as a result Europeans themselves are not organized to provide for their own security. Instead, individual nations contribute to NATO, a U.S.-led military organization, and it is the United States that is ultimately focused on and provides the capabilities for European defense. This involves everything from providing critical enablers, such as air-refueling, transport, and tactical intelligence; battlefield command and control; and highly ready combat-capable forces that have substantial stockpiles of ammunition, something most European countries lack. NATO is thus organized around European forces essentially docking into a U.S.-led campaign plan.

Proposals for a “dormant NATO” would thus create a vacuum and potential security crisis in Europe by removing the backbone of European defense: the U.S. military. There is no clear replacement for the United States. Whether Europe can organize itself to handle its defense is an open question, with many deeply skeptical on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, with a revanchist Russia bordering the European Union, the answer to this question may appear existential for some European countries and for the European project as a whole. As events of the past decade have demonstrated, when the European project is threatened—whether through Brexit or Covid—the European Union responds. Under a new Trump administration, the European Union would likely take significant action on defense but also try to buy time—perhaps asking the president to give it a few years to complete the transition from a U.S.-led NATO to a European-led one.

Europe might take dramatic steps not just to increase investment but also to restructure European defense. Without the United States, European nations would need to cooperate and integrate their forces in an unprecedented way, likely endeavoring to create a standalone European pillar within NATO. The European Union is set to have its parliamentary elections in June, and the agenda of a new European Commission will likely be dominated by defense. This may serve as an impetus for bold EU action, which may add momentum to calls for treaty reform to enable the European Union to adopt a stronger defense role. It may also serve as a catalyst for a new, more productive relationship with both the United Kingdom and NATO. The UK Labour Party has identified defense as a potential area of cooperation with the European Union, while NATO will likely be led by a new secretary general, most likely hailing from an EU member state.

Meanwhile, Europe would likely ask Trump to maintain the United States’ nuclear commitment. Although France and the United Kingdom possess a nuclear deterrent, many Europeans view it as less effective and doubt whether these two countries would use it to defend the continent. While a new Trump administration might also be reluctant to defend European countries, even the vague threat of U.S. nuclear retaliation could help deter Russia and other actors.

In addition, Europeans might credit Trump for prompting them to step up on defense. While aggressive European defense investment and action would largely be due to doubts about U.S. dependability, Europeans could commend his leadership in forcing them to act. Such praise, even if disingenuous, could make Trump invested in Europe’s success, reduce tensions, and potentially make the administration more sympathetic to European requests for a longer time. It also may have little effect on Trump, but there is little cost to trying flattery.

Ukraine and Russia

The struggle to pass funding for Ukraine through a Republican-controlled Congress foreshadows the dynamic that would likely exist in another Trump administration, with Congress reluctant to approve such spending and the White House reluctant to implement it. The onus would be on Europe not just to support Ukraine but also to deter Russia and ensure European security.

Europe would first have to accept this reality and fill the gap left by the United States. This will require massively expanding European security assistance for Ukraine, in particular investments to ramp up defense industrial production. This effort, paired with the need to replace the U.S.-NATO backbone, would necessitate massive fiscal outlays.

Europe could also encourage Trump to play the role of peacemaker, even if such efforts prove fruitless. During Trump’s first term, he eagerly sought out opportunities to help resolve or settle conflicts, such as in North Korea and Kosovo, with some speculating that he craved a Nobel Peace Prize. Brussels could ask Trump to use his relationship with Russian president Vladimir Putin to press for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, however unlikely this prospect may be. But while they could expect an end to U.S. support for Ukraine, European leaders could convey to Trump that a peace deal can only be reached if Putin sees Ukraine as strong—and that Trump would look weak in the eyes of Putin and other U.S. adversaries if the administration stops providing arms or other support to Ukraine, such as through intelligence sharing and military collaboration. After all, the Trump administration did sell lethal weapons to Ukraine, meaning continued U.S. support is not out of the question.

Ultimately, Europe would have to adopt a robust strategy for deterring and containing Russia. There are great risks to European security in a world where the United States pulls back both its support for Ukraine and its engagement in NATO. If Russia makes battlefield advances and emerges victorious in Ukraine, the Kremlin may seize an opportunity to challenge a weakened NATO and European Union. Preventing such a scenario would require Europe to develop not only a coordinated military capacity to deter Russia but also a more cohesive and agile ability to conduct foreign policy and make decisions. The existential nature of the security challenge thus may prompt bolder action than many analysts believe possible.

Ultimately, Europe would have to adopt a robust strategy for deterring and containing Russia. There are great risks to European security in a world where the United States pulls back both its support for Ukraine and its engagement in NATO.

China

U.S.-EU collaboration on China policy could be critical to salvaging the broader transatlantic relationship. Europe would likely highlight to a potential second Trump administration that there is significant transatlantic alignment on China. And if Trump sees the European Union as an important partner in addressing the challenge posed by China, it could significantly soften tensions on other issues such as trade and NATO. Yet even amid general alignment, the Biden administration has had only limited progress in strengthening economic and technological ties. The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council has had few notable deliverables, for instance. This is in part because it is exceedingly difficult to reach consensus on technical geoeconomic and regulatory issues between two complex unions. Nevertheless, engaging the administration on China is probably Europe’s best policy path toward preserving transatlantic relations.

Trade and Climate

Europe can expect to face renewed trade tensions under a second Trump administration. After all, the first Trump administration began with a trade war. It is likely that tensions would emerge over EU regulations—perhaps regarding U.S. social media platforms, data privacy, or artificial intelligence regulations. As Kiron Skinner, the former head of the Department of State’s Policy Planning Staff during the Trump administration, wrote for Project 2025, “The U.S. must undertake a comprehensive review of trade arrangements between the EU and the United States to assure that U.S. businesses are treated fairly and to build productive reciprocity.” In the same publication, Dustin Carmack argued that the United States will need to confront the European Union on the Privacy Shield Framework governing cross-border data transfers:

"The United States has never seriously pushed back against the EU; now is the time. An incoming President should ask for an immediate study of the implementation of Executive Order 14086 [on enhancing signals intelligence] and suspend any provisions that unduly burden intelligence collection. At the same time, in negotiations with the Europeans, the United States should make clear that the continued sharing of intelligence with EU member states depends on successful resolution of this issue within the first two years of a President’s term. It is time for a real solution, not the 30 years of stopgaps imposed by Brussels."

Another likely flashpoint revolves around the European Union’s imposition of carbon tariffs through the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). If a reelected Trump withdraws the United States from the Paris Agreement (as he did during his first administration) and rolls back climate regulations, as well as important energy and climate provisions within the Inflation Reduction Act, the European Union would likely move to impose carbon tariffs against U.S. companies. Although EU leaders would be under immense public pressure from their own constituencies to do so, it would also invite U.S. trade retaliation.

However, the European Union’s ability to act as one and to respond strongly to U.S. tariffs with trade policies of its own creates a balance in the relationship. Brussels should remind Trump it too can take strong retaliatory action against U.S. companies—and suggest that rather than a transatlantic trade war, a better approach would be to increase economic ties and coordinate export and technology controls against China.

Additionally, European leaders will face a test about whether they are concerned more with climate action or their economic competitiveness. Given the Inflation Reduction Act is at its core a massive, once-in-a-generation, piece of legislation designed to accelerate the green transition, its rollback would represent a massive setback for U.S. climate efforts. However, the European Union was outraged that some European companies were prevented from accessing the green subsidies and are thus at a competitive disadvantage. Moreover, the removal of IRA subsidies would likely stunt the growth of the green industrial sector in the United States, which might be to Europe’s economic advantage. Ironically, European leaders could become the best advocates for keeping the IRA, not by lecturing Trump on the significance of climate change but by talking up the economic potential of the clean energy transition and expressing outrage at U.S. subsidies putting European companies at a disadvantage. Trump is less likely to try to roll back the IRA if he sees it as to the economic advantage of the United States.

Conclusion

Unlike during the first Trump administration, Europe would have little choice but to make “strategic autonomy” a reality under a potential second Trump administration. It would also have to attempt to fill the gap left by the United States in Ukraine and deter Russia without much, if any, U.S. support—an effort that would require spending hundreds of billions of euros more on its defense and security. To oversee such a shift, the European Union would also have to strengthen its ability to conduct foreign policy. However, in taking these steps, Europe might also lay the foundation for the future revival of transatlantic relations. And instead of these relations returning to the way they were, they would become more of a partnership between relative peers.

#### BUT, Europe will wait to rearm until the very last second.

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It is time for the continent to wake up to the very real threat of a "dormant NATO"

The outcome of yesterday's Iowa Caucus merely confirmed what the polls have long been signalling: that Donald Trump is as good as certain to win the Republican nomination and is the frontrunner to be re-elected as US president in November. That is a prospect that should fill European governments with alarm. A second Trump term is sure to prove even more disruptive to the global order than the first. He has already made clear that he would scrap aid to Ukraine, pull America out of the Paris Climate Accords and slap a tariff of up to 10 per cent on all imports, destroying what remains of the global rules-based trading system. But for Europeans, the greatest anxiety concerns what Trump 2.0 might have in store for Nato.

Nato has played a far more important role in Europe’s post-war political development than is often recognised. It was thanks to America’s security umbrella that Europeans were able to focus on constructing an economic and regulatory union, without having to confront the far thornier challenge of developing a credible common defensive capability which would intrude far more deeply into national sovereignty. Plans for a European army and deep defence cooperation have been present since the earliest days of European integration, starting with the planned European Defence Community in the 1950s, but have either failed or amounted to little.

But a second Trump presidency would throw the future of the alliance in question. He has never made any secret of his dislike of Nato, accusing Europeans (rightly) of free-riding on American defence spending and questioning Article 5 which requires alliance members to treat an attack on one as an attack on all. Thierry Breton, an EU commissioner, last week recounted how Trump told him and Ursula von der Leyen in 2020: “You need to understand that if Europe is under attack we will never come to help you.” Last week Trump refused again to rule out quitting Nato. His election platform states that "we have to finish the process we began under my administration of fundamentally re-evaluating NATO's purpose and NATO's mission”.

Dormant Nato?

A paper published last year by the Centre for Renewing America, a Trumpian US think-tank, may offer a clue where this re-evaluation may be heading. According to recent US media reports, Pivoting the US away from Europe to a Dormant Nato is being widely circulated in Trump’s circle. It makes for interesting reading. Dr Sumantra Maitra, the author, argues that unlike during the Cold War when Soviet communism posed a direct threat to the American way of life, Russia today lacks both the “will and capability” to launch an expansionist push into the rest of Europe. Nor, he says, is it clear why a border war in the far east of Europe affects America’s vital interests. Plus European states are these days rich enough to take care of themselves.

Maitra accuses European governments of “fleecing” America, scaling back their own military capabilities as Nato’s border has drifted East, while “Eastern European protectorates” have dragged America into their ethnic conflicts at a time when America needs to prioritise confronting China. At the same time, he argues that Nato has “morphed from a military alliance to an ideological and political group”, finding new tasks to sustain its vast bureaucracy such as promoting democracy and counter-terrorism. His solution is to dramatically scale back Nato and put European defence entirely in the hands of Europeans; America would act only as an “offshore balancer”, protecting supply routes via naval and air power. He calls this “dormant Nato”.

Of course, it is hard to think what is more calculated to embolden America’s adversaries, including Russia and China, than a decision to scale back its most important military alliance. But Europeans cannot afford to assume that Trump is bluffing. The US Congress considers the risk to be sufficiently serious to have passed an amendment in December with bipartisan support preventing a president from quitting Nato without Senate approval. But that would not block a dormant Nato policy. Nor can Europeans count on “adults in the room” acting as a restraint on Trump as they did in his first term: Trump is reported to be preparing to install loyalists in key positions in the Pentagon, State Department and CIA.

Europeans need to start preparing for a dormant Nato now, rather than waiting to see what happens in November. That will require facing up to tough decisions that go to the heart of the political economy of the continent, including questions that have been ducked for decades. But is Europe collectively up to the challenge?

Make Europe Great Again

The immediate priority must be to ramp up defence spending. Despite recent pledges to increase spending, only 11 out of 31 Nato members meet the two per cent of GDP threshold. Last month the EU was unable to agree on a new €50 billion package of aid for Ukraine after it was vetoed by Hungary. Breton has proposed a new €100 billion EU defence fund, but it is not clear where this money would come from. Many countries are opposed to issuing new tranches of EU debt. Meanwhile draft new EU fiscal rules, due to come into force this year, reiterate the old 60 per cent debt and three per cent budget deficit limits. For most countries, defence spending will have to compete with other priorities in the context of a period of renewed austerity. Britain says it will increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP but not said when.

A second priority must be to ramp up defence equipment production, which is lagging far behind America, let alone Russia. A new EU defence investment strategy is promised at the end of February. Yet the reality is that Europe's fragmented defence industry is reluctant to increase production capacity without firm orders. Current EU common procurement initiatives are small-scale. State aid rules prevent national governments from subsidising domestic manufacturers. National politics stand in the way of much-needed industry consolidation. The result, as the Centre for European Reform has noted, is that Europeans armies have 17 types of main battle tank and 20 different fighter aircraft, while the US has one tank and six types of fighter.

A third priority is to speed up EU decision-making, particularly in areas such as fiscal policy and foreign and security policy, which remain subject to unanimity. Yet how many member states would really be willing to give up their veto power in areas that go to the core of national sovereignty? One way to overcome an immediate obstacle to faster decision making would be for the EU to use the nuclear option of Article 7 of the EU treaty to strip Hungary of its voting rights, to prevent Vladimir Putin-supporting prime minister Viktor Orban holding the bloc to ransom. But even with the Polish government now back in the European mainstream, it seems unlikely that the EU would unite to take such a drastic step against a member state.

That still leaves the question of how Europeans should organise their own defence. Could a dormant Nato be reformed to adapt to the reality of a scaled back US engagement? Many alliance members will be reluctant even to contemplate such a scenario for fear that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Similar concerns apply to handing a bigger role in European defence to the EU. In any case, even leaving aside sovereignty concerns and differing foreign policy agendas, how could an EU-led approach incorporate non-EU members such as Britain? The idea that Russia can be credibly deterred via the establishment of new ad hoc arrangements without integrated planning and command structures seems unlikely.

To be fair, this debate is already underway in many European capitals, though not in Britain, where there is no appetite for reopening debates over European integration so soon after Brexit. The temptation is to sit tight and hope for the best. Yet the reality is that even if Europe escapes Trump 2.0 in November, these challenges will not go away. America’s debt is approaching 100 per cent of GDP and is projected to reach 181 per cent by 2053 , according to the Congressional Budget Office. That is already a source of concern in the bond markets. Regardless of who occupies the White House, America will be increasingly forced to prioritise. Europeans should assume that dormant Nato is coming - and prepare for it. They may not have long.

#### That procrastination creates the worst of all worlds. A divided and chaotic rearmament effort produces a fractured strategy.

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So what can we do to get Trump-proofed? On Ukraine, the answer is fairly straightforward. Much has already been done to narrow the gap between aid provided by Washington and by European governments. Today, Europe gives about twice as much as the US does, counting both military and economic aid. This is still not enough. Europe has a year to fill the shortfall that would result if the US abandons Kyiv. And this would still be barely enough. If the aim is to support Ukraine to win the war, weapons and ammunition production will have to be ramped up to replenish supplies. Europe will have to make strategic investments too in drones and satellites, do more joint training and improve its logistics planning.

Beyond Ukraine, the defence implications of Washington signalling a reduced commitment to Nato are immense. Europeans need to confront the reality that their continent is at war. The fighting today is in Ukraine but could spread beyond it in the coming years. If Europe is to face the threat Putin represents alone it will need to start putting flesh on the bones of a European pillar in Nato. An EU-UK defence agreement would also fit into this framework.

Propping up liberal democracy and multilateralism is just as important. The EU should strengthen its rule of law conditions (not weaken them as it has done to win over Victor Orbán’s Hungary). It should make no discounts on the political conditions that are required of new member states. Unlike during the first Trump presidency, when Europe indulged in the magical thinking that it could work with China to strengthen multilateralism, it must now double down on relationships (both bilateral and multilateral) with like-minded liberal democracies (Japan, South Korea, Australia and Canada) and countries from the global south in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This will be an uphill struggle, given the dramatic weakening of Europe’s credibility in the eyes of much of the world for its complicity with the war in Gaza.

It makes sense for Europe to do all of the above in anticipation of a possible Trump comeback. But it should act regardless. Even worse than doing nothing over the coming year would be scrambling to react in a divided and chaotic manner if the worst fears are realised. That would be seized on by Trump as proof that his bullying works.

#### Putin would take the resulting window of opportunity – with both the U.S. and Europe’s commitments to Eastern Europe weakened – to invade the Baltics with nuclear weapons.

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Trump is overwhelmingly likely to be the Republican candidate for President, and some polls show him beating Biden in approval ratings by a significant margin.

Former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has declared his support for Donald Trump, but with a quite big string attached. “If he does the right thing and backs the Ukrainians — and I believe he will —,” says Johnson, “a Trump presidency can be a big win for the world. "

Critics of Johnson would say he is showing his true populist colors by backing Trump. But for Johnson to back Trump on the basis that Trump will do the polar opposite of what he is expected to do if he is elected President needs more explaining than that.

Trump described Putin's invasion of Ukraine as “genius” and “savvy” , and has boasted that he – Trump – would resolve the Ukraine war in 24 hours, with the implication that Ukraine would have to cede to Russia the territory that Russia currently holds. Trump's indifference to the fate of Ukraine, and his admiration for Putin, goes hand in hand with a disdain of NATO. In 2020 Trump reportedly told EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that NATO was dead and that the US would never come to Europe's aid if it was attacked.

Trump first took a liking to Johnson because he saw in Johnson a British version of himself, and he said as much In July 2019 when Johnson won the leadership of the Tory Party and became the UK's Prime Minister. Trump saw himself as challenging the elites in Washington, and Johnson seemed to Trump to be fighting much the same battle with the elites in Brussels.

Left-wing critics of Johnson have liked him to trump, and to European populists like Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Johnson certainly shares with Trump an impatience with detail, and an aversion to politics beyond the length of a soundbite. And in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum he was accused of being a Putin-apologist when he blamed the EU for Russia's attacks on Ukraine in 2014.

But if Johnson is a populist, he is not one in the mold of Viktor Orban or Donald Trump, and he is no Putin-apologist, let alone admirer. I have wrote a book about the UK's wartime leader Winston Churchill, and he sees himself as made of the same stuff. So when Russia invaded Ukraine in April 2022 he saw his fatigues-clad and embattled President Zelensky as a heroic figure and instinctively took his side from him.

Johnson visited war-torn kyiv only weeks after the invasion. Hey began supplying anti-tank weapons to Ukraine a month before Russia launched its attack, and for as long as he was Prime Minister he continued to supply weapons to Ukraine, leading President Zelensky to describes Johnson as his “true friend.” Since leaving office, Johnson has done his best to persuade conservative politicians and influencers in the US that it is vital that they back Ukraine in its struggle against Russia, and one of the politicians he met and tried to swing round was Donald Trump. He has, it seems, been extremely well remunerated for all this, but he is likely to be well remunerated for whatever he chooses to talk about at his much-in-demand speaking engagements.

Johnson's endorsement of Trump makes good sense as part of Johnson's campaign to swing Trump behind Ukraine if he can

Johnson's endorsement of Trump makes good sense as part of Johnson's campaign to take the case for supporting Ukraine to the White House, which is where it seems increasingly likely Trump will end up. Johnson's tactic seems to be to flatter Trump into doing the right thing, or at any rate to stay close enough to Trump to have his ear to him.

There may also be an element on Johnson's part of hedging his personal bets with Trump and those who back him, and ensuring he remains persona grata in conservative circles and speaking circuits in the US and elsewhere.

In hedging bets Johnson will not be alone. Leaders and potential leaders of all those countries who prize the US as an ally will want to be on the best possible terms with the person now most likely to be the next President of the United States. The latest follower in Johnson's footsteps is NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, who in Washington expressed withfidence that the US under Trump would remain in NATO. But his forecast was linked to a strong pitch to US legislation that support for Ukraine and NATO was very much in the US's interest. But whatever the blandishments of Boris Johnson or anybody else, a confident second-time-round Trump could still ditch Ukraine and signal to Putin that the US is no longer in the business of defending Europe at the American taxpayer's expense.

This would have huge consequences for NATO, the EU, and the balance of power in Europe, as I spelled out in some detail in a blog for Fide here.

The prospect of Trump in the White House has prompted warnings of war with Russia

Trump in the White House is a key if usually unspoken element in the flurry of recent warnings by top military officials in Europe that war with Russia could come as soon as in the next five years.

Ditching Ukraine could mean Ukraine and its allies would be pressured into accepting a cease-fire/”peace” settlement which would make permanent the present de facto division of Ukrainian territory between Ukraine and Russia.

If Ukraine refused a settlement and continued fighting Russia to regain its territory, NATO allies in Europe could back Ukraine with increased military aid, which already in total equals military aid from the US. But increased European aid would be unlikely to fully compensate for the loss of US aid, not least because countries providing it would be struggling to replenish stocks of weapons already supplied to Ukraine, while at the same time upgrading their own war-fighting capabilities.

With the withdrawal of the US as a credible player in NATO, whether it formally withdrew from the alliance or not, the threat of Russia's nuclear arsenal would enter the equation. President Putin recently pointed out that Russia had more nuclear warheads than NATO (including the US), and described this as Russia's “competitive advantage”.

With Ukraine's neighbors no longer shielded by the US nuclear umbrella, Russian might lose its inhibitions about the threat or use of its significant arsenal of battlefield nuclear weapons, some which are now based in Belarus, which borders Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Russian war-fighting ability has been depleted by the war with Ukraine, and NATO's European allies might have a breathing space of a Presidential term or two before Russia could contemplate further military adventures. Yet whatever the European allies did with that breathing space, they could not compensate for the loss of the US's nuclear umbrella.

On that basis I have argued that the best strategy for Europe's NATO allies, if Trump gains the White House and pulls the plug on Ukraine and NATO, it is a political campaign to bring the administration after Trump back into NATO. Until then, the European allies would have to hold the line against Russia with their existing and hopefully expanding conventional military forces.

A second Trump term of office could entice Putin to invade the Baltics

Yet to Putin, the window of opportunity for NATO allies to force a rethink in Washington about the US's role in European defense could be a window of opportunity of a different kind: the opportunity to consolidate his gains in Ukraine, while invading the Baltics under cover of tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus, on the borders of the Baltics, and in Russia itself, also bordering those countries. When I started writing this article, the year I had “pencilled” in for the unthinkable to happen was 2027. By chance, another writer has imagined the same year for a Russian attack on the Baltics.

A Russian attack on the Baltics is unlikely, but so was Putin's invasion of Ukraine

Such an attack is of course unlikely. But Putin doing what was generally perceived as unlikely is what has put Europe in its present unstable state. Putin had massed 120,000 troops on Ukraine's borders almost a year before the invasion, but until just before it took place, few experts predicted that it would actually happen.

#### Baltic war goes nuclear because NATO will have to rely on nuclear escalation. Conventional deterrence is key.

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For decades, Americans and Europeans did not have to think about the dynamics of large-scale warfare between great powers or the possibility of nuclear escalation. Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine has shattered that sense of security.

What’s more, the invasion of Ukraine, and the rhetoric surrounding it, has revealed the scope of Vladimir Putin’s grand ambitions: He wishes to reconstitute as much of the old Russian/Soviet empire in Eastern Europe as he can. The delegitimization of Ukraine has thrown into doubt the legitimacy of former Soviet republics Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia and even neighboring states such as Finland and Poland. Putin regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” and laments that it caused “tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen to live beyond the fringes of Russian territory.” Putin feels that in order to be secure, Russia needs to revise the current balance of power in Europe. This ambition is consistent with scholarship that explains Russian foreign policy as a product of Putin’s illiberal, conservative philosophy and Putin’s desire to develop a Russian sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space.

In the long run, the best way for NATO to deter him is to have enough conventional forces in Eastern Europe to deny Russia the ability to take the territory of countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland. But NATO does not have the capability to do this at the moment, and it will take time to develop it. In the intervening “window of vulnerability,” the American extended nuclear deterrent and NATO’s tactical nuclear weapons will form the backbone of European security.

The best way to ensure the credibility of this deterrent depends, in turn, on the outcome of the current war. If, as appears likely, Russia gets bogged down in a long drawn-out fight in Ukraine, it may have an incentive to expand the conflict by attacking an Eastern European NATO country. To deter this, the United States and NATO should increase the credibility of their nuclear deterrent by embracing a moderate form of the brinkmanship tactics articulated by an earlier generation of nuclear strategists. This would entail altering America’s and NATO’s nuclear posture such that it threatens to use its nuclear weapons earlier in a conflict. This solution is not ideal and should only be regarded as a short-term fix, but European security today requires NATO to accept a degree of brinkmanship.

Risk to the Baltics

The goal for the United States and its NATO allies should be to protect Eastern European countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland from a Russian attack. Eastern European NATO countries, especially the Baltic states, do not have the capabilities to do this on their own. The Russian military is performing poorly in the initial phase of the war in Ukraine, but this should not be taken as evidence that NATO countries in Eastern Europe have adequate capabilities for conventional defense. Indeed, these countries may fare worse against a Russian invasion than Ukraine has done, as their militaries are smaller than the Ukrainian military. Plus, the Russian operation in Ukraine appears to have been informed by wildly optimistic assumptions that the Ukrainians lacked the will to put up a fight and that resistance would crumble in short order. This could be why the first phase of the Russian invasion used only a fraction of the 190,000-strong force it amassed around Ukraine. The United States and NATO should expect that a Russian attack on a NATO country would have different assumptions and go differently, perhaps with Russia using many more of its forces in the opening phase of the campaign.

Many Russian forces are bogged down in Ukraine, but Russia still has the conventional strength to expand the current war into NATO territory. For example, Russia could leverage its strength in conventional long-range strike to attack convoys of supplies going into Ukraine. Indeed, this is something that Russia has recently threatened to do. Furthermore, Russia could try to hold territorial gains in eastern and southern Ukraine instead of fighting offensive missions to take more territory. A new “defensive” focus in Ukraine could free more Russian forces for an attack on an Eastern European NATO country. In short, Russia still has the capability to conduct strikes against NATO allies and to turn the focus of its combat power on them should it choose to do so.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, European NATO allies are now likely to increase investments in their armed forces that could make a successful conventional defense possible in the future. Germany’s decision to double its defense budget is telling in this regard. NATO’s increase in troops deployed to Eastern Europe is also a positive recent development. But these developments will take time to bear fruit.

Currently, NATO’s defense of the Baltics hinges on the threat of responding to a Russian attack with its nuclear arsenal. But Putin’s recent nuclear saber-rattling suggests he may not find this threat credible and believes Washington will back down rather than risk nuclear war. Indeed, even during the Cold War, it was difficult enough to convince the Soviet Union that the United States would trade Berlin for Boston. Expanding the alliance has only heightened this challenge. How can the United States make Putin believe that it is willing to trade Vilnius for New York?

The Art of Brinkmanship

In response to this challenge, the United States and NATO should embrace the paradox of brinkmanship, which involves trying to prevent war by making it hard to contain once it starts. In the words of Thomas Schelling, “by arranging it so that we [the United States] might have to blow up the world, we would not have to.” This involves making “threats that leave something to chance,” or threats that, once enacted, would “initiate a process that may quickly get out of hand.”

States use tactical nuclear weapons to bid up the shared risk of nuclear escalation in the event of a war. Because tactical nuclear weapons are less destructive than “strategic” nuclear weapons, they are seen as more usable and blur the firebreak between conventional and nuclear war. At the same time, the use of tactical nuclear weapons generates a higher risk of general nuclear conflict than does the use of conventional forces, meaning that threats to use tactical nuclear weapons early in a war increase the shared risk of disaster. This is why states who face conventional inferiority tend to invest more heavily in these weapons.

Brinkmanship tactics also involve a trade-off between deterrence and the risk of escalation. A state could employ a “minimal brinkmanship” strategy that generates low risk of nuclear use, and if the state lacks the conventional strength to deny the adversary its objectives in a war, this could incentivize the adversary to attack. On the other hand, a state could enact a “maximum brinkmanship” strategy that generates high risk for nuclear war in the event of a conflict, but that high risk could generate restraint on the part of the adversary. The United States used a form of maximum brinkmanship in the 1958–59 Berlin Crisis by threatening escalation to nuclear use very early in a war over Berlin. As one of Daniel Ellsberg’s colleagues described that strategy to him: “We send in a series of increasingly larger probes. If they’re all stopped, we fire a [nuclear] warning shot. If that doesn’t work, we blow up the world.”

The degree of brinkmanship in a state’s defense strategy lies on a scale from the minimum to the maximum end. Where a state’s strategy should fall on the scale depends on the adversary’s intentions and capabilities. Against an adversary with conventional inferiority, it makes little sense to run a higher risk of nuclear war. For an adversary with aggressive motivations, the risks of maximum brinkmanship may be justified. However, if an adversary is not planning on using force, a maximum brinkmanship strategy could make them feel insecure and prompt them to launch the attack that the state was attempting to deter.

Brinkmanship in the Baltics

What kind of adversary does NATO face in Moscow? The answer depends on the outcome of the current conflict. Based on current developments, it seems all too likely the result will be an aggravated Russia that is stuck in a grinding war in Ukraine. After six weeks of fighting, the Russian advance in Ukraine has stalled. This slow progress has prompted Russian forces to resort to horrific indiscriminate violence against civilians in these areas. At this moment, a quick victory toppling the Ukrainian government and leading to an emboldened Russia looks unlikely.

At the same time, Russia is unlikely to accept defeat in Ukraine anytime soon. Reports came out on March 29 that Ukraine and Russia were making progress on peace talks, but Russia’s lead negotiator Vladimir Medinsky stressed that there was “still a long way to go” before Russia would agree to a ceasefire. Instead, Russia appears to have changed its war aims from taking Kyiv to consolidating control over eastern Ukraine. Fighting for this objective is likely to be costly and raises the probability that this war will be a protracted conflict. Western sanctions against Russia will remain in place during the war, and Western countries will continue to provide assistance to Ukrainian armed forces. That assistance will flow through Eastern European member states.

To break out of a stalemated war and achieve victory, Putin could try to target supplies in transit while they are still in an Eastern European NATO country, especially Poland. Putin could also conduct a limited attack against a Baltic State in order to take territory that is majority Russian-speaking. That could bolster his claim of defending Russian speakers abroad. He may be incentivized to do this if the economic sanctions prove too harsh on the Russian economy, and he sees no way out of the crisis except by expanding the war. That pathway to escalation is similar to Imperial Japan’s rationale for attacking Pearl Harbor in 1941.

This scenario poses a serious test for deterrence for NATO. A strike on supplies going to Ukraine would be difficult to defend against, and Russian forces could overwhelm the NATO forces assigned to an initial defense of the Baltics. The best response to the threat of these scenarios is to prevent them from happening in the first place. To do that, a modest degree of brinkmanship could prove effective. Here, the United States and NATO should alter their nuclear posture and declaratory policy to allow for asymmetric escalation.

The alliance already has B61 gravity bombs deployed across five countries in Europe and deliverable by dual-capable aircraft. The United States and NATO can enhance their impact by changing the Nuclear Posture Review and the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review to stress that they reserve the ability to use nuclear weapons first. In addition, the aircraft units assigned to carry NATO’s nuclear weapons can hold more exercises to emphasize the operational readiness of those forces. If an attack by Russia looks imminent, the United States, in consultation with NATO allies, can put those forces on alert. The goal of these steps by the United States and NATO would be to emphasize to Russia the nuclear implications of an attack on a NATO country without taking steps that could cross a Russian “red line” and provoke it.

What is important here is not making sure that NATO has more tactical nuclear warheads than Russia or that they are able to stop a Russian advance on their own. NATO’s nuclear weapons would primarily have a political effect: threatening a breach of the nuclear threshold. The current arsenal of around 130 tactical nuclear weapons should be sufficient for that task.

Such an asymmetric escalation strategy is not ideal and carries great risks, but it is a product of past decisions to expand NATO without first developing real plans for the defense of new members. NATO expansion came at a time when policymakers assumed that the risk of war in Europe was low and thus did not have to think about the dynamics of great power war or escalation. Putin has disabused Western leaders of their naïveté and in the process shown himself to be aggressive and risk-acceptant in the pursuit of ambitious goals. Threatening early nuclear use in a NATO-Russia conflict may be the best way to protect Europe from Putin’s recklessness.

#### The plan facilitates gradual European rearm. Europe is capable of deterring Russia, BUT they’re free-riding now because of the nuclear umbrella.

Dr. Stephen Walt 24. Robert and Renée Belfer professor, international relations, Harvard University; PhD, Political Science, Berkeley. “Why Europe Can’t Get Its Military Act Together.” Foreign Policy. Feb. 21, 2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/21/europe-military-trump-nato-eu-autonomy/.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump set off alarm bells in Europe when he told a campaign rally that he would encourage Russia to “do whatever the hell they want” to any countries he judged to be delinquent on their defense obligations. European countries were already fretting about the possibility of a second Trump term, and these latest remarks sent these concerns into high orbit. European Commission President Ursula Van der Leyen told the Financial Times a few days later that Europe was facing a world “that has got rougher” and that “we have to spend more, we have to spend better, and we have to spend European.”

But the question remains: Will Europe do enough to be able to defend itself? Complaints that European states are overly dependent on U.S. protection and unwilling to maintain adequate defense capabilities have a long history, and the wake-up call provided by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has yet to produce a dramatic increase in Europe’s usable military power. Yes, NATO members are now spending more money and the EU recently authorized an additional 50 billion euros in financial support to Ukraine. But Europe’s ability to maintain substantial forces in the field for more than a few weeks remains paltry: It still relies on the United States for some critical capabilities, and some NATO members have reason to wonder if their partners could do much to help if they were attacked, even if those partners tried.

To be sure, rhetoric from European officials is becoming more strident. Danish defense minister Troels Lund Poulsen recently warned that Russia might test the NATO mutual defense clause “within three to five years” and another senior NATO diplomat believes “we no longer have the luxury to think that Russia would stop with Ukraine.” According to another senior diplomat, “Russia’s intent and capability” to attack a NATO country by 2030 was “pretty much consensus” within the alliance at this point. Because it might take Europe 10 years or more to develop sufficient capabilities of its own, diehard Atlanticists want to keep Uncle Sam firmly committed to Europe despite all the competing demands on U.S. time, attention, and resources.

Can Europe get its act together? Two well-established bodies of theory are relevant here. The first, to which I have tried to contribute, is balance of power (or if you prefer, balance of threat) theory. It predicts that a serious external threat to European security—such as a nearby great power with a strong military and highly revisionist ambitions—would cause most of these states to join forces to deter the threat (or if necessary, to defeat it). That impulse would grow stronger if these states understood that they could not rely on anyone else for protection. Recent increases in European defense spending and Sweden and Finland’s decisions to join NATO illustrate the tendency for threatened states to balance perfectly, and this well-established tendency should make us more optimistic about Europe’s ability and willingness to take greater responsibility for its own defense.

Unfortunately, a second body of theory makes that upbeat outcome less certain. Because security is a “collective good,” states in an alliance will be tempted to “buck-pass” or free-ride on the efforts of others, in the hope that their partners will do enough to keep them safe and secure, even if they do less. This tendency helps explain why the strongest members of an alliance tend to contribute a disproportionate amount to the collective effort. If an alliance’s leading members do enough to deter or defeat an attack, the contributions of the smallest members may be superfluous. After all, the alliance wouldn’t be that much stronger even if they doubled their efforts. Hence the temptation to do less, confident that the larger actors will do enough out of their own self-interest. If enough members succumb to the temptation to let others bear the greater burden, however, or if other selfish interests overcome the need to work together, then the alliance may not produce the combined capabilities and coordinated strategy it needs to be secure.

Taken together, these two well-known theories underscore the dilemma NATO faces today. The good news is that NATO’s European members have vastly more latent power potential than Russia does. They have three to four times more people, and their combined economies are a whopping 10 times larger than Russia’s. Several European states still have sophisticated arms industries capable of producing excellent weapons and some of them (e.g., Germany) possessed formidable ground and air forces during the latter stages of the Cold War. Even more remarkably, NATO’s European members alone spend at least three times more on defense than Russia does every single year. Even if we allow for higher personnel costs, duplication of effort, and other inefficiencies, Europe has more than enough power potential to deter or defeat a Russian attack, assume that latent capacity is properly mobilized and led. And the Russian military is not a colossus: Although its military performance and defense production capacity have improved significantly since the onset of the Ukraine war, it has had a hard time overcoming the less numerous and less well-armed Ukrainians. An army that takes months to seize Bakhmut or Avdiivka is not about to launch a successful blitzkrieg against anyone else.

The bad news is that a sustained effort to mount a capable European defense force faces significant obstacles. For starters, NATO’s European members do not agree on the level or even the identity of their main security problems. For the Baltic States and Poland, it is obvious that Russia poses the greatest danger. For Spain or Italy, however, Russia is a distant problem at best and illegal migration is a bigger challenge. Unlike some analysts, I don’t believe this situation prevents Europe from mounting an effective defense against Russia, but it does make issues of burden-sharing and military planning more complicated. Getting Portugal to do much to help Estonia will take a bit of persuasion.

Second, those who want Europe to do more face a delicate dilemma: They must convince people there’s a serious problem, but they also have to convince them that solving the problem won’t be too costly or difficult. If they try to mobilize support for a big defense buildup by exaggerating Russia’s military capabilities and portraying Vladimir Putin as a madman with unlimited ambitions, the challenge Europe appears to face might seem insurmountable and the temptation to fall back on Uncle Sam will grow. But if Russia’s power and ambitions are believed to be more modest and therefore manageable, it will be harder to convince European publics to make big sacrifices now and to sustain a serious effort over time. To make greater autonomy work, Europeans must believe that Russia is dangerous, but they must also believe they can handle the problem even if the United States does significantly less. For this reason, claiming that it is simply impossible for Europe to defend itself on order to keep the United State fully committed might be counterproductive, if it discouraged a serious European effort and the United States reduced its commitment anyway.

A third obstacle is the ambiguous role of nuclear weapons. If you really believe that nuclear weapons deter large-scale acts of aggression, then you’re likely to think that the British and French nuclear forces and the American “nuclear umbrella” will protect NATO from a Russian attack under almost any circumstances. (Ukraine, it is worth remembering, is not a NATO member). And if so, then there’s less need to build a big and expensive array of conventional forces. If you’re not that confident about reliability of extended nuclear deterrence, however, or you don’t want to have to threaten nuclear use in response to some low-level challenge, then you’ll want the kind of flexibility that capable conventional forces provide. This issue was a point of contention within NATO throughout the Cold War, as the intra-alliance debates over “Flexible Response” in the 1960s and the “Euromissiles” controversy of the 1980s showed. The issue remains relevant today, insofar as the continued presence of nuclear weapons may tempt some states to let their conventional forces languish.

Fourth, European states still prefer to invest in their own defense industries and armed forces, instead of cooperating to standardize weaponry and develop a common strategy and defense plans. According to a 2023 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, although overall European defense spending has risen sharply since Russia seized Crimea in 2014, the percentage devoted to cooperative procurement efforts fell steadily until 2021 and never came close to the 35 percent target previously set by the EU. EU countries reportedly field some 178 different weapons systems—148 more than the United States—despite spending less than the U.S. does. The stubborn tendency to go it alone squanders the enormous latent resource advantage that Europe enjoys over possible challengers, and may be a luxury it can no longer afford.

A final obstacle—at least for the moment—is America’s longstanding ambivalence about encouraging Europe to stand on its own. The United States has generally wanted its Europe partners to be military strong—but not too strong—and politically united—but not too united. Why? Because this arrangement maximized U.S. influence over a coalition of capable but subordinate partners. Washington wanted the rest of NATO to be strong enough to be useful but also fully compliant with U.S. wishes, and compliance would be harder to maintain if these states became stronger and started to speak with one voice. The desire to keep Europe dependent and docile led successive U.S. administrations to oppose any steps that might have led to genuine European strategic autonomy.

Those days may be coming to an end, however. One need not be Trumpian to recognize that the United States “cannot have it all” and that it needs to shift more of the burden of collective defense onto its European partners. But if the past is any guide, Europe will not pick up the slack if its leaders are still convinced that Uncle Sam will be “all-in” under any circumstances. It is worth recalling that the initial push for European economic integration in the early 1950s was driven in part by European fears that the United States was eventually going to withdraw its forces from the continent and that their ability to counter the Warsaw Pact would be enhanced by the creation of a large and unified European economic order. The security impulse behind European integration receded once it became clear that Uncle Sam was staying, but growing doubts about the U.S. commitment would give Europeans ample incentive to mobilize their superior economic capacity and latent military potential more effectively, purely out of self-interest.

U.S. officials should encourage this development, regardless of who ends up in the White House next year. As I’ve argued before, the process of turning European security back over to Europeans should be done gradually, as part of a new transatlantic division of labor. Reduced reliance on the United States will lead Europe to balance more vigorously, and moving slowly but steadily in this direction will give our allies time to overcome the dilemmas of collective action that will inevitably arise. Because the nations of Europe have considerably more military potential than Russia does, they need not do this perfectly in order to be pretty darn safe.

#### Now is key to engineer a soft landing. Clearly communicating the plan under Biden before a crisis arises overcomes free-riding.

Dr. Stephen Walt 22. Robert and Renée Belfer professor, international relations, Harvard University; PhD, Political Science, Berkeley. “Which NATO Do We Need?” Foreign Policy. Sept. 14, 2022. https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/14/nato-future-europe-united-states/.

Model 4: A New Division of Labor

You knew this was coming: the model I think is the right one. As I’ve argued before (including most recently here in Foreign Policy), the optimal future model for the trans-Atlantic partnership is a new division of labor, with Europe taking primary responsibility for its own security and the United States devoting much greater attention to the Indo-Pacific region. The United States would remain a formal member of NATO, but instead of being Europe’s first responder, it would become its ally of last resort. Henceforth, the United States would plan to go back onshore in Europe only if the regional balance of power eroded dramatically, but not otherwise.

This model cannot be implemented overnight and should be negotiated in a cooperative spirit, with the United States helping its European partners design and acquire the capabilities they need. Because many of these states will do everything in their power to convince Uncle Sam to stay, however, Washington will have to make it crystal clear that this is the only model it will support going forward. Unless and until NATO’s European members really believe they are going to be mostly on their own, their resolve to take the necessary steps will remain fragile, and backsliding on their pledges is to be expected.

Unlike Donald Trump, whose bluster and bombast during his time as U.S. president annoyed allies to no good purpose, his successor Joe Biden is in an ideal position to start this process. He has a well-earned reputation as a dedicated Atlanticist, so pushing for a new division of labor wouldn’t be seen as a sign of resentment or pique. He and his team are uniquely positioned to tell our European partners that this step is in everyone’s long-term interest. Mind you, I don’t really expect Biden & Co. to take this step—for reasons I’ve explained elsewhere—but they should.

# 2ac -- ku -- round the fourth

## commitment trap

### LBL – 2ac

## europe

### eurosurge DA – 2ac

#### 2. Eurosurge now. Doesn’t solve the case because Trump will draw down AND it is dependent on the U.S.

Monaghan, '23 – Visiting fellow in the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C. Mathieu Droin is a visiting fellow in the CSIS Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program. Otto Hastrup Svendsen is a research associate with the CSIS Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program. Sissy Martinez is the program coordinator and research assistant with the CSIS Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program. Carlota García Encina is a senior analyst at the Elcano Royal Institute (Sean Monaghan; "What Happened at NATO's Vilnius Summit?"; No Publication; https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-happened-natos-vilnius-summit; 7-14-2023; NC)

Q3: How did NATO strengthen its deterrence and defense in Vilnius?

A3: Building on their commitments at last year’s Madrid summit to strengthen deterrence and defense, in Vilnius NATO allies agreed on “significant measures to further enhance NATO’s deterrence and defence posture in all domains, including strengthening forward defences and the Alliance’s ability to rapidly reinforce any Ally that comes under threat.” These measures are designed to deter conventional and nonmilitary hybrid threats.

Conventional deterrence measures agreed to in Vilnius included the following:

Three new regional plans were agreed on to defend NATO allies on all flanks, along with new command and control arrangements.

Progress on the NATO Force Model (300,000 troops ready to deploy within 30 days) was hailed and a new “Allied Reaction Force” established. However, it is worth noting progress on the new force model appears slow—Chair of the Military Committee Admiral Rob Bauer cautiously admitted before Vilnius that NATO is “working towards those numbers”—and no detail is available yet on the new reaction force.

The eight Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups “are now in place” and the ambition to scale up to brigade-sized units “where and when required” remains. Before the summit, Canada offered to double its contingent in Latvia, adding 1,200 troops, while Germany confirmed it would send a permanent brigade of up to 4,000 troops to Lithuania in the future.

Enhancements were made to NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence posture, including rotating modern air defense systems across the eastern flank and increasing readiness. To further strengthen air exercises and activity, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania also signed a Declaration of Cooperation on cross-border airspace management.

Measures to deter nonmilitary hybrid threats included new resilience objectives; a new “Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure”; a new cyber defense concept, a cyber defense pledge, and “Virtual Cyber Incident Support Capability”; a NATO Space Centre of Excellence in France; and a commitment to protect energy infrastructure and secure energy supplies to military forces. NATO also opened a new Centre of Excellence for Climate Change and Security in Montreal, Canada.

#### 3. Troop presence is stabilizing and successfully deters Russia.

John R. Deni 21. Research professor at the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute, nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. “America needs a permanent military presence in the Baltics, and here’s why.” 9/24/21. https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2021/09/24/america-needs-a-permanent-military-presence-in-the-baltics-and-heres-why/

With the Defense Department weighing whether and how to change the U.S. military footprint overseas, it’s time to make the American military presence in the Baltic states durable. Maintaining merely periodic American boots on the ground, sometimes there and sometimes not — especially while a more permanent U.S. presence takes shape in nearby Poland — sends the wrong message at the wrong time to NATO’s most vulnerable allies and to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Particularly in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the concerns generated over American credibility, only a consistent U.S. military presence in each of the Baltic states can convincingly reassure allies that Washington has their back while also signaling to Putin the rock-solid American commitment to NATO. The seemingly rushed, chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has caused some American allies in Europe to question Washington’s commitment to NATO.

From this side of the Atlantic, linking the failure of the 20-year effort in Afghanistan to American credibility in Europe sounds absurd. After all, Afghanistan is a country with which the U.S. doesn’t share significant cultural or historical ties, a treaty-based mutual defense commitment, or serious trade and investment relations. Meanwhile, America’s cultural, historical, demographic, defense, and trade and investment connections to Europe are second to none. It’s no exaggeration to say that the American way of life — not to mention the outcome of the great power competition now unfolding between the United States on one side and China and Russia on the other — depends on a close, secure relationship with Europe. Not so with Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, perception is reality, and the lack of an enduring American presence in the Baltic states looks even worse than it would in the absence of the Afghanistan debacle. This is particularly the case today in Lithuania, which is literally and figuratively on the front lines of Western efforts against both Russian and Chinese authoritarianism. Wedged among the Baltic Sea, a hostile neighbor in Belarus and the Russian territory of Kaliningrad — the most militarized piece of land in Europe — this relatively small ally confronts outsized threats.

Over the last several years, Russia has significantly increased the number of offensive conventional and nuclear weapons in its Kaliningrad exclave, which shares a 185-mile border with Lithuania. Most recently, the just completed Zapad military exercise involved up to 200,000 Russian and Belarusian soldiers, sailors and airmen, as well as hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces first defending against in an imaginary invasion and then simulating a counterattack into Lithuanian (and Polish) territory. Worrisomely, the exercise may result in a permanent Russian presence in Belarus. Meanwhile, Belarus has recently weaponized migrants, sending thousands of Iraqis and sub-Saharan Africans across the border into Lithuania over the last year.

Much farther afield, China has opened a trade embargo against Lithuania and pulled its ambassador from Vilnius. These moves were in response to Lithuania’s seemingly innocuous decision to allow Taiwan to open a diplomatic post in Vilnius under the name “Taiwan” as well as Lithuania’s withdrawal from a Chinese-led effort to co-opt Central and Eastern European countries known as 17+1. Additionally, Lithuania has been subject to extensive cyberattacks attributed to both Russia and China.

A small but permanent American presence in Lithuania would bolster U.S. and allied security in northeastern Europe in three ways. First, it would clearly indicate to allies and adversaries that Lithuanian sovereignty and territorial integrity is a vital American interest. Second, it could be utilized to fill gaps in Lithuanian defense capabilities today, particularly in terms of anti-tank, artillery, UAVs and electronic warfare. And finally, it would provide Vilnius the confidence it needs to invest more in advanced, offensive cyber, electronic warfare, and information operations, better enabling it to respond to the most likely attacks from Russia and China.

The principal objections to a durable U.S. presence are that it might somehow violate the terms of a 1997 agreement between NATO and Russia, or that it might intimidate Putin, causing a spiraling counter-reaction. Assuming a carefully calibrated presence that’s nested within an already persistent NATO commitment to the region, these concerns are overblown relative to the wide-ranging security benefits.

For example, under NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence initiative, Germany has led a multinational battlegroup of roughly 1,100 troops in Lithuania since 2017. Adding a company-sized American contingent of about 120 U.S. troops to this NATO presence as well as to similar Enhanced Forward Presence units in Latvia and Estonia could hardly be considered destabilizing, but would go far in reassuring allies and deterring Russia.

Lithuania and its Baltic state neighbors are punching above their weight within NATO, consistently bearing more than their share of the common defense burden. But Washington needs to fix the holes in NATO’s deterrent posture in the region and the glaring lack of persistent U.S. presence.

#### 4. Conventional superiority deters escalation. Russia is defensive.

Dr. Bryan Frederick 17, Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, Ph.D. in International Relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, et al., “Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements”, RAND Report, p. 58-59

Against these risks, however, are key factors that make it highly unlikely that Russia would directly attack a NATO member in response to posture enhancements along the lines of those proposed at Warsaw. Most importantly, NATO retains a large edge in overall conventional capabilities, and recent actions have strongly signaled that NATO, and the United States in particular, would respond militarily to any aggression against the Baltic States or other NATO allies where posture enhancements are being implemented. Therefore, it is highly likely that Russia perceives that any aggressive actions sufficient to trigger Article 5 would result in direct conflict with, at a minimum, the United States (again, absent any substantial changes in political leadership in the United States or other key NATO members that could shift those countries’ commitments to Article 5). In addition, Russia retains substantial defensive capabilities of its own, particularly its nuclear deterrent, which should minimize fears that the relatively modest NATO posture enhancements currently in progress would be used for direct aggression against Russian territory in the near term.

Furthermore, there is currently little evidence that Russia is interested in such a conflict

with the United States or NATO. Russia does not appear to count any current NATO territory, including the Baltic States, within the sphere where it is willing to use force to preserve its influence. Although Russia has taken numerous aggressive actions in post-Soviet states since 2014, and indeed since 2008, and has undertaken numerous lower-level provocations involving NATO allies, it has taken no actions that approach announced U.S. or NATO redlines that would trigger Article 5. Moreover, even in the aggressions that it has undertaken, such as in Ukraine, Russia’s behavior appears to have been highly sensitive to military costs. Responding directly and aggressively to NATO posture enhancements that do not shift the overall local balance of capabilities on Russia’s borders would represent a level of cost and risk acceptance that has no precedence in prior Russian behavior.

### oco shift DA – 2ac

#### U.S. left-of-launch inev.

Michael Klare 19. professor emeritus of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College and senior visiting fellow at the Arms Control Association. “Cyber Battles, Nuclear Outcomes? Dangerous New Pathways to Escalation.” Arms Control Association. Nov 2019. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-11/features/cyber-battles-nuclear-outcomes-dangerous-new-pathways-escalation.

That cyberwarfare had risen to this level of threat, the 2018 NPR report indicated, was a product of the enhanced cybercapabilities of potential adversaries and of the creeping obsolescence of many existing U.S. NC3 systems. To overcome these vulnerabilities, it called for substantial investment in an upgraded NC3 infrastructure. Not mentioned, however, were extensive U.S. efforts to employ cybertools to infiltrate and potentially incapacitate the NC3 systems of likely adversaries, including Russia, China, and North Korea.

For the past several years, the U.S. Department of Defense has been exploring how it could employ its own very robust cyberattack capabilities to compromise or destroy enemy missiles from such states as North Korea before they can be fired, a strategy sometimes called “left of launch.”3 Russia and China can assume, on this basis, that their own launch facilities are being probed for such vulnerabilities, presumably leading them to adopt escalatory policies such as those espoused in the 2018 NPR report. Wherever one looks, therefore, the links between cyberwar and nuclear war are growing.

#### AND NATO.

Lonergan and Montgomery 22 – Dr. Erica Lonergan is an assistant professor in the Army Cyber Institute at West Point. She is also a research scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. Erica previously served as a senior director on the Cyberspace Solarium Commission. Retired Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery, US Navy, is the senior director of the Center on Cyber and Technology Innovation at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Mark previously served as the executive director of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission. ("Pressing Questions: Offensive Cyber Operations and NATO Strategy"; Modern War Institute; https://mwi.usma.edu/pressing-questions-offensive-cyber-operations-and-nato-strategy/; 1-25-2022, Accessed 6-24-2022)//ILake-AZ

Offensive Cyber Operations in NATO Strategy Above and Below the Level of Warfare

Historically, NATO’s cyber posture has largely focused on defense and resilience—and this continues to form the bulk of NATO’s approach. The alliance maintains that its “main focus in cyber defence is to protect its own networks (including operations and missions) and enhance resilience.” At the 2014 Wales summit, NATO endorsed the Enhanced Cyber Defence Policy, which affirmed that cyber defense is part of collective defense and that the alliance would incorporate cyber defense into its planning and operations. In 2016, NATO members pledged to improve their cyber defenses through training, education, exercises, and information sharing.

But the seeds were also planted in 2016 for NATO to consider a potential role for offensive cyber operations. That year, the alliance recognized cyberspace as a domain of military operations, comparable to land, sea, and air. At the 2018 Brussels summit, NATO began to more seriously consider offensive cyber operations. Specifically, NATO created the Cyberspace Operations Centre to coordinate requests for member states to provide offensive cyber effects through the Sovereign Cyber Effects Provided Voluntarily by Allies process. Following the 2018 summit, then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis stated in a press conference that five states—the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Estonia—were contributing cyber forces to “help NATO fight in this important domain.” More recently, in June 2021, NATO convened in Brussels and committed to a Comprehensive Cyber Defence Policy. A key feature of the new policy is the prominent role of offensive cyber operations. In Brussels, member states committed to “employ the full range of capabilities at all times to actively deter, defend against, and counter the full spectrum of cyber threats.”

NATO’s shift to incorporating offensive cyber operations into existing strategy and policy has focused on integrating offensive effects into conventional military plans and operations in the context of a conflict. While NATO’s updated strategy is a positive development,—particularly the mismatch between the alliance’s clear distinction between wartime its limited focus on conflict scenarios for employing cyber power fails to accurately account for the cyber threat environment NATO faces and peacetime and the approach of adversaries like Russia, who adopt a competition-conflict continuum. Additionally, the focus on employing offensive cyber during a high-end conventional fight is also not consistent with how several NATO members are already engaged in gray zone offensive cyber operations.

The primary threat to NATO allies in the cyber domain is not from high-end, decisive cyberattacks. Instead, cyber threats more frequently and effectively manifest as gray zone tactics designed to have a corrosive effect without rising to the level of warfare. There are numerous examples of this type of threat. For instance, in July 2021, NATO publicly condemned a range of malicious cyber behavior, including the Microsoft Exchange hack (which NATO attributed to China) and ransomware attacks targeting critical infrastructure. Russia has leveraged cyber and disinformation operations to interfere in democratic elections in the United States in 2016, 2018, and 2020; France in 2017; and Germany in 2017 and 2021—to name just a few examples. Russia also conducted distributed denial-of-service cyberattacks against government websites in Montenegro during the lead-up to, and following, Montenegro’s ascension to NATO in 2017. And when NATO forces were positioned in the Baltics beginning in 2017 as part of NATO’s enhanced forward presence, two threat actors, GhostWriter and Secondary Infektion, conducted a range of disinformation campaigns.

Additionally, the reality is that several NATO members are already speaking publicly about offensive cyber operations below the level of warfare and their statements and actions have an effect on the entire alliance. In particular, NATO member nations have not reached a political consensus about the role of offensive cyber operations. In 2018, the US Department of Defense and US Cyber Command issued new strategy and policy documents that articulated a role for the military in conducting offensive cyber operations below the level of armed conflict outside of US-controlled cyberspace (part of the “defend forward” strategy), and there has been some reporting about US offensive cyber operations. For instance, in 2018 the United States disrupted the Russian-linked Internet Research Agency from interfering in the midterm elections. And, more recently, in December 2021 General Paul Nakasone, commander of US Cyber Command, publicly acknowledged that the military played a role in disrupting ransomware groups targeting critical infrastructure. The United States has also worked with other NATO allies, such as Estonia and Montenegro, to conduct “hunt forward” cyber operations on allied and partner networks to uncover and disrupt malicious cyber activity.

### baltics D – 2ac

## uq

### credibility – 2ac

## russia PIC

### use PIC – top – 2ac

#### Any discretion is sufficient.

Dr. James Lebovic 23. PhD and MA, International Relations, USC. Professor, Political Science and International Affairs, GW Elliott School of International Affairs. “Nuclear ‘Superiority’ after the Cold War.” Chapter 3 in *The False Promise of Superiority: The United States and Nuclear Deterrence after the Cold War*. Oxford University Press. 2023. https://academic.oup.com/book/45387.

Such a conditional prohibition is less easily maintained than an absolute one, for “conditionality” grants even potential violators (some) power to determine whether their behavior is right or wrong. Even Cold War–era hawks who thought the United States should prepare to fight (and win) a nuclear war maintained that the underwriting principles were consistent with just war doctrine (Gray and Payne 1980). Conditionality thus reduces the potential offensiveness of the behavior by instilling doubt over whether it constitutes an allowable exception. If two parties can interpret the same act differently, we can question whether the prohibition has been violated but also whether it existed in the first place. As Elizabeth Kier and Jonathan Mercer (1996: 93–94) observe, precedent—the constraining effect of past rules and behavior—rests on “conspicuousness” which “means a simplicity, a clarity, an absence of discretion that make the violation of the convention unambiguous.”27 The implications are straightforward.

Simple and unambiguous conventions are better than complex and nuanced ones. A convention against using nuclear weapons in combat is better than one permitting occasional use of these weapons in specific circumstances. “Never” is better than “sometimes,” because it is clear, allows no discretion, and can in time acquire a symbolism that strengthens the convention. (Kier and Mercer 1996: 94)

#### 3. Perm – do the AFF and declare the PIC’s exception – it’d be incoherent, but that’s good because it preserves ambiguity in the cases outlined in their net benefit.

Rob Glass & Jeffrey Lewis 18. Rob Glass runs the DebaterCast Podcast; Dr. Jeffrey Lewis is the Director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey and the founding editor of the Arms Control Wonk blog. 09-11-18. “DEBATERCAST EPISODE 04 – DR. JEFFREY LEWIS.” DebaterCast. https://www.policydb8.com/articles.html/interviews-and-profiles/debatercast/debatercast-episode-04-%E2%80%93-dr-jeffrey-lewis-r17/

GLASS: If Congress or the courts were to actually move on this, and declare that the president should not engage in the first use of nuclear weapons, what sort of declaratory policy would be likely to follow that?

LEWIS: Let me say it this way. You can have declaratory policy, the idea of declaratory policy is that you're going to say certain things about your nuclear arsenal. You can pick different declaratory policies. So you can say, as the Obama administration did, they said they would use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear weapon states are in compliance with their NPT obligations. But then they said other things. They said that they would certainly retaliate with conventional forces if a country used chemical weapons. So the policy would be no first use, then I guess the question is what additional policies would one adopt. Frankly speaking, I wouldn't recommend this, I think it's a dumb idea, but you might well see, in a case where that happened, a president would adopt a series of incoherent policies, which the US did in the Clinton administration. We had a policy that we would never use a nuclear weapon against - how do they harmonize this - basically we reserved the right to use nuclear weapons against Libya because it was - it had a deep underground facility we thought was used for producing chemical weapons. But we would never use a nuclear weapon against a target like that. It was just incoherent. And so what we called it was strategic ambiguity, but wasn’t ambiguous, it was incoherent! And that was because they wanted to have the cake and eat it too. The way they rationalized it was by saying, we reserve the right to do it, but it wouldn’t make sense. Like, okay guys. You know? That's why I kind of blanched at your question because the policy would be no first use, and the question of what comes along after that is really the question of what comes along in addition to that.

#### 4. Perm do the counterplan – institutes an NFU.

John Loretz 23. Was Program Director of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War from 2000-2017 and was an IPPNW representative on the steering group of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. “Book Review: The Sheathed Sword: From Nuclear Brink to No First Use”. Medicine, Conflict and Survival. Volume 39, 2023. Issue 2. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13623699.2023.2186769?src=&journalCode=fmcs20

‘No first use’, as all of the contributors agree, is neither a single nor an easily pinned down concept. Only China and India have declared NFU policies. While China has pledged that it will ‘never at any time or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons’ (177), its position has appeared to shift in recent years, and two entire chapters are devoted to analysing whether Chinese leaders may be carving out exceptions to what had been an unequivocal policy. India’s NFU has been harshly criticized internally by hawkish politicians and military leaders since it was announced in 2003, given that Pakistan has made the first use of nuclear weapons a key element of its security strategy. Some analysts believe the Modi government may abandon no first use sooner or later (Dalton Citation2019). Nevertheless, both China and India have promoted a GNFU, though the proposal has gone largely ignored by the other nuclear-armed states. Most of those have pledged not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states (although, even here, they have carved out some exceptions). Yet they all, either explicitly or implicitly, maintain a ‘nuclear option’ in their security doctrines.

## secret CP

### nfu pic – 2ac

### secret NFU – 2ac

#### Public NFU is key to credibility – that’s key for Europe.

Michael Gerson 10. Research analyst, Center for Naval Analyses. “No First Use: The Next Step for U.S. Nuclear Policy.” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 2. Fall, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00018.

The second argument against NFU is that it would not be believed, and therefore NFU would do nothing to improve the strategic equation.119 Despite China’s consistent commitment to NFU, for instance, there is considerable debate among scholars and policymakers about its validity, and Beijing has been somewhat ambiguous about the specific conditions under which NFU applies, especially regarding Taiwan.120 For some, the possibility that an NFU pledge would merely be dismissed as “cheap talk” that could be reversed if necessary effectively negates any strategic gain the United States might accrue from such a policy.

Skeptics of the believability of NFU underestimate the international and domestic audience costs incurred by a clear NFU commitment.121 By making an NFU policy public, perhaps in the form of a presidential press conference accompanied by a formal document, the United States would increase the credibility of NFU by tying its reputation to the sustainment of and adherence to the commitment. The objective would be to bolster the credibility of an NFU policy by ensuring that noncompliance would have unacceptably high political costs.

A violation of NFU would likely have substantial domestic, and especially [End Page 45] international, political ramifications. Domestically, a president’s purposeful violation of an NFU pledge could incentivize the political opposition to rally strongly against the violation, providing an opportunity for vocal political opponents to generate attention and potentially bring independent voters and moderate members of the opposite political party into their camp. Internationally, breaking an NFU commitment risks damaging the United States’ reputation for honoring its commitments.122 If the United States were unwilling to adhere to its public policies regarding something as important as nuclear weapons, states might calculate that they could not trust the United States at its word. Such beliefs could weaken confidence in U.S. commitments to other unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral declarations and agreements; give states pause in considerations about entering into new agreements with the United States; and create strong doubts about the sincerity of future U.S. declaratory policies. In addition, the breach of NFU could undermine U.S. long-term security. Nuclear first use would signal that the United States believes that nuclear weapons have military utility and is willing to employ them regardless of the political costs, thereby potentially encouraging further proliferation in an attempt to deter future U.S. nuclear attacks.

#### Links to net benefit – leaks

Shane Harris et al. 23. Winner of the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense, with Devil Barrett and Ellen Nakashima, 4-14-2023. "Leak raises fresh questions about Pentagon’s internal security ," https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/14/pentagon-leaked-documents/.

The leak of hundreds of classified intelligence documents about the war in Ukraine and U.S. spying on allies has left many officials asking: How did this happen again?

Jack Teixeira, a 21-year-old, low-level National Guard member assigned to an intelligence support squadron in Massachusetts, allegedly removed hundreds of classified documents from his office on base and brought them home. He then shared them with his friends in an online community united by their love of guns and video games, the government says.

On Friday, he was charged with unlawfully taking and unlawfully transmitting sensitive information — crimes that carry a potential maximum sentence of 15 years in prison. Teixeira will be held in jail until a detention hearing next week, but bail is rarely granted in such cases.

It’s still unclear how closely Teixeira was monitored, if at all. But the timeline of his alleged activities, based on interviews with members of his Discord server group, as well as an FBI affidavit, shows that he was able to remove page after page of classified material, for months on end, with apparently no notice.

“I just don’t know why he should be able to print lots of documents. That makes no sense,” said one former senior intelligence official familiar with past leaks, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters. “What were we not doing, not noticing that pattern of behavior? Who’s not checking that? Where’s the human monitoring?”

Teixeira was far from the first insider in recent years to expose government secrets, and his case raises fresh questions about whether earlier efforts to plug leaks were sufficient or if the U.S. intelligence system, which is designed to promote collaboration and information sharing, is fundamentally vulnerable to disclosures from within.

Every time a trusted employee has walked off the job with classified information, U.S. officials have reassured the public that lessons learned will lead to new guardrails that will make breaches less likely. They have consistently proved insufficient.

### no inaction – 2ac

## concon CP

### concon – 2ac

#### Delay – concon takes forever. Ensures commitment trap in the interim.

Huckabee 97 [David, Specialist in American National Government, <http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/97-922.pdf>]

In the period beginning with the First Congress, through September 30, 1997 (105th Congress, 1 Session), a total of 10,980 proposals had been introduced to amend st the Constitution. Thirty-three of these were proposed by Congress to the states, and 27 have been ratified. Excluding the 27th Amendment (Congressional Pay), which took more than 202 years, the longest pending proposed amendment that was successfully ratified was the 22nd Amendment (Presidential Tenure), which took three years, nine months, and four days. The 26th Amendment (18-year-old vote) was ratified in the shortest time: three months and 10 days. The average ratification time was one year, eight months, and seven days.

### conditionality bad – 2ac

## disability K

### disability K – 2ac

#### 4. Language policing trades off with material solutions – assumes violence is interpersonal not structural.

Shafiq 11. Tiara, Associate editor at The Scavenger. “Just how useful is language policing?” The Scavenger. <http://www.thescavenger.net/people/just-how-useful-is-language-policing-617.html>.

It’s very easy and common for people to be really savvy in the language they use to avoid being ableist and so on, and yet have rotten attitudes and actions. How much are we letting language policing distract us from getting to the core of the issues raised? asks Tiara the Merchgirl.

I’m starting to get a little wary of language policing. Mainly because it seems a little too easy.

Instead of engaging with points of view that are challenging to yours (or just even working from a very different perspective), instead of looking within yourself to see how you’re perpetuating and practicing discrimination and harm, all you have to do is pick out a word and go “Ableist! Classist! XYZist!” and dismiss the other person altogether, self-satisfied that we’re done our Good Activist Deed Of The Day and so no one can call us out on our rubbish.

Prettying up the surface instead of dealing with the darker depths. Talking the talk but not walking the walk. Not willing to take what you dish out. Nitpicking on the small stuff because it saves us from having to tackle the hairier things.

I feel like we’re in some sort of weird semi-academic-language bubble in some internet communities, particularly Tumblr where I blog, patting ourselves on the back for not using ableist words or whatever, without actually thinking of how it works elsewhere in the world.

Honestly, outside of Tumblr, who else is going to look at words like “homophobia” and go “Oh no! That’s ableist towards people with phobias!”? Especially when the people who have a right to raise that concern haven’t brought it up in offline circles until now?

Will anyone else be able to understand why certain words are X-ist if you explain – or will they come back and say that just because they use supposedly X terms doesn’t mean they are that discriminatory in their actions?

#### 7. Their card says commitment to disability justice causes disarm – that’s bad.

Sinan Ulgen 15. Visiting scholar, Carnegie Europe; chairman, Istanbul-based think tank EDAM; MA, College of Europe. “Is ‘zero’ the right target for disarmament?: A Turkish response.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 71, Iss. 1. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0096340214563688.

Complete nuclear disarmament is a dangerous chimera. For three fundamental reasons, pursuing this theoretically laudable goal would likely produce a more dangerous world.

First, as a means for maintaining security, it is difficult to identify a credible alternative to nuclear deterrence. Simply put, nuclear deterrence has worked. Even at the height of the Cold War’s ideological polarization, the world never witnessed the sort of large-scale wars that, in the absence of a nuclear deterrent, were fought in the first half of the 20th century. Policy makers fully recognize the destructive capability of nuclear weapons and have come to understand the complexities inherent in a nuclear world. The concept of mutual assured destruction has provided, and continues to provide, a sound basis for limiting the scope and scale of confrontations between nuclear weapon states.

Devoid of a nuclear deterrent, the world would immediately become more dangerous. If military assets were limited to conventional weapons, nations would experience fewer inhibitions against armed conflict. This would hold true even for the major powers. With disincentives to conflict reduced, the renewal of conventional arms races would likely be unstoppable. This wo

uld have an important effect on, among other things, national budgets. Today, at least for nuclear weapon states, the existence of a nuclear deterrent allows for drastic reductions in defense spending during times of austerity. In a similar vein, countries that fall under another nation’s extended nuclear deterrence can spend less on conventional military capabilities than they otherwise would; they benefit from a nuclear dividend. So overall, though it may sound paradoxical, nuclear weapons are a force for stability. It is hard to imagine how similar levels of stability could be achieved through any means other than nuclear weapons.

Second, how would a world without nuclear weapons be managed? If the world were essentially one big “peace cartel,” this cartel would be very fragile indeed. Economic theory indicates that members of a cartel become more likely to engage in cartel-busting behavior as the rewards for doing so increase and the penalties decrease. A similar logic would pertain where nuclear weapons are concerned. In a world without nuclear weapons, breaking one’s cartel commitments by developing a nuclear deterrent would seem to have enormous security benefits. As for penalties, nothing short of a sanctioned military attack intended to destroy the country in question would change the calculus of a rogue regime intent on acquiring nuclear weapons. In other words, ensuring that the world remained free of nuclear weapons would require the establishment of a universal regime devoted to that purpose, backed by the unambiguously credible use of force. The world has never witnessed the emergence of such an institution, and likely never will.

When the first rogue state went nuclear, the nonproliferation regime would likely fall apart completely. Today, though the regime is not universal, it remains effective in constraining the nuclear ambitions of nations such as Iran. But in a world without the security that nuclear weapons provide, a single episode of noncompliance would likely cause many nations to seek their own deterrents. The result would be a collapse of the regime and a cascade of proliferation. It is a dangerous fallacy to believe that rogue states could be prevented from reintroducing nuclear weapons to a world from which these weapons had been eliminated.

The third factor agitating against total disarmament is the difficulty of effecting a transition to a nuclear-free world. States have developed nuclear deterrents for a variety of reasons, but chief among these—whether for the great powers, or for middle powers such as India, Pakistan, and Israel—has been threat perception. Until the threats that have led these powers to acquire nuclear weapons are permanently eliminated, it is difficult to envision them agreeing to disarm completely. For example, Pakistan’s security and policy establishment will never agree to total disarmament until Pakistan feels secure vis-à-vis India, its more powerful neighbor and its geopolitical rival. A similar argument could be made about Israel. The world will have to become much more adept at peacefully solving or at least managing its regional conflicts, whether through a universal security architecture or a multiplicity of regional architectures, for the middle powers in particular to perceive complete disarmament as safe.

Eliminating nuclear weapons, though a lofty goal, is a difficult proposition. But this is not to say that disarmament efforts should be abandoned. To the contrary, the nuclear weapon states (with the United States and Russia in the lead) should move forward with reducing their arsenals. Otherwise, the consensus that underlies the entire nonproliferation regime will be increasingly open to challenge. But there is a limit to what nuclear disarmament can accomplish without introducing new security risks.

Here’s something that can be achieved: gaining a universal commitment by nuclear weapon states not to use these weapons first. Today, China espouses a no-first-use policy. The United States forswears first use against non-nuclear weapon states that are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and are in compliance with their nonproliferation obligations—though Washington places some restrictions on that commitment (Defense Department, 2010). Russia does not maintain a no-first-use policy. This is a complicated picture, and prevailing on all nuclear weapon states to adopt no-first-use policies would be challenging. Ultimately, though, the goal is achievable. If every nuclear-armed state adopted an unconditional no-first-use policy, the risk of nuclear war would be greatly reduced.

## interoperability CP

### interoperability CP – 2ac

#### 11/5 is too late.

François Heisbourg 24. Senior Adviser for Europe, International Institute for Strategic Studies; former Chairman, IISS; Special Adviser, Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS). “Rearming Europe To Win Ukraine’s Long War.” Groupe D’études Géopolitiques. Feb. 15, 2024. https://geopolitique.eu/en/2024/02/15/in-europe-ukraine-war-in-the-long-run/.

Without sweeping and rapid changes in these areas, Europe will, for a long time to come, continue to build bonsai armies on a continent where Russia will be steadily pushing its pawns forward, while the United States will watch this defeat from its distant position in the Indo-Pacific region.

It is important to remember, however, that Europe remains important to the United States in its tug-of-war with China. On the one hand, the EU is an indispensable market for Chinese trade and technology. Its single market enables it to impose its standards, including in new technologies. Americans and Europeans alike have begun to understand this, with the creation in 2021 of a Euro-American body to address investment and technology trade with China. On the other hand, in military terms, Europe remains an essential hub for American access to the Indian Ocean: at the risk of surprising, the continent and its military assets are closer to American bases in the Indian Ocean than the American West Coast is to Taiwan and the South China Sea. In other words, Europe has some leverage with which to influence American choices. All that remains is to convince Donald Trump, should he be re-elected. This was not the case during his first term.

Here too, it is time to lay the groundwork: by Tuesday November 5th, it will already be too late.

#### 11. Congress can’t reclaim foreign policy power.

Goldgeier 8/4/18 [James M. Goldgeier; visiting senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and professor of international relations at the School of International Service at American University; 8/14/18; The Unconstrained Presidency: Checks and Balances Eroded Long Before Trump; <https://www.cfr.org/article/unconstrained-presidency-checks-and-balances-eroded-long-trump//ANO>]

In Congress, the combination of declining foreign policy expertise among members and increasing political polarization has reduced the ability of legislators to supervise the executive branch even if they had the appetite to do so. The bureaucracy, meanwhile, has lost its incentive to cultivate and wield expertise as decision-making has become centralized in the White House and congressional action and oversight on foreign policy have declined. And U.S. allies, for their part, have become less able to check the president’s foreign policies as the alliances have become ensnared in U.S. partisan politics. Similarly, the post–Cold War era has frequently seen presidents circumvent international institutions. Going forward, any attempts to stem the growth of presidential power will have to confront not just the damage done by Trump but also the deeper problem that damage has exposed: that the bodies charged with constraining presidential power have been steadily losing both their willingness and their capacity to rein in presidents. Many have written eloquently, particularly since 9/11, about the need for checks on presidential power. But the reality is that Congress is in no shape to reclaim its role in foreign policy

—and neither are the other traditional sources of constraint on U.S. presidents. It may take a major shock, such as the rise of China, to reboot the system. The Constitution grants Congress the ability to constrain the president on issues such as trade and the use of force. Although formal votes on presidential foreign policy are rare, the legislative branch can act as a check on the president in several other, more informal ways. Senators and representatives can hold hearings that generate debate and expose decisions to public scrutiny. They can also force the president to anticipate congressional reactions to policy, leading him to check himself before Congress checks him—an important, if often invisible, form of oversight. For example, he might shape the details of a controversial international agreement to make sure members of Congress will not balk. But Congress’ oversight of U.S. foreign policy has declined markedly since the early Cold War, and especially since the mid-1990s. As the political scientist Linda Fowler has put it, “Something is amiss in the Senate and its national security committees.” The two Senate committees tasked with oversight of foreign policy and national security—the Foreign Relations Committee and the Armed Services Committee—have held substantially fewer hearings (both public and private) over time, resulting in far less supervision of major foreign policy endeavors, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, than was the case for Cold War–era military interventions. Why this decrease? The rise of partisanship is one important reason. Although foreign policy has never been fully isolated from politics, political polarization began to rise in the 1970s, and it increased sharply in the 1990s. Today, members of Congress reflexively support their own party. In periods of unified government, this means extreme deference to the president. In periods of divided government, it means congressional gridlock. Neither scenario yields much in terms of congressional oversight. Polarization also gives presidents reason to simply ignore Congress when making foreign policy. As the political scientist Kenneth Schultz has argued, with members less willing to cross the aisle, it is “more difficult to get bipartisan support for ambitious or risky undertakings, particularly the use of military force and the conclusion of treaties.” And so presidents opt for alternatives such as executive agreements over formal mechanisms such as ratified treaties. Consider the Iran nuclear deal. In 2015, President Barack Obama, concerned that he could not get a treaty with Iran past the Republican-controlled Congress, chose to make an executive agreement (which made it all too easy for Trump to tear up the deal later). Another trend that has sapped Congress’ influence is the decline of congressional expertise on foreign policy and national security. Simply put, legislators used to know more about foreign policy than they do now. Greater expertise strengthened Congress’ formal and visible role, since committees could engage in greater oversight of the executive branch. Expertise also reinforced Congress’ invisible means of constraining presidential power. Presidents had to think about how a seasoned committee chair or member would assess a policy. During his initial escalation of the Vietnam War, for example, President Lyndon Johnson was careful to maintain the support of powerful committee chairs, such as Senator J. William Fulbright, who led the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1959 to 1974. Fulbright shepherded the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through the Senate in 1964, but two years later, his probative hearings helped shift public opinion against the war. Congressional expertise also led to serious, bipartisan policies that could force the president’s hand. A good example is the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, an initiative for safely securing and dismantling weapons of mass destruction in the former Soviet Union. Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia, and Senator Richard Lugar, a Republican from Indiana—two defense stalwarts who had been deeply involved in arms control agreements during the Cold War—proposed it in 1991 as an amendment to the annual defense bill. The George H. W. Bush administration initially opposed the legislation because it diverted $500 million previously authorized for other purposes, but Nunn and Lugar prevailed, backed up by 86 votes in the Senate. They were able to pass their bill because the existing polarization was still manageable and because both senators were respected experts on defense and foreign policy. The program was a high-water mark of expertise-informed legislation. In the years since, legislators have become less and less interested in the details of foreign policy. In 1994, a small group of newly elected congressional Republicans even proudly declared that they did not own passports. Several factors explain the decline in expertise. Changes in the way senators now divide up committee roles, by increasing the number of committees they sit on, have led to greater breadth at the expense of depth. The media, facing fragmentation and declining budgets, have paid less attention to the crucial committees, especially the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, thus diminishing their value as reputation burnishers on Capitol Hill. Increased turnover has led to less seniority, particularly on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reducing the number of specialists to whom other senators can look for leadership on complex issues. Add in polarization and gridlock, which, by reducing overall congressional activity, also reduces the incentives to develop specialties, and the result is a Congress with decidedly less expertise. An inflection point in the long-term decline of congressional oversight came after 9/11, when Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force, a measure intended to combat terrorism but that presidents ended up interpreting broadly. For nearly 17 years, the AUMF has served as the legal justification for expanding military operations across the Middle East, many of them only tenuously related to the original intent. But legislators have shown little appetite for seeking a new AUMF, which would constrain the president when it comes to the many counterterrorism missions the United States now conducts in places such as Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. That’s because the status quo actually suits many members of Congress. It lets them avoid voting on military operations—always risky, since they can be held accountable for their decision on the campaign trail—and it allows them to fixate on the legality of the operation without having to take a position on its wisdom. Obama’s decision in August 2013 to seek congressional authorization for the use of force in Syria in response to the regime’s use of chemical weapons may at first glance look like a sign of deference. But it actually exposed how weak legislators’ war-making powers had become. Unable to gain backing even from the United Kingdom, Obama announced that he would seek congressional authorization before launching an attack. Apart from a few Republicans who insisted that the president could not strike Syria without legislative approval (something they would not insist on later when Trump carried out strikes in 2017), most members were visibly eager to avoid being drawn into the debate—thereby proving how much Congress had been sidelined. As Ben Rhodes, Obama’s deputy national security adviser, confirmed in his memoir, the president sought a vote knowing he might lose, which would firmly demonstrate legislators’ lack of support for greater U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. (As events played out, the issue became moot when, at Russia’s prodding, Syria pledged to give up its chemical weapons.) Congress is equally reluctant to stand up to the president on trade. Despite misgivings over Trump’s protectionist measures, Democratic and Republican legislators have essentially given up on the issue. In June, Bob Corker, the Tennessee Republican who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposed a bill that would require the president to seek congressional approval for tariffs enacted in the name of national security. But he has not been able to gain sufficient support for the measure from fellow Republicans, who, with midterm elections looming, are reluctant to cross Trump. There still are some dedicated foreign policy hands willing to fight to give the legislative branch a voice. In 2017, for example, Congress managed to impose additional sanctions on Russia against the president’s wishes. But overall, Congress has relinquished its authority on foreign policy and trade to the executive branch—and would have trouble reclaiming it even if it wanted to.

## assurance DA

### assurance toolbox – 2ac

#### In particular, he makes prolif inevitable.

Dr. Stephen Blank 24. Senior Fellow, Eurasia Program, Foreign Policy Research Institute; PhD, Russian History, University of Chicago. “Donald Trump and the Calamitous Renationalization of International Security.” Center for European Policy Analysis. Feb. 16, 2024. https://cepa.org/article/donald-trump-and-the-calamitous-renationalization-of-international-security/.

Finally, there is the nuclear issue. There is no doubt that NATO, as its leaders frequently proclaim, is a nuclear alliance largely based on American nuclear weapons.

Those weapons lie at the heart of NATO’s deterrence and, thus, European security. A perception that Trumpian America would not defend its allies will accelerate global, i.e. not only European, but also Asian efforts to obtain nuclear weapons for self-defense against Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and other dictatorial states.

We already see that European governments are contemplating rebasing or relocating American nuclear weapons in Europe (the UK is preparing to accept new US tactical nuclear weapons removed after the end of the Cold War) following Russia’s all-out invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

And fears about Trump’s return have already sparked a debate in Europe — on February 13, Germany’s Finance Minister Christian Lindner argued that Europe considers falling back on the British and French strategic nuclear forces. While far smaller than the US deterrent, these are significant; but whether Putin would believe London and Paris would risk their countries in defense of Tallinn or Warsaw is another matter.

Putin and his acolytes meanwhile continue to issue regular threats to use nuclear weapons if NATO continues aiding Ukraine, and have now escalated these threats by using hypersonic missiles against Ukraine.

Russia believes these missiles cannot be defended against, and since all new Russian missiles are dual-capable, i.e., nuclear and conventionally capable systems, they could well signal an escalatory threat.

The Kremlin has also stationed nuclear missiles in Belarus, clearly to bring nuclear threats closer to the borders of our NATO allies. Not surprisingly, it did so despite official reassurances that it would not deploy nuclear weapons abroad, another indicator of the veracity of Russian official rhetoric.

And these deliberate threats to the international nuclear and non-proliferation order also include the deliberate violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by attacking Ukraine, a treaty signatory, in 2014 and 2022. It is, therefore, no surprise that a top Polish general now advocates that his country obtain a nuclear weapon for self-defense against Russia.

And this only applies to Europe. We need no imagination to grasp that the open display that the US alliance and nuclear guarantees to NATO allies are incredible will trigger an explosion of interest in nuclear weapons in South Korea and Japan.

Such sentiment in high places already exists, so such a race is quite likely. This certainly will also be the case if American guarantees evaporate in the Middle East and Iran continues to be unhampered or obtain foreign support in its quest for nuclear weapons.

### prolif – defense – 2ac

#### No downsides to Asian prolif.

Robert E. Kelly 22, professor of political science at Pusan National University, also the guy from [this video](Robert%20E.%20Kelly%2022,%20professor%20of%20political%20science%20at%20Pusan%20National%20University,%20also%20the%20guy%20from%20this%20video,%20), “The U.S. Should Get Out of the Way in East Asia’s Nuclear Debates,” 7/15/22, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/15/us-south-korea-japan-east-asia-nuclear-debates-nonproliferation/

Global Zero advocates, such as political scientist Scott Sagan, worry about the transactional issues of WMD possession because they are uniquely dangerous weapons. Indeed, theft, loss, rogue scientists, and so on are legitimate fears. But they are no more resonant with South Korea or Japan than with any other nuclear weapons state. Indeed, as liberal democracies with robust state capacities and preexisting, well-managed nuclear energy programs, they will likely be quite responsible, as Britain and France have been.

No one seriously believes Seoul or Tokyo will launch an out-of-the-blue, nuclear-first strike on an opponent; set up something like the A.Q. Khan proliferation network; sell WMDs to terrorists or other rogues; put Homer Simpson in charge of nuclear safety; or be so sloppy as to require something like the Nunn-Lugar program. Even Pakistan and India have been better with their arsenals than the panic of the late 1990s suggested. Even dictatorships have been cautious about these issues. And as democracies with a history of foreign-policy restraint, democratic peace theory suggests they would be good stewards, certainly better than East Asia’s autocratic nuclear powers.

There is generalized anxiety about a regional arms race, which South Korean/Japanese nuclearization might exacerbate. Perhaps, but as noted above, there is no local cascade to be sparked because it has already occurred. China, Russia, and North Korea have all moved first. China and Russia have established nuclear arsenals and no intention of complying with the build-down imperative. Russia’s growing rhetorical invocation of its nuclear weapons is a disturbing evolution. North Korea repeatedly agreed, non-bindingly since 1992, to avoid nuclear weapons—only to exit the NPT and keep building. It now has intercontinental ballistic missiles and several dozen nuclear warheads.

#### Asian prolif stops World War 3.

Noah Smith 24, economist and writer, “Japan and South Korea need nuclear weapons,” 2/26/24, https://www.noahpinion.blog/p/japan-and-south-korea-need-nuclear

Develop nuclear weapons.

For Japan and South Korea, the choice here is very clear. The U.S. is their only external protector against China, and the rise of MAGA politics (and the shriveling of the U.S. defense-industrial base) means that the U.S. is no longer reliable. Nuclear weapons are the only real possibility of an enduring security guarantee for Japan and South Korea. And that’s not even taking into account the need to deter the loose cannon of North Korea, whose nuclear-capable missile arsenal is growing more deadly by the day.

For Poland, the case is less clear. It has another potential protector besides the U.S.: the European powers of Germany, France, and the UK. Those countries can theoretically outmatch Russia in terms of both population and manufacturing, even if Russia gets Chinese help. And the UK and France have nukes of their own. And there’s no loose cannon like North Korea in the neighborhood.

The main danger for Poland is that Germany, France, and the UK, like America, will remain mired in political paralysis, and that their defense-industrial bases will remain moribund, and that they will fail to come to Poland’s aid against Putin. Even if its manufacturing base allowed Poland to hold out against Russia by itself, a non-nuclear Poland might be cowed into submission by Russian nuclear threats. If West Europe allows Ukraine to fall, Poland will almost certainly strongly consider scrambling for nukes.

So for Japan, South Korea, and possibly Poland, getting nukes is the obvious strategy for dealing with the expansionist empires next door. If these countries went nuclear, it would draw “hard boundaries” past which Xi and Putin could not pass, even if they succeeded in gobbling up Ukraine, Taiwan, and other small nations in the area. Japanese, South Korean, and Polish nukes would freeze the battle lines of Cold War 2, potentially stopping it from turning into World War 3.

## elections DA

### elections DA – 2ac

#### d. Dems underperform polls AND electoral college favors Trump.

Sahil Kapur 3-27. Senior national political reporter. “Biden's case for re-election is improving, but his polling against Trump is still shaky.” NBC News. Mar. 27, 2024. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/bidens-improving-polling-trump-shaky-rcna143968.

Biden’s campaign notes that Democrats have consistently overperformed the polls since 2022. But in 2016 and 2020, when Trump was on the ballot, Democrats underperformed the polls both times. And the Electoral College has built-in advantages for Trump: In 2020, Biden won the popular vote by 7 million and squeaked out an Electoral College win by 45,000 votes in three states.

#### 2. No link. Voters like nuclear restraint.

Sara Bakhtiar 23. Foreign policy analyst; former research intern, Quincy Institute; Candidate, Masters of International Affairs, Columbia University. “Foreign policy and the 2024 presidential election: Is America ready to embrace military restraint?” Orange County Register. Aug. 4, 2023. https://www.ocregister.com/2023/08/04/foreign-policy-and-the-2024-presidential-election-is-america-ready-to-embrace-military-restraint/.

With the presidential primary season ramping up, a central foreign policy question for the contenders has emerged: will you be a hawk on Russia, or on China?

Republican candidates are split on the question. Many, like former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley and former governor of New Jersey Chris Christie, remain adamant on continuing American support for Ukraine. Though establishment Republicans like Haley, Christie, and Mike Pence still espouse hawkish rhetoric on Ukraine, the candidates who are currently leading Republican primary polling—Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis—resist this, and instead emphasize policies that, for the most part, favor military restraint regarding Ukraine.

While in office, Trump’s brand of populism and nationalism resulted in some restraint-oriented foreign policies: he attempted to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, negotiated a withdrawal agreement with the Taliban, and was loudly critical of the U.S. overextending itself abroad. Despite how messily he may have executed these policies, Trump’s presidency posed a lasting challenge to the liberal internationalist orientation of U.S. foreign policy, making it easier for others in the Republican party to promote similar ideals, like DeSantis.

On Ukraine, DeSantis has rebranded himself as a non-interventionist, warning against further entanglement in the country and stating that it is not a vital U.S. interest. Still, he may not be the realist some think he is, given his foreign policy track record and hawkish attitudes on China. As experts predict, the way to get ahead in the 2024 Republican primaries is to make it clear to voters that you are more of a hawk on China than your opponents. To distinguish himself from Trump, DeSantis has been busy passing controversial laws in his home state of Florida, including a ban on the government use of China-based DJI drones and a law forbidding Chinese nationals from buying land in Florida.

Similarly, Trump’s inflammatory approach will at best worsen tensions with China and at worst escalate the threat of nuclear war; thus, neither candidate has earned the “restrainer” title when it comes to China.

Surprisingly, one of the loudest voices championing policies of military restraint is Democrat Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is promoting a realist vision of foreign policy with narrow U.S. interests. In his announcement speech in April, he outlined “the costs of war,” pointing to America’s ballooning defense budget while the government neglected the needs of its own citizens at home.

His views on censorship and foreign policy have captured the attention of an array of supporters, including influential tech leaders like Elon Musk, Jack Dorsey, and David Sacks. Sacks, a venture capitalist and libertarian who advocates for non-interventionist policies in his writing and on a popular podcast, hosted RFK Jr. on a Twitter Space in June. The Twitter conversation also included former Democratic Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, a critic of the military-industrial complex and of U.S. policy in Ukraine. RFK Jr. is seen as appealing by some voters: he is currently polling at around 15% and has higher favorability numbers than Biden and Trump.

Though part of the appeal for Trump’s and DeSantis’ anti-establishment foreign policies can be explained as Americans’ disdain for Washington elitism or the status quo, it is telling that these policies are supported by nearly half of Republican voters: 44% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say that the U.S. provides “too much aid” to Ukraine.

It is still too early to comment on how the current candidates will fare in a year, but one trend is becoming clear: Americans, ranging from conservatives and libertarians, to Democratic voters, to Silicon Valley elites, are no longer able to ignore the unchecked militarism of the global war on terrorism years. Though “out-hawking” opponents in rhetoric on Russia and China may be the foreign policy question that dominates this election cycle, it is clear that a growing number of voters yearn for candidates who embrace a policy of military restraint.

#### 5. Not a foreign policy election.

Elizabeth N. Saunders 23, professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, studies international relations and U.S. foreign policy, “Will foreign policy actually matter in the 2024 U.S. election?,” Good Authority, 9/21/23, https://goodauthority.org/news/will-foreign-policy-actually-matter-in-the-2024-u-s-election/

As Republican presidential candidates kicked off the 2024 election debates on Aug. 23, one of the loudest moments (and most-repeated clips) was when former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley attacked Vivek Ramaswamy on foreign policy. After a litany of policy criticisms, Haley, who served as ambassador to the United Nations in the Trump administration, drew loud applause for telling Ramaswamy, “You have no foreign policy experience and it shows.”

Will foreign policy be a major issue in the 2024 election? One of my first articles for TMC asked this question months before the 2016 election. The prediction then, based on what we knew about voters, issues, and elections? Not likely – but the election would have major consequences for U.S. foreign policy simply because the president is so dominant in this arena.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky certainly understands the importance of elections to foreign policy: news reports suggest he’s visiting Washington in person today ahead of a key congressional vote on more aid to Ukraine. In recent public comments, Zelensky observed how the U.S. presidential election looms over the war.

But that’s not the same as voters basing their choice on candidates’ foreign policy positions.

Of course, a lot [cough] has changed since 2016. So will 2024 be different?

Political scientists love to throw cold water on questions like this – and this post is no exception. Still, there are ways foreign policy could affect the 2024 election that depart from what we’ve come to expect over the last few decades.

Why we (still) don’t expect foreign policy to be an election issue

As I wrote in 2016, when we say “foreign policy issues,” we mean things like foreign economic policy (such as trade, currency, or foreign aid policies) or national security issues (including national defense policy, diplomacy, nuclear policy, or terrorism). Many issues touch on both economic and security policy, and some issues have a foreign policy dimension even though they are more often lumped in with domestic policy (such as immigration and border policy).

It’s still the case that voters don’t pay much attention to the specific details of foreign policy, except when there is major news coverage of an event.

In my forthcoming book, I present data on foreign policy knowledge from questions I asked on the Cooperative Election Study, an online survey administered by the firm YouGov and designed to be representative of the U.S. adult population, in various years from 2008 to 2022.

Consider two examples related to U.S.-China competition, a dominant topic in discussions of American foreign policy today. In 2016, 28% of respondents could correctly answer that China was not part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). In 2022, 21% correctly answered that the United States does not have a defense agreement with Taiwan that obligates the U.S. to intervene militarily if the Chinese government were to attack the island.

These findings are consistent with a lot of previous research showing that the public tends to take cues from elites, but that doesn’t mean the public is ignorant or that elites are better. We are all busy people, and we pay attention to some issues and problems, rather than others.

New research on foreign policy and elections

Since 2016, new scholarship has focused on other, more indirect ways that foreign policy can affect elections. For example, research in political psychology, including work by Ryan Brutger and Joshua Kertzer, has explored how different segments of the public think very differently about concepts like a nation’s reputation – which, in turn, affects whether they approve of using military force to defend that reputation.

And scholars Michael Tomz, Jessica Weeks, and Keren Yarhi-Milo use surveys of Israeli politicians as well as the public to study how voters’ views shape the use of military force. They examine two mechanisms: responsiveness, where politicians respond to public preferences partly because they fear that unpopular policies will harm their reelection chances; and selection, i.e., that voters are more likely to vote for candidates whose policies they like.

Other scholars have explored more subtle connections between foreign policy and elections. In his new book War on the Ballot, Andrew Payne argues that presidents alter their wartime decisions in light of upcoming elections, for example by delaying or accelerating major decisions. The shadow of elections can even affect military strategy and tactics, as research by Carrie Lee shows.

There may also be bigger-picture connections between foreign policy and elections. In research on womens’ suffrage and conflict, Joslyn Barnhart, Allan Dafoe, Robert Trager, and I show that women have consistently lower preferences for using force in international disputes. We detail how women getting the vote was integral to the well-studied phenomenon of the “democratic peace,” – i.e., that democracies tend not to fight each other (and are more peaceful in general).

Still, these arguments are several steps removed from the scenario that candidates’ foreign policy stances, or specific foreign policy issues, play a prominent role in any particular election. To be sure, it’s certainly possible for a foreign policy issue to be central in an election – as I wrote in 2016, what’s needed is a clear difference between the candidates on an issue voters care about a lot. One example came in the 2008 Democratic primary, when Barack Obama’s and Hillary Clinton’s stances on the Iraq War provided a clear differentiator between the candidates on an issue that had become very unpopular by 2008, allowing Obama to capitalize.

But most of the time, the match between a politician’s stance, events, and the timing of an election isn’t as clear. Politicians can do a lot of things to mitigate the damage of unpopular policies, wait until public opinion changes, or just let the issue fade in importance. Also, as research by Good Authority contributor Alexandra Guisinger has shown, citizens often do not know how their representatives voted on particular policies – even those that affect people’s pocketbooks, like trade agreements.

Instead, despite all the anti-elite rhetoric of the last two presidential cycles, since 2016 there’s plenty of evidence that voters still not only follow elite cues, but also adjust their policy views after they’ve chosen their candidate

. When Trump abruptly announced plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria in 2018, for example, Good Authority contributor Michael Tesler pointed out that polling data on Trump’s withdrawal showed that those who voted for him in 2016 supported his decision while those who voted for Clinton opposed it – a complete reversal from the preferences both groups expressed prior to the 2016 election.

While the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 did appear to harm President Biden’s approval ratings, will voters remember this issue when they enter the voting booth? It seems more likely that Afghanistan will be rolled into a larger narrative of “weakness” on foreign policy – a traditional GOP critique of Democratic presidential candidates.

And about that viral moment at the debate: Do voters care about foreign policy experience? There’s bad news for Nikki Haley: all that applause for her attack line may have mattered more for the tone of the debate than the substance. Despite research showing that experience actually matters quite a bit for running the nation’s international affairs, voters typically don’t mind when their nominee has little foreign policy experience–as long as they project some toughness.

The politics of foreign policy were changing before 2016

So, what changed in 2016?

It’s tempting to answer: The Trump presidency. But two trends that long predate Trump’s 2016 victory are now supercharged, making presidential elections more consequential than ever in terms of foreign policy.

The first trend is partisan polarization. Partisan divides in foreign policy views are not new – they go all the way back to George Washington’s administration, as anyone who’s seen or heard “Hamilton” knows (see Cabinet Battle #2, the one with the super dead King Louis’ head). Partisan debates can be good for U.S. foreign policy, providing the public with information, different perspectives, and even enhanced signals to adversaries.

But when everyday politics become so polarized that opposition party politicians reflexively oppose a president’s policies, then partisan debates become disconnected from policy choices. What’s more, as research by Rachel Myrick shows, polarization affects whether outside threats – like the rise of China – unify elites and the public. And as Myrick, Dan Drezner, and Ken Schultz have all pointed out, polarization has made it much more difficult for the United States to make treaty commitments, and leaves other countries unable to count on U.S. foreign policies lasting beyond the current administration.

The second trend is the growth of presidential power (and the corresponding decline in congressional oversight and other forms of constraint and accountability). This trend goes back to the birth of the “national security state” after World War II, but has had moments of intense acceleration, such as the years after the September 11th attacks. Partisan polarization also adds fuel to this trend, since Congress has reduced incentives to conduct policy oversight or even to invest in policy expertise.

As a result, the presidency is in some ways an even greater prize in terms of foreign policy than it was during the Cold War. But it’s also a diminished prize, because it isn’t clear how a president can make policy that lasts. It’s like a never-ending scramble to get control of the steering wheel of a car with no tire traction. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal is a case in point: with virtually no chance of passing the deal as a treaty, Barack Obama settled for avoiding formal congressional disapproval of the deal; Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the deal but failed to get the “better deal” he promised; and Joe Biden has struggled with the politics of getting a new deal.

No really, what changed after 2016?

Despite all the pre-2016 trends, the Trump presidency did have major effects on foreign policy that continue to affect the substance and politics of foreign policy.

A glance back at TMC pieces from the Trump years yields a long list: the gutting of the State Department, U.S. withdrawals from the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate accords, and the intense strain on civil-military relations that culminated first in Lafayette Square and then in the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, just to name a few. (It should be noted that Trump also pursued policies that Biden has continued, such as the end of the war in Afghanistan, the trade war with China, and the Abraham Accords).

But it is Ukraine and Russia policy where we see an especially stark shift in the politics of foreign policy and national security. The GOP’s split over support for Ukraine was on full display in that viral moment between Haley, who argued for strongly supporting Ukraine, and Ramaswamy, who opposes more aid. This trend was also evident in the 2022 midterm elections: for example, Ohio Republican Senate candidate (and eventual winner) J.D. Vance called for an end to U.S. aid to Ukraine.

The roots of the GOP split go back to 2016, when Republican voters’ views of Russia shifted dramatically once Trump – who was much more friendly toward Russia than most elites in his own party – became the nominee. This softened view on Russia became entrenched when Trump took office.

As James Goldgeier wrote at TMC, it was once unthinkable that the GOP would take anything but a tough stance against Russia in the face of Moscow’s actions like interfering in U.S. elections. Likewise, it often seems surreal to watch Republican politicians debate whether or how much to be tough on Russia. Yet in last month’s primary debate, GOP candidates did just that.

Of course, there are still traditional Republican hawks, especially in the U.S. Senate, where minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is staunchly pro-Ukraine. And as Jordan Tama argues in a new book on bipartisanship and U.S. foreign policy (and previously at TMC), Republican senators joined Democrats to challenge Trump over Russia policy during his presidency.

But McConnell’s pro-Ukraine actions are revealing as much for what they say about today’s GOP as for their effects. After his May 2022 trip to Europe – including a stop in Kyiv – McConnell gave an interview to the New York Times, in which he stated clearly that his trip was aimed at countering the “America First” wing of his own party. That McConnell felt the need to give the interview showed just how weak the traditional hawkish internationalist wing of the GOP has become.

It’s hard not to conclude, as Goldgeier did, that at least on Russia, “Trump is an outlier, but everyone is following.”

So where does that leave us for 2024?

The takeaways from all this are in some ways similar to 2016: No, it’s not likely that specific foreign policy issues will be front-and-center in the 2024 election; and whoever wins will get wide leeway to steer U.S. foreign policy for the next four years.

But while there are long-term trends and structural forces – two of political scientists’ favorite things – that got us to this point, there is also a real sense that this time might really be different.

If the GOP nominee is Trump – or perhaps DeSantis – the internal schism within the Republican party may be settled more decisively in favor of the isolationist wing. As Michael Tesler wrote here at Good Authority, GOP voters have followed Trump’s lead and become even more isolationist in recent years, while Democrats have become more internationalist and supportive of Ukraine.

Of course, isolationism is not new in the Republican party (or the Democratic party, considering Woodrow Wilson’s America First stance before he became associated with liberal internationalism in World War I). In the early Cold War years, the isolationist wing even dominated the GOP, until the later stages of the Korean War and the election of President Dwight Eisenhower. But the strand never disappeared, finding expression in the presidential candidacy of Pat Buchanan, for example.

In the modern era, however, it wasn’t until Trump that a candidate with staunch America First views captured the (increasingly powerful) presidency.

With all the domestic upheaval of the Trump years, it is sometimes hard to remember how much of the Trump presidency was loud rhetoric and abrupt action in the foreign policy and national security realms – including his Muslim ban; his acrimonious phone call with the prime minister of Australia right after he took office; his turbulent international trips; his withdrawal by tweet from Syria, triggering a rare cabinet resignation when defense secretary Jim Mattis quit in response; his first impeachment over his attempt to get Zelensky to investigate the Biden family for his own personal gain; his order to kill of one of Iran’s top generals, Qasim Soleimani, triggering a U.S.-Iran crisis; and the final spasm of January 6, after which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi felt compelled to call Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to ask about safeguards for preventing Trump from using nuclear weapons (spoiler alert: there are no such safeguards).

There has been a lot of ink spilled since 2016 about the durability, utility, and fate of the liberal international order. Ahead of the 2020 election, Trump signaled that in a second term, he would withdraw the United States from NATO – and his track record suggests that if he wins that second term in 2024, he probably would at least try. Although the original commitment to NATO (and internationalism) was politically contested, there is no question that withdrawing from NATO would be a major break with modern U.S. foreign policy and national security. And though politicians are currently competing to out-hawk each other on China policy, Myrick’s research suggests that competition with China is unlikely to bring the various elite or public factions together.

Little wonder, then, that Ukrainian President Zelensky is closely watching U.S. domestic politics. In addition to his visit to Washington this week, he made another trip in December 2022, an in-person visit timed to send a strong message before Republicans took over the House in January 2023.

So in 2024, as in 2016, foreign policy is unlikely to be a major issue in the election. But even more than in 2016, foreign policy – and America’s place in the world – will be on the ballot.

# 1ar

## UQ

### 1AR – Unsustainable

## Europe

### 1AR – EU Rearm Inev

### 1AR – Bad EU Rearm Now

## NATO OCOs

### conventional deters – 2ac

#### Sorry to go back and forth about this card but like lol

Dr. Bryan Frederick 17, Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, Ph.D. in International Relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, et al., “Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements”, RAND Report, p. 58-59

Against these risks, however, are key factors that make it highly unlikely that Russia would directly attack a NATO member in response to posture enhancements along the lines of those proposed at Warsaw. Most importantly, NATO retains a large edge in overall conventional capabilities, and recent actions have strongly signaled that NATO, and the United States in particular, would respond militarily to any aggression against the Baltic States or other NATO allies where posture enhancements are being implemented. Therefore, it is highly likely that Russia perceives that any aggressive actions sufficient to trigger Article 5 would result in direct conflict with, at a minimum, the United States (again, absent any substantial changes in political leadership in the United States or other key NATO members that could shift those countries’ commitments to Article 5). In addition, Russia retains substantial defensive capabilities of its own, particularly its nuclear deterrent, which should minimize fears that the relatively modest NATO posture enhancements currently in progress would be used for direct aggression against Russian territory in the near term.

Furthermore, there is currently little evidence that Russia is interested in such a conflict with the United States or NATO. Russia does not appear to count any current NATO territory, including the Baltic States, within the sphere where it is willing to use force to preserve its influence. Although Russia has taken numerous aggressive actions in post-Soviet states since 2014, and indeed since 2008, and has undertaken numerous lower-level provocations involving NATO allies, it has taken no actions that approach announced U.S. or NATO redlines that would trigger Article 5. Moreover, even in the aggressions that it has undertaken, such as in Ukraine, Russia’s behavior appears to have been highly sensitive to military costs. Responding directly and aggressively to NATO posture enhancements that do not shift the overall local balance of capabilities on Russia’s borders would represent a level of cost and risk acceptance that has no precedence in prior Russian behavior.

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#### MDA is doing cyber now.

Colin Demarest 23, reporter at C4ISRNET, where he covers military networks, cyber and IT, “Electronic warfare is ‘new frontier’ for US Missile Defense Agency,” C41SR Net, 5/28/23, https://www.c4isrnet.com/electronic-warfare/2023/03/28/electronic-warfare-is-new-frontier-for-us-missile-defense-agency/

The U.S. Missile Defense Agency is contending with what its director dubbed a “new frontier” of invisible threats to its mission, with foreign militaries sharpening their electronic warfare and cyber capabilties.

The MDA is tasked with developing and deploying layers of missile-killing systems to protect the U.S. as well as its deployed forces and interests abroad. Key to the assignment is detecting what’s actually incoming, calculating where it will land and quickly deciding the best means of interception, all of which is made more difficult by jamming and cyber harassment, according to Navy Vice Adm. Jon Hill.

“When I look at the future, and I think about the problems we face, beyond all of those different trajectory types and warhead types, for me it becomes the electronic attack and protection side of the house,” he said at a March 24 event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. “We have to make sure we are as resilient as possible. We’ve been working on the cyber aspects.”

Electronic warfare is a fight for control of the electromagnetic spectrum, relied upon for communications, situational awareness, weapons guidance and more. The Defense Department is attempting to rebuild its related arsenal after decades of post-Cold War atrophy and years spent in the Middle East fighting less technologically-savvy forces.

Hill on Friday said the constellation of threats that exists and continues to evolve today is a far cry from previous years. Adversaries “have really upped their game in this area,” he said, “which means you have to up your game in defense, which also means it’s harder.”

Both China and Russia, the top national security hazards, according to U.S. officials, are developing advanced missiles that can be launched from the air, ground and sea as well as below the waves. And newer systems take advantage of decoys and other countermeasures to hide and misdirect, ultimately boosting survival rates.

“The future is how do you deal with these different kind of attacks we’ll have on the system, that are beyond just jamming,” Hill said. “It’s going to be hard.”

The MDA for fiscal 2024 requested nearly $11 billion, up from its ask of $9.6 billion in 2023 and $8.9 billion in 2022.

The budget blueprint has $346 million for what the MDA this month called “flight, ground and cybersecurity testing.” It also allocates $39 million to continue innovation, science and technology programs meant to “explore leap-ahead and disruptive technologies” that can be folded into missile defenses.

#### Even our shit is vulnerable---other countries’ must be since we have the best cyber stuff.

Bruce G. Blair 17, a research scholar in the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton, is a founder of Global Zero, a group opposed to nuclear weapons, “Why Our Nuclear Weapons Can Be Hacked,” https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/opinion/why-our-nuclear-weapons-can-be-hacked.html

It is tempting for the United States to exploit its superiority in cyberwarfare to hobble the nuclear forces of North Korea or other opponents. As a new form of missile defense, cyberwarfare seems to offer the possibility of preventing nuclear strikes without the firing of a single nuclear warhead.

But as with many things involving nuclear weaponry, escalation of this strategy has a downside: United States forces are also vulnerable to such attacks.

Imagine the panic if we had suddenly learned during the Cold War that a bulwark of America’s nuclear deterrence could not even get off the ground because of an exploitable deficiency in its control network.

We had such an Achilles’ heel not so long ago. Minuteman missiles were vulnerable to a disabling cyberattack, and no one realized it for many years. If not for a curious and persistent President Barack Obama, it might never have been discovered and rectified.

In 2010, 50 nuclear-armed Minuteman missiles sitting in underground silos in Wyoming mysteriously disappeared from their launching crews’ monitors for nearly an hour. The crews could not have fired the missiles on presidential orders or discerned whether an enemy was trying to launch them. Was this a technical malfunction or was it something sinister? Had a hacker discovered an electronic back door to cut the links? For all the crews knew, someone had put all 50 missiles into countdown to launch. The missiles were designed to fire instantly as soon as they received a short stream of computer code, and they are indifferent about the code’s source.

It was a harrowing scene, and apprehension rippled all the way to the White House. Hackers were constantly bombarding our nuclear networks, and it was considered possible that they had breached the firewalls. The Air Force quickly determined that an improperly installed circuit card in an underground computer was responsible for the lockout, and the problem was fixed.

But President Obama was not satisfied and ordered investigators to continue to look for similar vulnerabilities. Sure enough, they turned up deficiencies, according to officials involved in the investigation.

One of these deficiencies involved the Minuteman silos, whose internet connections could have allowed hackers to cause the missiles’ flight guidance systems to shut down, putting them out of commission and requiring days or weeks to repair.

Editors’ Picks

Scarlet Sweaters and Scotch Tape: Readers Share Their Travel Hacks

Would You Pay $1,800 for a Facial?

I Just Learned My Son Is a Webcam Model. Should I Be Troubled?

These were not the first cases of cybervulnerability. In the mid-1990s, the Pentagon uncovered an astonishing firewall breach that could have allowed outside hackers to gain control over the key naval radio transmitter in Maine used to send launching orders to ballistic missile submarines patrolling the Atlantic. So alarming was this discovery, which I learned about from interviews with military officials, that the Navy radically redesigned procedures so that submarine crews would never accept a launching order that came out of the blue unless it could be verified through a second source.

Cyberwarfare raises a host of other fears. Could a foreign agent launch another country’s missiles against a third country? We don’t know. Could a launch be set off by false early warning data that had been corrupted by hackers? This is an especially grave concern because the president has only three to six minutes to decide how to respond to an apparent nuclear attack.

This is the stuff of nightmares, and there will always be some doubt about our vulnerability. We lack adequate control over the supply chain for nuclear components — from design to manufacture to maintenance. We get much of our hardware and software off-the-shelf from commercial sources that could be infected by malware. We nevertheless routinely use them in critical networks. This loose security invites an attempt at an attack with catastrophic consequences. The risk would grow exponentially if an insider, wittingly or not, shares passwords, inserts infected thumb drives or otherwise facilitates illicit access to critical computers.

One stopgap remedy is to take United States and Russian strategic nuclear missiles off hair-trigger alert. Given the risks, it is dangerous to keep missiles in this physical state, and to maintain plans for launching them on early indications of an attack. Questions abound about the susceptibility to hacking of tens of thousands of miles of underground cabling and the backup radio antennas used for launching Minuteman missiles. They (and their Russian counterparts) should be taken off alert. Better yet, we should eliminate silo-based missiles and quick-launch procedures on all sides.

But this is just a start. We need to conduct a comprehensive examination of the threat and develop a remediation plan. We need to better understand the unintended consequences of cyberwarfare — such as possibly weakening another nation’s safeguards against unauthorized launching. We need to improve control over our nuclear supply chain. And it is time to reach an agreement with our rivals on the red lines. The reddest line should put nuclear networks off limits to cyberintrusion. Despite its allure, cyberwarfare risks causing nuclear pandemonium.

#### Kathleen Hicks just said publicly we are going to cyberattack nukes.

Jon Harper 22, Managing Editor of DefenseScoop, the Scoop News Group’s newest online publication focused on the Pentagon and its pursuit of new capabilities, “Pentagon’s Hicks wants more focus on cyber, EW capabilities for missile defense,” FedScoop, 5/6/22, https://fedscoop.com/pentagons-hicks-wants-more-focus-on-cyber-ew-capabilities-for-missile-defense/

The Pentagon needs to evolve in its approach to air and missile defense, particularly through non-kinetic, technological means, according to the department’s No. 2 official.

The U.S. military faces a range of threats, from small drones to hypersonic weapons. While there is still a key need for “kinetic” weapons such as missile interceptors to defeat threats, “increasingly we have to be looking at opportunities that are non-kinetic,” Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said.

Speaking Friday during an event hosted by the Reagan Institute, Hicks highlighted the need for “integrated” air and missile defense capabilities, to include cyber, electronic jamming, and other tools.

“Whether it’s unmanned systems, low [and] slow fliers as we used to just call them, up through the cruise missile challenge … all the way up through the more advanced threats we’re seeing today, the way in which we have to think about missile defense, both regionally and here in the United States, really has to evolve substantially,” she said.

While Hicks didn’t identify what some of the other capabilities might be, the Pentagon has been working on directed energy systems such as high-powered lasers and microwaves that could potentially defeat threats less expensively than traditional interceptors.

Sensors are also an important piece of the kill chain.

The DOD put “quite a bit of money” in the fiscal 2023 budget request for investment in detection capabilities such as radars and its space systems architecture, Hicks said.

The Pentagon is currently “very challenged” when it comes to being able to defeat air and missile threats.

“I don’t want to sugarcoat that,” Hicks said.

She emphasized the importance of the U.S. military’s conventional and nuclear forces in deterring adversaries from launching an attack in the first place.

“We have long emphasized, and I will emphasize here today … how seriously we view any kind of attack on the United States homeland, whether that homeland is Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, or the continental United States,” Hicks said. “We have to be able to rely on that full suite of capabilities and the time and place of choosing for the United States to respond.”

Hicks isn’t the only senior DOD official who is keen on exploring new tools besides interceptors to defeat cruise missiles and other evolving threats.

Gen. Glen VanHerck, commander of U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, said he wants the Missile Defense Agency, the military services and industry to “let their minds run wild on capabilities to accomplish this mission.”

“There are multiple ways beyond the kinetic end game defeat of this that we could potentially be successful,” he told the Defense Writers Group on April 25. “And that could be through the use of the electromagnetic spectrum and other non-kinetic means to be able to do something beyond point defense and more wide area of defense or a limited area of defense.”

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#### Brussels summit proves.

Merle Maigre 22, senior cybersecurity expert at e-Governance Academy in Estonia, served as director of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence (CCDCOE)in Tallinn from 2017-2018, member of the Executive Board of the Cyber Peace Institute in Geneva, “NATO’s Role in Global Cyber Security,” April 6 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/natos-role-global-cyber-security>

At the Brussels summit in 2021, the allies endorsed a new Comprehensive Cyber Defense Policy highlighting collaboration as necessary to strong cyber defense, which recognized that “the impact of significant malicious cumulative cyber activities might, in certain circumstances, be considered as amounting to an armed attack.24 A key feature of the new policy is the prominent role of offensive cyber operations.25 In Brussels, member states committed to “employ the full range of capabilities at all times to actively deter, defend against, and counter the full spectrum of cyber threats.”26 In other words, the alliance declared it could respond to malicious cyber activities below the threshold of use of force causing significant harm with, among other things, conventional military or offensive cyberspace operations.

NATO has committed to develop its next Strategic Concept for the 2022 summit. The alliance’s current Strategic Concept dates back to the Lisbon summit in 2010. It is clearly out of date, having been conceived when terrorism and energy cut-offs were the major threats and the alliance’s primary mission was to cultivate partnerships with non-member states rather than to face aggressive great-power rivals.

Action Plan for the Next Five Years

To make NATO future-proof, it must be cyber-secure and operational. But is it doing enough to address the complex and evolving challenges of cyberspace? NATO’s strategic challenge is to blend its successful conventional deterrence functions with a new strategy for cyber action. NATO’s ability to send a collective message of resistance and to establish a credible threat response is its most valuable asset on the cyber-security front.

Four sets of actions for NATO are proposed. First, denying covertness by attribution: NATO should persuade opponents that they cannot be clandestine in their cyber actions. NATO and its members need to demonstrate that it is difficult or impossible to act covertly and be clear about attributing responsibility for cyberattacks.

Until recently, governments did not publicly release details on cyber incidents. But since 2018, public disclosures of cyberattacks by several Western powers indicate a new multinational policy of state transparency. The growing relevance of attribution is partially due to states becoming better at attributing cyber operations. Greater public knowledge of cyberattacks heightens awareness of cyber conflicts and leads to greater public acceptance of cyber countermeasures.

Ultimately, what matters is that states engaging in unlawful actions using cyber means will face consequences. With attribution, policymakers show that they know what is happening in these networks and can investigate incidents. It also clearly spells out unacceptable behavior and can help create state practice. The best way to implement the international norms is by calling out behavior and having consequences when these norms are breached. Attribution will make clear to the malicious actor that their actions will be seen and addressed. It is the basis, under international law, for countermeasures and self-defense.

When should states publicly attribute cyberattacks? Effective public attribution requires a clear understanding of the attributed cyber operation and the cyber-threat actor, but also the broader geopolitical environment, allied positions and activities, and the legal context. The public attribution framework put forward by Max Smeets and Florian Egloff in March 2021 27 distinguishes four factors that act as enablers or constraints in public attribution. These factors are intelligence, incident severity, geopolitical context, and post-attribution actions. The combination of these four components enables consistent decision-making about whether to publicly disseminate information about an adversary’s actions, privately tell the adversary, or restrict knowledge of the intrusion to the government and potentially other partners.

Collecting and processing intelligence—information about foreign countries and their agents—provides a technical basis for attribution. How could allies improve intelligence sharing to conduct more rapid attribution and enable a response to adversary cyber activity? During the Nordic-Baltic foreign ministers meeting in Tallinn in September 2020, a 90-minute tabletop exercise was organized28 to test the ministers’ ability to respond to and attribute an escalating cyberattack. They answered multiple-choice questions on communication of and possible diplomatic countermeasures to the attack. The ministers learned through first-hand experience that a timely exchange of technical intelligence can be key in attributing any cyberattack. “The shared view [of the countries involved]—especially when it comes to complicated issues—is crucial,” said Urmas Reinsalu, Foreign Minister of Estonia.29

Attribution is only as good as the information that allies are willing to share. NATO’s value can be in becoming the preferred platform for sharing cyber information. General Paul Nakasone, who heads US Cyber Command, told the House Armed Services subcommittee on intelligence that “in 35 years” he has never seen a better sharing of accurate, timely, and actionable intelligence than what has transpired with Ukraine.30 Sharing information and intelligence with allies “builds coalitions” and can “shine a light on disinformation” campaigns, like the one Russia used to lay the groundwork for their invasion of Ukraine.

As the second course of action, NATO should use the current crisis to accelerate the progress with setting up NATO’s own cyber command and sharpen allied responses to malicious cyber actions. Overall, this would give more credibility to its cyber defense. In February 2019, allies endorsed a set of tools to respond to cumulative cyber activities, but not much has happened to take it forward. It is now time to build upon this set and develop concrete steps at the political, military, and technical levels to model alliance behavior according to the threat landscape. This means a sharper focus on future responses to high- and low-end cyberattacks along with concrete deterrence actions and tools for individual sectors and target types. Much of this is based on the high-end cyber capabilities of select individual allies called “volunteer sovereign cyber effects,” where cyber-capable nations deliver voluntarily offensive cyber effects on a target designated by an operational-level commander. The NATO Cyber Command would be responsible for matching military needs with the willingness and capabilities of the nations potentially able to deliver such effects.31 The alliance should clarify which allies are responsible for offensive cyber operations against certain targets and the information-sharing and notification requirements.

### baltics defense – AT: intent – 2ac

#### Yes intent

Henry Foy et. al 24. Brussels Bureau Chief. Guy Chazan: chief Germany correspondent; former Moscow correspondent, Wall Street Journal. John Rathbone: defence and security correspondent. Richard Milne: Nordic and Baltic Bureau Chief; recipient, business and finance journalist of the year, Press Awards. “Why Nato members are sounding the alarm on Russia’s aggressive posture.” Financial Times. Feb. 16, 2024. https://www.ft.com/content/83f8a7e9-dd41-4976-be39-cfd2c9b3a899.

One senior European official went as far as saying Russia’s “intent and capability” to attack a Nato country before the end of the decade was “pretty much consensus” within the US-led military alliance. “Opportunity is the only variable,” the official said.

Officials said one reason for the dire warnings was to prepare societies for the potential danger, and to ensure that civilian infrastructure was ready for the possible consequences.

That includes ensuring national energy supplies and stockpiles are resilient enough, that communications networks are secure and could function properly in the event of war, and that critical infrastructure, including roads and railways, could handle the large amount of military equipment that would need to be transported across Europe.

Nato’s Joint Support and Enabling Command, an alliance command centre in the southern German city of Ulm, is drawing up plans for how Nato military forces would deploy around Europe and be sustained and reinforced in the event of a conflict, officials said.

That process will draw on lessons learnt from the ongoing Steadfast Defender exercise which simulates a large-scale conflict with an enemy to Nato’s east, the largest such war games in the alliance’s history since the cold war.

Admiral Rob Bauer, who heads the Nato committee that advises the alliance’s military strategy, said the exercise was about “preparing for a conflict with Russia”.

General Sir Patrick Sanders, the outgoing head of the British Army, has warned that the UK public needed to be ready to fight in a potential war with Russia. British citizens should be “trained and equipped” to fight, because Moscow planned on “defeating our system and way of life”, he said in a speech last month.

Such warnings were not an attempt to spark panic, said the first British intelligence official. The warnings, he said, “are so that we have foresight and are forewarned as there is often a very short period between being warned and being in a crisis”.

A senior Ukrainian official said Kyiv had “strong intelligence” that Russia’s leader was making preparations for war against the Baltic states. “Putin just cannot stop.”

However, some members of the alliance are sceptical that Russia’s president intends to attack a Nato member. “We assess that he takes our Article 5 commitment seriously and does not want to go to war with Nato,” said one senior US defence official.

Putin has said the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, and has made repeated statements about Moscow’s desire to protect Russian-speaking populations outside its borders. That argument was one of many deployed by the Kremlin to support its war against Ukraine.

#### Yes capability

Henry Foy et. al 24. Brussels Bureau Chief. Guy Chazan: chief Germany correspondent; former Moscow correspondent, Wall Street Journal. John Rathbone: defence and security correspondent. Richard Milne: Nordic and Baltic Bureau Chief; recipient, business and finance journalist of the year, Press Awards. “Why Nato members are sounding the alarm on Russia’s aggressive posture.” Financial Times. Feb. 16, 2024. https://www.ft.com/content/83f8a7e9-dd41-4976-be39-cfd2c9b3a899.

New assessments of Russia’s military capabilities and its threats to Nato’s security have led to a rising drumbeat of warnings from western governments and pressure to invest more heavily in defence.

“We are living in truly dangerous times [and] at a point when large-scale conflict is more likely than it has been in recent history,” said a British military intelligence official.

Russia’s bellicose “intent is still there”, said a second UK defence official. “Its land forces have been degraded in Ukraine, but its air force and navy are largely intact, and Russia is still a major nuclear power.”

That warning hangs over the Munich Security Conference which starts on Friday, an annual gathering of security, military and intelligence officials and experts that provides a snapshot of the global defence picture at a time of record instability.

One reason for western officials’ alarm is Russia’s revival of its industrial defence machine over the past year, which took place at a speed many in the west had thought impossible.

Russia will churn out some 2mn artillery shells this year and has acquired a further 2mn from North Korea. It can deliver more than 100 tanks a month to the army, although many are refurbished. The Russian army will recruit another 400,000 men this year without resorting to full-scale mobilisation, Ukrainian officials forecast.

## Trump Wins

#### 6. Ongoing swing state polling proves there is no Biden bump. Trump polls better on every issue by a large margin.

Nate Cohn 4/3, chief political analyst at the New York Times, “Another Poll Shows Biden Trailing in Key States,” NYT, 4/3/24, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/03/us/politics/trump-biden-wsj-poll.html

Former President Donald J. Trump still leads President Biden in the battleground states likeliest to decide the presidency, according to polls from The Wall Street Journal in seven key states.

Mr. Trump held a narrow lead in six of them: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Mr. Biden led in Wisconsin.

The findings echo other recent surveys, including a series of New York Times/Siena College polls in six battleground states last October. Over the last five months, Mr. Trump has led nearly every poll in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and North Carolina — states that would give Mr. Trump more than the 270 electoral votes needed to win.

But while the findings may not be so different, they nonetheless put a damper on Democratic hopes that Mr. Biden was poised to gain in the polls after his energetic State of the Union address and the effective end of the primary season.

Those hopes weren’t without merit. On paper, many of the conditions for a Biden comeback ought to be in place. Consumer confidence is rising. A Biden-Trump rematch is now an unavoidable reality. The concerns about the president’s age seemed to ebb with the State of the Union and the onset of the general election campaign.

Despite tens of millions of dollars in early advertising from Democrats and a vigorous campaign schedule by Mr. Biden in the key states, the Wall Street Journal polls still found that voters had a deeply negative impression of his job performance, mental and physical stamina, and economic stewardship. Mr. Trump had an advantage over Mr. Biden on almost every issue, and usually a large one.

#### 7. Third parties make that deficit irrecoverable.

Jonathan Cowan & Jim Kessler 4/5, opinion contributors at USA Today, Jonathan Cowan is president and Jim Kessler is executive vice president for policy at Third Way, a center-left think tank, “RFK Jr. can't win. But he and Cornel West could put Trump back in the White House.,” USA Today, 4/5/24, https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2024/04/05/rfk-jr-cornel-west-jill-stein-no-labels-help-trump-election/73189706007/

A recent series of six swing-state presidential polls offered Democrats and President Joe Biden a welcome dose of optimism. The head-to-head matchup with former President Donald Trump had Biden winning Wisconsin by a point and tied in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

With the usual warning about the accuracy of polls this far out, a gentle breeze in the blue direction would give the president all three states and enough Electoral College votes to win reelection.

But the same Bloomberg/Morning Consult poll contained a dire warning. When minor party candidates like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Jill Stein and Cornel West were added to the mix, Biden’s narrow lead in Wisconsin became a 2-point loss, a tie in Pennsylvania flipped to Trump by 6 points and Michigan remained dead even. Such an outcome would return Trump to the White House.

This poll is not an outlier. A Quinnipiac Poll conducted the same week put Biden ahead by 3 points nationally, but when respondents could choose among Kennedy, Stein or West, Trump pulled ahead. In nearly every public presidential survey this year, two truths are evident: Minor party candidates don’t stand a ghost of a chance of winning, and the addition of minor party candidates moves the outcome toward Trump.

That is why we are ringing the third-party alarm. In a race certain to be close, third-party candidates not only pose a problem for Biden, they also may be his biggest hurdle to reelection.

Who is RFK Jr.'s running mate?RFK Jr.'s VP pick shows his presidential bid for what it is: A vanity project all about him

The last two elections showed that Trump has a vote ceiling below 50% of the electorate. He did not reach 47% of the popular vote in either of his presidential races and secured a smaller share of the national electorate in both runs than Mitt Romney did in his loss to Barack Obama in 2012.

In Trump's Electoral College win over Hillary Clinton, he carried the same share of the popular vote as Michael Dukakis and John McCain got in their presidential losses.

Third-party candidates helped Trump in 2016

Trump was aided in 2016 by the presence of minor party candidates, who won a small but decisive 5.6% of the electorate. In 2020, Trump was ruined by their absence.

In a pure head-to-head matchup, Biden would be a prohibitive favorite because enough voters under no earthly circumstances will ever pull the lever for Trump.

But that is not the contest we will see this year. At a minimum, three minor party candidates are actively seeking to appear on the ballot. Every one of these candidates will hurt Biden.

Cornel West and Jill Stein will each run from the extreme left and likely garner a paltry number of votes. Not all of their voters would support Biden, but none of them would support Trump. In 2020, 44,000 votes in three swing states gave Biden the presidency. Stein and West, even with relatively few votes, could put Trump in the White House.

A No Labels “unity ticket” would have been far more damaging. Biden is president because he throttled Trump by 30 points among self-identified moderates, according to 2020 exit polls. A No Labels ticket featuring a Republican and a Democrat could have taken three Biden votes for every two Trump votes, a potentially game-changing boost.

Thankfully, both Chris Christie and Joe Manchin rejected No Labels’ enticements to run, citing their fear of aiding Trump. And the organization announced Thursday that it was dropping its effort to field a presidential candidate.

No Labels drops out of 2024 race.The truth is they were never in it.

Kennedy should have the money needed to stay in the race

Many see Kennedy's candidacy as a wild card. But he’s not − he’s Trump’s ace in the hole. With a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and former wife of a Google billionaire as his newly minted running mate, Kennedy should have the money to stay in the race. He also has the mythical name to appeal to a segment of Democratic voters.

Anyone who believes that Kennedy’s tin foil hat views on issues ranging from vaccines to mass shootings make him more attractive to Trump voters than Biden voters is making a mistake.

So, what does sounding the third-party alarm mean? Treating minor candidates with the same scrutiny as we use with major party candidates who have a shot at winning. That includes undertaking the extensive opposition research any normal candidate would face; examining their conduct, statements and policy positions; and warning the public that a vote for any of them is a lifeline to Trump.

The lessons from 2016 and 2000 are clear: Minor party does not mean minor impact. No-hope candidates can change the outcome of an election, even by garnering a relative handful of votes.

#### 8. Biden’s trailing his 2020 performance.

Sahil Kapur 3-27. Senior national political reporter. “Biden's case for re-election is improving, but his polling against Trump is still shaky.” NBC News. Mar. 27, 2024. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/bidens-improving-polling-trump-shaky-rcna143968.

WASHINGTON — The economy is improving, inflation is falling, joblessness is down, and the stock market is hitting record highs. Crime is dropping. U.S. crude oil production is at an all-time high. A special counsel declined to bring charges against President Joe Biden for mishandling classified information, and the Republican impeachment inquiry is flailing.

Biden's case for re-election is strengthening, but he still enters the general election in a weaker position than he did in 2020, when he consistently led Donald Trump in national and swing state surveys, often by wide margins. His struggles come despite Trump’s mounting legal bills and four criminal cases, with one trial set to begin next month.

Democrats offer a variety of theories as to why.

“Because we haven’t made our argument yet,” Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said in an interview.

“Democrats’ record on the economy, on crime, on making prescription drugs less expensive, on climate action, on civil rights, on human rights, on gun safety — our record is strong, and [Trump’s] record was catastrophically bad," he said. "But we haven’t spent any money and any time making that argument because we’ve been too busy doing the work. As we move into a different season, we’re going to be making that argument. Once people hear it, the votes move.”

'We've got quite a bit of time'

The president has just over seven months — and a lot of votes to move, according to surveys as he and Trump clinched their party’s nominations this month. Nationally, most polls show a statistical tie or a Trump lead. By contrast, at this time in 2020, Biden was leading Trump by about 6 points in the FiveThirtyEight average.

In the battleground states that gave Biden the White House — like Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona — surveys in recent weeks largely show dead heats or Trump leading outside the margins of error. A clear Biden lead was common in swing state polls around this time in 2020, but it's all but absent today.

#### Not caused by skewed polling.

Jonathan Chait 4/5, who’s been a New York political columnist since 2011, “There’s No Reason to Think Trump’s Lead Is Caused By Skewed Polling Denial leads to wishful thinking.,” NY Intelligencer, 4/5/24, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/polls-trump-lead-biden-skewed-red-wave-simon-rosenberg.html

The prospect that Donald Trump will be restored to power by the great and good American people, or even the less great and good Electoral College, is disturbing enough that it has spawned a wave of denial. How could people want go through that again? A species of this belief is a persistent refusal to believe polls showing President Biden is really that unpopular and that Donald Trump is really winning.

The argument has various strands but goes like this. Despite alarming polls, Democrats beat Trump in 2020, defied predictions of a “red wave” by winning the 2022 midterm elections, and have won a series of off-year and special elections since. The polls may show Trump winning, but the election results say otherwise.

That belief is endorsed by a New York Times profile of Simon Rosenberg, which begins like so:

Simon Rosenberg was right about the congressional elections of 2022. All the conventional wisdom — the polls, the punditry, the fretting by fellow Democrats — revolved around the expectation of a big red wave and a Democratic wipeout.

He disagreed. Democrats would surprise everyone, he said again and again: There would be no red wave. He was correct, of course, as he is quick to remind anyone listening.

It is true that the conventional wisdom predicted a Republican blowout. But it is not true that the polls did. The polls were highly accurate, as numerous post-election reviews found — see this, or this, or this. To the extent the conventional wisdom was off, it was because reporters and pundits ignored the polls and relied on history (the president’s party always loses seats in its first midterm election) or vibes.

There is a small exception here. Toward the end of the cycle, Republicans flooded the zone with partisan, low-quality polling that tended to push the average of polls in a Republican direction. Polling analysts noted this at the time it was happening: “This year, a wave of polls from Republican-leaning firms is driving the averages,” wrote Nate Cohn on the cusp of the 2022 elections.

Of course polls aren’t always accurate. They can err in either direction, and both kinds of errors have occurred in recent elections. In 2016 and 2020, polls underestimated Trump. In numerous off-year and special elections since then, they have underestimated Democrats (or Democratic-supported ballot initiatives, such as measures supporting abortion rights).

Do any of these things suggest the polls are underestimating Biden right now? No, not really. You can tell a consistent story about polls and results by observing that Democrats have started performing better with educated voters, who vote reliably even in low-turnout elections, while Donald Trump has attracted more working-class voters who only turn out in presidential elections (or, alternatively, when he is on the ballot.) That narrative explains both Trump’s over-performance in his two races, and the Democrats’ strong performance in the midterms (where they did not suffer a drop-off) and extremely strong performance in special elections and referenda.

The profile of Rosenberg notes that he “even has a Substack newsletter offering insights and daily reassurance to his worried readers — ’Hopium Chronicles,’ the name taken from what the pollster Nate Silver suggested he was ingesting back in 2022.” That links to a post-2022 election piece in the Times headlined, “The ‘Red Wave’ Washout: How Skewed Polls Fed a False Election Narrative.”

Casual readers may get the impression that this shows the 2022 polling was badly wrong. But it focuses instead on the effect of partisan Republican polling on the journalism narrative. It’s important to understand that Biden’s trouble right now is not with Republican polls. It’s with credible polls produced by mainstream-media organs.

There are two credible reasons for Democrats to feel optimism. The first is that the improving economy finally seems to be working its way into the public consciousness. Economic sentiment has started to turn upward, albeit from a dismal place.

The second is that it’s still early. The election doesn’t take place for seven more months, and polling right now doesn’t tell you as much as it does in October (and even then, there’s a margin for error). Indeed, Biden’s polling seems to have gained slightly in the last couple weeks.

But simply counting on the course of events or the innate awfulness of Donald Trump to have a predictable effect on Biden’s polling is to count on good luck. There’s no reason to believe the events of the next seven months will help Biden more than Trump. And if you’re telling yourself a story that the polls have some predictable skew that allows you to mentally add a few points to Biden’s total, you’re choosing hope over data.

### fopo not key – 1ar

#### Don’t be an idiot

Alexander Ward & Matt Berg 10/20, staff at Politico, “2024: The foreign policy election?,” Politico, 10/20/23, https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/10/20/2024-the-foreign-policy-election-00122691

After President JOE BIDEN’s Oval Office address last night, NatSec Daily can’t help but wonder: Will this, actually, be a foreign policy election?

November 2024 is a long way away, but the world’s crises have made global affairs a centerpiece of the recent campaign.

Biden is touting America as the indispensable nation while pushing a $106 billion congressional request to further aid Israel and Ukraine. On the Republican side, frontrunner DONALD TRUMP got bashed for criticizing Israel and praising Hezbollah while Florida Gov. RON DeSANTIS and former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. NIKKI HALEY spar over accepting refugees from Gaza.

If Biden had his way, he would keep the election focused on foreign policy. “It is for him familiar and comfortable terrain. He’s been involved in these issues for half a century,” said DAVID AXELROD, a former top adviser to then-President BARACK OBAMA.

A new poll by groups National Security Action and Foreign Policy for America, first seen by NatSec Daily, shows there is broad support for Biden’s policy toward China, the biggest overall geopolitical test facing the U.S. A majority of respondents, 73 percent, said they want to see high-level talks between Washington and Beijing and that they broadly back the administration’s China policies like strengthening Indo-Pacific alliances and curbing industrial espionage.

That’s the good news. The rest isn’t so Biden friendly.

For every poll that shows support for Biden’s handling of the Israel-Hamas war, there’s another indicating voter sentiment is net negative. A CBS/YouGov survey released Thursday reports 44 percent of Americans approve of what Biden is doing while 56 disapprove. There’s a partisan split, of course, but troublingly for the Biden campaign, independents are 61 percent opposed versus 39 percent in favor.

Congress is also threatening to be a roadblock to movement on Ukraine. While Democrats and Republicans broadly support backing Kyiv, there’s a groundswell, particularly in the speakerless House, that wants the aid to dry up. No matter how badly Biden wants to help, if a significant number of lawmakers disagree and block action, he’ll have fewer levers to pull.

“Any president who takes large political risks to get deeply involved in foreign policy may be later rewarded by historians, but not necessarily by the voters of his own time,” said MICHAEL BESCHLOSS, historian and author of a book about presidents in times of war. “Voters have sometimes reelected presidents who seemed to have just done the right, though largely unpopular thing — such as FDR in 1940, after mobilizing the nation for war, and HARRY TRUMAN in 1948, after rising to the Soviet challenge in the Cold War.”

Republicans see vulnerability where Biden sees strength.

They insist Biden hasn’t been tough enough on Iran, especially after Hamas’ attack on Israel. Some of the leading candidates, namely Trump, say Biden’s Ukraine policy unnecessarily risks World War III. They claim there’s far more the U.S. could do to counter China, such as flooding Taiwan with weapons ahead of a potential invasion. It helps explain why two candidates who see the world very differently, Haley and VIVEK RAMASWAMY, have curiously made foreign policy central to their presidential pitches.

No one here at NatSec Daily is naive enough to think that foreign policy will be the thing that matters in 2024 — who knows what could happen over the next 13 months? But it increasingly looks like it will feature in this cycle more so than others.

### gaza – 1ar

#### Specifically, Muslim voters in Michigan---that swings the election

Alex Seitz-Wald 10/21, senior politics reporter for NBC News, with Shaquille Brewster and Kailani Koenig, “'I will never vote Biden': Some Muslim Americans in a key swing state feel betrayed by the president,” 10/21/23, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/muslim-arab-americans-rage-biden-michigan-israel-gaza-rcna121513

Muslims make up only 1.3% of the U.S., about half the size of the Jewish population, but advocates argue their votes are critical in battleground states that may be won or lost on narrow margins, including Michigan, Minnesota, Georgia and Arizona.

There are an estimated 240,000 Muslims in Michigan, a state Biden won in 2020 by 150,000 votes. Trump won Michigan in 2016 by a little more than 10,700 votes.

“The president cannot win without the Muslim vote, point blank,” said Nada Al-Hanooti, the executive director of Emgage Michigan, the state chapter of a national nonprofit that works to engage Muslims politically.

Al-Hanooti, who is Palestinian American, said she’s heard many people say they either won’t vote for president in 2024 or they’ll vote third party.

The margins in states like Michigan in recent elections have been so thin that many groups can and do claim credit for swinging an election, with representatives of each competing for precious resources and pushing to get their agenda moved up the White House’s priority ladder.

And some of the demands from Muslim Americans are likely nonstarters for Biden and would have been even before the attack as well.

But everyone agrees Biden will need every vote he can get in states like Michigan.

“Michigan is a competitive state and it’s purple to begin with. With these complicated dynamics, it’s going to make it one of the most challenging states in the country,” said Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., who lived in Dearborn for 40 years.